

Forgetting the Audience

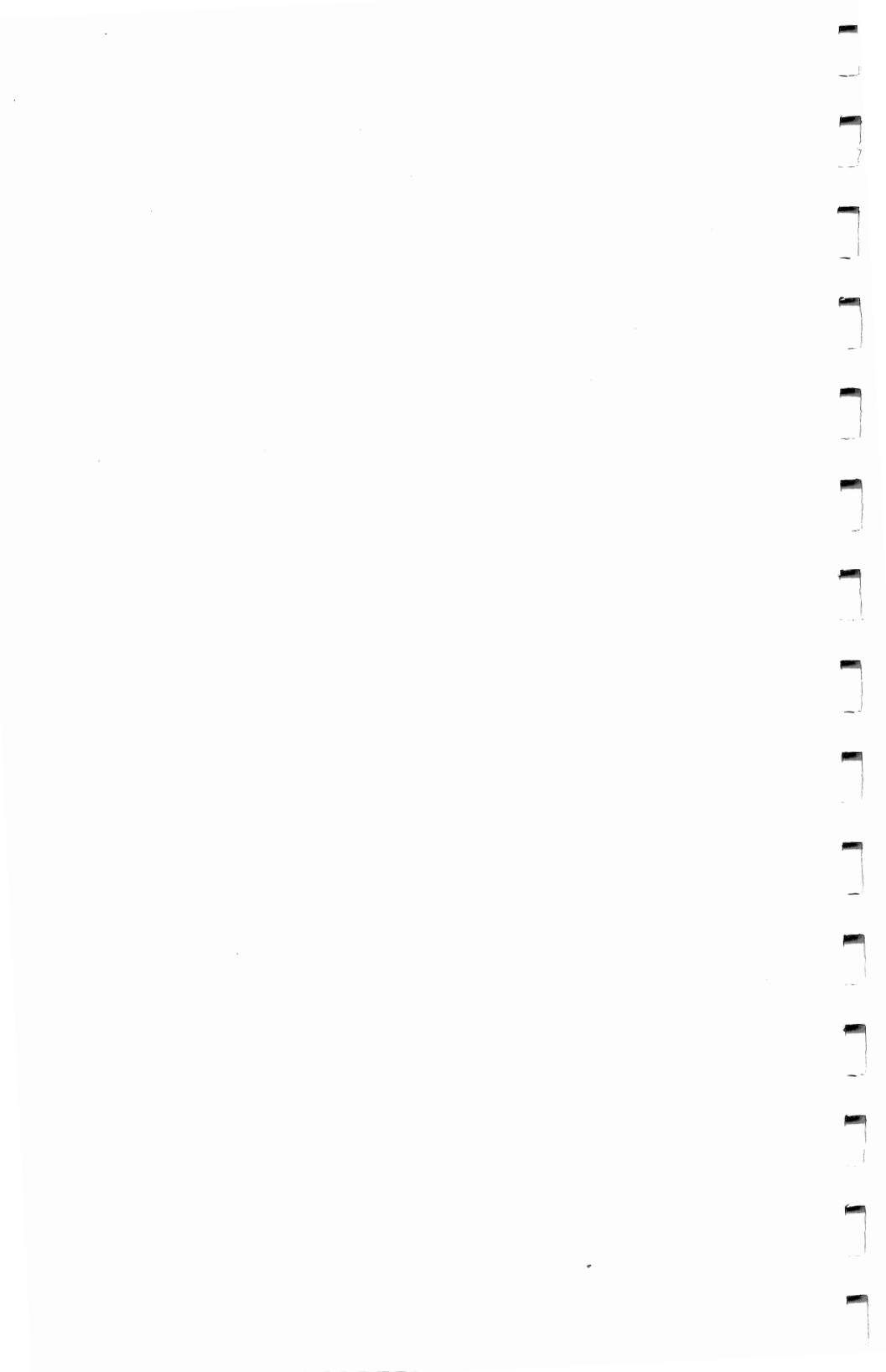
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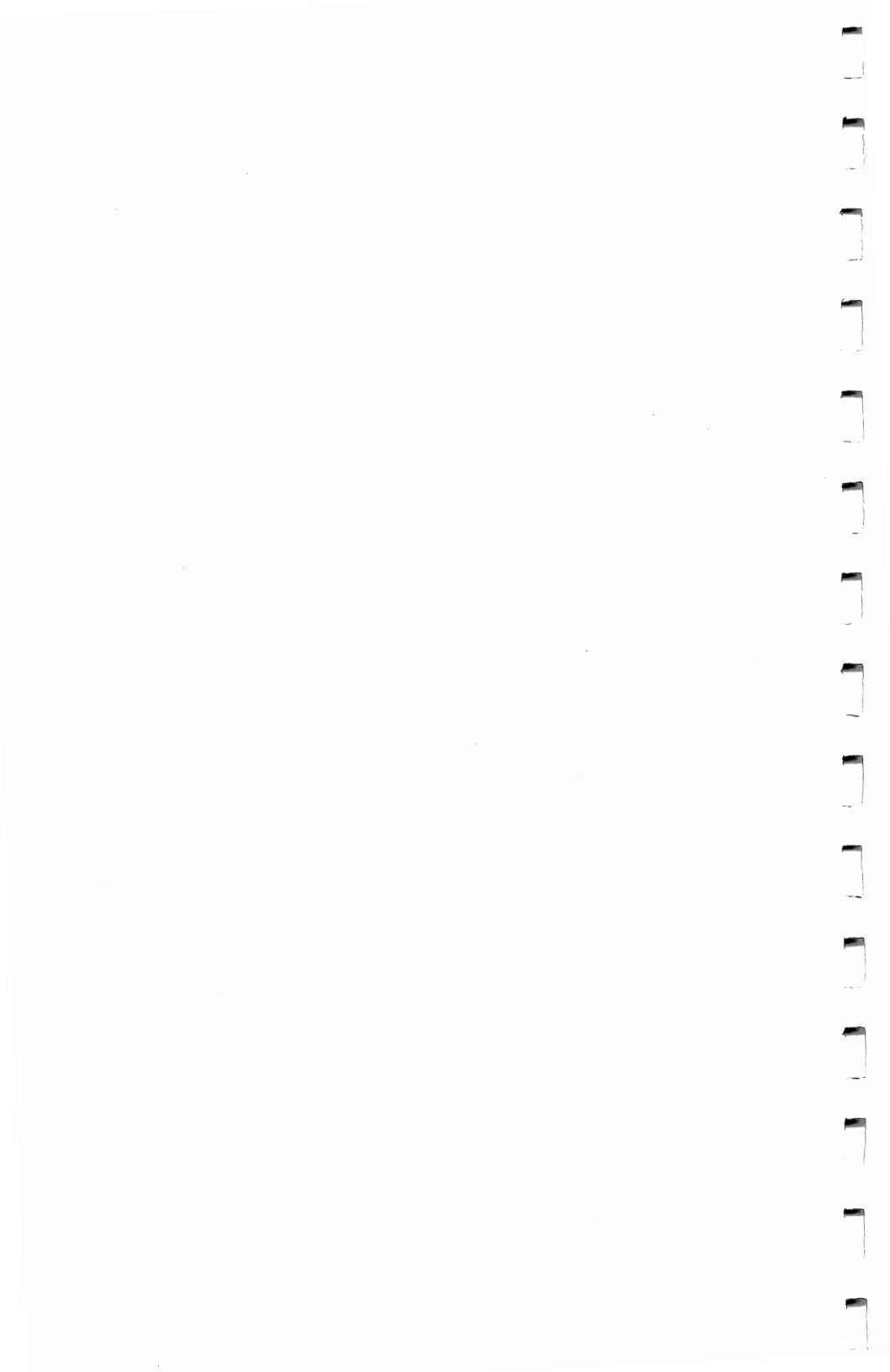
Writing Sessions at Castlegregory, Ireland

1st unedited edition

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Forgetting the Audience





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INTRODUCTION

My writing retreat in Castlegregory, Ireland, in the late winter of 1993, was a productive one. I had been doing some writing at the very beginning of the year at Śamika Rṣi's. I wrote at that time *The Rādhārāṇī Express* and two short books about writing, *Why I Write* and *Writing in Gratitude*.

After preaching in Northeast America, we then went to Ireland to a particularly isolated place. We had three weeks for this purpose. I think perhaps this was the first time that I wrote what I now call "Writing Sessions." They were not books in any sense. I wasn't writing so much with an idea that it was going to be published. I just wrote on the Ampad, light blue colored legal pads that Kirtana-rasa supplied me. I think I did as many as three one-hour sessions a day.

Later when they were typed and my editor read them, she said that there seemed to be less concern for the audience in these pieces than anything I had written before. Of course, to most literary persons, a statement like that sounds strange.

There's even a book teaching writing by Robert Graves which goes by the title, *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*. The teachers recommend that we should always be conscious of the reader, but there's also something to be said for forgetting the audience.

My editor also said that I cut through quicker and more steadier in these Writing Sessions and did not get hung up in the dialogue which actually consists of writing blocks, with my inner critic and inner censor (gremlin).

My editor went through this mass of material one time looking for "prose-poems," and from this came the little book with photographs, *Prose-poetry at Castlegregory, Ireland*. While at Castlegregory, I also did two poetry-writing sessions a day, in a different room than the room where I sat and wrote in the legal pads. I wrote at 7 A.M. and 7 P.M. for periods of about a half hour, on big sheets of paper, with colored pens. I omitted much of that material and edited out of it, however, a group of poems which are called "Wind in the Chimney," and which formed one section of "Collected Poetry from 1992-1994."

Now I am turning again to those Castlegregory Writing Sessions. This time I wanted to focus on the material that prompted my editor to say that for the first time in these sessions, I was writing with more of a freedom from audience, and able to just write things that I directly felt or that wanted to be said. I am publishing it for myself in hopes that that will lead me further in this direction.

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We are in Castlegregory, County Kerry, on the southwest shore of Ireland. This house faces the Atlantic Ocean. It is a beautiful setting for a *japa* retreat, thanks to Lord Kṛṣṇa and also to Manu dāsa who found this place for us.

Manu is now the temple president at Inis Rath. He's wrapped up in what he calls "playing the controller." It's a wonderful service, but he feels some shortcomings in his relationship with me. He wrote me a letter saying he has read my recent books and that he missed me the last two years I went to India. "I'm just questioning what I am doing to deepen our relationship . . . Could you point out areas I can increase my link? I'm too engrossed in myself to see them."

Of course, I'll reassure him that I am proud of him. He is "very involved in the restoration of the Irish *yātrā* . . . I like to think that it is a personal service to you."

What about *my* relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda? How is the link? I think, "It's there, it's okay. *It doesn't matter if I don't feel it personally like I used to (!?)*"

6:45 p.m.

Always waiting before I write. There are always a million delays, then as soon as I start, someone comes into my room and interrupts me. I looked at a few pages of *Begging for the Nectar of the Holy Name*. It's unnerving, not easy. It is also well written. Now I just want to write what comes. *Begging* contains incisive statements about *japa*. Shouldn't I want to read that at a *japa* retreat? Yes, but I'm afraid it will . . . (I lost my train of thought—Madhu came in to stoke the fire. This writing is such a delicate thing. Keep writing more so the train lines won't be so delicate; lay down steel rails.)

I meant to say something about *japa* reform. Okay, the thought is gone. In the same way, my whole head will be gone. And . . . I want to write better than I have before. In *Begging* (which is edited), things are well stated. I want to do more than that. I don't want to imitate my previous performance and think, "Let me do nicely, like I did before." Then I may achieve excellence . . . but it may be filled with vanity and not Kṛṣṇa's mercy. More eloquence about how I can't chant with love.

Rip it up, I mean, move along without performing for a *japa*-reading audience.

Kirtana-rasa dāsa brought a vase of blooming red carnations, placed it on the desk just behind the photos of Prabhupāda and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. The pressed turf is flaming in the fireplace. It's dark, almost night, and I can see the bits of rock islands, the dark blue water, the horizon and the sky.

I asked Kirtana-rasa what he'll be doing here. He said he'll be cooking and cleaning. He also has to make phone calls to America about a legal case (he's a lawyer) that's winding down. And he's brought some letters that his deceased brother wrote to him. He'll read them and think about writing of him. (I suggested he read Salinger's *Seymour; An Introduction*.)

I have a schedule for twenty-four hours engagement posted.

Yes, *Begging* is polished and on a single theme. It's a book; I wrote it with that in mind. This is different and I am different a year later.

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare. What I said in *Begging* about inability doesn't necessarily apply to me now. I may do better.

Saving time for writing. *Relax*, man. Relax. You're a devotee, or at least a servant of a devotee. Kṛṣṇa has

given you another ideal setting to express yourself, You will have to get up early and come here. It will be free-writing, meaning, surrender to whatever you've got. Now I want to read "Beauty and The Beast."

My schedule calls for writing from midnight to 1:30, but I fear when I wake, I'll feel empty of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and have nothing to write. I'll think, "Better I spend my first hour in *japa*." But I made the schedule this way in hopes the writing would be rewarding. It won't be easy. It won't come flowing out like *sāstra*. But if I persist, it will reach Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If I need help, I can keep a *sāstra* on my desk—*Prārthanā* or *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Read and write. Do as I did before, some reading until it sparks something. Springboard and jump. Then return again, springboard.

☉ March 12 ☉

12:10 A.M.

It's not just a dream, it's reality to be here writing. It is spiritual reality to see Prabhupāda's picture on the desk. I am still tied to this world via my body and my identification with its dreams. When my chest feels cold and I can't sleep, that becomes my reality. The *gopīs* of Vṛndāvana forget everything except Kṛṣṇa. They think of Him—His pastimes, form, name, and qualities. They have no need for "soul-searching" or writing methods or performance of *bhakti-yoga* as done by Śrīla Vyāsa-deva. The *gopīs* were in *sahaja-samādhi*, natural trance. If they spoke to someone, they were in Kṛṣṇa conscious *samādhi*. Neither did they perform *sādhana*. They always think of Kṛṣṇa and their desire for His happiness. They want to make Him happy. Remembering Kṛṣṇa is their "meditation" or *dhyaṇa*.

This and other 'rasika'
material should be edited
out before this is used - sdg

It's not a falsity to rise and want to write, but I must purify any impure motives. Remember the best pastimes of Kṛṣṇa; serve those *līlās* by faithful hearing and chanting.

In a sense, writing is a warm-up to chanting. I beg that my mantra chanting may be filled with thoughts of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana.

In Boston, devotees have trouble associating with Rāma-rāya. I asked him to learn how to behave and to become purified. I mention it here in the spirit of Śrīla Prabhupāda's letter to Lynn Ludwig: please forgive him, he may be negative because he's new in devotional service. He has given up *māyā*'s embrace and is seeking Kṛṣṇa's. He is attempting a great thing. He has developed, by faithful and intense hearing, a taste for serving the *gopīs* as a *sakhī* of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. It is not a bad thing.

Here I may write freely. What about the dreams of attachment to women? It is no surprise. It is at the root of the material psyche. It's even needed for the preservation of the species. But I don't need it. Let Māyā-devī conduct the preservation of the species without me. I want to be an exception to the cycle of birth and death. I want to transfer all my affections and desires to serving Kṛṣṇa. I don't want illusory sex life. That's why I'm up early writing. I don't want to sleep and dream; I want to serve, either by writing or reading or chanting. I want a permanent break from *māyā* and I want to help others achieve it. This is what Śrīla Prabhupāda calls declaring war against the material energy.

Vṛtrāsura prayed (*Bhāg.* 6.11.18), “My fortune will be to receive the dust from the louts feet of great devotees like Nārada Muni.”

I asked a woman devotee not to touch my feet, not literally, physically. Although it is a revered and ancient tradition in India—and I like to touch Śrīla Prabhupāda’s feet—if a woman touches my feet I feel mental and bodily transformations. Lord Caitanya, acting as a *sannyāsī*, said he felt bodily transformations just by looking at a wooden doll in the shape of a woman. Beware of indulgences which transgress—as if transcending—the rules regarding no association with women.

Don’t create unnecessary burdens and dangers. It is hard to serve by initiating and caring for disciples. There is no turning back from that duty now; but go forward cautiously. Don’t act to please the ladies. Just do a simple duty. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Vṛtrāsura was confident he would go back to Godhead by thinking of Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet while being killed by Indra’s thunderbolt. “A devotee is always ready to give up his material body, which is described herein as *grāmya-pāśa*, the rope of material attachment. The body is not at all good; it is simply a cause of bondage to the material world. Unfortunately, even though the body is destined for destruction, fools and rascals invest all their faith in the body and are never eager to return home, back to Godhead” (*Bhāg.* 6.11.21). The body is useful when it rises early under the steady intelligence and when it writes out the words of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and considers them. But it shouldn’t be pampered for its own sense gratification in an exaggerated way. Eat simple foods, dress simply, act to keep the body healthy—and use it in Kṛṣṇa’s service. When its time comes to die—even when that time only appears

to come, which is at any moment—don't panic. I think, "But I'm not ready yet. I'm not about to be attacked by Lord Viṣṇu's weapon in the hand of Indra." Still . . . I should have confidence in hearing and remembering.

That's why I have come on this retreat: to improve the quality of my chanting and hearing. I'll do it at the time of death, but I need to practice so I can be attentive. Give to this practice. Make the mental effort.

We learn from the words of Vṛtrāsura that a devotee of Lord Viṣṇu should not desire *dharma-artha-kāma*. "But a devotee has no other desire than to serve the Supreme Personality of Godhead both in this life and in the next" (*Bhāg*. 6.11.23).

Begging For the Nectar contains statements on inability in chanting. They are clarified to show faith in the *sāstra*'s statements of the absolute mercy and power of the holy name. Thus it is an acceptable book for devotees. What did I mean when I said the book is not helpful in my present writing? Because I can't guarantee beforehand the neat resolution of my doubts or the release from *aparādhās* like inattention. I have to go through them. They are not already solved and I am not already redeemed because I am the author of *Begging*, who brings Vedic texts to our rescue. I can't wrap it up in the canon so quickly. Go the whole route. It may not be assuring enough for readers. *But my primary act in writing is not to provide assuring reading, but to help myself in my struggle.*

This kind of writing is not selfish; we've found it can produce the best kind of communication and assurance on a deeper level for more serious devotees.

Have faith in that process despite critics.

In a book of his poetry, William Stafford writes on the dedication page, "To my critics, 'Thanks anyway.' "

The critics have all their suggestions as to what we should do—sometimes offered more as commands and judgments than as suggestions—but we reply, “Thanks anyway, but I have to go my own way.” Thank you for your concern, but I cannot change to suit your conceptions.

I’ve been writing for an hour. Write a little more. I don’t want to provoke a headache, but I want the body to try a little more in writing before I make my *japa* effort. Be careful here. I need to reserve strength for *japa*. I’ll need to see how the mind switches to automatic—it consigns *japa* to a ritual and goes off to various lines of thinking. I want to bring it back to fervent hearing. That takes effort. The effort brings its own reward. I sense so much the benefit of the act of writing—it has potential to be shared with others and thus fulfills my obligation to preach. It also lets people know I’ve been busy producing, etc.—that I find it difficult to sense the same reward from chanting. Chanting leaves no typed record.

Anyway, it is important, so I must save energy for it. This is primarily a *japa* retreat as well as a time for the freest kind of nonperformance writing.

Ready: gloves, stopwatch, *japa-mālā*, hand, fingers, brain, beadbag, altar full of pictures, small light, body in fairly good health, quiet place, heat in the room, will to do it, mercy and instructions from the *guru-paramparā*.

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

Standing in the kitchen last night talking with Kirtana-rasa about his Irish ancestry and the fact that we were both raised Catholic. We also talked of the

danger of driving cars in Ireland and India . . . not direct *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, but helpful for getting acquainted. Then we will be able to read and chant more at ease with one another.

The danger on the road is a kind of reality. He told a story that one of our Godbrothers cried out when it seemed a lorry was about to hit our taxi, "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" Then the brother apologized that due to his conditioning (childhood as a Catholic) he had called out those names rather than Kṛṣṇa's. All right, so we talked and stood together. But now I'm writing and just about to finish this early morning session and transfer to *japa*. Kṛṣṇa is allowing us this time.

We were reading "*Rādhā-kṛpā-kāṭakṣa*" and I noticed that I wasn't paying attention to the meaning or mood of it. Then I thought how my *japa* is the same way. But it is possible to think of the meaning. This is the difficulty in *japa*. It also occurred to me that *no one can do this for me*. We are each entirely alone in the application of our minds to hearing the holy name. If we think we can allow someone else to do it for us, we are mistaken. Śrī Kṛṣṇa doesn't want to do our chanting for us. He wants us to chant. Our guru also wants us to chant; not that he chants for us or that we think an obedient disciple is mindless, a robot operating under his guru's will.

It's easy to be neglectful. No one will notice. I can satisfy the devotees by making an appearance, sitting with them, fingering my beads and enunciating the names. They see me and hear my chanting, but they don't know what I'm thinking while I chant.

I want to start noticing. (When I wrote about some of these struggles in a *BTG* article, one brother wrote me that my words were those of a gross neophyte and

that my acting as spiritual master was a charade. He begged me to stop the pretense of guiding disciples.) Thanks anyway, but I have to talk my neophyte talk—and guide others too. When you accept priesthood, you don't give it up later. When you sincerely accept to guide others, you don't give that up. But I do want to stop the charade. Be as honest as possible—that truthfulness will be one of the important qualities I will impart to others.

7:35 A.M.

Couldn't find a good place to walk. Men and cars passing on the main road. This appears to be a fishing village. The boats are out by 7 A.M. . . . I walked back to our house and found a lonely road, but within a few steps, I came upon the shepherd. He was opening his gate and then began to work with the sheep for awhile. That side is also not solitary, even at 6 A.M. I went down to the ocean, but could find no beach or place to walk. I had to content myself with walking around and around the house on a cement walk, listening to tapes. The sheep are not a pleasing sight. Yesterday everything seemed perfect. Now we are seeing the defects. The heating system doesn't work except for in one room. Still, it's nice.

I am not writing this for a book, but I am accustomed to do it this way, daily. Don't apologize, don't explain. Just go on. Now offer the breakfast to Kṛṣṇa. We love You, He loves us. He is in control.

11:50 A.M.

Again procrastinating before the Writing Session. What shall I write, etc.? Don't you want to write?

Yes, I do. I want it to be Kṛṣṇa conscious, but feel I can't do it. It's like my *japa*. I never even think of stop-

ping *japa* just because it's inattentive—because it's a sacred vow, a strong practice, and I have faith that even offensive chanting is good. I must chant if I want to get better.

Why not apply the same to writing? It's my service to my guru. I read this this morning: "The body should be engaged in physical activity under the order of the spiritual master, the mind should think of Kṛṣṇa incessantly, and one's words should be engaged in preaching the glories of the Lord. If one is thus engaged in the loving service of the Lord, one's life is successful" (*Bhāg.* 6.11.24, purport).

And this: "And we should not be concerned with victory and defeat. Our only duty is to work sincerely, so that our activities may be recognized by Kṛṣṇa" (*Bhāg.* 6.12.7, purport).

Just write and don't worry about it. But I want to get into a serious flow of discussion . . . on what?

Anything.

Kīrtana-rasa is cutting vegetables in the kitchen right next to this room. I hope his mind is peacefully engaged. But I don't want to have to think about it. The sky is overcast, yet there's a clear view of the bay. There are ripples on its surface. I can see the rock islands clearer. The nearest one has a little sandy beach and a little brow of green—it's all rock, no houses. But the bigger one behind it has more grass, a flat top, and a building. In pre-dawn I saw it emit four flashes of light in a row, then dark for a minute, then again four flashes of light to warn mariners. Fishing boats drag nets.

I dust the shelf and my pictures on it. I told you most other things worth repeating. If M. gets me rubber boots, I'll be able to walk in the pasture area con-

nected to our backyard. It isn't being used by sheep at present.

The sight of the white foam breaking in the harbor, leaving a milky patch for few moments and then being covered by another breaker again and again is beautiful. Nature has so many monotonous movements, although some are more varied. Some only appear always the same. If you look closer, you see their variations.

I wrote asking Kdd to find a copy of "A Love Supreme." It kept nagging at me, sometimes even while taking *darśana* of the Deities. I think some desires build up like that and then at a certain point you rationalize that it will be favorable to devotional service to fulfill them. Of course, I trust I won't try to sell myself any desires that are clearly *aviruddha*, unfavorable.

Can't separate things. Don't know what I want to write down. Not every train of thought. Sometimes an express zips by. I could write it all down, but I'm usually not inclined.

What about prayer? That requires patience, a willingness to work with very little immediate result. It means concentration, like meditation. I have little ability to do it—hold something in my mind and study it. I prefer to flow with it; express it . . . Wait for it to come in its own way, as in serendipity. When it comes and has some meaning, I write it down.

At least I'm aware that a prayer quality is an important element in *japa* and it's not present in mine. I'm not even trying. As for adding Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa *līlā* to *japa*, there's nothing at all deliberate. If something comes, fine, wonderful. But I can't concentrate on such a thing.

This is the first day of my schedule. It's important to be on time, doing my work, even if it's mechanical. Momentum will build based on a favorable routine. The external circumstances are good for that. I especially don't want to worry, "People will know I'm here and later say something unfavorable about it . . ." like Rāvindra-svarūpa's remark, "(Seeing you) is like seeing J.D. Salinger come out of seclusion for a brief appearance and then back into seclusion." He's a talented jokester and makes his points that way. Years ago when I was more troubled with the frequency of headaches, he began a meeting with me by entering the room reciting, "Do I dare? Do I dare disturb the universe?" These Prufrock lines seemed to have several meanings at once and I never knew exactly what he intended—but they felt like a barb. Of course, *kṣatriyas* always do that.

Write it out, baby, write it out. You want to chant thirty-two rounds, but that's not all you want to do. You are waging some kind of campaign.

After one *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class I gave, an ex-disciple of Bhagavān dāsa, Nīmāi-Caitanya, raised his hand and made a comment. We were discussing that non-devotees have no good qualities, according to *yasyāsti bhaktir bhagavaty akiñcanā*. I had said devotees may lack good qualities, but they are doing the most important thing by surrendering to Kṛṣṇa. That surrender will gradually bring out all twenty-six qualities of a devotee. Nīmāi-Caitanya said the appearance of qualities like kindness and friendliness in a nondevotee is usually part of their personality. They want to be seen as kind, or whatever. But when the chips are down, they abandon these qualities; they are not so deep. He said a devotee has given up that kind of pretending, so he may not appear friendly, mellow, etc. Yes, I said, he is still

trying to discover and develop his spiritual personality. Any more on this?

No, not right now.

Exchanging notes with Vegavati. She likes to recall lines from popular songs, usually rock music, and apply them to Kṛṣṇa conscious sentiments. She said she used to do this, think certain singers were actually speaking to God in their love lyrics. I remember Hayagrīva doing that in 1966, saying the Supremes were like the *gopīs*, "Baby, where has our love gone?" It seemed like *māyā* (sense gratification) to me when I first heard it. But I've written about it in "Among Friends." When the songs come involuntarily and you notice them and connect them to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then there seems to be no harm. I don't think pop songs should be "revived" and studied as meditations for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They're watered down. The real thing is best.

I wrote in a relaxed way, recent events flowing through my mind. I honored them by putting them into writing. It gives relief, to witness the truth that *this happened with me; it affected me. This person and this thought is in my life*. It also serves a function to move them along. No congestion, no undue attachment—like the pop lyrics—so one day you wake up singing "Getting to Know You," but then it leaves you, like a bird that roosts for the night and flies off in the morning. Keep moving and looking for the precious things—that light in the sky of your dark *japa*, the writing on themes that mean the most. Keep attentive to whatever you've got at present. Honor *this* as a way to qualify for honoring the better when it comes.

7:02 p.m.

First day ending. M. back from shopping in Tralee, got boots and other stuff—relaxation sounds on tape for when I get headaches, house slippers, candles . . . These ordinary affairs. I'm still working on my schedule. Tomorrow we'll try driving to a place where I can take a walk on the beach.

Deep thoughts? Prayers? Wild, let-loose writing? Not so much. You come here and write simple accounts of what your routine is. But one poem got loose today, speaking truths I feel without worrying whether they sounded politically left or right.

Thirty-three rounds. Looking out at the sea chanting the last rounds, thinking, how to do it, how to hear. I want to add Vraja, but maybe I could do something basic like start to hear the mantras and pray to my mind—not just in a literary way, so it sounds like I'm doing it—but actually appealing to the mind even when I'm not writing. Although this place on earth has no trace of Vraja dust, I have come here because it's quiet enough to concentrate. I'm not answering the mail, at least not immediately. I want to give myself to this program. So far I don't see any speck of prayer or gaining attention—not even the effort. (It's one thing if you try and fail, but if you don't even try . . .) I count, I time myself, that is my present virtue. Afraid to throw myself into too much lest I get a headache? Then do it gently. Gradually and gently, but know where you are going and go there.

I can still tell memories of Śrīla Prabhupāda. The details fade as time passes. I can work against that memory loss by seeing videos, reading memoirs, and of course, hearing tapes. I have also lost my "innocence." I have matured. I think more of Śrīla Prabhupāda as he

who has gone to *nitya-līlā* and whom I want to know in his eternal form.

Right now I'm winding up for the night.

❧ MARCH 13 ❧

12:07 A.M.

Writing can proclaim something before it happens, but it shouldn't bluff. It has to be followed by action. It has to be supported by facts and truth.

I dreamed that I was encouraging Hari-śauri to advertise his book at a festival. Somehow he was reluctant, but he took my advice seriously. I said, "You have proven that whatever Prabhupāda did is important. Not that because Śrīla Prabhupāda used a mirror with a cameo on it, we should also use one, but you've proved it's important to write about it." I was surprised (after the dream) at how convinced and enthusiastic I was to help him. This indicates that I should be kind to devotees who want to glorify Prabhupāda. Also, I should glorify him more myself. I used to be happy to gather interviews and stories about His Divine Grace, and if I could ascertain they were authentic, I would print them in *Prabhupāda Nectar*. I loved reading that nectar to audiences.

I liked the lift of this dream, "You have proven that whatever Śrīla Prabhupāda did is important. Keep it up. Go ahead and tell the devotees to buy your book on Śrīla Prabhupāda's life and teachings." That lift isn't much present in my life. When I hear the preparations for the Centennial, it doesn't mean much to me . . . But I want to be enthusiastic about His Divine Grace and tell devotees and the world everything about him. In preaching I should tell everyone who he was as world preacher, what he taught, and to those

who can relish it, the details and memories of his life with us.

Why don't I meditate and remember him? Should I explore this and try to find out why I don't do it? I'm not inclined to because it seems like sticky work that will uncover negative attitudes. I've done it before. It doesn't seem to change things, at least not immediately. All right, quickly.

Śrīla Prabhupāda has an eternal *līlā* with Kṛṣṇa in Vraja. Our perfection doesn't end in following his life and activities in his preaching mission. Part of my energy for prayer and thinking of him has been transferred to that. This makes for less of a simple meditation focused exclusively on his preaching in this world, including those acts I witnessed. I seem to realize that I know him so little.

I think it's more of a service to him if I push ahead in my own *sādhana*. I'm doing it as his servant. That's not negative. I'm still interested in his letters and his preaching, but especially in instructions that lead us to the ultimate stage.

I am not so enthusiastic about the Bhaktivedanta Archives' emphasis on presenting his every word and gesture to as many people as possible without any editing or selection. We have to repeat his words and preserve his teachings, I think, in an intelligent and discriminating way, according to time, place, and person. This requires that we thoroughly know his teachings, but also that we thoroughly consider their meaning and how to apply them to get the best result.

Aside from these explanations of why I'm not more enthusiastic for a certain kind of "Jaya Prabhupāda-ism," there are negative feelings. They come and go, and some of them are offensive. I don't want to minimize His Divine Grace or give strength to the mad ele-

phant offense. Whatever Śrīla Prabhupāda did according to time, place, and person, he was empowered by Lord Caitanya.

One hint from that dream where I encouraged Hari-śauri is that I should encourage such projects. And it's good to have some project of my own that keeps me directly in touch with Śrīla Prabhupāda and his message. The project can be as simple as reading his books or thinking of him as my guide while I pray to him for help in *japa*. I can pray as a fallen servant who desires to please him and who needs his direction and favor. Uplift my own awareness and gratitude.

Someone suggested I write of my evolving relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda. "I would encourage you to explore those thoughts and make notes on them." The relationship is eternal, but not static. It changed from 1966-71 and from 1974-77. It has continued to change since his disappearance. "Explore this path and see where it goes."

I'm not writing right now in the *Prabhupāda Meditations* series. That series is a way of directly speaking and praying to him. Consider taking it up again. Pray to Śrīla Prabhupāda to help me contribute to ISKCON in my individual way without inebriety. Pray to him for help in my most neophyte condition. Pray to fulfill his expectations of me as an older student. (He was calling me that in 1974 and earlier.) His followers, first and second generation, look to me as a person who can connect them to Śrīla Prabhupāda. This is done by telling them stories of the 1966 days, but in other ways also. That's part of the evolving relationship. Simply to be a devotee in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is to follow Śrīla Prabhupāda. Whatever we do successfully is to his credit; and when we falter or fail, we should think, "I

want to do things nicely so His Divine Grace won't be displeased."

The wind is so strong it's rattling doors in the house. I hear its main buffet outdoors. It's coming from the vast stretches of air over the ocean, and hitting the land like sea-surf.

I read a little, now I'm back to this page. Do you recall how you confidentially wrote to please yourself in *Why I Write* and *Writing in Gratitude*? No, I can't. But I sensed it was right and felt satisfaction. It wasn't like a diffuse groping or like worrying, "Is this worth my time?" I felt a deeper sense of satisfaction that even though this wasn't a book that most could appreciate, I appreciated it.

I mention this because now I hesitate to write simple diary statements like, "I read a little and now . . ." I want more, but don't know what. It's coming, however, so just go with it. Write freely.

No one is going to stop me for these twenty days. Go further into the area of expressing what you think is best. One book progresses to the next! An evolution. Don't seek to repeat what was satisfactory in *Writing*. Be confident in the process. You are crossing ground now. You haven't been here before. Trust in it. Sometimes you have to write whatever comes in "beginner's mind." Be happy to be so engaged.

What you did gain in *Writing* and *Why I Write* that's worth remembering is freedom from performing for an audience?

But I feel pressure to write something more Kṛṣṇa conscious. I catch myself and ask, "Why am I not writ-

ing of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa?" I want to leap there, or at least go there by the most direct route.

Right now I don't feel verbal playfulness, but (with wind howling outside and awareness that although we wanted to come here with no one's knowledge, all my disciples in Ireland know it), I feel serious. We are here with our quota increase in chanting and improving *japa* as our main program. That also effects the writing.

It's not wrong if I write more freely, provided I think it will help me.

What do I know?

I rarely break down.

Don't sing out.

We are well set up for a journey inward: good solitary location, in Ireland, votive candles on the altar-shelf. Even have incense. Holy pictures. Time to do it. Sure, as soon as I begin I'll fall into the mechanics of it (stopwatch, beads, main clock hours and minutes, counting my rounds—trying to reach nine in a first morning batch . . .). My mind will chew up grasses in various fields instead of hearing the *mahā-mantra*. It will seem, "Of what use is all this arrangement?" But don't despair. The fact that you are sincerely trying will have a good effect.

I haven't come here to write a wonderful new kind of literature that will establish my reputation. Pray to be spared from that. Then why are you here, away from the normal participation in the temple? I have come to prosecute the duty of improving my own *japa* by the method of increasing the quota.

It's a privilege of old age and seniority in ISKCON and I'm taking it. The immigration officer asked me where I was going in Ireland. I said to a cottage in Kerry with a few friends.

"For a vacation?" he asked.

“Yes,” but I meant, “For prayer and study and writing.” That would have been too much to say, although I did say that once when a highly critical officer at the Canadian border was interrogating us because we were “Kṛṣṇas.” I said I had been writing and it left him speechless for a moment. He never asked me more about it, like what or why was I writing.

Vacation, I told him. Is it like that? A little. Vacation from the demands of temple performance, but not vacation for sense gratification, lounging about, acting like a tourist, enjoying. No, I am applying myself with a tight schedule.

Well, someone might ask, why *not* take a vacation? Vacation is included; all devotees are on a vacation from material life, from family and nationalism and sex. I am working to improve myself. Śrīla Prabhupāda told a reporter that he worked harder than him; in his old age, he was traveling several times around the world every year. “At least you have to admit that you cannot do this.”

Okay, I believe you.

You are trying to improve.

You are praying to Kṛṣṇa to help you. Go ahead. I wave you on, green light, speed over the border with no delay, go to your destination, traveling as lightly as possible. And as you utter Kṛṣṇa’s and Rādhā’s names, try to remember what you are doing and pray for help.

5:10 A.M.

When I went to the bathroom, I met Kirtana-rasa in the dark hallway. He was wearing a cap with flaps over his ears and a long cape. He had no heat in his room and was trying to get warm in the hall near a radiator. The fireplace in my room is supposed to heat all the rooms via the radiators, but it doesn’t work. Madhu is

building up the fire now in hopes it will get the system going. At night we cover the large windows with shades and curtains to keep out the chill.

The usual *japa* report. The association of a pure devotee is important. That's why some of the ISKCON devotees are inspired to go to Puri Mahārāja who speaks often and intensely about "*nāma*." Each of us has to go alone and apply what we have learned. Now is my time for that. Think about it at least—how my rounds go by and I don't think of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa or Their pastimes or the fact that I am chanting divine names and I should bring my mind to hear them.

Madhu picked up a brass bell for me to ring in my room when I want him. I tried it this morning, but he didn't hear it. I opened the door and then he heard it. In ordinary dealings, when something doesn't work, we take further steps to fix it. Chanting can be improved too. I can make myself more eligible and then wait for Kṛṣṇa's mercy to descend. I have an original, blissful soul that's waiting to be uncovered. I have to do something. Talk with yourself about it, "What shall we do?" It's not as easy as me opening the door so Madhu can hear when I ring the bell. It's subtle. But I am not helpless.

11:10A.CD.

We just sat in three chairs around the dining room table and read together, starting with Cc., *Madhya* 3. There is authoritative information about Vaiṣṇava *sannyāsīs* in the verse and purport to *etām sa āsthāya parātma-niṣṭhām*. I felt a hankering to have my *tridaṇḍi* staff with me and an awareness that it means a body, words, and mind dedicated to serving Mukunda, Lord Kṛṣṇa. I also mentally reviewed some of my recent behavior, exchanges with female disciples, the writing life,

etc., and estimated whether I'm doing all right. The *sannyāsa* order is very dear to me; I want to always be a *sannyāsi*, even though in one sense it is another temporary, material designation. Śrīla Prabhupāda always remained a *sannyāsi* and so did Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and Lord Caitanya. Don't take it for granted, but pray to Prabhupāda that I may stay in the honorable order of *sannyāsa*. *Sannyāsa* is significant to me also, because it is another initiation that was given to me by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

The day is more than half over. We walked on an excellent beach, starting in darkness. It took a few minutes to drive there. I walked with M. because I don't feel a need to be alone. I'm using the time for chanting two rounds and hearing a tape. The wind was cold and strong, but our new coats and hoods purchased in Boston and our Wellington boots kept us snug.

M. sometimes mentions what he prays for as he chants. For example, he said he prays that his chanting may become more effective in inducing others to chant. And he prays that his own chanting may improve for his own benefit. I have heard him say he prays to serve his spiritual master. I used to pray in recent years and I advocated it. I referred to interjected phrases like, "Please help me!" and, "Thank You!" Also a developed meditation, feeling the presence of God, followed by adoration, thanks, self-examination, regret, etc. Some of this was influenced by my reading the Christians on prayer. I adapted their *lectio divina* into prayerful reading of the *sāstras*. Then I recited prayers to the *paramparā*, the gurus, the Pañca-tattva, and Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vraja. Now I don't do any of that.

Instead I go headlong into *japa* and writing or reading. One excuse is that I don't have time to stop and pray. Even if I'm up by midnight, my schedule is too

tight to allow even five minutes for prayer. But as I write this excuse, it sounds ridiculous. I have lost the ability (or rather the discipline—the ability is innate) to hold thoughts in my mind and silently verbalize them. I suggest I try to revive this while we are here. And since I don't want to waste a minute, then put it on your schedule; pre-*japa* prayer and prayer at another time in the day.

What did I think you would be writing here in Kerry?

Oh, maybe something like a *japa* journal, and maybe talking to Śrīla Prabhupāda. And free-writing sessions with attention to the session itself, an intense, nonstop practice without fear of how it looked. Yes, I thought I'd be doing that.

Are you?

So far it's been more a simple diary of the externals.

Have you followed the concept that more than ever you are not writing to create a particular book—that these pages will be given to your editor with that in mind—to be used for “Among Friends” and the collection?

Yes, pretty much I've been doing that. Poems on newsprint in colored markers, not connected with this prose.

Not reading any mail yet. Hold it off. The writing goes along. I'm hoping to be able to concentrate and pray to be attentive in the increased *japa*. There are no good signs of that yet, but at least I'm aware of it.

It doesn't seem that we will be bothered here.

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

Freer.

Boy Scout “No Nature” title of Gary Snyder's new poem collection, and these poems that speak directly. An old man lying on a beach. I can't tell you from

where I get all my references. He just came into the room with pressed bricks of turf for the fire.

I can only take one good walk per day (half an hour to forty minutes brisk walk). Otherwise my ankle starts to hurt. The sheep run together when the shepherd enters their penned-in ground with food. They all run like sheep—timid, mindless conformists. Two walk slowly in the rear, but they also follow. Most of them run with a bubbling gait, eager to show that they too are coming and don't want to be left out.

They seem to say, "Please don't think we are doing anything independent of the group. Don't single us out. We are afraid." They are not even embarrassed *not* to show individuality. They surge forward nakedly, pitifully, like sheep. It's the end of winter, so their coats are at their thickest. Soon the men will shear them. It's for this purpose that the shepherds get up early every morning and come to the field to give the sheep their minimum needs and make sure they are all still captive behind the stone and wire walls. I don't know their practices, but I guess they'll be slaughtered when they give their wool. Otherwise, it might not be so horrible to keep sheep. Even Gītā-nāgarī keeps a small herd for spinning wool, and Śrīla Prabhupāda was pleased to receive a blanket made from Satyabhāmā dāśī's spinning wheel.

These are just relaxed thoughts in the countryside. I prefer to be here, and that in itself is radical. But my thoughts are simple ones, not so controversial. As I relax, I speak more freely, not aware that I am giving an opinion or criticizing. I don't want to argue. But to have come here instead of to a temple is an act of will, and a "message" to the world. So be it. Keep writing without preaching about that, unless I really feel the

need to defend myself. But I think it's better I just write about sheep a little if I like, and a little about *sannyāsa* if it occurs to me, and enjoy the warmth from the fire-place and the view of the bay stretching out to the Atlantic Ocean's horizon.

I tell you more, I'll tell you more over twenty days.

Pick and choose what to say. If you were a painter, you would attempt to paint these blue skies with layers and shades of blue clouds and this gray-blue water. The water sits in the basin like soup in a bowl. A monster like Dvidida or an incarnation like Lord Harideva of Govardhana could drink up this water, although it's salty.

Wait a moment before you write. Notice the wind bending the grass and causing it to shiver. Think what you'll do in a splendid schedule of activities. Each practice is wonderful, read a little, or chant . . . but when you go to do them, it is not splendid, and yet it is something. A good effect accumulates.

I'll be seeing these fishing boats, each with a following of gulls. The boats have inboard motors and one is shaped like a tiny tugboat. A fisherman on the beach in Orissa couldn't even dream of such boats as these, but it's the same life, up early, out to the harbor, killing the fish in the net. It's a way to make a living because some people will pay to eat the fishes' flesh.

5:16 p.m.

I finally came to the end of my thirty-two rounds—long rounds interspersed with drowsiness. The shepherds were coming and going next door, bringing food in a truck. The sheep were running foolishly back and forth. Madhu said the men only keep the sheep for wool for two years and then slaughter them while they

are still young. Lamb is a popular meat, but no one wants to buy old sheep flesh. They keep breeding the animals and produce new lambs for wool and slaughter. It's not a very lucrative business, but it's one way to make a living—and to incur horrible karma.

Now a mist comes at dusk, making the horizon hazy. I don't know what to write. I'd like to do something nice, but not for any contrived reason. Let it be true and natural. I'm not creating stories to sell or even lessons in *bhakti-yoga* for students in an institution. I am writing what I find.

Are there some worries blocking the way? Am I worried that someone will notice the frequency of my retreats and say I am doing wrong? Even so, I should relish them while I can. If I am building my determination that they are right for me, then go ahead. Even if someone tries to stop me, I will find a way.

I came alone so I can write books, which is my main preaching. When I do that, it's a writing retreat. Once a year (for the past two years) I take a three-week *japa* retreat, increasing my minimum quota to thirty-two. It hasn't made things much better so far. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

In *Vidagdha-mādhava*, the prologue states, among other things, his humility, that he is a fallen person, but the glorious pastimes of Kṛṣṇa will issue from him. He says even a low-class man can start the fire for the sacred *yajña*. He also hesitates to begin his poem, and he progresses slowly, out of fear that persons averse to Kṛṣṇa consciousness may hear and object. The assistant narrator tells him not to be worried about that. He says the critics will be indifferent to the poetry of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, while the devotees will delight in it—so go ahead.

The drama begins with the appearance of Paurṇamāsī-devī, who desires to bring about the meeting of Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Plastic lens cleaner in a bottle. I'm getting lower, down to noticing the material objects. I have left America for the year and I have four full months ahead in Europe. We're starting here in Ireland, where I was supposed to be in hiding, except Manu dāsa leaked it out. They know I'm here, but at least for these twenty days, no one is going to come out and see us. The simple routine is underway. All the parts of the day and night are planned with good activities. Accept them as best I can without lamenting that I don't read more. As for the *japa*, that too should not be lamented. Try again, try again.

I have purchased this quiet, or it has been given to me. Now don't spoil it. Make the best use of it.

I just stopped writing to try and pray, but I drowsed and the mind went from Guḍakeśa dāsa in Vṛndāvana to the toilet bowl in the house . . . A few sincere wisps of thought, but nothing concentrated. Sometimes at odd moments, I am able to embrace a few Hare Kṛṣṇa mantras.

At least I'm not a sheep.

I have no desire to play around with words.

Discipline is the way of the soldier and devotee. A fire in the fireplace could be flames from my head. Śrīla Prabhupāda in '66 lecture breaks into song, first stanza of "*Daśavatāra*," praising the *mīna-śarīra*, *jaya jagadīśa hare*. I'll be doing that too, lecturing wherever I go.

12:40 A.M.

Honesty is important. I feel impressions of association with female disciples, but fortunately it fades. I also feel the fear from the attack of people like Dhāma-ghoṣa and others who say I (and other ISKCON gurus) are carrying on a travesty of the guru-disciple relationship. It's good to be alone just to get a distance from these impressions. There is also the stress of interaction with devotees of all sorts in the temples when I visit and the possible directions on my activities that may come from the GBC and its committees (like the *sannyāsa* committee, the Centennial committee, the ISKCON Book Review Board, etc.).

Being alone has a good result, and writing too.

I think I can function in ISKCON's service, initiating and guiding disciples. But to do that, I must stay under Śrīla Prabhupāda's guidance and I must not bluff. I have to keep admitting what I don't know. The other night in Boston, a disciple asked (at a meeting) why I write of myself as faulty in my published books. I answered, but more can be said. My qualification is that I am Prabhupāda's disciple and that I admit all mercy for guruship comes through him and through *param-parā*. If I have a particular predilection to admit my own faults, that is healthy. I don't want to fall into claiming (directly or indirectly) that I am a *mahā-bhāgavata*.

My present critics, like Yaśodānandana, bark back to my former mistakes and link them to my present tendency to admit I am an offensive chanter, etc. They say, "Formerly you claimed you were the essence of the verse, *nikuñja-yūno rati-keli-siddhyai*, but now you state that when you chant, you find it dry. We conclude that you are committing guru- and *nāma-aparādha*—as you

yourself admit (*nāma-aparādha*). Therefore you are unfit to be guru. The cause of these offenses is your assumption of guruship and this offense is continuing. The only difference is that before you admitted to no faults, and now you admit to faults. But *still* you perform the charade of acting as a guru of disciples.”

My reply is that the guru reform we underwent in ISKCON was sincere and effective. We admitted to receiving over-estimations in praise and worship by disciples and even Godbrothers. We allowed this to go on on the level of worship of the *mahā-bhāgavata*, which should only be offered to Śrīla Prabhupāda and devotees on his level. We also restricted the functioning of spiritual master to only eleven persons and the few others who were added by the GBC. ISKCON’s reform consists of lessening the worship offered to gurus in our institution (while preserving their absolute status) and in opening the taking of disciples to many senior devotees.

This is a reiteration of the situation in brief. I usually don’t get into this in my journal. But from time to time I can.

I’m more concerned with surviving and not falling down. We will always have critics and there may be more changes in the institution’s definition and operation regarding guru and disciple and other matters. In any case, I need to stay honorable and discharge my duties as guru and *sannyāsī*. That is more important than how many temples I visit, how many miles I travel, how many disciples I initiate, how often I lecture, etc. Survive, don’t fall down, be honest.

How can you be a spiritual master if your chanting is as poor as you admit? Because I am striving, trying to do something about it. That is the implied meaning of a retreat like this. It is a response to the criticism that

we are not gurus, and is in response to my own desire to be sincere. I should be on a higher level. Taking time to chant extra rounds is one kind of response. Another response is to plunge into regular ISKCON *sannyāsa* duties. Writing goes on as much as possible, whether in a retreat, book writing, or as a hurried travel journal while in the midst of preaching.

Being honest, admitting faults is an expression. The main thing is the fact. It also helps to create factual states. I fight with the pen. I free myself from *māyā*. I see that I can't free myself—so with the pen I pray for mercy. Thus on an individual basis I reflect various issues and conditions of life in ISKCON. I claim it's a valuable record.

Being honest . . . but Mahārāja said disclosures should not hurt people's faith. Okay, but I have to test their faith to some degree by exposing them to the truth of my own condition. I can't hide it. I should write inspiring things.

The bad news is the same—about lack of taste, lack of higher technical knowledge, retaining of images of past conditioning and present subtle desires. As far as free-writing, that is risky in the sense that its outer forms have little precedence in Vaiṣṇava writings (which are more perfect utterances of *śāstra* and not dwelling *so much* on the personal feelings of the writer). I say it's a risk I must take and want to take. Because the guruship of a Westerner like me is held in doubt, I want to make it clear who I am, how I dream at night, how I doubt and think—so no one can say I hid these things. I assert, "When you say people like me can serve as Vaiṣṇava gurus, this is what it entails. This is my consciousness. I admit it, but I also declare we are valid representatives of our spiritual master."

In this way I defy the critics. I don't want to be only a mouthpiece for the institution, but an individual who freely operates within it.

Writing this way this morning is giving me some encouragement in the purpose of this retreat as healing and re-ordering. As hoping to pray—as admitting my *japa* state is surely in need of repair and God's grace.

To be myself—it's not easy in these circumstances. But it's important. It's part of the integrity we demand of ourselves—it's also demanded by followers and devotees. They want persons who are not false, not cheaters. It is cheating if one doesn't know himself, doesn't act as himself. I need to be true to myself and yet not indulge in sense gratification in the name of being honest to my inclinations.

Okay, don't start patting yourself on the back too much or you'll be claiming you're the best. (We found a coffee cup here, which is now on my desk as a pen holder. The cup states, "It's hard to be humble when you know you're the BEST.") Good joke on me. I try, still, to be humble. Why? Maybe because I have so much innate pride. My humility conceals this self-estimation: "I'm actually the best, as proven by all my actions, such as humble behavior and writing, taking time to do *bhajana* alone, and admitting I need help."

Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Oil your own machine, friends. This machine of my body is putt-ing along, fifty-three years old. What about you, dear reader, how are *you* doing?

Pens out, wits flashing, pursuing a trail I didn't know I would pursue. Stafford refers to the image of sniffing. The artist is sniffing a trail and can't look up from that to see if he's pleasing his audience or critics. If he looks

up, he'll lose the trail he's following. He must be true to his experience; there's no choice in the matter.

I'm not in control of what I say? Well, I keep heading on a trail of Kṛṣṇa conscious *siddhānta*, so there's *that* control. But I don't predetermine the exact subject matter at any given time.

The crowd-pleasing motive is always ready to enter and take over. I work against it by writing as freely as possible. For example, if I ask myself whether this morning's writing about the guru in ISKCON can be published, then I miss the point of honest self-inquiry. On this retreat especially, I want to think aloud and not try to structure a book or edit remarks for publishing. I have to be willing to write whatever comes and be fallible.

A guru is not supposed to be fallible? But every human is. Is a guru human? Is anyone a guru? No, Bhakti-siddhānta says, especially the topmost devotee never thinks he's a guru (what to speak of lesser devotees). They do their duties as servants.

I think critics of ISKCON gurus like to attack me because (1) they think I'm soft and may feel guilty when I hear their accusations, and (2) my position is strong so they need to attack it. Strong because I already admit to faults; because I have found a self-purifying method and a way to be honest even while discharging the duties in the controversial post.

Hey look at me.

Look, Ma, I'm dancin'!

Watch out you don't fall on your face. Get out on the leash and walk in the wind. Stay at your writing desk as much as possible. And your *japa*, your subtle *japa*, chasing after the mind.

Run out of time now. This is not a book. Neither do I intend to throw it away. It's for re-cycling. What do I mean?

I mean I hope it's valuable. Why would I attempt it if I thought it was useless or only garbage? Yet if it doesn't "make it," that's all right. I understand many of my attempts won't be worthy of print. I accept the process of purification, expression, and practice.

Act below the superficial expression. (I wish this pen would flow more smoothly.) I have much to say.

I'm smiling at you, brother. You think you're something. And you are. You're a rootin'-tootin' dixie bureaucrat. I mean you're an aristocrat from Brooklyn and Queens. You're a main-liner; a pussy footin' ex-sailor from X Division (the pussy division, the airmen and gunners called—and we had names for them as well).

All quiet on the western front. All's well. The sun is getting ready to rise soon. Bow down and pray.

I offer my obeisances to Śrīla Prabhupāda and to Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and Gaura-kīśora dāsa Bābājī. These are the real persons in my life. I accept them as guides, not the persons I accepted earlier in my life. I am entitled to change.

I offer respects and loving prayers to the *paramparā*—Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, etc., the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana. I pray to Lord Caitanya and all His associates, especially for the mercy of Lord Nityānanda. I pray to Lord Kṛṣṇa and Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and all the *vrajavāsīs*. I wish my *japa* to be conducted in Vraja.

I pray to the holy name. Please forgive me. Please accept me. Thank You!

I pray to my own mind, "Please be kind. Please act for our welfare (not our destruction) by patiently hearing the sound of the names and surrendering your propensity to wander all over the universe in search of mental food and plans for sensual enjoyment. Please be a servant of the Vaiṣṇavas."

5:20 A.M.

When I said *gāyatrī*, my mind roamed elsewhere, to an advertisement for a book about baseball. Then it was too late. But I could perceive that you can bring the mind back from one preoccupation and fix it somewhere else. Lord Kṛṣṇa refers to the austerities of the mind. Prabhupāda says we have to divert the mind to the Vedic literatures. With this predicament, I looked at the Avanti *brāhmaṇa*'s song in the Eleventh Canto. I have only read a bit of it, not the song yet.

It's strange how the mind goes. It doesn't always go to things I love or which are of interest to me. Rather, it has a nondiscriminating curiosity. As a goat eats anything, the mind "eats" anything. It turns it over, sniffs at it . . . Roaming through the worlds, without scruples, without considering my self-interest.

I may bring myself to a nice situation, but the mind doesn't come along, or it comes only part of the way. For example, we will take a *japa* walk on the beach. The mind will appreciate this along with the senses. But that doesn't mean it will agree to hear the holy names. It will do its usual jumping from one train car to another. If I really bear down on the purpose of this *japa* retreat, I will see it as a stark battle between the higher self and the *cañcala* mind. Am I ready to engage in hand-to-hand combat? I don't think so. I am hoping to win the mind over on friendly terms. Hope to gradually appeal to the mind and receive a drop of Kṛṣṇa's mer-

cy. One drop will inundate the mind with pleasure and it will gladly become a devotee. By force of attraction to the name and form and *guṇa* of Kṛṣṇa, the mind will give up its roaming and devouring, its sniffing in the garbage pails. I am trying for that. But until the drop of nectar falls, I will have to bring the mind back whenever I notice it roaming away, and do something Kṛṣṇa conscious. Writing is for that, and reading. Chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is the most direct and easiest method of associating with Kṛṣṇa, but I can't convince the mind to do it. Sometimes it cooperates, but not for long.

11:04 A.M.

I feel reluctant as I begin this one-hour Writing Session. My heart is constricted, I don't know why. And particularly, why writing? Why not reading? To encourage myself I had placed a note on the page:

"Keep going as much as possible. It's the *process*—not any individual entry."

When I didn't have great thoughts, I contented myself with descriptions of this place. But now that doesn't interest me. I've said it enough; worn the place out in two days. I notice dust settles quickly on objects in this room because of the peat burning in the fireplace. We just read together, the joking scenes of taking *prasādam* at Advaita Ācārya's house.

I isolated (noticed) my tendency to look at everything and everyone—even Lord Kṛṣṇa or Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu—in an external and superficial way. Usually I just do it, but today I saw it as a function of my mind and not as an absolute judgment which I must make. It could be abandoned, I hope, in favor of a deeper way of seeing. Even if I see things first in a superficial, critical way, I can dismiss that as unimportant. Fiction writers take these impressions as important, and

they painstakingly write them into their stories to reveal the characters of their fictional people. I don't think it's untruthful to refrain from reporting in that way.

How far should I push myself to write if I don't feel like it? It should be a plodding duty. Didn't I want an hour all to myself for writing in the quiet? Now I have it. To keep going I may have to break loose. I find I am tight and not loose. I feel solemn inside, and quiet, and don't want to muss up my "room."

Well, I don't want to do violence to my natural attitude, but I suggest I find a way I can write in this attitude—or consider a change if possible. Why not try skipping lines between sentences? (Why still so much care of how it will look to others? Anyway, still doubting whether a writing session is a worthwhile Kṛṣṇa conscious event?

No dogs, no bags, no dogs for shoes. No songs, no bongs in the head; no dead please, no dead. No truth, no proof in the pudding. No putting around. The tenor sax player blew a few riffs *à la* Lester Young, and then sat down.

Look, if you don't want to write for yourself, you could start opening your mail and replying to letters. But I thought you wanted this.

Sad about *japa*.

I read in Ueland's book that we should not *lie* to ourselves—"And one of the very worst, self-murdering lies that people tell to themselves is that they are no good and have no gift and nothing important to say."

Stupid things on my mind, like Clinton's push for getting homosexuals in the Army and *Time* magazine's clever cover: "Uncle Bill Wants You." My weird and idle curiosity about this—I'll want to know whether his

move was defeated and what it did to his popularity, and what the Army thinks. Somehow the unthinkability of the whole issue, and the implications of Kali-yuga sin. Only twenty years ago Śrīla Prabhupāda said priests were allowing homosexual marriage and he condemned it.

These balls of cud I chew. Getting warmed up. Go ahead, say what you want. Each day away from America is good and enables me to turn from that, to . . . who I am on a little peninsula facing the sea. It's a chore, Prabhu, but you must do it. You didn't come here only for *japa*. It was Madhu who insisted a time be given for this. I agreed with him—I need improvement terribly. But improvement doesn't come and that sets a pall of disappointment over the writing also.

Face it. Your shortcomings. And even your *tendencies* toward impurity. I read "Beauty and The Beast" because previously I thought it was partly my story—me the beast and Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa the Beauty. I have to "woo" Them—court Them—in my external ugliness.

I look up and see sheep. What a place! Their timid going back and forth. Let me not be like them. Fight your way through.

Okay, I won't tell the lie that all is bad, but I'm trying to be truthful. I don't want to imagine, "I'm discovering truths about myself here in the quiet." Don't claim a wishful thought to be a fact.

My thumb aches with the strain of writing. Take a thinner pen.

What is that hint of improvement? I think I can accept myself. Know myself. And accept the writing process; satisfaction of permissive poems. Add another layer to my conviction that I want retreats and do well on them.

If I can't control my mind while increasing the *japa* quota, that's not a reason for *new* disappointment. It's what you've had all along. Now you get to see it better, like taking expensive box seats at a baseball game. See the action of your mind, see the infield and the players; see the face of the pitcher. He could even see you if he chose to look in your direction.

One island looks like a huge tanker. Another reminds me of an apple crumcake (with whipped cream around the edges). We just read the verses and purports where it says Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu is a *sannyāsi* and doesn't want to eat too many varieties. Kirtana-rasa is cooking in that mood. I can eat until I'm full, but dessert is just two small balls in the fine tradition of the doctor's advice, "Cut down on sweets."

That's my mood in writing too. Just rice, *dāl*, one *sabji*, and two small balls. As many *capātis* as you like. What do I mean by that? I'm not exactly happy over the fact, but accepting it and thinking, "Yes it's probably best."

One island, seven islands. One clock on my desk. How is young Dāmodara dāsa with his asthma? He's a case of unrestricted eating causing misery and possible death. Or so it seems.

I keep nagging myself, "Boy this writing is really small time. There's nothing here but gossip and little stuff." Why nag? Because a devotee should be bathing in the nectar of *kṛṣṇa-smaraṇam*.

Have faith in the process.

Am I interested in this small stuff? If so, then don't berate it. It's practice and (according to Ueland) it will be interesting to others. She speaks of a politician orating with artificial interest in the subject. We detest it

and we are bored, waiting for him to come to the end. That can happen even with *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* orating. It happens every day in many ISKCON temples. But some speakers hold our attention.

Ueland describes how she would write long sentences and then finally, angrily ("as though throwing off a great weight") would say to herself, "What in thunder do you want to say?"

"That women are too fat," my true self answered immediately and in a flash." She advises we write in our diary quickly so "you will touch only those things that interest you. You will skip from peak to peak. You will sail over the quagmire of wordy explanations and timidly qualifying phrases."

I wrote asking for the Coltrane tape, "A Love Supreme." Rest your case. It either comes now or it doesn't. You already know it's going to tax your nervous system too much and the charge of the music will frighten you. You'll recall that Śrīla Prabhupāda said even Ravi Shankar was sense gratification. Do I want some sense gratification in music?

What does my conscience say? He's sitting back. He says if it gets heavy I'll say something, but for now it seems harmless. He is also affected by the smooth-talking lawyer who says hearing "A Love Supreme" will be good for our writing and will enable us to present a revised and added-to edition of a memoir of my coming to God consciousness. I'll write not only how it was then in 1964, but what it means (does) to me now.

Peak to peak. Admit you're a little guy who likes to take a hot-cold shower, listens to tapes, wants quiet yet would love to suddenly be hit by a windfall of Kṛṣṇa's mercy. Anyway, you've chatted on paper for an hour.

My father and I (when I was seventeen) were driving around Staten Island. Maybe he was taking me back from the Parks Department office at Love Lakes Park where I got assigned to a summer job, or maybe he was driving me from the Naval Reserve. He asked me, "What do you want in life?" I replied honestly that I would like to have a white Jaguar sports car. My dad laughed. Probably I said that influenced by my friendship with Phil Backoff. But don't blame him. It was a vision we both shared—owners and drivers of Jaguars (or in a pinch we'd settle for a 1948 MG sports car with wire-spoked wheels).

I have come a long way from hankering for a sports car—which I never worked for. Soon went from that desire to hankering for *bhāva*—it's so rarely attained I'll have to be patient.

Hey, I proved to you again—if you write whatever comes, *without* the fear that "this isn't Kṛṣṇa conscious," it will be fresh and will turn to Kṛṣṇa consciousness in a nicer way than if you just preached and avoided yourself.

Your own past life and hidden ISKCON life is not taboo. When you think of something nasty (too nasty for explicit detail), you can still say it in a gentlemanly way. You don't have to assume a rough, nasty voice just to tell the truth. But don't avoid an unvarnished, actual description when it comes. (Do it on scrap paper if you must.)

5:17p.∞.

Up-to-the-minute reports. You talk of yourself in your little drama the way Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī talks of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Go ahead, tease me; point out my self-centeredness. But for one who is in such a low state, it is necessary to

have regular reports, like when Dāmodara dāsa was in intensive care.

There was good news in the last eight rounds, 3–4:30 P.M. Although I chanted them too slowly, I was steady and mostly alert. More importantly, I enjoyed, felt a deepening center to myself as I went on chanting. I was doing more than merely counting rounds.

Rocks in the sea. Don't make fun. Or do. Sailor hat; sailor. Kṛṣṇa smashed Kāliya's heads until he vomited blood. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that.

I am not a conceited person.

I have given up my bad habits of youth, but some subtle bad habits remain, like fault-finding, *nāma-āparādha*, etc. You know this. You live beside a mountain and chip at it with a spoon or a small pick ax, this pen until your thumb is too tired.

I am sorry for you.

I am glad for you.

Each Writing Session is a new crunch.

No more eating today; just a glass of milk. If you eat, you can't digest.

The diary is a mixture. Some in it is inferior. You work to separate it. Too much of it is like that?

Creepers.

Get rid of unwanted desires, get rid of the egotism. Over the years, bad things have fallen away from my person. Can't always tell what they are, but a conceitedness that was once so total has certainly diminished. The *ahaṅkara* doesn't have a full hold of me. I don't notice much so much how I look to others; it doesn't matter. As a kid I'd be horrified if I didn't wear shoes and pants and shirts that were considered stylish at school. Now I am not so much embarrassed even by front teeth missing. If someone doesn't praise me, I notice it, but I don't unreasonably demand it. Thus in

writing I look for what I want to do, the work and not the praise. I want to publish, but after that, it doesn't matter so much whether books are sold and popular. I want to be able to go on writing with enthusiasm.

It's 5:45 P.M. and I'm winding down. I say to myself, "Maybe I can't write now." All day long it's like that whenever I go to write.

My eyelids grow heavy. Please let me write something that's like a breakthrough.

Pudding. Coca-cola. I don't need these things to titillate the tongue. I'm not up in my room at 125 Katon Avenue. I don't have to go down to low consciousness. I am not this body. My spiritual master, has opened my eyes from darkness and revealed transcendental knowledge to me. I live for that, steady. This writing is an attempt to dig something out, but it won't disrupt my steady behavior on the platform of *vaidhī-bhakti*.

I'm not going back, I'm going forward. Too soft, sick-looking-green sofa and easy chairs in the front room of this house. I use the room to write poems. The stack of newsprint is on the floor and I sit over it or hover over it or lean on it. Read a little in published poets and then go forward.

Other rooms: the bathroom is always cold but there's an electric heater in the wall. My many little rituals, like soaking dentures overnight in Polident, taking half a teaspoon of *trifalla*, clock by the bed, knit hat for the night, etc. I'm like a *pūjārī* with millions of little things to arrange, but instead of *pūjā* to my worshipable Deity, I perform *arcana* of my own daily functions.

I'm teasing you. I mean to say, you are using everything in Kṛṣṇa's service; yourself as an instrument to perform *sādhana-bhakti*, so there's no harm in the rituals.

The writing seems inferior. The nagging feeling that it would be better to do direct *śravaṇam-kīrtanam* rather than groping here. But when I look back at the two Writing Sessions today, I conclude they were worth it. In each one there was at least one moment of breakthrough.

Why I don't live in Vṛndāvana? I'm not eligible. I don't have a service there. I couldn't do it in the present ISKCON context. I'd be seen as a *bābājī* who doesn't preach. I come to the West and see devotees and write books which are a kind of preaching.

I'm in a sad state, but I'm happy too. A mixture. I'm happy to have this routine in this place, with not much free time, but sad that my *japa* remains distracted.

Kṛṣṇa knows what is best for me. He took away the wealth of the Avanti *brāhmaṇa*, who then suffered, but entered a deep state of renunciation. He then could tolerate even when rowdy people passed urine on his food or beat him with sticks or put him in chains. He accepted it . . .

I am your *chela*,
Śrīla Prabhupāda.

The beach . . . the *japa* . . . the devotees talking in the kitchen . . .

Where is John Wayne now? Where is Elvis Presley? Where is my buddy John Young? Why do I ask? I don't much care where they are? I am actually asking where will I go? I'm asking, What is the fate of *jīvas*? How is it we all die quickly and take new bodies? How to understand it?

Accept *sāstra* and then you can know.

I want to surrender. I want to sing a song. I want something to be extracted from this writing so it can endure and be admired and help people because we all need to serve and this is my service. I want to make it

okay for you. Faith in writing to help you. To stand as an art, as a way to inspire and teach. Whatever I have already written is okay, but we need something now.

Tired, he stumbles.

Please . . .

He is foolish. Ink spills, blood drops on his sweatshirt from a small cut on his finger. He will have to pee every four or five hours. The body will collapse like a heap. We don't see many dead bodies because the creatures go somewhere private to die. The living continue and when it's their time, they go someplace and lie down.

I just ran out of time. Sorry
this session wasn't better.

☉ March 15 ☉

12:40 A.M.

Beware the Ides of March. Take shelter in Kṛṣṇa's name, and guru and *sāstra*.

We spent thirty minutes just now, fifteen for *Bhagavad-gītā* with commentaries by Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, and fifteen in *The Nectar of Devotion* with comparative study of *Bhakti-ras-āmṛta-sindhu*. I could do this much longer, but I want to come here and write. No one writes so much out of his own head and heart. I want you to justify it.

Yes. I want to know who I am. It's a habit. I'm so far in this direction, I keep going. It's a practice of an art to get better at it. We want to hit streaks of good writing etc. So many justifications.

Why—in the presence of such perfect, substantial exalted works as *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* and *The Nectar of Devotion*—works which are essential and which I haven't fully absorbed—do I turn to free-writing, which often puts me on the trail of nonsense externals and my pre-Kṛṣṇa conscious past?

Because, because . . . Okay, so you are demanding and ask that question of me. It is a serious one. I'll try to answer not just by a quick reply, but by considering it and replying when I can.

Maybe I'll reach a stage where I won't feel impelled to write so much. Am I being influenced by Baladeva and Kdd in this and by my own created pressure to produce books, to attain stages in evolution I claim can be reached only by writing? Can I let it go, and if so, when? What do I want to do?

I recall stopping writing about four years ago under the influence of Amala-bhakta. He said I should stop out of humility. Only write after much inner pressure has been developed. Pray, don't write. Who do you think you are that you should write so much? I stopped for maybe six months. During that time I spoke *Entering The Life of Prayer*, thinking it was just for me. But when I started to write again, I felt resentment that I had been stopped at all. Why should I be silenced? Why should I think I have no right to make poems? I went ahead again, looking for a form and started with *Iṣṭagoṣṭhi*, then the *Nimāi* series, *Memory in the Service of Kṛṣṇa*, *Truthfulness*, etc. Then *Prabhupāda Meditations* (which came after six weeks of talking of my life before Kṛṣṇa consciousness in interviews with Baladeva). Then "Among Friends" started due to fear of ISKCON censorship. Then *Shack Notes*. For two years I've been doing that free-writing and mostly nothing else. Everything can come from it. Writing retreats, journals produced in three or four weeks as books. I love them. They are the essence of my *bhajana* and life in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Now two of them are published and moving in the ISKCON market, *Here is Śrīla Prabhupāda* and *Begging*. I'm mentioning all this to remind you that what we're

doing is the result of previous development. I tend to see it as the home stretch, the big harvest of my productive years, my fifties. Even if I have productive writing years in my sixties, then what's the harm in my thinking with urgency that maybe my fifties are my last years? Get your work done.

I will tend to *śāstra* study also. I'm trying to balance it all. These three weeks are not the usual writing retreat. I give it three hours a day, no more. It's a *japa* retreat. When I took the *japa* retreat last year, it was ideally combined with a deliberate attempt at a book, *Begging*. This year I'm deliberately *not* attempting a book. But I am writing seriously anyway.

I found this on page 88 of *Begging*:

"Come back again for more retreats like this and write more of this simple and sublime theme: 'This is what happens when you spend time chanting.'"

Prayers and poems. Go ahead.

Free-write stutters sometimes.

I have been confining myself to things immediately at hand in this house and what I see out the window. This is what happens when I write with no theme.

What about writing *what you want*. Seymour's advice was you write the *book* you want to read. That suggests you get an idea of a particular form or story, and then you carry it out. I have taken the concept "Write what you want" to mean, *at each sitting or session, start from scratch, confronting yourself as to what to write and why*. That doesn't lend itself to a developed story or a structured essay. You tell the truth of how you feel at 1 A.M., then again at 6 A.M., then at 11 A.M., then 6 P.M..

I'm not mocking it here, but trying to say more clearly what it is. Does it come from Goldberg's "writing practice"? Others too—Elbow, Stafford, a whole

school and generation of writing teachers. They all advocate the practice of "free-writing," but mostly they say it's a basic discipline, a warm-up. They don't say it's the only way to write. (Stafford may say that, he does.) Peter London made a good argument for it.

Once having written like this, it's hard to go back to the old way. Nothing is as direct or therapeutic. You keep digging at every sentence, for what is true, what actually concerns you, not what will look good. The opposite extreme is where the writer doesn't care what he's saying—that Shaeffer Beer is the best—but he strives to say it in a clever way that will sell and capture people's attention—for an unworthy cause.

Staid, disciplined writing is fine in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. You write carefully, you think of what Śrīla Prabhupāda said, go and look it up, and include it in your purport. The reader is taken along on perfect, already chalked out route. You don't demand he go through your actual day, your actual mind. You treat him to śāstric gems and the spiritual world. But you don't give him your heart. Your heart is unworthy.

Striving, being who you are. Hoping to break through and write a poignant piece—within pages of free-writing.

Ueland: "But the main thing is to discover the real. You, not the bogus literary you who got "As" in your English courses . . . What do you really care about and love? Who are you?"

It seems ridiculous that I and readers (especially disciples, but others too, critics, etc.) keep asking why I write these things which berate myself and show me as less than perfect. What is the value of such writing? We want the Absolute Truth?

Why ridiculous? Because we already have the Absolute Truth. I am not perfect. My life is not 100% con-

stantly in tune with the Absolute Truth. *If I'm going to write and be a writer, why should I pose and present myself as something other than what I am? Why should writing not be truthful? If it means admitting I do and think things which a perfect Vaiṣṇava doesn't, why should I refrain from writing it, at least for myself?* Dostoyevsky said, "Never, never lie to yourself. Don't lie to others, but least of all to yourself."

The free-writing has led me to the point where I don't write for others, don't write a book or essay, but write only for myself—the immediate and most important images and experiences. Sometimes it comes out as a *kind* of book—a different and new genre of book. It's like a diary, but not a diary per se. It's free-writing, but directed. It has chapters—a beginning, middle, and end (based on a set duration of time, usually four weeks)—but the writer feels free at any moment to depart from his theme and write what counts for him right then. It works well (as art, as Kṛṣṇa conscious reading) when there's urgency to it.

Sometimes it's nonsense and I welcome that as a sign I am letting down barriers and pretensions. Such a demanding, yet welcoming, easy artform. A friendly art for real people. I fear it, yet I love its truth and intimacy. I fear it may stray outside the Kṛṣṇa conscious canon. *But I am already straying* every hour and every minute in my consciousness. The writing is only catching some of it and holding it up for my attention and that of others: "Look, this is how we actually live. We claim we are devotees, but this is what passes through our minds."

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa. I want to surrender. I want to evolve my writing so the total person in honesty, desires to write only about Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, has no choice but to live in Vraja (at least in the mind), and with his

whole self, constantly, and not casually, he writes only about Kṛṣṇa because that's who he is. I want to reach that state.

By this career, I seem to say I am willing to die in an imperfect state and my writing is a kind of self-sacrifice to readers and to the art of self-expression. I can say that. But I can also say that I will die in an imperfect state, not due to the fault in this writing process, but due to false ego, *aparādhās*, and lack of surrender. The writing tracks and records whatever I am.

But doesn't the writing also contribute to what you are?

Yes, therefore I'm praying and singing in a writer's *parikrama*, or saying what it's like in Vṛndāvana.

I'm writing about writing, and even that's not my theme. This morning I started feeling guilty that I was spending time with myself when I could have been reading *sāstra*. In self-defense, let me give an example of a devotee I know. He's an excellent scholar, has an incredible ability to analyze what he reads, the more intricate the discussion, the better. He translates from Sanskrit and Bengali, gives us definitions and understandings of *rāgānugā*, and other areas of *siddhānta*. He loves this kind of analytical, intellectual-spiritual study so much that he could do it all day. But he can't strictly follow the rule for no illicit sex. I might say it's more important he confront himself as to why he can't follow. Not that he has to write in a mundane way about it. In fact, it gives him too much pain to confront this lacking. If he thinks about it too much, he wants to run away. Better he pursue his academic studies. But I'm just saying . . . study of *sāstra* has to be balanced with self-awareness and a way to improve and stop hypocrisy.

It could be argued against me that I write too much of my relative self and not enough of the Absolute.

Yeah, yeah.

The black clock with white hands. The alarm startled me at midnight. It came from far outside. I was deeply inside, in a dream, under a comforter, within the zippered sleeping bag. I was sweating, although the room was cold. Woke with a shock. That's one way to do it. The force of my habit was enough to overcome doubts and the invitation to sleep another hour and skip this writing.

Picture of Prabhupāda. I pray I am on course. I write like a madman. Ten more minutes and then begin today's *japa*.

Prepare yourself. The mind will want to talk as you are doing here. But in *japa* there shouldn't be "writing." Your practice is to bring the mind to hearing. Assure yourself that you will give time to write later. The writer's interests will be best served by attentive chanting. The poor writer at present has nothing but material of dissatisfaction and complaint on *japa*. He'd much rather write a success story but you don't give him one. So *when* you are chanting, don't write. Do each act wholeheartedly. (When you write, don't chicken out and say this isn't Kṛṣṇa conscious, I shouldn't be doing this etc.)

Bring the mind back to hear the chanting. I know you can't do it, but try. Make the easy effort. Don't bludgeon yourself like mariners bludgeoning seals or whales. Be gentle and let go all thoughts and pray to Nāma. You need it and you want. Be your own friend. Believe in the efficacy of the Name. In this room alone, you can do it. At least you can keep alert and keep making the effort to pray.

You are so fixed on setting out to do the numerical quota. Okay, it will get done. But that's not all. Also . . . you think a million things. Don't allow that. Catch yourself and go back to the single act of hearing. Hear and recall This is Kṛṣṇa, this is Rādhā, this is God's names given by Śrīla Prabhupāda. I am about to do and need this medicine. This will grant love of God the goal of all goals (*uttama gati*) if you can chant in the submissive way. To those who chant with *prīti*, Kṛṣṇa gives intelligence how they can come to Him. Remind yourself of these valuable themes and not just the Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa counting and pushing of beads. Okay? Yes, okay. Save yourself. Turn to Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda.

11:13A.CO.

Wind buffeting the house, sheep bleating, and if I look out the windows, I see breakers smashing against the rock islands in Brandon Bay. We just finished our group reading of C.c. Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu agreed to Mother Śacī's request that He make His headquarters at Jagannātha Purī. I remarked that He actually kept this promise His whole life and that it was not only done for Mother Śacī, but for all His Navadvīpa followers.

Madhu said, "There is room for affection in Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

"Yes, respecting the bonds of affection." Of course at other times, the Lord acted differently, as when He parted from Sārvabhauma and others.

I spoke with M. about India. When I'm there, my disciples who come expect me to meet with them frequently. Some of the ladies send me letters every two or three days and expect quick replies. Thinking ahead. I see this as a burden. But if I don't reciprocate,

they may complain, "We have come all this distance to be with our Guru Mahārāja, but he doesn't let us see him." I'll do what I can, but I don't want to feel intimidated. They can't expect me to "dance" according to their expectations.

Now I am more free, traveling in Europe. I like to be detached from these bonds of affection.

I also thought about the few, meaningful relationships I have with Godbrothers. Even those whose examples and friendship are important to me are rarely in the same place as I am. If we happen to cross paths, that's all right, but I don't make special attempts to meet them, phone them, or write them. I'm not on any managerial committees, so don't get to meet with brothers in a working relationship. This is what I want. I hate such committees and hope I'm done with them for good.

(As I write, I see two fishing boats close to each other, both splashing through the water, foam breaking off their bows. It's a brisk day.)

My relationships are with disciples—that has its rewards and also its dangers. Disciples make for intimate friends. They will share with you whatever you want. They will trust you, for example, in your writing attempts (although some of them are confused by it and would prefer I write only straight śāstric commentaries like *Mukunda-mālā Stotra*). But if your only friends are disciples, there's the danger of not getting critical feedback which could help you form an objective viewpoint of your own activities. This is obvious and has subtle ramifications I won't go into right now. I mean the lacking isn't easily rectified. I take the position that it is good for me to go on my own. I have been excessively impressionable, and most of my Godbrothers tend to be conservative about what constitutes duty. I

feel this has stunted me in some ways, and also led me to lose my own conscience and integrity. Thus I went along with whatever the GBC and ISKCON *ācāryas* decided and wound up as a leader in the mistakes of the nine-year period following Śrīla Prabhupāda's disappearance.

Also, I *do* receive critical feedback. It comes unsolicited and sometimes savagely, in letters or newsletters. I don't exist in an Ivory tower where I never hear any opinion but my own.

11:34 A.M.

Keep writing. This is a *japa* retreat. Or more simply, a hearing retreat. You calm down and see where your emotions have led you. In the USA, I became alarmed at the difficulties *Gitā-nāgarī-dhāma* is going through. Sometimes it's presented because someone wants me to feel guilty for having left my GBC duties there—as if I should go back and help the fight for survival. But I won't be swallowed up. I gave \$3,000.00 to help bail them out, but I can't stick my finger in the dike for that one project.

Other emotional issues include female disciples coming near, wanting to touch my feet, and how I feel about that.

And then the four or five attacks in the mail stating I am a bogus offender and *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* is offensive, my writing is out to lunch, etc.

I'm putting a distance between me and these issues. I realize I have to stay involved to some degree, but it's good to be able to step out of them for awhile and see who I am aside from those pressures. Do I have an existence aside from the bouncing off of interrelations with friends, co-workers, and critics of ISKCON? Do I have my own opinions? Do I have a relationship with

harināma aside from the one we all claim to have as followers? Do I have a relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda and what is it now?

Regarding Śrīla Prabhupāda and I, there seems to be something less “personal” about our relationship. To say it sounds awful. But maybe not. It may be a transition. “Personal” could mean sentimental. For example, Śrīla Prabhupāda definitely had a strong personal relationship with his Guru Mahārāja, and it formed his identity as founder-*ācārya* of ISKCON and as author of his BBT translations. All these duties were done by Śrīla Prabhupāda as the disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. Yet he didn’t always talk of the many details of his spiritual master’s life. Just a few which he would occasionally repeat. He didn’t write a biography or memoirs or books of “meditations” about his guru. He didn’t distribute his spiritual master’s books or get them translated into English. But he did everything in service to Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. He wanted to please him. How Śrīla Prabhupāda thought of his spiritual master in his own solitude, I don’t know. We shouldn’t try to understand the mind of the pure Vaiṣṇava.

On a retreat like this, I don’t expect big breakthroughs or sensational conversions. I may have thought like that years ago when I started taking retreats. I thought that within two weeks I would either have to see God or at least experience a flood of tears. Otherwise my retreat was a failure. At least this time I’m benefiting in quietly passing the days—always busy, but quietly noticing things in myself. I am satisfied that this is a good thing to do. Sure, I want to do better, so my retreat writings are filled with complaints about bad *japa* and no prayerful attitude. But to come here is

better than not coming. It's an essential part of my life. In this respect, my life doesn't have to conform to the image of other's lives. What is duty for me is not duty for others and what is duty for them is not my duty. Not always, not in all respects.

I write this as the grass is shivering in the wind. It feels right to say this and think it. Although the interior of the retreat speaks of frustrations—facing myself as a drowsy chanter—the overall purpose is one that seems right and brings fulfillment.

One area I can approach only gradually is my attempt to become acquainted with the workings of the mind and to gain control over it in *bhajana*. One devotee who has done *vratas* of 108 rounds daily in retreat settings told me he discovered that “the mind is an organ.” He got to see that it works in the same way any other part of the body works. It can be pushed to perform, and it has certain limits and behaviors. Rather than think the mind is “you” or be helpless to the mind's dictation, we control it. *Vāco vegam manasaḥ krodha-vegam*.

I want to be able to place the mind on hearing *hari-nāma* and thinking favorably of Kṛṣṇa during *bhajana*—and take the mind away from distractions.

Also I want to feel devotion. Or pray to Kṛṣṇa to allow me to feel devotion. To feel remorse over my lack of devotion and my inability to purge out *anarthas* and *aparādhās*. This is the general work of a retreat. I don't have a vigorous program for it. Years ago I read St. Ignatius Loyola's retreat program. I don't have some process like that—daily meditations upon one's sins, turning to God or Christ . . . I have a *japa* increase and writings.

Only with this 11-12 session have I considered that my Writing Sessions during these three weeks constitute retreat writings. Maybe that's why I'm not so inclined to "cut loose" with wild mind, first thoughts. I'm moving more toward reflective statements that want to come out about my life, where I am and where I'm going.

5:10 p.m.

It's a stormy day. Between here and the rock island it's covered with sheets of white breaking surf. Occasionally I see a fishing boat bobbing, foam smashing its prow.

I pray to Rādhā-Dāmodara, If You desire, keep all of Your temples opened, for Your devotees.

Finished my last nine rounds up to the minimum thirty-two by 4:30 P.M. Those last nine were not sleepy. My pace is still slow, about eight minutes per round, but moving along and aware at least that I have the ability to take my mind away from distractions. I hope this can keep up and improve.

We sometimes have little conversations in this house which are not about Kṛṣṇa. They mention a tape of harp playing that may help me when I get headaches; I show Madhu a poem by a nondevotee; we discuss candles and our future itinerary, the visit to the dentist in Italy. I talk a little—three minutes or so—in the evening with Kirtana-rasa, asking him about his work as a lawyer. We say something about the shepherd neighbor. Something about photocopying. I also mentioned to Madhu that at least in a general way, I am starting to use this retreat in the right way. I told him, "I'm writing quite a bit, but not at all thinking of it as a book." He liked that. He said, "This is your only time in the year to

devote to chanting." I'm not sure I'm using the retreat so wholeheartedly for *japa* . . . But in an overall way . . .

And today I forgot to say my noon *gāyatrī*.

I told you about this note in *Begging*: "Come back again for more retreats . . . write more of this simple and sublime theme: 'This is what happens when you spend time chanting.'"

Better quality, better quantity, that's my private prayer-mantra. Today I felt patient with myself, assuring, it will come. Adding times when I chant. But I rarely chant except with the beads in hand and counting it as my quota. I have a tape of Śrīla Prabhupāda holding *kirtana* at Dr. Mishra's *āśrama*. When I play that, I sing along and I continue singing when it stops.

And the writing is connected. It's "Writing Sessions while on a *japa* retreat." The emphasis on increased quota and no other major responsibilities (no book-writing, letter-answering, lecturing, meeting people, studying for a seminar, etc.), but a mood in whatever else I do besides chanting.

Not eating too much, but I have a hearty appetite for what he gives me (as he lovingly cooks it). The morning walk is devoted to *japa*. Hear tapes . . .

I don't have much to say right now. Kṛṣṇa wrote Her love letters in red rose ink, I write in blue-black Sheaffer with no such love. But I like to hear of His letters and the letter which Rādhā wrote to Him, even before They met!

This session hasn't amounted to much. M. will be here shortly to do verse memorization. Do I know Bg. 4.9? 9.2? *Bhāg*.—the same verse I memorized over twenty years ago?

I didn't write something wonderful. The peat is smoking in the fireplace. This blue ink on light blue legal paper. Fishing boats bobbing. The two shepherds entered the field along with their small black dog, who runs frantically ahead of the flock and drives them into a corner. I had to close the window blind when he put them in the tight pen. I didn't want to see whatever it was he was doing. Then chanted better with one window covered and the other facing the sea.

Kirtana-rasa is out shopping in Tralee, wearing his cap with ear flaps, like a cap from my childhood. He says his brother lured him to Reno, Nevada, on a promise of lucrative law work. But he went and has no clients and no prospects. He's thinking of moving again.

This is what comes when I write. I can't stop for better.

Okay, don't pressure me. And don't try to play the trick, "I say this isn't any good but I hope in its own way it's good."

Be like the waves. Some are agitated. Be like the sea. Some days calm, some days stormy. Be who you are if you can find that out.

Each morning and each moment is precious, even though I accept them in a matter of fact way. I believe I deserve it, just like I expect to get a hot cup of milk in the evenings with honey and Chyavan Prash. If all these amenities don't appear, I think something has gone wrong. Similarly, I expect the evening to turn peacefully into night. At 7 P.M. I'll go into the room next door and sit on the floor and draw a poem with colored pencils. *Something* will come. Then lying on the floor for four hours until midnight, then begin again with a new date. I expect these things. When there's a disruption, I try to tolerate it. All right, something hap-

pened. I can't write a poem. Something else gets canceled. Accept the changes. Go on chanting as best you can.

Now this session is used up.

The edge of the shore, mist, white water splashing against rocks. Unless you are a good and chaste devotee, an obedient celibate, then all your descriptive prose jottings and poems can go to hell. Who cares for you except as a simple and strict disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda? Cling to this more than anything. Don't sour the milk. Don't spill it. Don't spill it and run it.

I depend on Kṛṣṇa to maintain my Kṛṣṇa conscious vows, which are always hanging on a thin thread. How can I claim I am a big steel cable connected to right behavior? How can I claim I'm as protected as Fort Knox and the US with its fleets and Airforce? What protects me? A little sincerity and His Divine Grace. What threatens me? The senses' demands—tongue, belly, genitals, mind's demands, urges of speech, and anger. The world is ferocious, Māyā-devī is all-powerful (she can knock over cities with a little hurricane and the mental and sensual control of any *sādhū* with just one *apsara*).

Pray for protection as you chant.

Now this session has ended, but I have said something. I am weak and fallible. I want people to think I'm strong. You can count on me like you can count on the Prudential Insurance Company. But I'm weak, soft, and susceptible to feminine advances. It's good to know that and take shelter. Don't take chances. I've been saved again and again.

The red carnations tell me, "Don't dally with ladies, even in letter exchanges or in the mind." Tell the navi-

gator on the bridge of the ship, "Steady as she goes, two degrees right. Now two degrees left."

Alas,

Where is the private place where I am not performing for the audience?

Even when I cavort freely, it's for them to see later when they read how free I was.

Milk. Verses with Madhu. These worries I've expressed. Now put them aside. You're in a safe place for now, and if you follow your *sannyāsa-dharma*, the Lord will protect you. May He protect other *sannyāsīs* also. Don't gloat when anyone has the trouble that you yourself wish to avoid. Help others. Give solace. Be a friend.

And don't let your enemies wear you down. I rise and rejoice in a little life of well-being and service. They shall not trample me under. My Lord, I wish to be faithful, and not just so I can die with a good reputation. Not, "Whew! I made it." But true allegiance. Because it's part of the honor and allegiance to Śrīla Prabhupāda. For that reason and to give no pain to those who trust me so much and serve me wants and needs.

I'm a man standing on my own feet, but so fallible. Clay-footed hero. If You, Balarāma, will hold me up, only then can I lead those who depend on me. Let me be aware of this. I'm in constant need of protection.

O mind, why are you not a Vaiṣṇava? Why do you lust after women, all of whom are meant for Kṛṣṇa's enjoyment? Why do you enjoy them on the subtle plane one after another? Why do you hear the tidings of men and women in the world? You know such input will agitate you.

This is another mood for *japa*. Usually I say I'm praying for taste. But I also pray for protection of vows, and for the right reasons. Die before you lose your

reputation. For one who has been honored, dishonor is worse than death. For the right reason—it's your preaching service to reciprocate. Disciples give faith; you have to give them at least minimum honest behavior. Honesty here doesn't mean merely being candid—but being true to the vows I have taken.

You, Lord, are the protector of those vows.

I pray to You, Please protect mine. I want to do the right especially by those . . . enough.

12:45 p.m.

Here we are, squinting and sitting up, with eyes, spine, hand, heart, digestive organs, everything cooperating, sometimes begrudgingly. As you grow older in ISKCON, you want to act more voluntarily than by the rules and regulations, but your body is less spontaneous in its performance of functions. The neck never noticed it was carrying the burden of the head. Now it does and it often aches a bit, so you try to ease it. Other functions too, like digestion and bowel movements are less spontaneous.

Ironically, this slowing down and less cooperative functioning of the aging body occurs at a time when the mind is more inclined to voluntary or spontaneous drives. We don't want to be told what to do by authorities; we want to feel ecstasies. But the body is more sluggish and pained than ecstatic. The vehicle for devotional expression is more in the mind and intelligence.

Last night, lying awake (too long) I tried briefly to feel the soul. Where is it? What is it in relation to the body and perceivable subtle state? Śrīla Prabhupāda teaches us the simple method of self-realization: you can sense your head, hand, feet, and other bodily parts, and when you do, you say, "This is my head, my mind, etc." But you are different than these bodily

parts. You are the owner of the senses (*kṣetra-jñāna*). But where are you? Who are you? We know the śāstric definition or answer to this question! You are the tiny spirit soul (*keśāgra*) in the heart. Your nature is to be the eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa. But I was trying to directly perceive it or understand why I can't perceive it. I could not glimpse myself in my *rasa*, obviously. But I wondered, what am I besides this collection of bones and lump of body lying on the floor, snug before the fireplace, thinking alertly (and not falling asleep as I should)?

I also guessed whether I can get by with less sleep. It wasn't such a profitable thinking session, but I may try it again. It's different than this writing, which is reporting the results of an experiment or experience. The experience itself is a confrontation or meditation.

I've also been trying to write on different levels, not only the reporting with the intellect of something already experienced—either a moment ago or twenty years ago. Writing automatically, what comes. But writing does seem to always lag behind some experience. However, the experience can serve the writer. The writing becomes more important to me than the experience—is that undesirable? Or, the experience is complete only when I take time to write about it. Some intelligent people feel no urge to write about life; they just live it.

Prabhupāda asked Yoko Ono and the men with her, "What is your philosophy?" She answered for George and certainly for John, "We have no philosophy. We are just living." That is not intelligent.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said write, don't be dull. Whatever you realize, write it down. It's a form of *smaraṇam*. In that sense, it's desirable and not a morbid preoccupation with experience that already happened.

I'm trying to see myself, and not only at writing times. At writing times I usually scan my experience and hope to discover some little enlightenment or something that has occurred. These occurrences may have gone unnoticed by me, or at least they are going unrecorded—so they may pass into oblivion. I try to capture them by writing them down. Maybe while walking on the beach, some insight occurred. Now at the desk I go back to that moment. First I sense by intuition, "Something happened on the beach this morning." Then I go back and recall the moment and then eagerly write it down as fast as I can before it evaporates like a dream.

Ah, dreams. They present a whole experience, as if lived, as we see in a film-story (Hollywood). I have been recording some, but recently, I have been thinking they are not worth it and letting them go. I mention it as a related phenomenon to writing down experience. First you see the dream, then, if you're inclined, you write it down. The "dream" may be waking realities . . .

Chasing these thoughts this morning in a more analytical mood, maybe inspired by reading Navadvīpa's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* translation . . .

Then there's a blank. Like "break in tape." You pick up again where you left off, jumped ahead, having completely lost the thread. This seems to be another symptom of old age. It's funny. One moment you're serious about some thought and the next moment you can't even remember what it was. How serious can it be if you can't recall it? You have to laugh at your own limits. It *may* have been serious, but you are laughable, unserious, and absent-minded.

You keep walking, keep writing,. In free-writing, you develop trust in first thoughts. Why? I don't know. I

mean right now I can't think of *why*. Doesn't seem important to mention it.

Why first thoughts? 'Cause N. Goldberg and her Zen guru say so? No, I hope that's not it. But I've experienced some good in it.

You want to sincerely arrive at Kṛṣṇa conscious thoughts. You want all your thoughts and emotions to flow to Kṛṣṇa in devotion, just as the Ganges flows unimpeded to the sea. That's Kuntī's prayer. Let all thoughts, be they first, second, or tenth, flow directly to Kṛṣṇa. Then we're onto something. Let them flow rapidly.

I don't have much time.

Let me use it well. The words and sentences should be ones that count. "Lose control." Why trust that? Because your heart and hand know what they want to say and do better if you don't edit and censor them.

Forbidden areas? Like talking of female disciples and all females. Female dogs? Erasers? Pencils? You didn't want to lose control, you said, on this retreat because you were in a quiet mood. Thought losing control was foolish?

No. See their faces and tell the truth: "I see the girls' faces even when I'm not there." Sometimes I make a noise with my mouth, meaning—I can't write that, it's not even true.

But the thought *came*. Do I have to honor every damn thought? No, it's not honoring. It's just admitting. Yeah, but what if someone critical of me reads it? You said faces—and wanted to add the word thighs. There, I did it.

I am not going to commit a bad act against the regulative principles. I am sane. Not going to jump out of LSD windows or into illicit beds. I am not going to smoke corn silk in pipes or drink big doses of nutmeg,

LSD, marijuana, pied piper (euphemism for what?). No self abuse, other abuse, vein injection, beer guzzling, bar entering, woman-hunting—no hunger in the body, no hankering for orgasm—truly I mean it. The desire is elsewhere hankering upwards for pure *bhakti-rasa*, even though I can't attain it.

And why can't I attain it? That's the big question in a *japa* retreat. You admit and accept that you are not an ecstatic chanter. But it's worthwhile increasing your quota. You assume you can't feel love because of your past and present offenses. Your critics (ISKCON's critics) want to tell you exactly what those offenses are—like when you assumed *mahā-bhāgavata* status and offended the Godbrothers. You reply to this, "I am sorry about that. We admitted it together in ISKCON and we've changed. Where were you when it happened? Come on back." But they say, "No, you didn't apologize sufficiently to us and now we want you to give up your continued *aparādhā*, which is to assume any duty or privilege of acting as the *master* or guru. Give it up and come to us and we will tell you what to do and how to run ISKCON," etc. In other words, they have a loaded program.

I am sorry. I am trying to reform. My attempt to write honestly is part of the same wave. I don't claim I'm fully reformed and perfectly situated.

(Just took an ear plug out. Lost a bit of concentration; now hear the heater. Oh, this body and its constant demands.)

A writing retreat—I meant to say a *japa* retreat—means you ask why you can't feel love of God. I don't want my critics' answer to that. I want my own answer, if I know. Being alone gives me a better chance to *hear* my own answer. It's not just a written reply. I live alone

and increase chanting and I notice the answer quietly unfolding. I'm being gentle with myself. But by writing as much as possible, I'm trying to confront myself. Not "gentle" in the sense of letting myself get away with murder.

In fifteen minutes I turn to *japa*. There's room in *japa* for asking this question, "Why don't I love?" Or, "May I, Lord, be allowed to love and serve Your name? Please give me clarity and devotion; I don't want to remain only a counter of beads, like a Chinese laundry man using an abacus to calculate how much money you owe him for cleaning two shirts. I count beads, but I want to feel devotion. I want to praise You and recall Your *guṇa-līlā-nāma-rūpa* in Vraja."

I came here to get away from playing the helpful know-it-all to disciples. Breathe with relief. M. says on the beach, we benefit from *fresh air*. I say there's another kind of fresh air—being away from rooms where you preside as the know-it-all and solve peoples' problems. If they don't respond you think, "Why isn't this disciple more responsive and adoring/affectionate?" But the same duty can be done humbly.

Jagadīśa Goswami singing *bhajan*as, *kīrtana* in the evening with his disciples in Vṛndāvana, counseling them according to *Bhagavad-gītā*. Many examples, and I too, as an old-timer with some experience, can give help to young devotees. Do it cautiously. Beware of becoming "affected" or of "having your head turned" by the respect they give you.

Fresh air on the beach.

New vistas.

Breathe alone.

Don't make *that* a cult either. That "I go alone. Ain't I wonderful?" Talk to a young girl in a hall. Tell her, "I

just wrote you an answer to your letter.” Okay, okay, some of this is inevitable. I realize you are not attacking me, but showing me awkward situations and places to be more careful. They want personal response. You can’t give it except as is proper for a *sannyāsī*.

Any last thoughts for this session? Fresh air on beach, why can’t I love Kṛṣṇa? Will I be able to know?

While not falling asleep last night I thought, “Hey, maybe I’m about to have a big realization—this is the calm before the storm. Maybe because I’m *willing* (I accept) for it not to happen, therefore Kṛṣṇa will let it happen? Doesn’t St. John of The Cross say all this is spiritual sense gratification, and we should just pray without expecting any tangible return? ‘You can make me broken-hearted by not being present before me.’

“Hey guys! I’m startin’ to feel separation! My hairs are standing on end. Look, Ma, I’ve got *bhāva*.”

Oh,

You

Clown

Oh, you womanizer.

Oh, you pretender. (Huh?)

Playtime is up now.

You were saying!—

I lay awake thinking it was a

breakthrough. Slept and dreamt of Advaita Ācārya dāsa. Nothing special I could discern there.

Hello all. Farewell for now. Let’s go to our *japa*.

5:10 A.M.

Yes, writing will do me and others good.

I also like to write. I have faith.

Glasses fog up. I fall asleep at night and wake a half hour or an hour later. M. says it’s due to travel. The

body is mixed up. The typewriter. Be true don't deliberately make confusion. Maybe that's why I don't like "fooling around" in free-writing nowadays. Nothing artificial. If I feel inspired to fool around, go ahead and do it. But don't just mess around for no reason. Words are sacred, the function of writing is sacred and useful.

A game of Monopoly, a game of Parcheesi. A vintage memory pops out like a weasel (in the song) or a squirrel or mouse in life. You type and wait for the bell to ring. You read what you wrote in "Davey's Day" fashion. The bell rings again and again as if to say, "Stop! Stop!"

When you get attached to performance, then it's not good. What is it I want? Worship . . . I want to chant better. I am not ashamed to ask it again and again. You see, that's performance-worry, when I think, "I have already written here that I want to improve chanting. If I keep on repeating it, it will be tiresome to the reader." That's crap. It's important for me to keep saying it: *I want to improve*, I want to improve. I want to chant better and I think I can do it. I can improve. I just have to take the mind from where it is and bring it back to hearing.

I rarely do that. Very rarely do I think this is Kṛṣṇa, this is Rādhā. Rarely do I even hear it. I don't know what I am doing. Usually *something*, or I fall asleep.

Overall it's not bad; you are a nice person and all that, but for real results, we'll have to consult someone else. I mean we need a real guru, not you who can't even chant. We appreciate your honesty about it, but we need to go to a higher stage of *harināma*.

Leave me on the beach to chant my mantras with no depth. But I come back here and tell you about it. I am

going to chant, the phantom of the opera—I don't know where that came from.

I am going to do better. Right after I finish this page I'll do round number fourteen and then do two more on the beach. Don't despair or expect the heavens to open and Lord Viṣṇu to come down as He did in *yajñas* when they chanted the hymns and with devotion, longed to see Him. I want to do better and come away from this retreat. *Begging* may be better than anything I write now. But I still have to write now. *Begging* was written over a year ago. I have to keep moving, keep moving.

11:20 A.M.

Rādhikā-Ramaṇa dāsa (in Boston) said that in Zen, there's a concept of "beginner's mind." He liked that idea and asked how to attain an equivalent of it in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He referred to a loss of freshness and setting in of mechanical service. I recommended certain acts which bring about "beginner's mind," such as book distribution on the street or a long *kīrtana*. For me, writing does this. I have to come to the beginning each time, find my original motivation for writing, search what I want to say, confront my *anarthas*, steer to Kṛṣṇa, and pray to Him to accept me and my writing.

Flames and roar of wood on fire in the fireplace. Kīrtana-rasa cooking in the kitchen next door. Scratching sound of pen on paper. If I stopped I could hear the outdoors, wind and sea, but right now I can't.

Where did I leave off in these notes? I was saying?

Nevermind. Say where you are now. "If you are going to write, you must become aware of this richness in you and come to believe in it and know it is there so that you can write opulently and with self-trust. If you

once become aware of it, have faith in it, you will be all right" (*If You Want to Write*, p. 148).

But you don't know it. You find it and then lose trace of it again. Where is it? You know Kṛṣṇa consciousness is unlimited in terms of the *sāstras* and the Lord's pastimes either recorded in *ślokas* or being carried out every moment in the spiritual world and in the minds of pure devotees. Unfortunately, I think this last treasure is mostly not available to me. That which is written in the scripture—why should I repeat it here poorly? That which is unmanifest, I don't see, and of course, I'm not going to concoct "pastimes" of Kṛṣṇa. But this leaves me out in the cold to so much warmth and celebration. I can refer to scriptures and repeat them in new contexts and applications, but right now, I don't have a happy solution to the problem of not being able to touch the *līlās* with my pen as much as I'd like. Also, they should touch my heart and the lives of possible readers. Mere recitation doesn't seem enough. Then in search of original material I go to my own life. It's so tiny, so neophyte! But it's mine. I draw from it. I admit it interests me. The pastimes of Kṛṣṇa pass through it when I read them and can honestly say I feel and think something about them. If I want to write, I have to write of my life.

William Stafford defends the artist as "regional." He says art is a kind of sniffing along on a trail, "And that trail is one-person wide, terribly local and provincial: art is absolutely individual in a non-forensic but utterly unyielding way." Artists have to respond to the immediate, "emerging right at the time from the myriadly active, local relations of the artist." They have to be responsive to where they find themselves" (*My Name's William Tell*).

We'll plunge into *Vidagdha-mādhava* this afternoon. Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Now I have to get onto my one-person-wide trail and sniff along. I'm warm in this room. But that's the body. At this rate, I'll quickly run out of things to say.

The land is divided by low stone walls all over the Irish countryside. The shore isn't good land, too salty, but tolerable for a flock of sheep. They stain them red and blue and feed them and hate them enough to kill them after a few years—as if they are to blame for your poverty and miserable shepherd's life and getting drunk and hard-heartedness.

The *japa* late this morning was ten minutes per round and I couldn't get it to go faster. I was lucky to keep it down to that. You know why.

Crack! Wood pieces in the fire.

Please don't write like a wallpaperer who just wants to cover as much wall space as possible as soon as possible, neatly. Don't write at all if you can't write well. Oh, to hell with that. I'll write as I please.

But Kṛṣṇa will not be pleased unless I serve Him. The pinch of your unworthiness. Falling apart at the seams. Mostly you defend your honorable profession and yourself. If someone says, "You have a separate motive other than pleasing Kṛṣṇa," I reply, "Every devotee I know has that at least to a small degree. That's not a reason to stop." But still, sometimes it falls apart at the seams. You see your lack of purity, your stubbornness, and your desire to do things your way rather than making the utmost effort to find out what Kṛṣṇa wants of you.

But He's silent. He wants me to decide! I have to do it this way. Sniffing along. I am me. Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, alone in a house by the sea. What the hell is he doing that for? Don't bother to argue with them. Go

on with your *bhajana*. What is unworthy in you, you have to struggle to purify. Find something good and engage it in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Give hope to yourself and others—but a hope actually purchased or attained by your best, long efforts.

I bow down and pray for pure *sādhana*. I won't forget *gāyatrī* today.

This is the weakest session so far. All right.

I can fail. You can't fail either if that's not the game. If someone asked you, "Read aloud from one of your Writing Sessions," why not read this one? What's the difference? It's a real moment, a real attempt. So the Muses of Vaiṣṇava writing didn't bless me so much, so I was stubborn and forgot the required mantras and the way to the river. So we had to sit down wherever we were and chant our *gāyatrī*, but despite good intentions we lost our attention. Didn't enter the meanings of the guru-mantra, *gaura-mantras*, or *kṛṣṇa-kāma* and *gopāla-mantras*. But I did recite them and I here mention their holy names.

So you had no subject or theme. Still you sat by the fire and M. massaged your back and head and arms. That's new. I relaxed. Oh, and I slept an hour earlier, making up for the sleeplessness of night.

You stumble on a path. Those with you ask, "Where are we?" You frankly say I don't know. This is just a wandering. Okay, someone says, but can we at least discuss some *kṛṣṇa-kathā*? Are you averse to it?

No, I say. Mādhavendra Purī was wandering in ecstasy in Vraja. He didn't beg for food, but only accepted what anyone brought him. A beautiful, young cowherd boy came and gave him milk, asking what *tapasya* and meditation he was performing. Mādhavendra Purī accepted the milk from the boy and went on chanting

all night. At the end of night he dreamed (*svapna*) that the same village boy came to him. I reside in a bush, Gopāla said—for indeed that boy was Gopāla Kṛṣṇa Himself and He had been waiting a long time for His pure devotee, Mādhavendra Purī, to come and visit Him in Vraja.

Please take Me out of the jungle. Establish worship of My Deity form which was first begun by Vraja but has now been neglected. Mādhavendra Purī did it.

They worshipped Gopāla in a wonderful manner with *abhīṣeka*, a temple opening, and then regular, daily *pūjā*.

Foam at sea. Somewhere a vast ocean of milk. Kṣīro-dakṣāyī Viṣṇu lies there on the “surf board” of Ananta Śeṣa. It is pleasant and inconceivable (*acintya*).

Even better is the Lord in Vraja playing in the Yamunā.

When you chant on your beads, can you think of these things? Why don't you surround yourself with books and insert their sayings into these sessions?

There's a bureau, or whatever you call it—a case with glass enclosed shelves. They have it filled with porcelain cups and saucers. I took over the bottom shelf (which was not covered with glass) for my altar. I moved the statue of Christ as the Little King to a higher shelf. He is worshipable by the Catholics in his red robes and red and gold crown. He holds a blue globe in his left hand and his right hand is held in a pose combining the *jñāna-mūdra* and the *abhaya-mūdra*. He is welcome here by me, another holy personage on my shelf. Gathered in a threesome are the great Kṛṣṇa conscious writers. On the left is Rūpa Gosvāmī, on the right Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja. They are both constantly

writing. In the middle is Jīva Gosvāmī, blessing us with his hand in the *abhaya* pose. Don't worry, you'll attain love of Kṛṣṇa.

We know what Rūpa and Kavirāja Gosvāmīs are writing. I am hoping to be a tiny speck of dust at their feet. They are my *śikṣā-gurus*. I like to see them writing and hope to always take these pictures with me. Śrīla Prabhupāda also writes every day. I'd like to get a picture of him with a dictaphone. (Pictures of him with a pen seem artificial, since he only used it to sign his name after 1966). Get a picture of him composing and all these persons can inspire me.

Pañca-tattva is not writing with pens or tape recorders.

I have to take a break from writing, I know. *Kīrtana* at least three hours every evening.

And Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Am I to be always a scribe?

But if you are to be a scribe in the spiritual world, Prabhu, I think you'll have to give up this *sādhana* of legal pads and free-writing. It can be exchanged for a more satisfying essence—and I hope your writing is leading you to that. Even now the pen and words in English are only the way to serve, not the service itself.

Time's up.

5:20 p.m.

You are not the crest jewel on the head of all Vaiṣṇavas. Neither are you a bewildered, lusty *karmī* seeking fame and always unhappy, addicted to illicit sex and intoxication. You are not a monarch; you are not a street dog. You are not a priest of the Catholic Church; you are not humbler than a blade of grass. What and who are you?

Madhu is stirring something in a pot in the kitchen. Kirtana-rasa has gone shopping. I asked Madhu, "Are you cleaning the lunch dishes?" He said, "Yes, and I'm preparing something for tomorrow."

"Oh? St. Patrick's Day."

He laughs. Is he cooking something special because of that? I don't pursue it. Wind whips around the outside corners of the house. We seek warmth indoors.

Is this a writing career? You write whatever comes as much as possible and don't worry what to do with it? How quickly I'm exhausted by a single sentence. Judging performance. There's nothing to say. I already know my plans, so why write them here and make a public announcement? Why try to draw others into your net?

Paurṇamāsī and Viśākhā exit. Kṛṣṇa and Madhu-maṅgala exit. We read forty to forty-five minutes and I said, "That's enough." The wind whips, the fire grows in small flames, devouring the peat in the fireplace. Long sheets of ocean breakers foam white. "If the Atlantic had showed its usual face . . ."

What if I had to always stay here? It wouldn't be possible. I would have to adjust. I would have to change. I hanker to be part of ISKCON dealings, or at least my own dealings even while I claim solitude and take breaks for it once in awhile.

I know Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme. It is best not to try to figure this out, but go on hearing from the undisturbed authorities. *Śuśuruma*, hearing from them. *Tat chṛṇu*. Hear from Kṛṣṇa and you'll know everything phenomenal and noumenal, without a doubt.

From here across the ocean is the shortest distance across the Atlantic—Shannon is the first stop when going east. And we are here.

Free-writing is fine when it's whole-hearted. But this "stuck" attitude is not.

I'm this way because my pipe is also like this. I think this is a direct result of free-writing. It puts me like a dry monk performing austerities on an isolated peninsula. Cheer up, he's cooking something for St. Paddy's day.

Oh, the world's a fine place. Grab a little chaos on a couch. Eat what you can and enjoy your genitals. It's a good place if you're a rich human being; in that species you can go farthest to hell. And after that, you're reduced to misery as a sheep in the rain who awaits his slaughter. Or if you're lucky, in human life you can turn it all around and become Kṛṣṇa conscious. But that takes work. You have to be willing to perform *tapo-divyam*. There is no other way; *nāsty eva nāsty eva* in Kali. Just chant *harer nāma harer nāma eva kevalam*.

At least I did it my own way and I don't care what you think.

☉ March 17 ☉

12:40 A.M.

I woke with some fear that I'm not doing the right thing by taking a retreat outside the routine temple duties for a *sannyāsī*. The fear was external—that some authorities will criticize me. It was also internal—whether it is actually right to choose to spend time like this in my own set up. I thought I ought to write something about it.

When I calm down and use my intelligence, I see the retreats (writing or *japa*) as useful. Other ISKCON leaders, including GBC men, take retreats from time to time. Generally, the retreat enables me to *do something* in a more effective way because I am released from other duties and can concentrate. I may use it to study books and prepare seminars, or for writing books or remedial *japa* work. Then I come right back into the routine duties and among devotees and temples or whatever the preaching field is—and I am personally refreshed and equipped with whatever it was I achieved on the retreat. Don't be afraid. If the frequency of retreats gets questioned or taken away, then I can accept that. A "retreat" can also be taken in a milder form by choosing to stay in an ISKCON community where I would be allowed time to do my own work.

I just witnessed in a typical way, how a visit to a temple is stressful for inner life. The Boston visit was enjoyable and provided a way to relate especially to disciples who gathered there. But they make me dance according to their needs. They give me letters and want meetings, and if I am able to accomplish these demands, it develops in me the feeling that I am indeed the guru, the leader who should be served.

Stress isn't always bad, so there are good features to temple life. Each day I prepared for the morning and evening lectures by researching Prabhupāda's books. Meeting people and helping to inspire them in spiritual life is rewarding. I've done it for over twenty-five years. Currently, I'm going through a period where I see the limit of these activities and a yearning to develop my own spiritual life. I don't see that I am best used by helping people directly in their problem-solving or by being dragged into the problem-solving of a community in financial crisis. I'm not willing to sacrifice myself

in that way, although I used to be. I don't see this unwillingness as a lack of surrender, but I desire to surrender directly to Kṛṣṇa (before it's too late) by increased hearing and chanting—and by writing books.

The temples operate under great pressure. They are doing front-line work. But I want to provide inspiration for chanting and hearing. A guru and *sannyāsī* is expected to provide inspiration. To have the actual taste for *sādhana*, I like to go alone, on retreats, and practice my own *sādhana*. Otherwise I'm talking about something I'm not doing myself.

But does my behavior suggest that others should also take retreats? Yes, but let them first serve for twenty-five years without retreats. Even now they could take small retreats or make better use of their available time, like India pilgrimage.

It's a specialization, what I do. Many don't want it or couldn't use it as I do. You have to be disciplined to continue a tight *sādhana* when you live on your own in a house outside a temple. I do a brief version of the morning program, but my whole day is actually an intense morning program—it's many times more *sādhana* than is normally allowed by temple life.

The retreats don't provide opportunities for outward preaching or meeting people, lecturing, etc. For that, I join the temple communities. Do it humbly and gratefully, but in a retreat, I can also prepare myself to be an effective preacher.

There's a place for inner work in devotees' lives. I'm emphasizing that.

This morning when I felt this fear and doubt, I thought maybe I shouldn't stay on this retreat. I should start visiting temples as soon as possible. But now I don't want to panic. My absence is not much noticed or a matter of criticism. Stick it out here and start do-

ing the work of improving the quality of your *japa*—to the degree that it is within your power.

Quicken the pace of each round by exerted effort to stay alert. When alert, enter moods of contrition, gratitude, and remembrance of Kṛṣṇa (*rādhā-kṛṣṇa guṇa smṛtir*). This is the work of a *japa* retreat. Instead of thinking of going back to temple life, and since you have taken this opportunity and have a good solitary house, *go for it*.

This writing is also allowed. Do it as best you can. I write what comes. I don't see it so much as literature-making. It's writing life. I just want to flow with it and let my editor decide what can be used for others. But the writing should still have an immediate function even before it gets published.

For example, this early morning session has been clearing fears and doubts that came during the night. How else could I have dealt with them? I could have consulted a friend. Most friends would be unable to take the time to *closely* evaluate my needs. They'd make a quick "fix" based on their own dispositions and situations. Since they are involved in temple duties up to the neck, they'll tell me, "Get back in here as soon as possible and take part in the real work. Help us here in Dublin, (Miami, Cuba, Australia wherever)."

What I needed this morning was a cool courage to continue inner work and see it as a part of my spiritual master's mission. If I found a friend who sympathized, that would be nice. But I would have become dependent on him. By writing I consult my intelligence and my guru through his training of my intelligence. It seems important to me to learn self-reliance—to know what I want to do and what I have to do to achieve my purposes of individual surrender in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The path of devotional service is like the razor's edge. We may not know we're doing wrong until we cut ourselves. The retreat I'm on, however, is harmless and healthy. Keep it simple and with emphasis this time on the increased *japa* quota. The writing is what it is.

I said the writing is not literature-producing. But making Kṛṣṇa conscious literature is a good act. In fact, I'm trying to provide nourishing reading, but using a method that doesn't emphasize book production. By "literature" I mean reading matter that is more oriented toward the formal and expected kind of book. I'm trying to go beyond that usual presentation.

Don't talk *about* it so much. You know what you mean.

I mention it, however, to encourage myself that the seemingly purposeless aspect of my writing is actually full of purpose. It's useful. It's the best way I've found.

Don't back out of the prayer retreat or the Writing Sessions. Have heart. You're not even one-third through this one. Three weeks seems long or short, depending. When one doesn't take many retreats, then a retreat even becomes a time to achieve external goals. Write a book, prepare for a seminar. That's fine. But to take time for extra *japa* and no more than that—in recognition of your need for it—takes courage and determination. Who else but your own self can see this as a priority?

They're good for you, too, as a writer, to go on practicing writing, but this time with no goals, just the practice itself. In fact, this has become my commitment for the indefinite future: Keep on writing in sessions with no plan but to get to the truth and to be Kṛṣṇa conscious.

In these March '93 sessions so far. I have been concerned about a lack of playfulness. I assume that it was part of a naturally solemn and quiet mood. Okay, but when I did loosen up yesterday—and played with the little scenes of T.V. broadcasters, etc., it felt good and made for good reading. It wasn't apart from *siddhānta*—rather it revealed to me how the television images and news create distractions to a devotee's *bhajana*. In other words, the goofing off had serious purposes behind it—and helped me gain ground I couldn't have by ordinary thought processes.

It may take prodding to get into play—those opening moments when I feel “this isn't serious, isn't what a devotee should do”—usually it's for good. This is a safe atmosphere—no women and no playing for the grandstand. If I do play for an audience, that can be degrading. I'm not sure of these things I write. They are tentative and that's part of the truth. Everything I say is only *part*. The whole is Kṛṣṇa Himself and I'm the eternal fragmental part.

Oh, did you think you were the whole *om purnam*? No, I know I'm part. I'm a little part. A tiny, tiny part given a voice he likes to use—in service to Kṛṣṇa.

What were they trying to achieve, all these writers? Some spark of sincerity, but also *anarthas*. Some outright *asuras*, also *duskṛtinās*. Some more God conscious. Best are the praises of God, not those who don't want to give credit.

Śrīla Prabhupāda says *duskṛtinās* don't know God's plan or that He's the person behind the material nature. They vainly fight against nature and try to improve things with “planning commissions” that don't include the will or pleasure of the Supreme.

Just write and send in your reports. They'll get typed and editors can decide what's useful.

Not diary. But practice.

M. appreciates and I appreciate the reading of *Vidagdha-mādhava*. A world so sublime there's no trace of it here. Here people see the exact opposite—as in the Hollywood movies and their own lives of man-woman passions. No possibility they can know the truth of Vraja *mādhurya* as long as they try to act out roles of *puruṣa*, especially in sex life.

I want to leave all that far behind. This I discovered earlier, distancing myself from female disciples.

Always serious purposes to write about. Help yourself in *jaṇa*, in renunciation, in any way you can.

The daily life here is not much to report. This early Writing Session is usually directed to a serious purpose. The 11 A.M. one tends to be much harder. I can't see my way. I'm more tired then and can hardly go from one sentence to another. Less concentration. Now the curtains and blinds are closed—no sea, no sheep, no noises anywhere. This shows that beautiful or impressive natural scenery can be a distraction. And the mechanics of even a little routine like ours on this retreat, becomes my subject matter. But I want to write more than that.

Seek, seek.

A way to be a writer of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. The only way I know is to *read* and then give my impressions. Or recall what I read long ago.

5 A.M.

Cold breezes blow through the rooms. This is nothing compared to the blizzard they had on the north-east coast of the United States, the worst in a hundred years.

This world is temporary and full of misery. Thus it is certified by its Creator. In ISKCON temples and preaching fields all over the world, we repeat this truth. The *karmīs* keep trying to improve things, but without Kṛṣṇa's blessings they cannot succeed. We are considered insignificant in their midst. No one cares for us.

And we have often not done much to uphold the good name of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, with leaders falling down, intense infighting, and other scandals similar to those found in many world religions. But Lord Caitanya's movement is our movement. We have to live up to it. I write at an outpost where I try to better myself.

Can you write out of your heart and self? What are you doing on this morning, you who are a writer?

I am telling my activities in a simple way. The rounds chanted, looking at the stopwatch, confessing how foolish I am and how I perform this *nāma-bhajana* with an external attitude. But I hope that by performance, the inner quality of the name will be revealed. If one's chanting is infested with offenses, then despite his endeavor to chant for many lifetimes, he will not get *kṛṣṇa-prema*, which is the ultimate goal of the chanting. Whatever we know and are able to do for removing offenses, we're doing it (or not doing it). In addition, we chant more. And say prayers and write things down.

It is a sublime thing and we are thankful to Kṛṣṇa and Lord Caitanya for giving us the process of *japa-yajña*. You simply repeat again and again the combination of names in the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Do it on your beads as much as possible. Many Vaiṣṇavas do sixty-four rounds a day and recommend that one chant this much, especially if one is a *sannyāsī*. But we are not able to do that and Prabhupāda knew it. All right, he said, you are Western people and I know that for you it

is not possible. You are too restless. You don't have the capacity. You should chant at least sixteen rounds. "Sixteen rounds is nothing." And they should be chanted with love. Not slurred. Chant with love and Kṛṣṇa will help you. Prabhupāda has also given us many duties to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But whatever vow of numerical strength we have taken, it must be followed. I am saying this in the official way, but it is also who I am right now. I am speaking about *japa* and doing it, so it's not hypocritical. The only unfortunate thing is that I do it without feeling. These one-sided complaints disturb some people who read them, especially those who are my friends and those who think I am committing offenses by describing the dry results of my chanting. They say, "The holy name is bliss and nectar. Why do you defame it by saying when you chant you are dry?"

This looks like it will be a cold walk on the beach. Wrap up your troubles in your old kit bag. Blowin' in the wind . . . Go for a walk by the seaside before the sun is up in weather so cold and buffety that you won't meet anyone out. It will be just you and your heart beating and your mantras and your prayer. Put a prayer in your mouth and deeper down inside you. It's not exactly bodily, so I can't describe it in those terms . . . I say, "Kṛṣṇa, please help." I say, "Kṛṣṇa, please descend in *śuddha-sattva*. Please give us a little bit of that medicine we hanker for. You are the great physician. Please give it, and if You ask for payment, we say please give it in charity (because we don't have any money). We want to serve You as payment. But what can we do as long as our hearts are so closed to You? Please open them. You are the greatest mystic. You can do anything. Don't be indifferent to me. Please, I'll be Your

broadcaster. I will do my best not to dishonor the gift You give.”

11:15A.M.

I spoke during our C.c. reading. One purport praised cow protection. I said I admire devotees like Hare Kṛṣṇa dāśī in America who thoroughly challenge worldly society’s economic systems and propound the Vedic alternative. I said I don’t have time to study that cow-ox-land preaching, but I admire it. My implication was that in a similar way, I’m a writer, an artist (or whatever it is I am in my life-pursuit), so I am trying to do it thoroughly and offer it as a example. This is one of my favorite themes about the varieties of flowers in the ISKCON bouquet—variety in unity.

C.c. described Mādhavendra Puri’s *annakūta* festival, which he got together in one day. How he did it all was inconceivable. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes how the devotees in their *saṅkīrtana* movement can become victorious if they work together in a society. I said we shouldn’t be skeptics and disbelieve that the *saṅkīrtana* movement can be victorious in the world. Within the last five years we’ve seen incredible changes in world politics, so we should be open to “anything is possible”—even the victory of the Kṛṣṇa conscious movement.

Yesterday I saw Madhu cooking in the kitchen. He said it was for today. I just asked him, “Were you cooking because it’s St. Patrick’s Day? Is there some way we should observe this spiritually?” He laughed and said when in Rome, do as the Romans do. I won’t follow it up with further discussion, but accept the little feast they are offering in honor of Ireland’s patron saint. At least we won’t be observing it by drinking whiskey.

Long sheets of ocean foam. It's an everyday affair.

Now having skimmed off the surface of most immediate events, what shall I write?

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa . . . We want to improve our chanting, but it doesn't seem possible, so we make this humbled offering of a *japa* increase with the awareness that nothing will change unless the Lord wills to change it. Even Mother Yaśodā couldn't bind Kṛṣṇa until He agreed. I'm on a foolish, lower platform. Don't know what I can do to get higher, but I keep trying and don't give up the effort.

Don't speculate as to the offenses that are holding me back. Try to improve.

This hand will write for a few years more. These eyes see, these ears hear *sāstra*. The belly and digestive organs will work until they're too worn out. Even the heart will say, "I've had it." The spine and neck will say, "We are getting too old to hold this up." Like an old wagon it will fall apart. Everyone knows. Until then you traverse the region while you can. I don't mean sheer physical travel over the earth planet. The body has to be there to carry us through self-realization. It can do so for at most one hundred years, and then we'll have to change bodies. But that changing is not a small thing. It involves our karma. We don't suddenly give up a seventy-year-old body and next minute get a twenty-year-old body with a suitable memory and disposition for spiritual life, renunciation, devotion, association with pure devotees. These things are rare.

We hear in *Bhagavad-gītā* that we will get a favorable body next life for further spiritual development. But it's risky. We could easily go astray in Kali-yuga, even if born in a *brāhmaṇa* family. So many catastrophes, traumas and upheavals. And we go through birth, full of pain. And death. We wonder, "How can I cross this

dangerous ocean at death and assuredly take up spiritual life in the next body?" We don't know how it will happen. It's beyond our control.

So I say this body I have now is the vehicle to take us as far as possible. Bring it down the road as best you can for as long as you can. Kṛṣṇa and His agents will decide where you go next and they will bring it about. Your soul, which is enlightened but still partly covered, will be sent onward in its journey. The good and bad will be weighed. Your inner desires will be awarded. Who you really are (aside from false poses) will be taken into account. Of course, it's not just a cut and dried legal case presided over by a low-consciousness judge in a white wig. The all-knowing, all-merciful Supreme Personality of Godhead is behind the judgment. He sees your essence of sincere desire to serve—He counts that heavily in your favor. But still, if you harbor material desires—if you lack the greed to render loving service to Kṛṣṇa in Vraja, then how can you expect to be whisked there into His entourage?

I'm writing this not in an attempt to figure it out, but to put myself in a sober mood. Do what is favorable; avoid what is unfavorable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Know that Kṛṣṇa is Your protector and maintainer. How to know that? Act on it, according to the words of your spiritual master. Ask Kṛṣṇa for that understanding by which you can come to Him. Depend on Him in real life, and not on so many material arrangements.

Know nothing happens independent of His will. Be meek and humble, knowing that you need His mercy. These are the symptoms of *śaraṇāgati*.

Stafford said a poem is a miracle that comes and you have to accept it. Words that form and give you a unique way of seeing things and the world and persons.

Maybe you want to go next door and do an extra poem in honor of St. Patrick's Day. You don't have much to say here in your prose voice.

What did you do? We walked some miles and spoke what occurred to us. Watched the level of the ink go down the cartridge. Threw the empty one away and reached confidently for a new one, a new one.

I've got two sets of beads, the red ones Swamiji gave me (which I purchased at Tandy's on 14th Street in Manhattan), and a set of genuine *tulasī* beads which I bought last year at the gift shop at the Krishna-Balaram Mandir. Both beads have been chanted on by pure devotees. And the blue waves roll and crash in Brandon Bay.

Whichever beads I choose, the problems crop up as usual, instantaneously. I intend to hear *nāma*, but my mind hears something else. I've even been toying with the idea of putting on earphones and listening to my radio to hear if there's something interesting on St. Patrick's Day. (What?) And the turquoise waves crash in low rows against the sides of the rock islands in Tralee Bay.

After lunch I'll rest. Then I'll get up, ready for the last seven rounds. You can't keep me down. I'm trying to squeeze a real sentiment out of the rock that is covering my heart. "Who goes there?" says the guard of the treasure. I slink away. But I'll be back. The waves crash and jump upward, wind catches their tops and spins the foam higher.

Learn from nature, Prabhupāda says. The gulls are feeding in the same yard as the sheep. I thought there was no grass there at all, but they keep nibbling whatever they can get. Learn from life. In the kitchen next door, my friends are talking, although I told them not

to. Learn how to concentrate and write despite that. Be tolerant, like the grass blowing in the wind and holding on by the roots. Be like a stone wall to *māyā*. Be humble like a small daisy on the shore. Stand up for your rights like a fence post. Live in danger like the road and the car that passes by the cliff (with no guard rail) and the wind's buffets and the waves' booming in space and falling open like white flowers on the rocks in Brandon Bay.

5:10 p.m.

There were extra sweets for lunch, all served by Madhumaṅgala—two kinds of sweet rice, *halavā*, and a milk sweet. "Happy St. Patrick's Day," he said when I glanced into the kitchen after eating. We survived that without indigestion, and now we just had our reading of *Vidagdha-mādhava*. By reading of His activities, Kṛṣṇa becomes our friend.

Then what is left for me to say or do after such auspicious hearing? I can look at the surf pounding the rocks. I pick at my fingers. I refrain from using the radio. I've already heard the best thing.

But I have to go on living. I finished my thirty-two-round quota. At least I'm seeing that mass of distracting thoughts and, separate from them, I see my desire to fix my mind on the holy names. Periodically I catch myself and express at least the desire to hear the names as they vibrate on my tongue. No one knows, not even me, how strong this bad habit is. I've indulged in it like any other addiction. Now to get free isn't easy. It's a mental habit of allowing the mind to go wherever it wants during *japa-yajña*.

There, I've said it concisely and accurately. Now stay on this one point. Whatever gain I can make, please do it. Continue to focus on that problem. Distinguish the

distractions from the desire to hear. Start a new habit, deliberately, of taking the mind away from other thoughts, and applying it to hearing Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. Don't expect this to bring nectar at first, but be persistent. There's hope I can make some headway. I shall not indulge so wantonly, obliviously, callously in other thoughts while chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra on beads. I'll remind myself what to do.

Just thinking of my college friend Lenny Sulverbery drawing pictures of people suffering in New York City. He's been doing it for decades, especially the homeless street people. Kowit wrote me (two years ago) that Lenny was starting to gain recognition in the art world.

Oh, God.

I want to get free of the things that hold me back. I'm so afraid, however, to leave whatever comforts I think I possess—and run off into the forests to join Kṛṣṇa. I'm not fearless like the *gopīs* who give up all comforts and reputation. Even when they joined Kṛṣṇa, He rebuffed them. They cried and protested, showing their intense love for Him and the cherished hopes that He would dance with them and embrace them. Kṛṣṇa satisfied them in the *rāsa* dance, but then disappeared from their sight and again they lamented.

But I am an elderly man seeking to ease myself of headaches and stressful duties. How can I follow the mood of the *gopīs*, running off recklessly to follow Kṛṣṇa? In what way may I follow them?

Be steady in this retreat. Early this morning you awoke with doubts and then steadied yourself with reason. Be ready if those doubts come again. I'll stand my

ground and execute these three weeks, even though I am not producing a book or gaining brilliant new grounds of advancement in chanting. Stay with it and realize the commitment to increase rounds. Do sixty-four on Ekādaśī. Press gently, but persistently, on this vantage point of distinguishing distractions from the desire to be attentive. I am trying to relieve myself of the *aparādha* called *pramāda*, the madness of inattention which is due to laziness, lack of taste, and attachment to material pleasures.

It's worth it. This is the time in my life for doing this. I may do it later or not, but now it's ripe and right to be alone and practice the subtle art of *japa*. I have been doing it wrong. I say this so often it can become a kind of pose—humbly claiming I don't chant well. Secretly I may think, "I don't chant so poorly. If I were to compare myself to others, I might come out not bad. After all, I am sincere in seeing *japa* as important."

But then, don't I believe I need improvement? Yes! I need it. It's real. A bad habit has developed. I must try to do something about it. And the first thing is to keep reminding myself of the obvious—my mind goes somewhere else when I chant. I'm not attracted while chanting to *śravaṇam-kīrtanam*. Intellectually, or theologically, I am attracted to *harināma*, but my personal practice is different.

My desire for reform is not just a literary dance so I can write books to help others. It's a real desire for improvement, although I can't seem to translate it into practical work. Each time I pick up the beads, it's the same thing more or less.

Increasing the number of rounds daily appears to have the potential to help me. It hasn't occurred yet, but "it" may. I will give this much effort and try for more, even if there is no tangible result.

While keeping steady in this *vrata*, I take some notes in Writing Sessions.

Stuck. Sermon. In a high pulpit. Everyone knows what he's talking about. Or no one knows God by direct experience, not to the degree the great saints know Him. We listen to the sermon. When there's new material, that doesn't much satisfy us either. We find fault in it. The true devotees are those who are able to hear these lectures without fault-finding, and take them as Kṛṣṇa's messages and Prabhupāda speaking in *paramparā*. Śrīla Prabhupāda said he was not speaking. He said it was Kṛṣṇa's message and Kṛṣṇa was speaking through him. He said he was simply the mouthpiece. This was Śrīla Prabhupāda's powerful and humble assertion. He actually did it—served Kṛṣṇa's message without adding his own. This made him potent and pure.

Can I do that? Do I think it's not enough? Do I think I *am* doing that in my own way? Despite my upbringing in speculation, I'm doing my best to remain truthful to the words of the Gauḍīya-Mādhva *sampradāya*, whatever Prabhupāda says.

And why these daily notes written wherever I am? What is my compulsion? What is my plan?

I told you. I told you.

The gray-blue clouds are like a blanket, a comforter to lie against the body of the sea. The evening theater is beginning—precious last light, blue but darkening, and soon plunged into an impenetrable night. Then again the planet revolves like an all-night plane trip, and in the morning the kingly sun rises. We'll be there to see on the strewn beach.

Am I measuring time's vital drops instead of spending it? But what does that "going out" mean for me? It means visiting temples, giving lectures, meeting devo-

tees privately, whoever wishes to see me. It means public lectures, as many as possible. But when I attempt this, I don't feel satisfied. And it is too much for my health. I get a rash of headaches and then say to M., "This proves I can't live like this."

The sweet discovery that I am meant to live as I'm doing, on retreats and writing and being careful not to provoke headaches. I can't operate when they come. For example, recently I canceled an advertised program at 26 Second Avenue. That's the way it is with me. I need to remind yourself and others of this situation.

Therefore embrace this day, these days, these weeks, these retreats in places like this. Embrace this one.

I love you, Lord of retreats.

It is a quiet life. Somehow I have chosen it or it has chosen me. I don't want to be lethargic, but neither do I want to needlessly resist the thing You have given me.

I must keep vigilant. Don't oversleep or overeat. Use time well.

I am savoring the precious drops of time, but not in an impersonal way by void meditation or anything like that. I chant extra rounds, I read the best books, I hear Śrīla Prabhupāda's tapes.

And this writing. It's a chronicle. It discusses to see what we are and what we may become. Sometimes it jumps like surf or paints pictures following Kṛṣṇa's lead, who paints light on water and other scenes. I write with life in me and wish to offer it as *bhakti* to my master.

☉ MARCH 18 ☉

12:40 A.M.

In one dream, a Godsister returned from Vṛndāvana, India. I was waiting to see her, to hear her news and look at the items she had brought. She had re-

ceived a type of *śikṣā* initiation from a Godbrother. She informed me, "Many people admire you and want to receive blue card initiation from you." This referred to a kind of *śikṣā-guru* relationship ("Blue card" feels like the green card given to American immigrants when they get permanent residency.) I said, "Who, me?" Even while in the dream, I was aware that I couldn't be innocent of this admiration. One either tacitly accepts it or denies it, disallows it.

No further comment on this in the dream. It shows at least that I'm considering such things. In correspondence and meetings with devotees, I'm careful before allowing any relationship to develop toward *dikṣā*. I directly put people off and tell them reasons why they should accept someone else. If they say they prefer me, I continue to offer them reasons why it is unlikely. But if someone says, "I consider you as a *śikṣā-guru* by reading your books," I don't object. The word "*śikṣā-guru*" in this case is taken somewhat loosely or generally. If I write and publish, how can I not expect some people to respond that way? If I absolutely don't want it, then I shouldn't publish. But if I don't publish, then how is my writing preaching?

In some cases, people may read my books and benefit, but not consider that the author has become a *śikṣā-guru*. This is good and will occur when Godbrothers and Godsisters read the books. Or it may occur when disciples of other gurus read. I heard an incident where Indradyumna Swami met with his disciples and told them their *japa* was the most important duty. He then recommended they read *Japa Reform Notebook*. This is a happy incident for me. I prefer that recommendations like this come without any additional encumbrance of whether I become a *śikṣā-guru* by their reading what I have written. I shouldn't generally

think, "By publishing books I'm becoming the *śikṣā-guru* of the whole world." Inadvertently this attitude could develop in me, but I'm cautioning myself against it. It needn't be. I can write and publish out of a desire to preach and please Śrīla Prabhupāda without looking to collect followers.

This is certainly possible in my case. When one reads and accepts Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, one thinks of him as *śikṣā-guru*. But my books contain many statements of my own disqualification. One can read, commiserate, benefit from the honest discussion of Kṛṣṇa conscious topics and struggles, and yet not think that the author has become one's *śikṣā-guru*.

I like the feel of this, not only because it allows me to remain modest, but because it suggests to me that my writing is preaching and can be appreciated by people around the world—and I don't have to become embarrassed or ashamed when that happens. It's similar to the way we appreciate any devotee's service. We admire, we benefit, we are inspired—we may even borrow from them and follow their suggestions—but it doesn't mean we've become their disciples. Nor should we be quick to accuse, "Oh, that Mahārāja is preaching just to gain followers and admirers." No, he's preaching because he's a preacher; Prabhupāda has trained him that way. If he's expert, he'll avoid the mentality of working to accumulate admirers. *Na dhanam na janam na sundarim*.

I don't often think of these practical repercussions of my work. I'm too busy with my head down, sniffing the trail. But it's helpful to be prepared, especially against accusations from unfriendly persons. And also, I should be aware of my own motives and adjust them or adjust circumstances so that I don't fall into new *anarthas*.

Without the descending mercy of Prabhupāda and the *paramparā*, I can't expect to make progress. My own concept of remedial work in a *japa* retreat will not be successful without their mercy. One can go on chanting for many lifetimes without getting the desired result.

But the concept of a solitary retreat is not unheard of. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura prepared himself for his missionary activities with a long *vrata* of solitary chanting. It's not done constantly, but sometimes. I did it for three weeks last year and three weeks this year. In *Hari-nāma Cintāmaṇi*, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes, "The devotee should make it a regular practice to spend a little time alone in a quiet place and concentrate deeply on the holy name" (*HNC*, p. 84).

It seems, however, that I have a taste for solitary *nāma-bhajana*, yet an inability to practice it well. Sometimes I think I'm simply endeavoring without mercy; something's wrong in my *bhajana*. But more often I think the situation is favorable but I have *not yet* received the mercy due to my direct faults in *japa* like *pramāda*, inattention.

Doubt about writing. (This morning I covered two doubts—whether I am seeking to become everyone's guru by my writing, and whether a *japa* retreat is a bona fide activity.) Writing these notes is all right. I needn't justify it right now. I'll mostly be writing justifications. Rather, agree to do it and then do something other than saying, "Shall I do it? Is it all right?"

A gray jacket hangs over the back of the chair. The heater hums and rattles. I'm aware of the back of my neck and the pleasant, companion-like sound of the scratching pen.

It's hard to write when I have no ongoing topic or project. Hard, yet easier than writing a carefully constructed piece. Again opinions and justifications. Everyone has their own angle. If I could write without blocks and hang-ups and doubts, what would I say?

I'd write poems that spin from occasions in life. Kṛṣṇa conscious reflections about everyday matters. I'd just write and an infinity of interesting things would flow. There doesn't need to be a specific topic, but I would prove that everything is interesting, even in a *sādhaka's* (beginner's) attempt at Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī says the whole universe becomes joyful (*viśvam purnar sukhāyate*) to a Kṛṣṇa conscious person. I can at least prove that the whole universe is interesting when written from the Kṛṣṇa conscious point of view.

It's not mundane. He sees Kṛṣṇa everywhere. "A true *yogī* observes Me in all beings and also sees every being in Me. The self-realized person sees Me, the same Supreme Lord, everywhere" (Bg. 6.29). In his purport to Bg. 6.30, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The Personality of Godhead is never out of the sight of the devotee."

"At this stage, Lord Kṛṣṇa never disappears from the sight of the devotee, nor does the devotee ever lose sight of the Lord. In the case of a *yogī* who sees the Lord as Paramātmā within the heart, the same applies. Such a *yogī* turns into a pure devotee and cannot bear to live for a moment without seeing the Lord within himself."

Gallop free. Sit on a hard chair, uncomfortable. Can some good come out of this person? Sure.

He sees the picture of Rādhā seated beside Kṛṣṇa on a jewel-inlaid throne in Vṛndāvana. It affects him. He writes something with a shadow of *bhāva*.

But it would be good if you could flow more in a particular direction with force. Or if your writing could help more in your present purpose of improving chanting. In *Begging*, you give a glimpse into the life of a struggling chanter; you give us many relevant verses from *sāstra* and “snapshots” of Śrīla Prabhupāda. But the writing doesn’t result in a dramatic change of heart in chanting. You may write along and keep a record of a not-so-successful journey. In that case, the writing’s sincerity is its virtue. It is a kind of victory just in attempting the *yajña* (*japa-yajña*) and in writing through your days. (Scott’s diary of his last expedition is victorious in that the human will doesn’t get defeated or act dishonorably, but he’s a failure in that he dies.)

Death a failure? Death is also victorious for the devotee. The continued struggle of a Westerner coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, despite the persistence of *anart-ha*s—is a victory. *Begging* will help the many devotees who are in the preliminary stages. It offers them companionship on the road rather than perfect advice by one who has already arrived at the goal and is sending back messages to the poor strugglers.

In just a few minutes you get into my space capsule and shoot off into the spiritual world of *japa-yajña*. This will be the first hour for today. All paraphernalia is ready—the altar with pictures and candles, the *japa-mālā*, the stopwatch, my willingness. I know I’ll hit the brick wall and will disperse in many directions. I can’t prevent that. But I can keep going and keep trying for a break in the weather conditions. I mean *looking* for a break. It may not occur. He may handle me roughly in His embrace. (What a statement! If He does embrace me, why complain, “It was rough. He’s not gentle.” Be

glad you are embraced.) Or He may neglect me and not come before me as I chant His name. Even in pure sound He may not be willing to come.

Then I chant the covered sound or *nāmābhasa*, or *nāma-aparādha*. Face the facts of my limits. Go on. See the virtue in *utsāhān niscayād dhairyāt*. Enthusiasm and patience.

This is a warm-up. I hope to be a little more aware than usual. I hope to not so fully allow myself to think over memories and plans while chanting. I have come here at the risk of being criticized for living outside the temple routine. I have risked being called a *bābājī* or "What he's doing is described by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī as a cheating method." I have already undertaken that risk. I have also decided not to quit this house prematurely. Then why not get the benefit of it? I'm here, now make an effort, some gain, at least whatever is possible by my endeavor. It may be very small, but try for it.

5:08 A.M.

I am the one who has to write. Take it seriously, please. The angels of mercy come down as *śuddha-sattva*. You become overwhelmed by feelings of ecstasy and that is *sāttvika-bhāva*. These things can be studied, but it is different when they actually happen to you. Anyway, I simply want to be well employed in Kṛṣṇa's service. Dāruka didn't even like the ecstasy which impeded his service of fanning Kṛṣṇa. So we write on. There is no snow falling in Ireland, but it is plenty windy . . .

Kṛṣṇa is my God and the God of all, but He is the one whose names I am calling. I am doing a little thing, noticing that my mind is wandering and then snapping out of it. This is good. Show Kṛṣṇa that I care and am

taking steps to improve myself. Then He may make something change. It is up to Him. Keep aware of that, keep saying it, keep it on my mind. Ultimately, I can do nothing. Whatever little things are in my own power, that also is granted by the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

He is the one who symbolizes all prostraters . . . Why do you write things that don't make any sense?

Because sometimes they are the words that are supplied and I think I ought to accept them just as they came. Sometimes it makes no sense, but sometimes it may be my good luck to receive such a thing just sent without asking for it . . .

The way is to skip over the inane, like Clark candy bars and some things I won't even mention, like switching channels on T.V. or putting on those eye masks so I don't have to see films called *Consenting Adults*. Instead, I watch films of dreams which are better, shorter, and which I can get out of when they get too sexy. These thoughts are in my mind when I am awake, and the jams disciples get themselves into and write to me about. Someone wrote to ask if they could conceive a child by the test tube method. Why ask a *sannyāsi* such a question? The line is not in so deep, but at least this is practice in listening to the little voice within.

I think of riotous, rollicking messages I was taking in a day in the shack. Showed it to Baladeva. He said if something comes that is too shocking, I can switch T.V. channels. I said, "Yes or I can write it down and throw it away."

This time around I am a man, next time maybe I am a goon or a dog. I could be something I fear or hate if I think too much about it—a queer, a football player, a hen, a Polish housewife, a poet named Nazim Hikmet. Someone who has the identical license plate of the car

parked next to him—what a coincidence! They print it in the newspaper. I could be a mouse, a louse, a house . . . A dot of paper on the floor, Don Marquis' roach, Henry Miller's *Oranges of Big Sur*. Stop, stop being a literary cutey.

I could be like that song, "Or would you rather be a pig? A pig is an animal with dirt on its face . . ." "Would you like to swing on a star, carry moonbeams home in a jar, and be better off than you are?" Or would you rather be a pig? The Andrew Sisters (or some sisters like that), swinging sisters who sing. There's two sets of them current in the 1940s, and one lasting into the 1950s sang, "Teach Me Tonight" and "Mr. Sandman," big hits on the Make-believe Ballroom hour.

I remember the radio on top of the fridge. My mother turning it on and ironing shirts and drinking a little water to wet her whistle and water also sprinkled on the shirts to steam-iron them. These memories and birds in birdbath seen out the back window. I don't exist only now. Everyone has memories. Even Mahārāja told us how his mother was bitten by a snake and taken urgently to a snake charmer. Prabhupāda's family guru told of his guru who brought a pomegranate branch fresh from Kabul by mystic power . . .

I've said enough, though I could go on showing that the past exists and not always in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It's a relief to know. But better if I could always be absorbed in Kṛṣṇa conscious *līlās*.

For whom have you written this and what do you do with it? At the end of the page.

Answering your question, "Who is this for?" It is for Kṛṣṇa. That is, I claim it is a way to make me a better writer by practicing and being looser. I think, "Now I am ready to write about Kṛṣṇa and I have learned to become fearless in what I write." That's the idea.

The little king in red robes oversees what I do, along with the sixteen witnesses mentioned in the Vedic literature. I see Rūpa-Raghunātha dāsa in my mind, and I also think of how my master is taking care of us all. We quarrel, that's a fact. But we are his children. ISKCON is living, greater ISKCON too, and I am trying to serve within it.

Don't talk so much about justification. Even better is the Andrews Sisters and those other sisters I can't remember. But best is to love Kṛṣṇa and say I want to enter His pastimes at the river Yamunā, feel the water, swim in it, washing away memories and sinful impressions of past lives. Not only this one, but past centuries and species less than human. All this is going on. Now I have to stop.

I mean to say that Kṛṣṇa consciousness can wipe away attachments to the past and I can actually live immersed in happy thoughts of the Kṛṣṇa conscious present. I am not a *sannyāsī* from India, but an ISKCON man from America. And I am pure spirit soul like Svārūpa, who joined Nanda-sūta's *līlā*. I can join too in my original form. It's waiting for me if I chant Hare Kṛṣṇa with devotion and not just with bead-counting while dragging the wildcat mind back before it runs off again.

11:17A.CD.

How did you do in your late morning *japa* session?

You wouldn't believe how bad. But the last round was quicker, not sleepy. Then we had a reading.

I also thought, "Why are we here and why am I writing?" I thought how Madhu arranged it. I'm addicted to retreats. They are controversial. I imagine some committee or one-man authority (GBC) catching up with me and saying, "Now you must stop this. Here is

your assignment for the year." I'd try to squirm out of it. As I said earlier, at worst I'll go to a place where even my daily routine will be peaceful, although I'll be living in a temple. Say at Inis Rath, or maybe in a foreign country, or we'll live "deviously" in the van, stopping between temples when we feel the need. I have not had to explain this to anyone, except to myself. Better have your lines together so when you do get asked, you'll have your reply ready.

This pen leaks sometimes. I wipe it. Listen to the voice within that tells you what to write. Write for the deepest, best purpose, not fooling around. But you want to write "all the time," so that means you have to keep pushing to get at what you want to say. That pushing is done *on the page*, not by chewing your fingernail.

Boat bobbing. Surf sound all around. The sun never shines. Gull hovers. A little bit of red at sea, a little bit of boat heading into shore. The rattle of a door or window. The daily round of our activities. I think of what friends are doing, are they all right, what happened to them during the blizzard in America?

New candle will tell the story. The witnesses know I tried to chant but spaced out due to fatigue and "inattention." While we read together, M. was slurring the words and drowsing. My first instinct was to be annoyed with him, but then I thought, "That's what I was just doing with my beads." If M. has to drive a van somewhere, he can push himself. Authorities want to push a man to get the job done and the head man is also pushing himself and that's how we live in the world. Okay, a *japa* retreat should also have some pushing in it. It's not a vacation for extra food and sleep. But as in any situation, you have to find the right balance.

I find the very early hours so superior that I won't sacrifice them in sleep, even if it means I'm drowsy later in the day. My first sixteen rounds are better than the rest I do after breakfast. Writing varies with ups and downs, but pre-breakfast is usually best.

Where's that little voice? What does he want me to say? He wants me to find the best way to chant and stay focused. I've touched on some vital themes, but now I have to live up to them, like caring and concentration and prayer.

Take the *mahā-mantra* seriously. I tend to take writing as more vital. Writing lasts, it's preserved; it's me. *Japa* doesn't get preserved; it's something I do, but even a big quantity leaves me broke (without capital). This attitude of minimizing my chanting of isn't good.

Writing about my problems in chanting is valuable. Don't ask whether it will make interesting reading. I have to write to help myself and not worry if it's repetitive.

When I notice that one round has taken eleven or twelve minutes, I should do something immediately. Don't stay in the same chair or even the same room. Where are other places I could go? The hallways are so cold! Outdoors means putting on a coat and walking around and around the house in the heavy wind, but it might be good. Let's try it in the late morning or afternoon when the "drowsies" hit. Chant faster outdoors.

Chant faster even if you think it seems mechanical. It's better than too sleepy-slow. Rapidly, rapidly, other things fall away and I'm left with concentration on the energetic rapid chanting. I hope it works that way.

I just told myself to write to help my *japa* and immediately I came up with a practical plan—going outdoors when drowsy. This idea never came until I wrote it. The writing has such power. Whatever I turn it

toward, it starts thinking creatively, productively. Even the “practical” lines about fishing boats have meaning. It’s leading us somewhere, have faith. We are staying true to whatever comes. But when I can drift into vital concerns, that’s welcome. In this new freedom of writing practice without making a book, I should never refuse a thinking session on the page, even if it’s just practical plans. Not that I have to always be artistic. Be a practical *sādhaka*. Help yourself. Have fun too. Use Writing Sessions as best you can.

Move through concerns one after another. If something I write is worth immediate action, write it separately in a *brief* note, and then back here.

The wretched world of perverts—I mean those who are cruel and degraded and ruin the pure life. They do it in me; they do it in themselves and in others. I can’t wipe them out. I can, however, help to make the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement a haven for those who want to escape the cruel and filthy minds of the world.

The atmosphere is balmy, said the ventriloquist. His mannequin, Jerry Mahoney, did the talking. Edgar . . . what was it Charlie McCarthy . . . He was more famous, but I could see his lips move. What a strange talent! To be able to talk without moving your mouth. The weird faces of those puppets. And so many entertainers—we thought they were just *great* because they’d developed something to tickle our funny bones. All trivia, all lost in a few years.

The bouncing ball, goes back into the hallway of my childhood and gets lost in a field of doubt. I lost my baseball in those weeds. Keep looking for it. There it is. Who found it? Alvin Galter. The baseball returns to the air, to the baseball glove with four fingers, well worked in Neats Foot Oil. Oh, Stevie had a good glove. That he could do, have a good private catch in the street or

backyard, but he wasn't good enough to play regularly on an organized team. He was also good for a make-shift game on a Saturday in some lot. When there was no pressure and demand from the elders. Fortunately, I was older than twelve when Little League came to our town.

Now there's something like sunlight, briefly. But I'm looking down to this page. We read of Mādhavendra Puri. I don't have anything useful to say. I used it up. But there's more, of course. However, I don't know right now what that might be.

In a socket . . . I'm not thinking in a way that is connected to Kṛṣṇa conscious topics. There's a big world in ISKCON. I thought of writing to M. regarding my asserting myself not to be guilty about taking retreats. Instead of a note, I'll mention it to him when he comes in to cut my hair.

Poems coming. I'm sorry right now I can't crank anything out. I see you, young foolish boy, between the lines of this page. I can help you. The best thing is to live in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, following today's schedule. There will be another chance to write later. As my chanting improves, the writing may also.

Stop thinking of good or bad. I am free to write the worst, even if it's not Kṛṣṇa conscious, if an arid patch comes—like New Mexico, like fringe benefits like words that fear they'll be washed away. Admit I can't, I have no desire to, I have no love to. It's in me, but not at my fingertips right now. This is what it means when they say something got "lost in the computer." Try to find it. Turn off the power and try later. You'll find your way by His grace.

3:45 p.m.

I mentioned to M. that I had had doubts about so many retreats. He said if I doubt whether they are preaching, just consider that I am writing books which devotees are reading all over the world. He also said our schedule was flexible. If I want to visit and lecture more in temples, I can.

This led me to more agitated thinking on my own. Maybe I should revise this present retreat. Drop the extra rounds or write something more directed. But it's supposed to be the one time a year for *japa* concentration. But is it doing any good? I think of God-brothers who wouldn't approve of what I'm doing and wouldn't do it themselves. Think of *Choṭa's Way*. Arjuna coming to Choṭa in his Tobago sabbatical: "The jig is up, Choṭa."

If I want to be preaching more, is there a better way to spend this time? What would Prabhupāda think? And what do I, in the depth of my being (as close as I can get to that), think I must best do to wholeheartedly surrender myself in voluntary, positive service?

Probably best to stick it out as planned with thirty-two rounds. Take a peek at Merton's *Wisdom of the Desert*. See if there's any help there for enduring in prayer in a lonely place. And this writing. Is it not satisfying to me? Do I feel more lively and committed when I know I am doing a book, so I'm willing to see it through, looking for how it will develop, stocking it with interesting items? But I wanted, for once, to write without that concentration. This combination is tough for me—increased *japa* (which has no immediate "result" and Writing Sessions not intended as part of a book). I accepted this during the first few days. I acknowledge the quiet and said I have the courage and patience for it. Now some restlessness.

I imagine a scenario. A Godbrother is with me here for awhile. He decides it's too quiet. He goes into town and makes phone calls. He comes back to this house and says, "I'm going to fly out tomorrow. It's too quiet. I've got too many responsibilities. You can do this, but I can't." Does he leave because he is a better disciple of Prabhupāda than I am? Is his return to the doings in the preaching field a sign that he's unable to be quiet and simply hear and chant?

I don't want to waste mornings and afternoons in drowsy *japa* where each round goes over eleven minutes. That's wasting time. As of today, I ruled that out. I posted this sign; "As soon as *ONE* round is eleven minutes long, put on your coat and chant outdoors, around the house." I did it; it stopped the drowse. Cars were going by, so I wasn't so free to go round and around the house with my bead bag. But just to stand outdoors was good. After a round I came back in and stayed awake, chanted my thirty-second round in six minutes and thirty seconds—all time fast. Was it a *better* round or just faster? Hurrying to get on to something else.

It's not easy.

Tomorrow is Ekādaśī and I want to do sixty-four rounds. If I feel restless in the retreat mode—not producing something—the sixty-four rounds will be even more of that "do nothing but chanting." I'll give it one day. Maybe it will force the issue one way or another—to either revise this retreat in its remaining days, or to accept it as a *japa* retreat—and to consider the retreats in general.

5:35 p.m.

I think the main thing tomorrow is to keep the vow to keep moving through the quota increase. It's counting, It's also preaching.

I am tired now and will be tired later. Then while briskly chanting throughout the day, I can jot down thoughts a few times. I don't have to think things out. Just your sixty-four rounds and that will put me in a new place. Then I can proceed further.

I'm already out of my tight little routine of one week, and tomorrow's sixty-four rounds will take me more out of it. The morning after that should be clearer.

Fear of not residing in a temple. It's the same fear a conforming *karmī* has. He punches the time clock and is at his office desk with his Social Security card in his wallet and his various I.D. cards, credit cards, passport, emergency phone numbers . . . His boss can see him seated in the right place.

The ISKCON equivalent of this is to be always in the temple within a GBC jurisdiction, within reach of telephone if anyone wants you, and the community can see you holding your *daṇḍa* as you stand before the curtain prior to *maṅgala āraṭi*, then again right on time before Greeting the Deities.

Quickly I tire of these routines, mostly because of the social element. I don't tire of rising early and seeing the Deity, but of going through the paces with the group, and the way everything is drawn out and formalized—the prayers take longer to complete in a group, and then I must stand through the *kīrtana* and sit through the lecture. I can't relax or do what I want. I can't be myself or speak what's on my mind because no one is an intimate friend.

Now I have escaped from that into a retreat setting, but I'm afraid of being "out of station." I think some truant officer will catch me. Of course, he won't be able to find me here, but when I turn myself in again at the nearest temple, if not immediately, eventually the subject will come up. "Where were you from March 11 to April 3rd in 1993?" They will ask and they will already have the information. I won't deny anything.

This fear is silly. Do I think it's all right? Yes, to be out of the temple sometimes is all right. But I *do* belong in an ISKCON place and in communication. But once there, my time is stolen. And I have to perform. Then I make plans to escape. When I do escape, I again feel uneasy that I am not living with the protection of the society's building and routine and on the ISKCON map where I can be reached by Fax or phone.

Anyway, no one much bothers to contact me, even when I am safely in the fold. They know my condition.

I'm cramming while I can, writing *yajñas* to complete as many books as I can, before the jig is up. My jiggling may be stopped by GBC action, by my own conscience, or by death itself. With so many factors about to stop this free-writing, I go ahead and do as much of it as I can. Thus I called one recent book *Before It's Too Late*.

The wind is whistling. I don't know exactly how—does it blow on the wires of the sheep fences and cause that whistle? Gulls flock together onto the nearest rock island, they have it all to themselves. The sheep move from pasture to pasture, driven by the herdsmen and the small black dog. I shall not be penned in with them.

Take this solitude. Don't think you have lawlessly stolen it. You're not a criminal or a deviant. Your spiritual master has given it to you. Not everyone will agree or understand, but you should accept it. Breathe easy.

Be happy. Time will take it away and that may be part of your fear. But don't spoil the whole thing. Don't avoid the work either. You have come here and there's work to do, just as there's work in the temple.

Tomorrow my work is sixty-four rounds.

In the temple or outside it, there's work to do, and there's security and fear. Even Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja is trying to find the balance—looking for more time to spend in his own writing. His conscience, position and allegiance to his guru's *māṭha* (his room there with books), and the loving bondage of the people in Mathurā where he has ministered for forty years, bind him there. I'm in a much bigger, worldwide institution, and I'm much smaller. My movements are hardly noticed; I'm not missed because I am not in charge of any place or project. I wander about and send manuscripts back to my editor and books come out.

Śrīla Prabhupāda looked for more time to himself, but felt it wasn't possible. His ISKCON was huge and he was the active authority who made final decisions in many areas—and who could reverse the GBC's final decisions. He couldn't run off to Ireland and increase his *japa*. Neither did he have to.

I can. Before the jig is up. Golden years. On the run; on the lam. After I'm gone, they'll be glad I wrote so many books; it will seem sufficient. Also, I write for people of the future, not only for those I know now.

Also, my rear end is sore from sitting on this unpadded chair.

Drink your milk, Sant Colony, drink your hot, sweet milk. Then run off and write a poem in the cold room next door.

If there's time later, I'll talk with M. about this, but it looks like there won't be time. Besides, I don't like to

agitate my brain before sleep. I want a good four hours rest so I can be up and chanting brisk rounds like a mechanical man by 12:10, March 19. Will it be possible?

Don't think you have nothing to write or there's no joy in it.

Go ahead. More keeps coming.

Spoke with M. about the voice that feels guilty I'm not in a temple. We do and will go to temples. *Accept the discipline of this retreat. It's only three weeks. Who knows when we'll get another opportunity like this?*

Later in a temple, I can lecture on the importance of chanting, with this *yajña* under my belt.

Don't expect most devotees to appreciate this.

Remember the cartoon: "A writer? Fantastic! I wish I had time to write."

Artist and poet not appreciated in society. But his contribution is important.

Villa Vṛndāvana and Vṛndāvana, India seminars and visits are important. Keep it up—pay dues sometimes in temples and sometimes hide out and write and do *bhajana*.

☪ MARCH 19 ☪

12:10 A.M.

Is there any deep desire to improve the *yajña*? Yes, some. Then please acknowledge you have come here for this. There may be some mental inconvenience, thinking, "I'm not in a temple right now," but there are many advantages for extra *japa* in this retreat. We read how Mādhavendra Purī, in a contrite mood, left the Remuṇa temple and went to chant his *japa* in the marketplace. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "This chanting can be executed anywhere, either inside or outside the temple." The Gosvāmīs chanted under trees. And

don't forget the importance of chanting and the fact that yours needs work—people are looking to you to do something about it.

Okay, today's a big day. Let me put down the pen and pick up the beads—and put the mind on the names.

2:05 A.M.

Chanted thirteen rounds. Don't get agitated and depressed over your lack of attention and devotion in *japa*. Be grateful for what attachment you do have and capitalize on that. Build up. You watch yourself merely counting—the minutes and seconds per round, the number of rounds, the time of day . . . the progress that any worker feels as he shovels his way or she types her way or he reads his way through a designated amount of work. Think of piece workers who get credit for so many items sewn. Any worker with his eye on the clock, waiting for the coffee break, the lunch hour, the five o'clock whistle . . .

There's that level of my *japa* reality, but I assume there's more. I know there's more. I keep going with it yearly, my whole life is only one life-chapter in a career that may take many lives of improving chanting. (*Kṛṣṇa-prema* could happen in a moment or it could fail to happen for many births.)

I don't want to fake my actual attitude. I mean, I shouldn't be overly dramatic about my disappointment. I'm not that upset about it. It's a long-standing fact that I'm not ecstatic when I chant, I don't experience that Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa's name are nondifferent. Yet I chant every day. I feel good about fulfilling that obligation.

I also dearly love the practice. If a nondevotee sees me chant, I feel worlds apart—how much I value these

prayer-bead-mantras, and how he or she cannot understand. If I cannot chant my mantras aloud and privately because I'm with the *karmīs*, then I feel how I love *japa*, how it's like my life and breath.

But we accept more as matter of fact, that we chant with no taste. "When, oh, when will that day be mine when my offenses ceasing,/taste for the name increasing—/when in my heart will Your mercy shine?" When I read those lines, I think he's describing me. But it's no big deal. It's like the way I accept my somewhat crippled left ankle or my headache syndrome. I live within those limits and I don't unnecessarily lament. If I can walk for an hour a day, that's fine. I don't expect to walk more than that. If I can go one or two weeks without clusters of headaches, that's wonderful—and I try to get as much done as I can within that no-headache zone. But when the pressure starts coming again, I live with it. I have no other choice. The love-less, inattentive chanting is another part of my life and conditioning.

Besides, I have hope I can improve. It's up to Kṛṣṇa. Within my power is the ability not to worsen. I can occasionally take a *japa* retreat. Then when I increase the quantity, I may notice as I've been noticing the last two days that I actually can be aware of the things my mind is focused on and I *can* curb them, or at least I can be aware. This morning I started chanting and also started thinking about my book production. I noticed it and said, "Okay, you're thinking about book distribution. It's a nice thing to think about. But this is *japa* time." That curbed the one line of thought. These little things come to me and I am grateful.

(1) I live with my limits; (2) I have hope improvement can be made.

Although I made fun of my duty-bound counting up of the Ekādaśī quota, still it's a virtue. Maybe I inherited it from my *karmī* parents. I learned (rather late) to be an achiever and study for exams, to be a punctual worker. I can apply that and I count. It's small-time and I don't mind if you joke about it. I'd rather be this way than slovenly and unable to take my quota seriously. I like to count. How many rounds done? How many left? How many minutes per round?

I don't mind that I'm such a slow chanter, averaging eight minutes per round. But if I can go faster, that would be better.

That's me, my hand of veins and bones and flesh, holding the beads on the cover of *Begging*.

So what? A penny for your thoughts.

Don't pinch the housewife. Don't cut off the mice's tails in the fairy tale. Don't make deliberate sense. Go back to your chanting without a crutch.

Walk and chant. You know all those corny commercial names they give to stores and products where they change the spelling into commercial-eze pop language? Like Soap 'n' Suds, Stop 'n' Shop, Quik 'n' Eazee, —well today for you it's Chant 'n' Walk, Stop 'n' Talk, Count 'n' Sit. No suds and no dogs, no broads and no shop, and no wise guy remarks. *Shut up 'n' Chant*. Close down and walk with mantras. Refrain from much time in writing or reading or anything else. It's a day for sixty-four rounds. Get another one or two in wherever you can.

And be an athlete or musician in bringing the mind back gently to hearing. Be a renounced person who humbly accepts whatever he can get, but who goes on chanting.

5:30 A.M.

If writing is going to be helpful, then how to keep the mind fixed on chanting? Is there a way to bring writing's effectiveness into *japa*? Write little notes while chanting? No, I don't think so. Just keep going with it. Writing has been permissive, accepting what comes. The intro to *Writing Down the Bones* says the book is about "Giving people permission to think the thoughts that come, and to write them down and make sense of them in any way they wish." Does this idea contain anything helpful to *japa*? Maybe, in that I don't hate myself and make it worse when I see I have been chanting drowsily or with the mind going off and not being in a devotional mood. Say, "All right, this is how I am now. Let me pay attention. I was thinking of something else, now let me think of Kṛṣṇa even though my mind will soon be off again. And anyway, whatever I think is also in Kṛṣṇa's energy."

Books on Zen, mind control, meditation, etc., may be helpful. I can borrow methods. Some devotees play a *bhajana* tape to occupy their minds—a concession to the fact that the mind is going to go somewhere and not stay only with the mantras, so better to keep it in a devotional mood. But then you have to come back.

I've done twenty-four rounds, I do like to chant more. That's a nice sign, wanting to turn back for another round. Śrīla Prabhupāda said we can't expect to know Kṛṣṇa in full, but a good sign is when we enjoy wanting to hear more about Him. With chanting, if you want to do another round, that's good. While you're at it, why not try to pay attention?

I am usually sarcastic with myself. I could be lighter. As I am kind to good friends—do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Seeing myself about to start a round (or at any time in the round), make a

light, friendly suggestion, "Prābhu, since you're already making the effort to chant, why not make a little more effort and hear what you're chanting?" It can be expressed even nicer than that.

A friendly reader recently said, "Why are you so hard on yourself? I can't accept the hard statements you make against yourself. Do I have to accept them?" he asked, or "Can I turn away from them?" I answered him by saying I have to tell the truth about myself. But maybe I *am* too harsh. He for one doesn't like it. Of course, I can't write to please him. But I'm talking about *japa*. I haven't succeeded by my strong-armed tactics. Perhaps a sweeter encouraging approach might be helpful.

I do appreciate that I persist patiently even when there is no nectarean taste in chanting. I'm just suggesting if I could be alert and bring the mind back to hearing again, why not try it? All the authorities say that attentive chanting is very important. They must be right.

What is actually needed is the repeated effort, small though it may be, to bring the mind back to hearing the names. The mind will continually go off, and we have to continually bring it back. Unless we have a good-natured attitude, we'll become soured at the stupidity and stubbornness of the mind. We'll call ourselves demons and then the mind may be insulted. We are asking him to do something he can't do—give up all distraction. Rather than ask for the impossible, ask him to add something.

We tell newcomers they don't have to change their lives, but just add chanting. This is similar advice . . . You are already chanting, so please remember to bring the mind back. The mind will be glad to do it, knowing he's not responsible for an impossible task. Ask him,

and stay with him, "Shall we do it again, bring the mind back? Time to bring the mind back again. Here we go again, let's bring it back. Hey mate, let's go back and hear that mantra. Shall we hear it again? One more time. One more. Let's hear the chanting. What was that you were just chanting?" Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa.

5:50 p.m.

Just finished my sixty-fourth round. I was looking forward to writing all day. My head is a bit weak, so I may not do it today, but I'm looking forward to tomorrow and the pleasure of deep Writing Sessions. I also found a place outdoors where I can write one of the sessions.

I hope to stay beyond book-writing. From Judith Guest's Foreword to *Bones*: "It is easy to lose sight of the fact that writers do not write to *import* knowledge to others; rather, they write to *inform* themselves." I think this will eventually lead to wherever I'm supposed to go. It's the way to prepare materials for publishing. It's also one of the most effective ways for me to live and try to surrender to Kṛṣṇa. Who am I? Where am I going? I can find these out as I write, and as Kṛṣṇa informs me.

I'm certainly eager to keep up the two-week duration of this retreat with thirty-two rounds a day. I will not space out with drowsy rounds. As soon as I feel drowsy, I'll do something about it—go outside or walk in the hall—something. After today, thirty-two rounds shouldn't seem like such a huge effort and I should not take so long to do them—at least a consistent approximate 7:45 per round.

Of course, each Writing Session is the same beginner's mind crunch. I don't know what to say, I flounder. I try to reach Kṛṣṇa conscious, *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. I see I'm concerned with other things. *Kṛṣṇa-kathā* is not the

sole overwhelming reality for me, not yet. But I want it. So I infuse it in various ways, reading and chanting. And the writing goes for it.

I asked someone to try to get me “A Love Supreme” on tape. Thought of that today and felt some fear. I don’t want to re-activate karma by engaging in the sense gratification of listening to music the way I used to—with no direct connection to Kṛṣṇa in Vraja. But then I thought, “Don’t be afraid. You’re not going to get dragged back to 1964 and have to live that over as a nondevotee. It’s a specific ‘research’ project. It will produce some writing *from now*. I already wrote a piece telling what it was like then. Now tell the story how I got the tape and wanted to listen to it again and what happens. Even if it is ‘bhoga,’ it’s a limited lab experiment and I don’t think it will cause much harm.”

It’s good to be conscientious about everything, weighing and worrying before you do anything. It may seem cumbersome to live like that, but it’s conscientious. So much is at stake. If I could *run* ahead—like the *gopīs* run to Kṛṣṇa—that would be best. But I can’t.

Kṛṣṇa says He supplies what His devotees lack and preserves what they have. He’ll always help as we try to maintain and go forward.

Don’t keep looking in a mirror as you write.

It’s nice to do sixty-four rounds on Ekādaśī. I can’t promise, however, that I’ll always do it. But next Ekādaśī, April 3rd, I should be able to. Prepare (you can’t really, but *wait* for it.) for writing profusely and freely in the remaining two weeks here, with free spirit, seriousness. You don’t know exactly why you write, and with each session you don’t know what to write. But you do it and with faith. *Steer to Kṛṣṇa* That much.

☉ March 20 ☉

12:40 A.M.

Felt more fears due to being out of station, i.e., at a retreat in a private house in Ireland.

I may do something wrong here. It would be seen as deviation. (Although the same could occur in a temple, it would be easier to explain it as a misunderstanding.)

We may be attacked by dacoits.

ISKCON authorities don't approve of the retreat mode per se and they make statements to me that in the future, this can only be done with their expressed approval. Thus the fact that I'm now on a retreat without such permission is a cause for me to do it under-cover—and that produces some fear or guilt.

A fear (doubt) that the activities of the retreat are not authorized or pleasing. For example, so much attention to writing. This is no less than a fear-doubt that my peers do not even accept the fact that I've taken writing as my main service (along with traveling to various places in the world). My portfolio has have never been scrutinized and received permission. (I think of what I imagine to be the corresponding behavior of a monk in a world religion. I think he would operate much more in obedience to his institutional authorities. But there are probably exceptions where much freedom is given. Bhūrijana said elder *sannyāsīs* in the Gauḍīya Māṭhas seem to have this freedom, "to do what they want.")

The freedom itself produces a fear. This goes beyond "what will others think." It's a healthy challenge, but can nevertheless produce fear. It's actually easier internally to just do as I'm told and assume that my directors know exactly what is best for my inner life at every moment. The fact is that I take responsibility for

my freedom—as expressed in my tight schedule of daily activities, and my deeper purpose, and in producing tangible preaching results in the form of published books, seminars and a “good consciousness” for detached lecturing.

This behavior of mine directly or indirectly serves to teach others. Directly in *Choṭa’s Way* I said everyone should find their way to serve Kṛṣṇa. Indirectly, by not belonging to a particular ISKCON project or working under a particular GBC or committee, I may signal to my followers, that they can do the same. TKG and Ravindra S. have mentioned this to me.

But I don’t accept this as a valid criticism of my behavior. I encourage my disciples who belong to projects to work under their authorities. Those living outside I encourage to serve in connection with ISKCON. But in a positive way, I do encourage that each devotee, especially as they grow older, take responsibility for what they want to do in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They have to do it as an individual expression of surrender. I admit that I do teach and encourage such individual expression, but that these things are not easily discovered or expressed. It takes time and work to develop our own ways. But it is an important aspect of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and one not much recognized by most leaders who are in a crisis situation.

I am still working out my own way. Of course, we don’t automatically attain to that which you might aspire for. There are obstacles. The institution itself might offer obstacles. Then, whether in the temple or out, we have to fight to find time to do our chosen service. For example, Madana-mohana dāsa would like to paint pictures in Kṛṣṇa consciousness but has to spend most of his time making money as a graphic artist in a way which doesn’t inspire him. In some cases, we simply

have to be patient and wait for signs when we can wholeheartedly do as we desire. We can wholeheartedly attempt to guide our own life in the desired direction. (For example, renunciation of family may be helpful.)

Other obstacles are offered by our needing facility to do the service. It may require the cooperation of other, money, land, etc.

There are also challenges or obstacles in the art of the service itself. Someone may want to be a writer, but doesn't know what to write, doesn't know his own writing voice, etc. In any desired service, we may at first have only a vague, but strong desire, and we don't know the realities of the art of that service or specifically what we want to do. This area has to be narrowed down and specified before we will be satisfied and productive.

Considering these things, I find myself to be in a fortunate stage of my life. I've served in ISKCON mostly out of duty, and at the same time, I have expressed my natural proclivity for reading and writing in services as lecturer, *BTG* editor, and writer. The managerial leadership as temple president and GBC was mostly thrust on me as needful for the spreading of my spiritual master's movement. There is still an urgent need for such project leaders, but I have dropped out from that role. I see my life has a different mission.

I'm still operating, however, in the recognizable missionary activities of ISKCON, both as a *sannyāsī* (traveling and lecturing in temples and practicing *sādhana* and renunciation) and as an ISKCON guru (guiding disciples by correspondence, books, meetings, and example). Also, I am functioning as an ISKCON teacher in seminars held in ISKCON.

The area of taking retreats and of spending time in the type of writing I do maybe considered an uncharted area. That doesn't mean it's wrong. I think I'm getting good results and should pursue it as much as I can, but not in a way that is disobedient to the ISKCON GBC. At present I am not acting disobediently, yet I am charting out my yearly program on my own and seeing that all I do contributes to my responsibilities as guru, *sannyāsī* and teacher.

If I take care of myself as a person, then I'll be able to take care of others. This is one way that my personal *sādhana* work in retreats is connected to ISKCON.

The creative writing is part of my commitment to this service. Becoming serious to the challenges of writing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness has led me a long way into seeking the best forms of expression. I find this work to be the most personally satisfying. The writing is inextricably connected to my progress on other fronts. That is, whatever I'm trying to learn in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, I'm expressing and assimilating in writing. Similarly, what I'm trying to achieve in reading or *japa* or discovering of who I am and how to surrender—I progress in all of these fields with strong assistance by writing.

At present, by writing in an autobiographical yet creative way, I am mapping out a record of my own attempts and sharing that with those who are interested.

I'll read the above argument or justification to Madhu. Otherwise, its only purpose is to strengthen me in awareness of my goals and behavior—to become convinced against doubts. Also, in fairness to the truth, I write these things out to see if they sound right. This one sounds right. I mentioned to M. a fear that some

"Arjuna" (the mouse character) will come to my retreat and say, "All right, Choṭa, the jig is up."

But that's not going to happen. Neither are my parents going to come and say, "The jig is up. You must give up being a Hare Kṛṣṇa and return to normal ways." Neither is the law or government going to crash in and say "The jig is up. Stop these Kṛṣṇa conscious activities." Time is not going to drag me back into being a fearful child or adolescent who is denied permission to do what he wants. Don't have unnatural fears like that. Take responsibility for what you're doing.

This doesn't mean that I won't have to explain myself or defend myself. In my quiet way, I am making waves. I'll have to account for them. (Miller says you have to take the consequences of a pure act.) But I'm not advocating that others should behave like me or do what I am doing. My cause is a personal one. I advocate action to others only in an implied way. I should also be more aware of those implications, real or false, such as the charge that my "independent" behavior encourages my disciples to be irresponsible.

Writing this morning what comes, this examination of what I'm doing. Thus I'm writing about myself and my responsibility.

Sometimes I write about writing. I never seem to exhaust that topic, always asking, "What is writing? What should I write?" Looking for the form or genre that will best inform me and best express Kṛṣṇa consciousness for me. I like this present genre. It's not exactly an already existing mold. It's diary, it's autobiography, self-revelation, poems, musings, mini-essays, travel writing, vignettes of life in ISKCON, preaching to ISKCON members—all mixed in and woven together.

Now more than ever I'm writing without knowing what I want—and not seeing this as a period of groping before latching on to a topic, but the “not knowing” is life itself and includes “knowing.”

This is all I'll ever know. “Should I try to make sense or tell the truth?” Keep going. Keep asking yourself, “Is this right and where am I going?” Keep your balance and at the same time move ahead.

Freer

The charisma of the Christmas bulb was only—word choice of the author. He didn't signal when. He just began. Don't jump off the cliff. Don't just sit there. But go there for *japa* and bring your writing pad. Write quickly to help yourself.

Soon I'll start my day's *japa*. As the writing has its own discipline (keep the hand moving, etc.), so the *japa* has a different discipline. It requires bringing my attention to the quick utterances of the mantras and not indulging in other trains of thought. I can't even try at this point to think of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, to add Vraja worship, etc.

Free-write to free yourself. This is ironically the best way to communicate. Put all concentration into whatever you feel the urge to say in each Writing Session. *This will produce the most connected and vital material.*

My subject (Kṛṣṇa consciousness) is already well defined. My readers also are familiar with it. Now we simply need vital statements on this vast and demanding subject of how to practice and surrender in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Direct strikes are what we want. The reader doesn't need the big super-structure of a story or essay. Go to the heart if you can, again and again. That's all you really have. And it's all you need. At least some readers are willing to follow you in this.

Time to get off this page and go to *japa*. (You are worried that this ink will smear with moisture before you can get it typed. If you really mean this, then use a ball point pen. But I like these pens better—they flow—and so far that hasn't happened, that we've lost material because of smeared pages. So many fears and insecurities. It's good to plan and avoid them. But in the end, you can't protect yourself and your work from *erasure by time*. The soul, however, does not get moistened or dried out or shredded; it doesn't lapse, expire, or go out of print. It doesn't need money or food. It needs love, but it already has that—Kṛṣṇa loves us. You don't need to look for love or work or prepare. As Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Everything is there." Just discover it.)

Now go and discover your own *japa-yajña*. Have a good time. See you later.

(And don't get too affectionate with women, even in writing.) Preserve yourself for the ultimate expressions in your writing which can be shared by all. I can give that much to each person, especially ladies. They may demand but I can't give what they want. I should decide what I can give; not that they decide.

Okay go now.

11:15A.00.

At first an hour seems like a long time to write, but when I'm near the end of it, it seems short. It also seems that I only began to discuss the things I wanted to discuss.

So carefully I start a sentence and try to get to the end of it. Writing takes a great effort. I think I'll be physically exhausted when it's over. This seems to be another type of mental block.

I catch myself not writing "well," nothing exciting or explicitly Kṛṣṇa conscious, and I say, "Come on, at once, start preaching, start glorifying." I want to jump to attention like a soldier when the officer enters the room. But loving service shouldn't be offered like that.

The pedant finds faults in every line of Homer or Shakespeare.

Don't ask me why I'm writing my own instead of reading a superb *grantha*. I can't answer it, but will write on instead.

Does you mind repeat the same pattern, so there's never anything new? Kdd kindly said it's like a pendulum swinging back and forth, but going down too, dangerous to the false ego, cutting to the pride, the pen of free-writing swings back and forth. It's not for nothing.

But constantly I have to expose my lack of wealth, lack of devotion and learning. I beg, "Mister, can you give me fare for the bus to Chicago?"

Where's your money? Lose your wallet?

No, I never had it. I have some dollars, but not devotional wealth.

Sure, here's ten bucks. Will that do?

It will help. If I need more, I'll ask someone else. Or I'll take this and ride as far as I can go with it.

Scratch, scratch.

I have Merton's *Desert Wisdom* here and thought it might help my determination for the retreat. The desert monks did not abandon their prayer cells; they met all the mind's and imagination's demons and called out to God to save them. But Merton (though I like his personal voice) emphasizes nothingness. You get the impression he really thinks God is Void. How can I be inspired by that desert of hopeless surrender? We can

gain something there—the hope against hope, the courage of renunciation and constant prayer (my *japa* seems like that sometimes—hanging in there with no taste, but an undying determination which itself is a sign of God’s mercy).

But in the limited time at my disposal, I hanker for more direct *rasa*. Better go to Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. The Gosvāmīs are not only better teachers, but they are my gurus. That’s not true of Merton or the desert monks. Raghunātha and Rūpa and Sanātana and Jiva, and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and Narottama and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and Śrīla Prabhupāda—are all residents of eternal Vṛndāvana.

Here we are and the wind is in the chimney. Do the magpies mean winter is over? In Ireland you don’t get much of a spring, and even in summer you wear a sweatshirt or a coat on a morning walk.

Sometimes I slice at myself. Gītā-nāgarī dāsa says he can’t bear to read that. I won’t allow that I have any realization at all, no truth. I don’t really believe that either. But I don’t want hollow-sounding stuff about my affection for Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes. Face it, I am struggling merely to believe in their reality, to overcome the doubt that it’s all mythology. I’m fighting that good fight and begging for mercy. And I’m getting mercy.

The pastimes are real. There is a spiritual world. Within it, the best section is Vraja. I am not going to be able to convince many people of this and I shouldn’t even try. Try to convince them in a general way that there is a kingdom of God, with many depots or Vai-kunṭha planets. Kṛṣṇaloka is the best. Actually many people are accepting this, thanks to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

(Dwelling right now on that vicious article by Śubhānanda against hardhearted, hypocritical ISKCON. I haven't even read his article, but I know what it is. Vicious attacks and implied atheism. ISKCON is hypocritical and cruel, etc. God doesn't exist, and certainly He's not Kṛṣṇa, as taught by Śrīla Prabhupāda. Another poison. You can't avoid all these, especially when newer devotees are in danger of being administered the poison.)

I'm fighting for faith in Vraja. I admit it. Please see this in a positive way, Lord, and send me hope and *śrad-dhā* and *niṣṭhā*. I think I'm doing okay in good association. I pray You'll always let me have that company of devotees and avoid the nondevotees. Even the God conscious person who's not a devotee of Kṛṣṇa is no help to me, and I can't share my heart with him. Thank You for letting me write this in the house.

I peeled off another layer of fear, admitted some doubt. As a result I feel more prepared to protect myself and do the needful. It's best to write out of your immediate and naked feeling. Yes, you want to talk on more elevated topics. But you *will* arrive there. And from wherever you honestly begin, you will soon be expressing explicit Kṛṣṇa consciousness—even if it's to say "I don't always speak of Kṛṣṇa, but I want to.

I want the peacocks, camelle, other flowers beli, *pari-jāta*, *karnikāra*, lotus, roses of Vraja, the *tulasī*s, Yamunā, the places, the persons . . . the discussion, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. I want to be safely there.

"When the saints come
marchin' in,
O when the saints come
marchin' in,
I want too be in their
number,

when the saints come
marchin' in!"

Time for massage, bathroom, lunch, and rest. Catch you later, maybe outdoors. But only after thirty-two rounds are well on their way to being finished.

5:15

I didn't pay nice attention to my rounds. I am sorry to report that. I remember in my P.S. #8 days, the report card had a line stating, "Could do better." Often the teacher checked that line in their reports on me. There was Excellent, Good, Could Do Better, Fair, and Poor. My parents used to preach to me about the meaning of this "Could do better." It held some promise that I had hidden talents. That was reassuring to both my parents and I. At least I wasn't a dope; I was intelligent. But there was an implication of serious trouble unless I corrected myself. It was like getting cavities—not a good sign. You'd have to pay for it by undergoing drilling at the dentist (without novocaine). "Could do better."

But what if he doesn't? What if he grows up and doesn't do better?

I'm feeling like that now with my *japa*. It seems I can't do better. Who's marking my report card? Who do I show it to?

How fearful we were before receiving the card. You never knew whether you'd get a bad rating or a good one. It was up to the Fates, the higher powers.

Now things are different. The guru is my friend. Lord Kṛṣṇa is my friend. I don't think of myself as a rebellious, confused kid. I want to serve and improve. Sure I can do better. In fact, I'm "Fair" only or "Poor." I'm poor, but not out of rebelliousness so that the smart alecks in the class will approve that I'm not a

brown-noser or a sissy. I don't care for their opinion. I'm a Hare Kṛṣṇa devotee now, so all smart alecks and honor roll kids can have a laugh on me. I'm in a school for devotees now. I go on chanting. But what to do about the quality?

How pleasing it is to eat *prasādam* cooked by Kirtana-rasa dāsa. He likes to do it and serve it and bring me seconds. I eat with *bon appetit*. A nice reciprocation, sitting on the floor using a plastic mat we found here in the house and porcelain dishes.

☉ ☉ March 21 ☉

12:12 A.M.

I dreamt of Śrīla Prabhupāda. I was his servant on a temple visit. I was impressed with the simple enthusiasm of those days and the feeling of it being special to serve him. My first impressions (on waking) were to want to go back to such a simple life, to recapture it. In those days, we had Śrīla Prabhupāda's association and service and nothing else mattered.

We can't go back to those days. Still, I want to lovingly serve him in this lifetime. I suppose the dream can't change the priorities I have been discussing in these retreat notes. For example, in the name of wanting the taste of Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal service ("the taste of the good old days"). I can't just take over the management of one of his centers. Don't do something inebriated like preach that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the only guru for ISKCON or that no one should write any books, only read his books, etc. These are desperate and ignorant attempts.

My "crazy" free-writing? My life with not enough direct reference to Śrīla Prabhupāda? Well, I can do something, I'm sure, to increase the purity and direct-

ness of my service to him. Śrīla Prabhupāda himself didn't cultivate a constant nostalgia of the good old days with his guru, but he always kept a personal focus of carrying out his Gurudeva's order with one hundred percent faith in his spiritual master. If there's something I can do to work in that spirit, then try for it.

Be careful not to try and impress his followers with my faithfulness. The connection of my life-work and meditation on Śrīla Prabhupāda should be one I feel personally. I don't think I can *always* be writing books of memories of my days with him, although sometimes I can. But even when I spend extra time chanting *japa*, I should be doing it with thoughts of him. Always be in some kind of Prabhupāda consciousness.

I'm grateful that dream came. I ask forgiveness from those followers of his I may have offended. All glories to Prabhupāda and the many ways in which devotees are serving him.

Keep in mind: if some special services come my way for the Centennial, try to do them if they are in my line. Someone mentioned writing the text for a pictorial biography. Maybe I could start on that in 1994. Maybe other writings too. Although gathering reminiscences doesn't seem to be what I want to do now.

What about more *Prabhupāda Meditations*?

Reading in *BRS (NOD)* regarding hard and soft hearts. Which is better and which do I have? The hard heart doesn't melt easily, it's deep and it's also large. In a large city, elephants and chariots are not noticed, but in a small village, even small things are noticeable. We usually use the words "hard heart" in a derogatory way, but this is a more technical use of the words.

When emotions arise, as in my dream of Śrīla Prabhupāda, I often turn to my free-writing work and ask if it's all right. Because of its external symptoms, the free-writing can be easily criticized. I mean its concentration on myself and the fact that we allow whatever comes to mind to be expressed. Beneath the surface of such randomness and self-absorption lies a deeper purpose.

I read a statement by a doctor who was a friend of Van Gogh in his last days of madness. He said that Van Gogh had too much faith in art and became a martyr. I suppose I could have too much faith in free-writing. Better not to always think I'm following a particular method of writing with trust in "first thoughts are best thoughts." Rather, I take some tips here and there and plunge into the river of writing whatever comes in search of myself and in search of how to surrender to Kṛṣṇa. When I find a topic worth working on, I stay with it.

To keep free-writing sane and healthy, I only publish things that are directly Kṛṣṇa conscious or that are obviously leading to the Kṛṣṇa conscious moment of truth. Or I describe Śrīla Prabhupāda or Lord Kṛṣṇa. Free-writing assumes one's life is dedicated to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If that's a fact, then the writing of what comes in a sincere *sādhaka's* struggle has value to him and to others.

It can be easily misunderstood and misused. I should not print things that are mundane. I should not *do* things in life that are unfavorable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Revise your life, Stafford advises the writer. Yes, that's what I need to do. And writing is merely a record of what I just did in the immediate or remote past. It also helps create the present and future.

Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa. These days alone for increased chanting at the seaside and careful observation of what changes occur. I don't expect miracles. But I look at the sea and sometimes pray (like yesterday), "Please reveal to me the nature of the holy name." The prayer-application is made and I can also listen closely to any answer Kṛṣṇa gives in the heart. We need to discern if "the answer" comes from our own intelligence or from the Lord and His pure devotees.

I also have written this note to myself, "Face fears." Yes, the barren seaside is a good place for this. I advise myself not to panic and want to break out of here. Don't try to prove that you are busy and active in ISKCON. Relax and concentrate on the work (and peace) you came here to seek and find. That means *japa* increase and what can be derived from that. Time for writing in the retreat setting, this time with no intentions of making a particular book as I usually do. Work on these areas especially. Steadily hear Śrīla Prabhupāda's tapes.

Next time you go alone, it will mainly be to prepare for the year's seminar on C.c., *Madhya* 8. Do a five-lecture course for Villa Vṛndāvana, tailored for that audience. And do more on the outline for the full twenty-two-lecture course. I have to focus on each lecture and make it substantial, to my satisfaction.

As for writing time ahead and specific plans, I'm not making plans. In that comparison of "the stalker and the dreamer," I'm using the dreamer approach. I'm writing whatever comes and trusting that if I want to (need to) write a book on a specific theme or structure, it will evolve from this "method" of writing with no structure in mind. I'll continue this even in a retreat specifically devoted to writing. Now in the *japa* retreat, I'm giving three one-hour slots for writing prose and

two half hour slots for poems. Plus twenty minutes typing prose. That's a total of four hours and twenty minutes. A "writing retreat" might mean to increase the time spent in writing. Otherwise, it would be the same as I'm doing now.

The free-writing books are happy occasions too. They take deliberate decision-making to make them happen, but sometimes not much effort on my part. The main thing is to not be artificial. I seem to be making more of a demand that writing be honest and not playing for audience. *That will make it harder for my creative-unconscious self to come up with some theme which can sustain me through many sessions or become a whole book on a writing retreat.* I'm demanding more simmering and more pressure before releasing a volcano. Actually, a volcano should come by itself without pre-meditation.

That would be nice if in a retreat setting, all the sessions were directed on certain themes enough to make it a book. For now, I've deliberately released myself from this purpose of craft. It's a new discipline or freedom. I just write and let the editor find the books or even shape the material into a book. I won't avoid a book if a strong sense of theme comes, but I won't fall so easily to artifice.

Therefore in these three weeks, I call these notes "Writing Sessions during a *japa* retreat" because that's exactly what they are. I don't have to put myself in a certain frame of mind when I write each time. This creates freedom, but the danger is I feel a lack of purpose. That lack may be a lack of fruitive purpose and conscious direction: "I am writing a book on such-and-such theme for the next two weeks and I will publish it with illustrations, etc." I want to find my motive to write, even without those familiar signposts. Just swim.

Then despite not planning for it, themes will naturally appear. The writing of these three weeks will be distinct from other times because of time, place, and who I am now. I am not stagnant. Nothing is stagnant, but moving on like a river.

5:07 A.M.

Following an inner vision

Just looked at a page in Ueland about the artist's vision—Van Gogh, Blake, and others. They had a conviction of their inner fire, their "god," and worked at it. They, she says, weren't sure others would see it. Blake in particular didn't let anyone stifle his genius. He believed in it and never let anything hinder it. He said, "Prudence is a rich ugly old maid, courted by incapacity . . . " and, "He knows himself greatly who never opposes his genius." These things have to be translated into Kṛṣṇa conscious terms, and I am not sure I do it expertly.

Some artist's talk is egoism, but some is the spirit. I translate it as the desire to serve Kṛṣṇa with the best you have. You cherish a hope that you could do some big preaching that would change people's minds, make thousands into devotees. You don't dare say that, not even to yourself. Modesty seems to forbid it. Besides, it might not be true. Just work and serve Kṛṣṇa. If He likes, what you do can be influential to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It's as simple as that. He can use you if He likes; He can empower you if He likes. Your job is not to figure out if you are great, empowered, etc., but to assume you are empowered in the way all Prabhupādanugas are, and go on writing.

Now the question comes why write the way you do, so differently? Why not write in the seven ways Druta-karma suggested in his seminar, either *BTG* essays, let-

ters to the newspapers, or some other recognizable preaching? Well, this is also recognizable preaching. I write to myself with the best honesty and freshness of trying to see my way through the darkness. This is who I actually am, this is how Kṛṣṇa consciousness is actually touching me, this is how I actually fall short. If this kind of writing is meant to help many people or a few people, if it is meant to last after I am gone, then that will happen, not by my manipulation. I should do my best, and yes, follow a vision of doing something wonderful. Shoot for the rhinoceros. Follow Śrīla Prabhupāda in that way, not as a yes man, a cipher, but responding to the call within yourself that, "I shall do something wonderful for my spiritual master. I shall work and revive an inspiration to write in a way to help myself and appeal to others. I cannot even say exactly what it is. I should not boast, but I believe in this vision within and follow it."

This vision has to be based on a life of good Vaiṣṇava behavior. Only if you are sincere in your *sādhana*, prayer, and practical service can you write in a way that is sincere, practical, and Kṛṣṇa conscious. Otherwise honesty is just a mundane, moral ethic. The one who is attached to Kṛṣṇa or who strongly desires that attachment can write something interesting in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The world already has plenty of interesting, honest writers, geniuses, martyrs, light-hearted spirits, human fellows, great stylists—everything has already been done in any genre you may wish to invent. But what the world doesn't have is Kṛṣṇa conscious writing . . . Now that Śrīla Prabhupāda has created devotees and a movement, let us write our truth of trying to serve him and be devotees. I have worked in the movement to help build it. Many find fault with it now, and some find fault with me as a corrupt example of the

ISKCON leader. But I shall not be stopped. I'll try to behave and do this for Śrīla Prabhupāda—tell a person's experience in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Enough, or too much.

11:25 A.M.

I'm on the grassy cliff. Dandelions and Irish daisies are growing in the meadow. It's not raining, so I can notice the flowers better.

Kirtana-rasa invited me to drive twenty-five minutes this afternoon to Conner's Pass where there's a panoramic view. I prefer not to go. I feel pressure in my eye; also, I've got a good enough view right here in the backyard. I'll need to chant my rounds this afternoon. If it's not raining, this cliff is excellent. It's private. The invitation to go to Conner's Pass (where there are likely to be tourists) makes it clearer to me that I'm seeking solitude, not car drives and scenic vistas.

The tide is out. When it's in, the waves jump right under my feet and I even think, "If this gets much higher, I better not stay here." Now nature is more "at bay." The rocks with their deep pockmarks are all exposed.

I want to expose myself also. I want to praise God with true appreciation.

We just read the *Sakṣī Gopāla* story. Śrīla Prabhupāda compared himself to the young *brāhmaṇa* who had complete faith that the Supreme Personality of Godhead Kṛṣṇa is the topmost authority. With that faith, Śrīla Prabhupāda spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness and Kṛṣṇa supplied men and money.

Sigh not for Killarney. I'm *in* Killarney so I don't have to sigh for it. I'm sighing for Goloka, Vraja. May this fragile, headache-prone body hold out longer and let me make praise and help myself.

A devotee isn't motivated. In the *Sakṣī* story, it appeared the young man wanted the Deity to get him a wife. But he was not motivated that way. I also don't want to be wrongly motivated when I say, "God, please reveal Yourself in my writing" (so I'll become a famous, loved author). I don't want to yearn, "Dear Kṛṣṇa, please appear in Your intimate *mādhurya* feature in my writing" (so readers will think I'm a *rasika*).

I pray to write in a Kṛṣṇa conscious way to help myself and give Vaiṣṇavas joy. Why? To serve them. Why? As the young *brāhmaṇa* in *Sakṣī* said to the old *brāhmaṇa*, "I serve you as a way of serving Kṛṣṇa."

Similarly, if I write to expose falsity in myself and to give myself confidence, it is not for a mundane motive. Let me elevate it. I want to be a better person so that I can be a better servant of my guru and the Vaiṣṇavas. Even if I admit that I want to improve myself for my own well-being and happiness, that can also be taken in a Kṛṣṇa conscious way. I am a spirit soul and I should be brought back to my original position. I should be a friend to myself; preach to myself with good counsel. Get good company for myself, best literature to read. Be kind. Discipline yourself for the highest good. You must save yourself first, then you can save others. Pursue self-realization like that.

I want to be in their number, when the Vaiṣṇavas come marching in.

Freer.

Freer doesn't mean I become silly. I see the world. LSD made me see the world in vibrant colors and more exposed physical and psychic realities, beauties, and fears. The orange bay, the long-haired grasses on the bank—why do I mention this? Because I want to open up without fear. Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa. I want it to

be by the natural method, which usually means in slow, gradual increments. Slow yet sure, and not *so* slow—like the changing of the tides twice daily. (The sun is shining, soon it will be hiding.)

I want to see what is what and not be afraid. I don't want to live sheltered from the truth. But I *am* frightened and I want peace. Sometimes I ask Kṛṣṇa, "Break it to me gently." When I was a young LSD-taker, I had a bold sense of adventure. I had faith in the unknown and swallowed a sugar cube. Now I would not gamble so recklessly with what I have gained over the years. In those days (1960s) I thought I had nothing to lose. I was more or less an atheist, so what could I lose? Maybe I could gain—maybe I could "see God" on my psychedelic trip. Now I have everything to lose.

Still, I want You to know that I am seeking You. I am begging for spiritual insight, revelation of spiritual truth.

What about the fact that I can't keep secrets and I write everything down? Is that a reason why You won't reveal more to me? Please teach me then, how to keep a secret.

But I take pride in writing all, bad and good, for Your glory. Although I am not actually so truthful. Teach me that, also, to have the courage to speak and see truth. Even the "truth" that "I doubt. I don't believe" should be admitted, and then I'll go beyond it and find a way to gain faith.

An ounce of faith is worth tons of faithlessness.

5:25 p.m.

Don't tell us too much about yourself as a romantic figure sitting on the rocky shore of the ocean. I remember you.

I remember April. Then (freer) you will open the box of walnuts . . . Why, with such important things to do, do you amuse yourself by writing whatever comes like "box of walnuts?"

Or, if you want to take it seriously, isn't that like too much psychology? "Hmm . . . Why do I say walnuts? Perhaps it's a symbol of masculinity." Oh, don't peruse your stock . . .

Getting down, I won't say, "to brass tacks." I'm willing to write something more thoughtful. I'm a beggar. I must take anything I am offered that will lead me to Kṛṣṇa.

Don't forbid me, however, from recalling moments in my life. Don't mock my sitting on the cliff and chanting. It's all I have. It is an attempt to serve my spiritual master and Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. You can joke if you like, but don't censor me when I feel something favorable in my own activities and I wish to pursue it further.

I'm at a low level, but still I have to live. I can't expect at any moment to tap into total, auspicious Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I have to be patient. But if I feel so affectionate and purposeful in writing that I can write four hours a day, that's all right. Then don't be angry or upset when all I have to write is little things. Also, give us some Kṛṣṇa consciousness at any time, even if it's just a verse or a "truism." Inevitably, I am leaving a written record when I write, so make it Kṛṣṇa conscious.

What is my opinion? What do I think of it? Just saying what is?

M. phoned Kdd in America. Some messages exchanged. Books sales and books production. No bad

news. Lalita-mañjarī sold \$600 dollars worth of my books at the Māyāpur festival. Now those books will wander all over the world, probably in many different countries. It deserves a mention in these notes. If I am actually writing not to create a book, but just what comes, then mention this and the satisfaction I feel and the reciprocation with Bhūrijana's daughter who so devotedly and determinedly sold my books from a table day after day. She didn't even want to go to Māyāpur because of the crowds and some confusion she says she has about Māyāpur being the same as Vṛndāvana. (I couldn't quite follow it in her last letter.)

In the old days, people put much of themselves into letters. I don't do it that much. It's mostly a chore or a vital way to communicate and serve devotees. But I don't see it as "art." But I might explore this. What is it I want to express in these Writing Sessions and how is it different than writing letters? Is it not a long letter to myself I am writing here? Or a series of letters to friends who read my books? Yes, but it's different than the letters I dictate.

I say, "I can't put myself so candidly in a letter." In favor of letter-writing I may say at least it always has a focus and theme—I must accept the assignment of answering any questions that are raised in the letter I am answering. It's more limited in that way, but no room either for spacing out or failing to communicate. If I can't rise to the occasion, then I can't write the letter. I must meet certain requirements. But these sessions have no such requirements. At least that's how I'd like to write—just being with "you" on the page.

12:40 A.M.

I take pleasure in filling up blank pages, or in using up ink, seeing the ink flow onto the page. These are obviously minor accomplishments! But I needn't become disgusted to notice these little pleasures connected with the performance of my chosen devotional service. Similarly, I may be pleased by the feminine gestures or responses of lady devotees in my exchanges in devotional service with them. This kind of enjoyment is potentially dangerous. One can be aware of it and not dally with women, and then there is no harm. The example given by Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī Ṭhākura is that when a snake's poisonous fangs are removed, the snake's movements are no longer dangerous—and similarly the sensual activities of a devotee fully absorbed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness will not bring him a bad reaction. In exchanges with women devotees, therefore, I may often ask myself, "Am I dallying with her? Is she dallying with me?"—if such is happening, then I should politely but firmly terminate it. Otherwise, I'll bear the burden of it later.

Sometimes when it's time to begin a Writing Session, I feel doubt or disgust or reluctance. As I am asking myself not to be disgusted by the physical and mental pleasure I find in writing, so I should also not be distracted by feelings of doubt in my designated service. First, I should accept that it is my service to write, and that presently I'm doing this type of "writing practice." Don't knock it. Do it. Start wading and swimming and being Kṛṣṇa conscious. It's the same with almost any service performed by a *sādhaka*. He may find some aspects of it pleasing or displeasing. As for displeasing, Śrīla Prabhupāda says the cook should (must) go into

the kitchen even in the summer season when it's very hot. The *sannyāsi* has to endure the renunciation of his former wife and children. The *kṣatriya* has to fight to kill. If there is reluctance in doing such duties, the reluctance should be thrown off.

I may tend to reject the service itself, "Oh, this writing is so self-centered, especially since *Shack Notes*." Even Arjuna had a basic doubt in the most essential activity of a *kṣatriya*—fighting the enemy on the battlefield. Lord Kṛṣṇa asked him to give up his lethargy (or cowardice, or undue family attachment, or whatever) and fight for Him without attachment to the results. The writing is my battlefield, my hot kitchen in the summertime. I must not put down my pens and say, "Govinda, I shall not write."

Arise, O slayer of enemies, said Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and with the sword of knowledge slay the demon of doubt. With the flow of free-writing, obliterate the writing block and all its excuses such as doubt whether this is Kṛṣṇa conscious. Arjuna offered many reasons why the fighting would have bad results. His reasons were plausible, but not in the context of disobeying Kṛṣṇa's desire (and abandoning *kṣatriya* duty.)

I have reasons not to write—some people don't like it, it gets "dirty" (impure), makes me go through my material past, isn't all Absolute Truth—but I need to confess impurities and this may hurt people's faith in me or in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, etc. This is pettiness of heart if it stops me.

Writing advice: don't be too timid to make strong statements when they come. Or—they will make themselves, if you just don't get in the way with your censoring and editing.

5:13 A.M.

Oh, my puppets. My permissive story. It has innumerable incidents as we travel and put on our shows and recruit devotees. Innumerable jumps and turns and starts and stops. Anything can happen in this tiny world of one person's imagination, just as anything can happen by the inconceivable energies of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

You write what you want, with the same objectives as any writing—going at once to the heart, without preambles, from peak to peak, admitting you live in the world, but striving for acts of devotion in *bhakti*.

The puppets wanted to go out and play in the sunshine. They are naive. They don't know that the sunshine can quickly disappear and they'll be left outdoors in strong, cold wind and maybe splashing rain. They're like little children.

"The mountain peaks of desire roll down to the plains," the puppet maintenance man writes in his ledger. He fixes the faces of the puppets, but in his spare moments, he tries to write. When you are tired, your eyelids start to lower and the white universe of imagination closes out. How to sustain it? Somewhere (in the past) a small group of parkies (temporary summer workers for the Department of Parks in New York City) sit outdoors around a remote toilet house on a stretch of beach at Great Kills Park. One of them has a big bottle of Coke and a hero sandwich as his lunch. The uniform is orange pants, green T-shirts, and green caps. The parkies sit and kill time until they can go home for the day, having earned their measly wage.

This is called feather bedding—they have jobs, but no full-time work to do. They find places to hang out around the beach. Even the supervisor knows their

when it wanders where the mind takes me, because of its intention to explore, test, be honest . . .

Some *raconteurs* speak that way (Jean Shepherd for one)—in free association. I used to love it. It was really not like a stuffy studied lecture on official curriculum which bored the teacher as well as the student. Give us a live, enthusiastic teacher. But my spiritual master didn't lecture that way—wandering. In some smaller groups he might reminisce. But he was naturally so Kṛṣṇa conscious that he was soon preaching to us. He was made of compassion and the preaching spirit.

I am not. I'm therefore explaining the nature of my spontaneity in a controlled and private atmosphere. What I write is therefore interesting only for someone who cares for me and trusts me. I think I must write this way, even if it's not for a wider audience. I'm not satisfied with my own official talks. I can do it in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class for thirty or forty minutes and answer questions an additional thirteen minutes, but after that I'm exhausted. I can lecture like that twice a day. But even on such days I hanker for a private Writing Session to say how I really feel. I used to do without this. Work and remain silent as to my own interests. Sacrifice my self-inquiry for the higher good. But now I don't want to refrain from expressing how I feel every day in writing. I think it's good for me and even the official lectures will be better as a result.

Time for massage, end of this session. No puppet story, huh? But don't be reluctant to write whatever you want. Thank you for the parkie story and for how it relates—to killing time versus the *bhāva* of using time for Kṛṣṇa.

5:10 p.m.

I feel tired and not likely to write something ambitious in this session. May I at least surrender to the non-fruitive attitude of pure writing practice. There is nothing to prove. Surrender to busy penmanship and truthful recounting.

I am pampered with the only warm room in the house. Kirtana-rasa has a heater also. But M. hands me a piece of paper from another Āyurvedic person who says a *vāta* man shouldn't eat yogurt.

A *vāta* person should be regulated, and should keep calm and keep warm. An air-dominated constitution is good for active, creative life of the mind, but it needs to be grounded by hot food and regular habits. He tends toward flatulence and constipation, to chaos and confusion in the mind. Stay calm and warm. Wear a hat and socks to bed at night.

Gasping and groping, I say a few disjointed words. How have I been able to write so much if now it seems . . . I have no direction? *My own life is far away from me*—that is the meaning of this feeling, “I can't write.” If I remember something like walking on the beach, it seems long ago. How delicious it actually is to walk in the high-breeze on the beach, protected in a hooded coat and boots while listening to tapes.

What happened? When I see him, I'll ask Kirtana-rasa what happened in his search for a vet to fix the wing of a wild bird. I won't be sarcastic or lecture him on the futility of such an endeavor. I think it means a lot to him and I should not trifle with his feelings—even if I don't share them. (I wish he was as conscientious about his vow to chant sixteen rounds daily. But

still, it is not a bad heart that is overcome at the sight of a wounded creature.)

I can't eat tomatoes, potatoes, ice cream, yeast bread, red or white sauce on pasta, raw foods. I shouldn't let myself get cold. And watch that airy mind and its anxiety. You *vāta*.

Do *vāta* people write disjointed paragraphs at 5 P.M. and not know where to go with them? Do they build towers with bricks, piling one atop the other with no blueprint? What about indigestion?

Do what you think best. But follow some guidelines.

In a mood to chastise his enemies, Pinocchio rose from his bed. He grabbed a bramble branch and began to chant God's names. He and I are not offenders because we chant with devotion. We have so many faults, but we chant with devotion.

We are waiting in the wings. We are ready to go on-stage as soon as we receive our cue. We will recite for the audience as many *Bhagavad-gītā śloka*s as we know, including the thirty that are sufficient to defeat any *Māyāvādī* in debate.

They don't understand who criticize me, and neither do I understand.

Hail like tiny camphor balls or moth balls—driving slant-wise to the ground. I couldn't write through this hour. Lay on the floor.

Kṛṣṇa is the Lord. Why don't you read more what He teaches and says? Okay, I'm no good. But at least I listen to Śrīla Prabhupāda's lectures every day.

Read and weep

Read and you don't weep.

☉ MARCH 23 ☉

12:45 A.M.

I am falling into a diary mode, but quite free from the sense of writing a book. Dutiful to do the sessions, having ups and downs. It's best when I address concerns in my devotional life.

We don't want to waste time. We are trying to improve and listen to voices within that either impede or want be expressed (favorable or unfavorable). I generally allow any voice that is insisting to have its expression. By use of intelligence I expand on points that seem more useful or are fit. (Don't want to feel obliged to write down every blip or emotion or wave that occurs, just as I don't remember or care to record every dream I have in sleep.)

Getting work done, dispensing with "assignments," like reading of Navadvīpa's *BRS* translation. Then I have Bhūrijana's notes on the *Bhagavad-gītā* commentaries of Jīva and Baladeva. They could be kept as references; but better to actually read *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* in connection with them, starting with chapters 7-12 and thus induce myself to a regular reading of *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. Various readings and studies are always required to keep us fit and alive in Kṛṣṇa conscious thoughts, for better lecturing and writing. Life means mental activity. If we are not active and pursuing Kṛṣṇa conscious studies, then we'll transfer (channel) our energies into mundane interests.

Chill in chest no matter how long I run the heater in this room.

Prabhupāda's picture and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's picture. This writing pad is capable of holding whatever thoughts I put down. Admit my defeat before the

quantity of notebooks unfilled and the amount of ink ready to be used in pens.

Also my present reach is limited. But I keep going. Life in newer and newer reflections comes to me and they are worth noting, such as what I just wrote about two attitudes toward reading: (1) the know-it-all, and (2) The humble, eager approach which acknowledges that I have read these books, but have yet to realize them.

How am I today? What am I doing? How shall I serve this day?

The best thing is to absorb oneself in chanting and hearing the names, forms, *līlā* and qualities of Rādhā-Mādhava. That I will do, in *japa* and hearing a tape and reading with my friends.

Writing poems, etc., comes when there's an excess of feeling—I just have to put it into writing. But I may also approach the page out of a need, out of a feeling of emptiness. Begin, "Why don't I feel anything? Why do I feel so purposeless today?" And then pick up a trail of thought as it occurs to you.

Write whatever comes and don't end a session thinking this was not a good one. They are all good and they all are "not good"—in the sense that I remain a tiny beggar with Kṛṣṇa's mercy on me. Gurudeva has the good qualities, the attachment to Kṛṣṇa, and He can grant it to me. So thinking, "this session was particularly good" is still a kind of passion for results.

Or it may be that I sense Kṛṣṇa's mercy in a particular session. Okay, that's okay. I'm just trying to encourage myself through a session like this one where it seems "nothing is happening." To keep going at such times is important. Therefore something is "happen-

ing” when I insist on my practice, even through the desert. *Haribol, haribol*, we are chanting for the four directions, to the sun and the moon. We feel a chill, but what can be done? We have sold ourselves to Mukunda’s service in writing, at least for this hour.

Then when I go to *japa*, it’s even more pronounced that I need to keep trying even when I don’t get desired results. I surrender in that way. Again and again, with each bead and each word in each mantra, I fail to be attentive and devoted. Yet again and again I chant. *This* is my devotion and I love it, strange as it sounds. St. John of the Cross and other practitioners of prayer have credited this persistence through arid times as a high order of surrender. There’s something to be said for it, even more than for times when we are tasting nectar. There’s no other choice for a neophyte except to persist or give up. He takes joy and satisfaction in persisting, even though there are no external signs of that joy. If someone suggests to him, “Why don’t you give up chanting? Don’t do it if it’s just a guilt trip or a duty,” he’ll find the devotee shocked and disgusted at the suggestion. “No! I will never give up *japa* (or writing). Even if it takes me many lifetimes to realize the nectar . . . I am not doing this to taste spiritual sense gratification, but because I am the eternal servant of the servant of the Lord and it is my constitutional nature to chant His names.”

Thank You Lord for this realization. That double-banded attitude of prayerfulness in *japa* is good—*Thank You*, and *Please help me*.

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. Sincere chanters appreciate sincere expressions by fellow chanters. They want to hear the perfect śāstric statements on the glories of the holy name and its blissful

effects. But they also like to hear from one who takes his chanting seriously, even though he admits it's a struggle and he hasn't tasted all the bliss "claimed" by the *sāstra*. (One enemy criticized me strongly and at length when I said chanting was dry. I defended myself, but I can't forget his criticism. Let it stay then and help me, but not weaken my determination—not only my determination to get the nectar, but to admit when I don't get the nectar.)

Haribol. Time to go now. I like you, free-writer, and I like your chosen process of humbly writing whatever comes every day.

5:10 A.M.

I just opened Ueland for some help. It started off that way, saying that we should write utterly unplanned stories. But somehow I wasn't in the mood for fiction. Rather than going on that suggestion I read further. She started blasting people who only write for art's sake, for themselves. I hope it didn't describe me. I've discussed this with Kdd, who says that when you write for yourself in a diary, it is interesting to others. H. Miller's editor said the same thing, that Miller was having a good time writing for himself and inviting us along. Ueland was saying we should be humble and generous to address the reader and hold his attention (I see this in *Begging*). You write for an audience, you speak to them. Ueland criticizes books "full of your own psychological writings, your own entrails all pinned out on the surgical table. Who cares . . . every reader knows at once that you are a snob and an egoist and do not care about anyone but yourself. So the reader flags and thinks . . . Why read more?"

But there is another kind of writing where the writer talking to himself *is* of interest to us. We are honored

to be included, to be able to read it. I suppose it has to do with diaries and private writing. I found Kafka much more interesting when he was talking to himself in diary than in his novels. Last night I walked into Kirtana-rasa's room and he had a legal pad on the bed with him and no cover on it—a diary. I started reading the top page. It's interesting. It's written sincerely about why he wants to get away from the cities and come to Ireland. In this kind of writing, you write for yourself and then you share it. I shouldn't be thrown off by Ueland's description, which seems to apply to something else, disdain for readers and a snobbish, artistic, literary game. I always try to communicate in plain language and hold a reader's attention. Of course, the point is well taken and I should be aware of it. If I write just for my own amusement then—with no awareness of how it affects others . . . at any rate, even when writing to myself, be plain and clear so that when I read it later, I'll understand it, it will speak to me. If I do that, then I am communicating. I'm not sure what she refers to by "psychological writing." Hope I'm not guilty of this.

I think I have gone beyond that and reached a stage where I can write for my own benefit, and some of it will be the best I can write. Better communication than when I try to hold the reader's attention by all known devices, as an entertainer, trickster, cunning novelist, etc. Forget all that. Just talk to one who cares, yourself, and your friends. Talk of what matters. And let the world into your writing—that will automatically be interesting, at least to some.

Are those absurd stories too much *for myself*? No, no, they are full of devices for communication. Things I just don't have the guts to say outright, I say in story form. And story means I am doing things to hold inter-

est. But because they are “absurd,” no one expects to understand it all in terms of common sense reality. But they are not smug. Writing what comes, with a kind of madness is not bad.

The main thing is to write what you care about the most. This urgency is what will hold the readers. Okay, try your own story now. If you don’t feel like it, you can quit it as soon as you like.

One night I put on a puppet show in what used to be East Germany. It was a good crowd. I did Sakṣī Gopāla. I lost interest in the middle of the play, but I kept going. I got the interest back. The audience liked it. Afterwards, devotees said so. We members of the troupe took *prasādam* together—milk and cookies—late at night. I felt high. It was a feeling of preaching and associating with the devotees and working for Kṛṣṇa all rolled into one. Nice times like that make up for the tedium of traveling and the inconvenience of living too closely with many people.

There’s one theory that you write to avoid writing. Say that I just don’t have a determination and humility to write and re-write stories or essays which I should be attempting. Just say it for the sake of argument. Instead of ever starting on that real work of writing I write huge amounts of notes, which are easy to do, just saying what comes to mind and how you feel. Then you put this forward as a kind of compensation. You spend your whole life like this—very prolific, but the point is to avoid real writing.

I know some will say that’s what I’m doing. I defy that opinion. I am writing and it is another way of re-writing, of working, and of being careful and disciplined. I am disciplined because I never write what I

don't want to write—I don't allow anything artificial. I have my own fierce code and I adhere to it. I go for the truth always, and don't care where it fits in. And it's what I prefer to read anyway. I can see through these structured writing pieces. They are illusion, built on some game of fiction. Or they are too formal and I wonder where the person who wrote it went. Why don't we see more of him? Or I see the writer as calculating. His writing isn't sincere.

I want to write in a way that encourages people to trust me. I'll give them the straight truth. It may be too tedious for them, too much. They don't have to read it all. We'll give them edited versions. They can read what they like.

Now I've written three pages about writing because it's what I had to say after reading that bit in Ueland about snobbish, non-communicating writers. I take you with me as an intimate sharer in my life. If you think this is egotistical, then don't come. Go read your formal essay to get your information. Read your excellent stories and poems. Anyone want to come with me?

It's hailing out this morning, and cold and windy. I warned you earlier. But the recording of it will be pleasant and interesting. Sometimes it may get uneasy. I warn you. I invite you. I'll have to do something Kṛṣṇa conscious so I can write about that, or else what's the use of all this? Hare Kṛṣṇa, *Haribol*.

7:20 A.M.

Poems slowing down last night and this morning—less of them, less desire, less to say. Just watch and write what comes, even if it's very little and if it wants to stop and ask, "What do you want to do now?"

I'm not opening the mail yet. Not giving up on this *japa* retreat with its three, daily, one-hour sessions and

its poem-writing times. Don't give up on it. Find your topic and go. Be part of ISKCON.

11:17 A.M.

What are you writing?

Just some notes.

What's it for?

It's my *sādhana*. I try to write as much as possible.

Kirtana-rasa and I just read C.c., opening scenes of Lord Caitanya's first arrival at Jagannātha Purī. His falling into *sāttvika-bhāva* trance of *mahā-bhāva*. Now Kirtana-rasa is in the kitchen and I'm alone facing the sea and the blank pages, filling them in line by line. Madhu has gone for the day. Shopping in Cork.

Make sense out of things. I don't know what to say, what to do. So much advice, but I am left on my own. I wrote in *Begging*, "Everything proves to me that there is no substitute for devotion in your own heart. Even reading and chanting will not melt the steel-framed heart in which offenses dwell" (p. 225).

In writing, I always dwell outside the surrendered flow until I actually sit for a session. Then it's sentence by sentence overcoming resistance. I think of things I could say, but they seem too ordinary. That's when it gets really difficult to write at all and I start picking at my fingernails and gazing (dazing) out the window.

Why not accept those things so I can at least keep the hand moving? This is not going to be scrutinized by a board of judges. Do I think Kṛṣṇa doesn't know the principles of writing practice? He knows my intentions better than I do. If I am serious about trying to reach breakthroughs by free-writing, then Kṛṣṇa will accept it and see even my sentences on ordinary perception to be attempts at going further.

Slowed down to a halt. Then don't force yourself. If you don't want to write, you don't have to. You can read and finish *Begging*.

3:12 p.m. Cliff

Image of myself writing notes while on a *japa* retreat. Go beyond that. Counting today, I've been writing twelve days, 356 legal pad pages. "It's not a book." But what is it? A collection of paper, it truly is. It's what it set out to be.

Now a serious pause. I don't know how to go on or whether I want to go on. "Go ahead, take a break. Prove to yourself you don't have to write. It's not a compulsion." That's one way to end it.

Maybe pause and take a new direction.

I am a bit tired of being aimless. Don't know what to write, I keep saying here. Tired of that. And maybe some other reasons. A little tired of the method that gives so much time and importance of my life to these thoughts as they come. It's good when I think something out and seem to resolve it. But at other times . . .

I don't hit "first thoughts" often, don't trust that naked edge. Take a Kṛṣṇa conscious look at what's coming down the pike. See through the scriptures.

So much telling how I am here—cold on cliff. And how I think about that—read in Āyurveda that a *vāta* shouldn't get cold. And the waves in the Atlantic Ocean. This isn't for performance sake, and then thinking, "If you don't write for the audience, then why write?" Why not admit it is for the audience in a roundabout way?

I've been over all this, these doubts and objections. What I just wrote is nothing new. Maybe there is further reason why I think this *japa* retreat with nine more

days is at a crossroads, especially in terms of the writing.

If you want to write something else, or stop, you're free to do it. You could spend those hours reading more. Or take a break from the solitude and answer letters for a few days in the same time slots you wrote your notes and poems. I bet you could answer all the mail in two days. Then see where you're at. Then if you like, you can get back to this practice. That way you wouldn't have to stop your thirty-two rounds. Answer mail—12 A.M.–1:45 A.M.—I bet you could get a big batch done right then. And then, 5 A.M.–5:30, and 7:00–7:45, then 11:15–12:15 and 6–8 P.M. Hey, I bet you can do *all* the mail in one day. I say, let's go for it. If that builds up a good pressure for more writing, that's fine. And if it doesn't—if you don't want to write because the letter-writing is too worldly or whatever, then deal with that too. At any rate, you'll still be here at the retreat and still be making the commitment to thirty-two rounds.

Okay, I'm gonna do it. In fact, I'm starting tonight, as soon as I finish my rounds.

This is not a book. But it will be sweet to write a book again. Maybe I can find new themes and a slight shift in the genre. A good way to do it is to keep pushing, keep doing this genre of free-writing with no book in mind. If you can't stand it and want to write a book, then that will come—it will evolve and will be a different kind of book.

My little ventures into "absurd stories" have been sufficiently continuous, haven't driven me to want to do them on a binge like my other fiction.

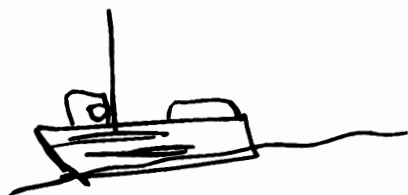
It just seems a little too much the same that every day for three, four hours I write with no theme except how I feel. That *can* be sufficient. But I have to listen to

my inner direction, creative voice, desire to use the writing in the best way, etc. Don't write forced or artificial, or without the love—and of course don't write outside Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

I answered the mail. Now what? I also decided that starting tomorrow, I'll talk (think out loud) into the tape recorder as I take a morning walk in the shadow of Mount Brandon. That talking will be like these notes have been so far, not a formulated book, and not "Prabhupāda recall" drafts or "Letters From a *Sannyāsi*"—but free talk.

Thus I'm responding to a feeling for change in the writing at this retreat. That still doesn't tell me what to do with the three or four hours of writing I've been doing for eleven days. Do I stop daydreaming that there's some new direction and just go back to basic writing practice, or do I respond to a feeling of weariness and sameness and try to find some direction to the writing? Stop it and read instead? What?

I'm going to go to the cliff right now and write there in hopes of some outdoor inspiration.



The basis for writing. The basis for writing. Don't give it up. Be humble however. Don't think you are a conqueror who shall outdo Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura. You are just a confused Westerner trying to grasp the mercy of Lord Caitanya's culture for humans as given by Śrīla Prabhupāda. My own "culture" is a mishmash

of pop America and random academics, speculation, literary permissiveness, egotism . . .

The tide is out, black seaweed exposed on the light gray "moon" rocks. When I first got here I felt shy seeing a fishing boat moving from right to left. I persisted and sat down anyway. Now he has turned from left to right, dragging his net. He may think I'm a useless tourist wasting time on shore while he works hard. I don't know his labors. But he doesn't know mine either as I sit with pen, dragging my nets for fish of direction.

What shall I do? Shall I merge myself back into the free-write mode? Do I like what I've done so far? Oh, I don't know; I haven't read it through. I suspect it contains parts worth sharing. Even so, should I continue? It would be exciting if I had a new project—and I do, in the morning walk.

If my main purpose is *japa*, I might think how writing could support that more. Yet what can I do? When I chant, I chant. I know I should bring the mind back into prayerful hearing—that mostly I can't do it. How can writing—a separate discipline—help *japa*? I'm not writing a sequel to *Begging* where I'm thinking of the reader and how to help him chant.

Okay, tell yourself, "Ma'am, why don't you pay attention when you chant?"

The sea—blue brilliant under a clear sky. At least for awhile. Don't mind that my words are repetitious. The sea itself is not restless with boredom, although it has repeated the same movements since the beginning of creation. It's beyond boredom. My truth while here is to see and hear the sea. Tell us again, in slightly different ways, how the waves splash, about the light, the colors of the sea, the foam, the cool air blowing, your windproof, hooded coat. What do you feel when you sit here and face outward.

Bring yourself toward prayer. Surely writing can help with that, with a literary version. O God, O Kṛṣṇa, O spiritual master, allow me to be sincere. I wish to chant with devotion. I don't know what to do. All I know is to count and pronounce the names and surmount drowsiness and to sometimes notice what I'm thinking and then correct myself.

I read references to *sannyāsa*, like Sārvabhauma's concern that Lord Caitanya was such a young *sannyāsī* and might be allured. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments that a *sannyāsī* should study the *Vedas*, be renounced, and avoid allurements. Then I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda lecturing in 1966, sixth chapter *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, on *yogabrahma*. He said, "Suppose someone takes to spiritual life and falls down . . ." He mentioned feminine allurements and gave the example of Viśvāmitra and Menakā. I am afraid of this. In one sense, that fear is good. I'm so afraid I don't even dream of it—I wake up if dreams get sexy. I'm *grateful* for that.

Please protect my *sannyāsa*. While answering letters, almost all of which were to disciples, I naturally had to think of myself as someone people look up to and trust. I don't want to let them down. Can't be complacent about that.

When someone praised Lord Caitanya, He cried "Viṣṇu!"—remembering Himself not as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, but as a *sannyāsī* in need of protection from pride. Let me be humble, but remain the example for the devotees who look up to me. It's not a farce or charade, provided I keep my standing in the rules and regulations and devotion, and so on.

Keep writing here. There are new concerns, old concerns, incoming waves, incoming and outgoing

tides. Just by writing, I am answering the question of whether I can or want to write in these last days of the *japa* retreat.

Do try to help yourself. This is more than filling notebooks.

Now I have to go inside, but I've got a partial, provisional answer to my doubt. As of now I say take heart and keep writing in the same way I have been over these eleven days. Go for another ten days.

There's a one-engine plane circling over the Hog Islands. Another plane is leaving twin jet trails as clear as sky-writing. And another. All this I can see because it's so clear.

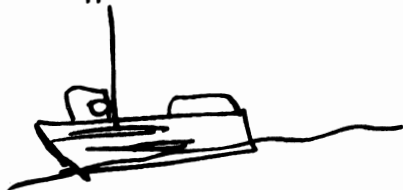
Hare Kṛṣṇa. I give myself hope, just as Kirtana-rasa gives me his offering of cooked rice, *sabji*, *capātis*, and *dāl*. He also may get bored, but he overcomes it. Don't take it for granted. Madhu might also become bored, but he goes deeper, prays for respect and humility. I also. I also. On this page.

I don't write primarily for an audience. I write—for pain?

What do you mean by that?

I mean I write despite pain or doubt, pain that I *may* be wasting valuable time, pain that I can't do better. And I write with joy and personal satisfaction. I write through it and offer it to Kṛṣṇa, aware of its imperfection.

3:44 Cliff



Do you remember how you were writing here, giving yourself the best, addressing problems, and feeling free? I don't even remember what I went through, but I recall it was good, something wholehearted about it and evolved past what I did while writing books in the last writing retreat.

Freer.

You don't care what comes out. You beg permission to become a Kṛṣṇa conscious writer. One woman wrote me, "I saw the buffalo horn on Dāmodara's belt and then I envisioned that I observed a whole scene of His *līlā*. I heard the horn and saw Kṛṣṇa running with His boys." I told her this is just a shadow of the real thing. She previously told me of ecstasies experienced during *japa*. I'm wary of such things, wary of telling her it's not right or it is right.

Wary indeed are the high masts on the little fishing boats.

M. told me the sad tale as seen in an Irish ballad of the freedom fighter Roger Casement who in 1916 tried to smuggle weapons into Ireland for fighting the British. A German U-boat came offshore just where we are now in Tralee Bay, loaded with arms and with R. Casement on board. But the British were waiting and captured him.

Heave-ho hearties.

I will not allow the foolish thoughts to make it onto the page. Why give them the honor of "immortality." Ah, that's what Hṛdayānanda Goswami said to me years ago, "You have made Dr. Sarma immortal." Of course, I didn't praise Dr. Sarma, but told it as I saw it, and politely. If he is enshrined as a character in my true life story, no harm. Even C.c. has some characters who are less than perfect, like the Buddhist teacher,

etc., although they wind up surrendering to Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

I needn't immortalize what I thought was funny on the Steve Allen T.V. show forty years ago. If it comes now, brush it aside, like sawdust, with a small broom. Then see what is in your cleaned heart. Or if you feel it so strongly, then get it out of the way by telling us and then step over it like a lumberjack crossing logs in a log jam. Unloosen the jam and flow to Kṛṣṇa.

She heard the buffalo horn. I don't. But I have to write. Would I have visions to write of? But who would believe me? I would believe it myself.

May the rocks of my despair float far away. May all of us reach the Promised Land, Goloka.

It is true, we will get there, and some like John Hickey may be left behind to build new dog kennels. Some may go forward. There will be surprises. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. Get yourself fixed up so you won't be left out.

I say to you, waves, don't splash devotees. Dumb elements, recognize the fist of God. Human beings, this śāstric message is meant for you. Bow low and be happy in simple duties.

They took to me, but some have ceased doing that. I can tell the story of a Kali-yuga guru and his ISKCON disciples, what it was like, if I dare. If I care. Use the whisk broom to brush out dirt in your mind, but which you don't wish to preserve in prose. Switch the T.V. channel to see what you want, and not the horror show if you don't want that. Consider your readers. But consider also that they are not children and they want the truth. The truth shall set us free.

3:40

To go on writing means to accept my little, humble life. "Little" and "humble" are good words, but another word is mediocre. I haven't used it in awhile. One dictionary defines it as, "not good enough, inferior." That pains me, that my *japa* and reading habits are mediocre. I write a lot, but here also I confront my mediocre realizations on *śravaṇam-kīrtanam*. What can I write from a mediocre spiritual life except mediocre writing?

Of course, the writing medium allows me to do something worthy when I am honest and I pass on Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It goes beyond mediocrity.

This is a disturbing topic I don't feel like dwelling on it. It makes me sleepy. (The yawning weapon of the enemy; they convince you that you are mediocre and then you yawn and lose interest in striving in *japa* or writing.)

Writing is a strong arm, not a weak sister. I keep hitting with this gun, pounding the beach of indifference with gun shells.

I doze off recalling news broadcast years ago on the war in Iraq. Bring the mind back here.

My search for image, recognition that I see the practice of art as verbal expression. It's more than that—a metaphor or allegory helps me to see myself and my life and the obstacles and goals. Thus, I was writing, seeking a direction, and the little fishing boat went by. It struck me, he is fishing and I am trying to catch also. Even now, back and forth the boat goes dragging for fish.

Someone crossed the Atlantic Ocean in a small boat, like a row boat, as St. Brendan is supposed to have done.

Green grow the rushes ho.

allow yourself to write to write whatever comes. Welcome it all, and especially encourage devotional thoughts. It's like birds landing in your field. Some are ugly, some unknown. They come and fly away. Leave feed for the good ones.

Noble birds,
birds of a family,
seaside gannets and gulls,
crows of various kinds,
common and rare,
come to this field as the wind blows you
and you track your food for the day.

White cloud painted in the sky over the horizon. The same white the artist used for the sea foam. And in various shades of blue, always changing with the change in sunlight.

A letter-writer asked me, "What does it mean that Kṛṣṇa said I'm everywhere and those who know it are Kṛṣṇa conscious and those who don't are in *māyā*?" I explained what I know.

Don't berate yourself. Hold on. Accept that you taught what Śrīla Prabhupāda taught. You taught it all right. He said you were a good *paramparā* preacher. Pride comes when you think you are better than other preachers and devotees. My unique brand of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the best. Again that coffee cup on my desk, "It's hard to be humble when you know you're the best."

Don't be proud, but don't smash yourself either. Take the credit which your spiritual master has offered you as a gift. Accept it and use it. When you are confident, you can work better. But you're not the best.

The spray is dancing. The neighbor drives his car with a little trailer behind it for feed for his sheep. He leaves and the sheep stand behind in the close-clipped field, the last sun rays of the day on their woolly chests. They have been given very little intelligence and don't know what is going on. They are a symbol of dull conformity, docility, helpless ignoramuses, pitiful and victimized. One of them is hobbling with a bad leg.

Just a stone's throw away from their pasture, the gorgeous spray dances and catches the light.

☪ March 24 ☪

12:40 A.M.

I say it is important to keep writing. Something may come. It produces humility to acknowledge what I am doing, writing in such a low state. I'm like a parent or friend who shows interest even in the little efforts of his child (or friend) Outsiders will not be interested, but the friend is interested because of his love. We should have interest in our own state.

It might be said, a lover of Kṛṣṇa has no such (much) interest in his own state. His only interest is in pleasing Kṛṣṇa. He sees Kṛṣṇa with all His senses and desires to serve Him in nine-fold (or three-fold or one-fold) *bhakti*. There is no time for self-examination.

One might also say that the preacher, in his *bhāva* of delivering Kṛṣṇa consciousness, is also so absorbed (he is another kind of lover of Kṛṣṇa, or dedicated servant of Kṛṣṇa's pure devotee-guru) that he has no time for self-examination.

Is self-examination a luxury, a distraction, the pre-occupation of an idle, decadent mind? I think it can be like that, but there's also self-examination in Kṛṣṇa's service. My guess (excuse me) is that this may operate in the *sādhaka* stage where it is crucial, but be dropped

in the *siddha* stage. In the *siddha* stage, one's spiritual life is fully under the control of the internal energy. He or she is running to Kṛṣṇa. No time, no need to ask, "How am I doing? Why don't I chant better? Am I doing this for myself or for Kṛṣṇa? What shall I do in this case?"

Right or wrong, I write. Self-examination is the evidence that it's good. Yes, I quoted Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura saying one should always do this to make progress. Another example: one should examine to know the difference between weeds (*anarthas*) and one's devotional creeper. We need to pull the weeds and nourish the *bhakti-latā*. But sometimes one is confused and he waters the weeds.

We are advised to be vigilant. Notice if we are becoming inclined to women, to lust, to overeating . . . Again these seem to pertain especially to the practicing stage. But that's where we're at. We may ideally discuss the perfect stages of Kṛṣṇa consciousness—and we *will* do this. Discussion of Kṛṣṇa Himself and Rādhā and the devotees is the way to purify the heart. This is discussion of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. But improving the mind and heart of the devotee is also important.

One critic said The ISKCON gurus are psychologists. He prefers to consult with a person he sees as a pure devotee who's in touch with Kṛṣṇa directly and who speaks only of *harināma*, the *sāstras*, Kṛṣṇa conscious affairs.

But one may answer that pure devotees also discuss the "psychology" of practicing devotees. Thus we have the teachings in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and elsewhere of *kañiṣṭha*-, *madhyama*-, and *uttama-adhikārī*s and how to progress, what is favorable, and what is unfavorable. We are psychologists. There is no harm in this. But our expression of psychology should be according to Vaiṣ-

ṇava psychology. It should situate the mind in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We discuss the psychology of the *gopīs* minutely. Viśvanātha Cakravartī never tires of examining the subtle and varied mental states of the *gopīs* in their relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

In my case, I may practice a form of psychological counseling when encouraging devotees. We all do this. In some cases a devotee could even borrow some understanding from the professional psychologists who teach under the Western model. That is *yukta-vairāgya* and has to be done by careful selection.

But even if we don't use Western methods, a senior devotee or friend will employ "psychology" naturally in dealing with disciples, equals, or superiors. As we serve, befriend, or instruct the devotees, it is never just a matter of transferring śāstric information, or a giving the person *śakti* (teaching by transference of electric shock). We see their needs (sometimes mental and emotional) and deal with them accordingly.

Love (*bhakti*), therefore, has its own psychology, and the devotees who practice it may be called psychologists. Similarly, we are scholars, actors, musicians, writers, warriors, farmers—all these things can be done without mundane taint. A pure devotee can be many things at once. Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged us to be expert so that we could prosecute the Kṛṣṇa conscious mission against the complex obstacles offered by *māyā*. A devotee is not a fool. He may sometimes have to become interested in material affairs in order to prosecute Kṛṣṇa's mission.

The more brahminical devotee may not get so involved in mundane affairs, but his followers may need to get involved on his behalf if they want to keep their spiritual master's temples open, print his books, and manage his affairs.

I have dropped out of management. I don't declare myself superior to it, but I am physically unable to do it. I *lacked* the capabilities to manage men and money, yet I did it as duty. I don't do it anymore. Others are managing. I am using my last years for concentrating on the best part of spiritual life, hearing and chanting, and I can give this to others. I wish to be allowed to make this contribution to the ISKCON society. I *will* make this contribution, even if I am misunderstood or criticized or if devotees are condescending toward me.

Just give what you have in a positive way. This discovery enlivens me: that I am in the last stages of my life, entering old age, and it is proper for me to concentrate on the essentials. I can't and won't take management duties. I myself am a dependent and a subordinate within the management scheme as directed by the GBC. Yet I am an independent unit also, as is the nature of a *brāhmaṇa* and *sannyāsī*. At best, the managers will encourage me to freely give my teachings to the devotees. At least they will tolerate my doing so. I am satisfied if I am tolerated because I will be able to enthuse at least some of the devotees in ways which are crucial to them. Then I feel useful. We don't have to be managers to be useful to Prabhupāda and ISKCON.

I will stand up for my rights as an individual and a senior citizen. Be confident of your own place and not intimidated by others wanting you to serve according to notions which are contrary to your mood.

Writing as an art or craft. Writing practice is also "practice" in the simple sense of the word—"to do repeatedly in order to learn or become proficient." Someone may ask, "This is your writing practice, but shouldn't the final performance be different, without mistakes and with more of a structure than your prac-

tice?" Yes. But the final product is made of practice also. The two—practice and final performance become closer in nature.

Practice also means "to put knowledge into practice." *Qualification* as a doctor or lawyer is not enough. You also have to practice. A writer is always practicing. Some of the products of his practicing may be published. It is in publishing that a writer distinguishes his exercises or repetitive drills from his finished work. The difference is achieved by editing and selecting from his inspired writings—all of which come in his practice of writing—and using the best for published works.

The synonyms to practice such as exercise and drill, imply a more formal discipline or training.

Practice is action. You do it repeatedly. A person heard John Coltrane's record, "My Favorite Things" and said despairingly, "Sounds like he's practicing." They could only hear a random, apparently undisciplined playing of notes. They wanted an ordered recognizable melody. Coltrane, or any jazz musician, is more interested in improvisation. The artist practices to attain spontaneity. He attains a proficiency where he can always be himself.

Perfection is when you write spontaneously in the course of your constant practice and it comes out in a deft way ready to publish. My aim is to practice as much as possible and select from some of it. This is better, I find, than adapting a stricken mentality, "Now I am not practicing. This is the real performance. Now it has to come out just right." Why should the real thing be so divorced from what you constantly practice? Rather by frequent practice, you will more often attain your best expressions. The distinction will disappear. Your private performance and public performance will be the same. Leave it up to editors what they think

should be published and what should remain unpublished.

What about *japa* practice? Deity worship practice? It is simply constantly done; there is no performance time as distinguished from warm-up time. No rehearsal as distinguished from public show. Even the time of death, which is a time of judgment, is a result of constant practice. You keep on doing what you have been doing all along.

There is such a thing as rising to the occasion and having especially inspired moments. They may come and go. Again the editor or readers can decide which parts of a writer's practice are favorites or best pieces.

What can I do but keep practicing *japa*? Try to improve the conditions in which I chant (or preach etc.), increase the quantity, try harder, learn new skills, associate with those who are masters in the field. But the essential unavoidable work is my own practice.

The curtains are closed—no sea or sky. That's good. The pictures on the altar will be my focus of my visual attention. I will also close my eyes. I will try to concentrate. I can't do as well as I would like. I pray for forgiveness and for the mercy to see how I can chant purely. In any case, I go on with the practice.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says the *vaidhī* practice is only "going through the outward motions." Also, if your chanting is infested with *nāma-aparādha*, then despite your practice for many lifetimes, you won't get *kṛṣṇa-prema*.

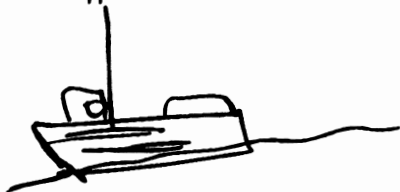
I can't stubbornly say, "Practice is all" and not try to avoid and uproot the *aparādhās*. I have to practice in the right way. Don't keep doing the wrong thing. Correct yourself—that is a superior kind of practice.

Say a tennis player holds the racket in the wrong way. The more he practices, the more he enforces that bad habit. At least he doesn't rid himself of that shortcoming. Our practice should be enlightened. We should expose our practice to others and hear their estimation of what we are doing. And we may study our practice ourselves.

The Christian monastics say a monk only has to go and stay in his prayer cell, and the cell itself will teach him all he needs to know of the life of prayer.

I'm stating both sides of the issue. Practice itself teaches us all we need to know and yet practice must be improved by deliberate action.

11:30 Cliff



Don't rush, but keeping going for thirty-five minutes. Be serious and profound, I told myself. Yeah, but be real.

Kirtana-rasa telling me the importance of M. and I doing exercise. Yes, I say, but usually we don't spare the time. Rather exercise the mind with pen or with *japa*, the soul, but I do find time to walk and maybe ten minutes of daily yoga poses, stretches. It's got to be aerobic he says, to increase the heart rate and circulation.

Black seaweed exposed at low tide. The tape recorder cut off on me on my walk, but only toward the very end.

Now what will I do?

The trouble with exercise is that it puts you on the bodily platform. *Gopis* don't do pushups. But they

churn butter. They run to Kṛṣṇa. They dance. They walk into the forest. They walk to Sūrya-kunḍa and up and down Govardhana Hill. They play water sports in the Yamunā. They get nice exercise, especially in the *rāsa* dance.

We are on such a lower platform it probably wouldn't hurt us to exercise, especially if we keep in mind that we want to remain fit for serving Kṛṣṇa and we can hear Prabhupāda's lectures while we do it. Otherwise, I sit all day and write and read and that's not good for my health.

Please write something spiritual. I can only write what I know and do. We read together in C.c., the Lord's arguments against Sārvabhauma's Māyāvāda interpretation.

Kirtana-rasa said, "But the Māyāvādīs would say that we too are interpreting when we say the verse *apāni-pādo javano grahītā* means the Absolute Truth has no *material* hands and feet, but He has spiritual hands and feet." He remarked this at end of our allotted time and I said I didn't want to pursue it right now.

Madhu dropped out of our reading after ten minutes. He was nodding asleep. He had skipped his morning nap in an attempt to chant more rounds. When he is tired, he looks old and it scares me. Kirtana-rasa says he has a trainer friend who will recommend a set of exercises for people our age and in our condition. Very well, but where is the *bhakti* to Kṛṣṇa?

I have a note to myself: "You keep writing in any session until you get the *darśana*." Sometimes there are little peaks of *darśana* here and there, not that every Writing Session has a major climax wherein Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā appear. It would be too easy to simply write out a verse in the note pad and say, "There's the *darśana*." Sometimes the *darśana* is a moment of truthfulness

which tells me something about myself. It's not Kṛṣṇa appearing directly, but it enables me to remove a cataract.

The *Upaniṣads* say "O Lord please remove that glaring effulgence so that I can see Your face. Please remove the *brahmajyoti* rays."

Wait for a good wave or image to come in. Wash, wash the waves hit the shore. I wait and listen. But I can't wait long. Starting to think of our next travels, to Italy, pasta, Nanda-kiśora dāsa, the dentist in Brescia . . . Same quiet thoughtfulness that I entered in the first week seems to have ebbed away.

But I'm getting a second wind, I think, with the half hour walk-talk in the morning. There will be time to say what I want, chatterbox.

Japa in the hallway of the house, sunlight strained through thick orange glass. Please, Lord, grace me just a little inch. Just a little mercy; I need it. If I can't ask for this while I'm actually uttering the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, then please accept it now. I am weak, headache prone, badly distracted, I pray.

Wash on the rocks of Brandon Bay. There's sunshine on the very edge of the cliff and not where I am a few feet back. I don't dare sit there.

Go inside; be alone. Kirtana-rasa is a sweet and loving person. He also is entangled in material life and not about to finish it yet. In that sense, his association doesn't lead me way inside to the questions I seek.

Kṛṣṇa, I need to be able to see clearly what I am doing wrong. I have *some* sincerity, but not enough. By becoming quiet and listening I can't achieve Your mercy. But it appears to help.

M. bought a book by a local poet, Michael Funning, from Dingle. It's called "Optimism," not the last word

in sophisticated, hip outlook. But he's sensitive, speaks obliquely of hurts he's received in love affairs and the healing nature of living close to the sea. It's the sea of this Kerry Coast. I too could heal here if I could become quiet and learn to pray with a small self unto the Great Self. But now it's not mystical relationships I seek, but Vraja consciousness. Somehow the Vraja consciousness has to replace my other yearnings.

We yearn to be protected by Kṛṣṇa, soothed, treated, loved—given indication of His affection by His allowing us to *hear harināma*. Well, read how the *gopīs* are the best lovers even when Kṛṣṇa neglects them. How they want His happiness. *Mādhurya* is hard for me because of traces of sex desire and impressions of male-female love. I'm like the cow who sees red in the barn, "Oh there's a fire!"

3:55 p.m.

Writing honestly means not seeking a literary climax or literary anything, structure, etc. Literary means make-believe in order to get an effect. And for an autobiographical writer it means you actually live or make believe you live through a problem, crises, enthusiasm, ecstasy, wisdom—in order to write it down. I would prefer to write without that.

I didn't go to the cliff because fishing boats were passing by too closely, ruining the privacy of the seaside perch.

Maybe I'll have to take a retreat or figure a way that will send me to Śrīla Prabhupāda's books with more concentration. I have drive for writing, but not the same for reading. Yet unless I read, what will I write. Even now it's a hand-to-mouth existence for me as a writer; what I read today I put into my writing. Where

is the hunger and the faith that by cramming the purports I will find what I am searching for—the *darśana* of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and Prabhupāda (in *sādhaka* and *siddha* form)?

In preparing for the seminar on C.c., *Madhya* 8, that may help me look up reference in books to present each lecture. It will be a more śāstric discipline to prepare those lectures on topic related to the chapters.

[illustration missing]

One of the islands is shaped like that. I don't know what the bump is on top.

Chanting *japa* up to thirty-two rounds in the hallway, 7:40 per round, to think that I want to think of prayer. Be grateful for any improvement.

When you think you have nothing to say, that's not true. There is something preventing you from going ahead. There is always something you care to write, but almost always something blocking you from saying it. So you write something else instead, while waiting in the waiting room outside. When can I get in?

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is intended for everyone.

The small stone walls all over Ireland. They don't even grow potatoes anymore, but import them. All cultural life is in one city, Dublin. Madhu laments what Ireland has become; it's just another room in the mad-house of modern civilization.

A small open boat. The light is fading on the day's kill. Rest, me hearties, until tomorrow. Then go out in your boots and kill again. Kill until the end of life when you meet your karma. The government has posted "No hunting" signs to preserve wildlife, but they kill sheep and cows with a sense of economic righteousness.

Around 5:15 p.m., cliff



Notebook #9 begins with thuds of spray against the rocks. The words and cadences of *Vidagdha-mādhava* still in my mind.

Why have you come here with your note pad instead of a *Bhagavad-gītā* or another book of study? Why do you write out your musings at length?

I have already told you, this is my service. By writing a lot, I may get better at it. And my service to the devotees may improve.

The sea is about as close as it will get under this cliff. It is calm tonight, otherwise the waves would be jumping up and maybe even splashing me. The waves crest on the rocks themselves, not before, and yet they are small waves.

Some kind of little gnat has appeared here. There goes a motorboat more quickly than the rest.

Kṛṣṇa, I've done my quota.

Think of it again—the fact that you don't write like a workman addressing the arguments of the *karmīs* in a basic essay. Neither can you write an exalted philosophical treatise filled with the *ācāryas'* arguments. Neither do you do intense scholarship, and certainly you don't know Vedic or Indian languages, so you can't translate. You're not qualified to write anything *rasika* from any experience. So you "doodle" your thoughts.

That's not fair. I am doing something in American literature. I'm making a new chapter in American autobiography. Oh, why do I have to defend myself in those terms? I know what I'm doing. It's for myself, a

therapy and a *bhajana*. It's for readers who know what I'm doing and who follow it avidly. It is a genre. And this is a process by which we can't expect every page to be top-batch presentable.

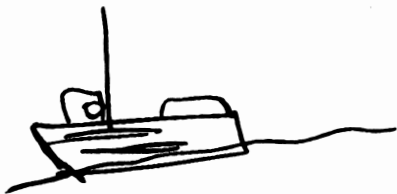
Push and wash and smash—the waves hit the craggy breast of the rock again and again.

I glance from the corners of my eyes—partly blinded by my hood—thinking someone may be there. And I keep an eye that the waves don't get too high. How dark is it, how cold is it, what am I writing? Am I destroying my coat by leaning against the rocks? Am I all right? Who are you asking? Better answer that yourself.

I could not worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, so my life is wasted. So laments Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura.

Friends, let us each pray to serve the holy names. And let us serve them together. Let us discuss spiritual life together and give each other encouragement. *Tuṣyanti ca ramanti ca.*

The sky. The horizon. The quick sketch. The little boat:



back and forth they go. Remember your shop teacher, Mr. Shea? He signed everyone's autograph book (when we graduated from P.S. #8 at twelve years old) by making the same quick drawing of a sailboat at sea and the same proverb about the sea and life.

Now these gnats will cause a problem.

Don't linger anywhere.

12:45A.M.

I want to be kept down in humility. Just now reading a few pages of *Begging* where I discuss *Manah-sikṣā*, I thought, "This is good writing. How can they criticize? Don't they see how advanced I am?" But writing in itself doesn't make for pride. Maybe a complacent looking at what you wrote later could promote vanity. But even if you do think, "*This is good*," then use that to propel yourself forward. Because—as we see in the pages of this retreat journal—I often doubt the validity of my taking the time to write. But final products convince me that it's worth it. Also, the special use of words that comes from practice, my own voice, etc., convince me that *the more I write, the better I'll be able to express myself in Kṛṣṇa consciousness—and that means being more convincing*, which is an important qualification of a preacher.

And the stumbling, the repetition, the passages when I am honest enough to write that no Kṛṣṇa conscious interest or taste is present, they also serve as they lead me to better things.

I have to appreciate that not all I write is worthy, but that all the time is sincerely spent and that the process (of constant practice and free-writing) is freeing me to write better and better.

Photo of Prabhupāda on this desk. I sprayed it with lens cleaner and shined it up along with the picture of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. I have no theme, no topic. Later maybe I will again, in some diary dedicated to specific themes. That's good for readers. Let's stretch out for now and improve and see if this system works, where the editor selects for the collected writings, putting it into suitable containers. A reader does like to think he or she is going somewhere.

In *If You Want To Write*, Ueland quotes G.B. Shaw, discouragement is the only disease. Don't let the bastards get you down (Auden said to a young writer, referring to critics). Down the critics, full speed ahead. Enthusiasm is all! (Said W. Blake.)

I walk around my garden seeing what the needs are. At different times, different things can be tested too. This retreat is for *japa* increase; I only do it three weeks a year. Another time I have to work at reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Freer?

If you like. The motorcycle speeds through the fields. You are on the back. You are not sure of your driver. You go near cliffs. You go into the city. Always there is danger. You should not take a risky trip unless you have to. Better to ride in a solid car at the specified speed limit, but keep going, moving as much as you can.

I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda in a '66 lecture. In the Eighth chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā*, verse 11. Śrīla Prabhupāda read *yad icchanto brahmacāryam caranti*, and read aloud Dr. Radha-Krishnan's translation which said "Desiring such perfection, one practices self-control." Śrīla Prabhupāda said this translation is not correct. The word *brahmacāryam* means complete celibacy. He told how the young boys are taught celibacy. No sex life. That's essential.

Don't indulge in reading news, sports, and mundane literature. Some writers, like poets, I dip into to get a feel for what I want to do.

There is no need to keep dividing the lines in poetry, but keep on writing the poem.

What does that mean? What makes it a poem?

You know when you write them in a poem's mind set. For now, it means when I go to that room and write on the big sheets of newsprint.

Here I am at home.

I couldn't do better than this.

The altar is set up waiting for me to go there and chant.

The countryside near Brandon Bay is set up waiting for me to walk and talk.

About five minutes left in this session. When I can drift into an area of concern, then it is most satisfying. It will come as I write.

The heater is moving a piece of paper. I've forgotten my sense of place and body while writing about the best attitude for one who is about to die.

You can't bluff it; you speak in lectures about what actually concerns you. If you don't practice, if you don't like to read the books, then how can you convey to others an inspiration to read and practice? Keep this in mind when you prepare your seminar lectures.

I put down the pen and take up the beadbag. With pen in hand, when a thought comes, I either write it down or put it aside as unworthy. In *japa*, even the worthy thoughts can't be expressed much. It's all prayer and yearning and being with Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā without need of other verbal expressions. It's more direct, but I usually don't realize it. I think nothing is happening. I think, "This is hard. I'm supposed to stop thinking and plan-making and reminiscing, but I get nothing to think of in return." I claim it's like being in a dentist's waiting room with no books or magazines (or pen or paper or tape recorder). Why didn't they give me

something to do? How will I occupy and entertain myself? But I have the best thing and it doesn't require external paraphernalia. Enter the names. For a starter, simply hear Them. With faith, put aside, leave, the other trains of thought.

Yes, this is good advice. Well said. Now may it help me. May it help everyone. (Start with yourself.)

5:10 A.M.

I wrote a note to Madhu to give me suggestions for things to talk about on my morning walks. Even if he makes a big list, how can I follow it? What is the nature of accepting assignments? The commercial writer, the newspaper man, must accept these assignments. The artist disdains them, yet he looks for an assignment that he can voluntarily embrace wholeheartedly. I too look for something to say and I go for it when it occurs. I use it up and then go looking for another, different genre, a new title, a new concept for a book. But it has to come from within.

Or it can start anywhere, but it has to be accepted as an assignment. N. Goldberg writes that you don't need a profound reason to choose any particular genre, like a novel, the main thing is that you are a writer (agree on that), so you want to enter the field and work. Let it be novel, poem, autobiography, or writing practice—the main thing is to find something, take something and go with it.

For me that also means a variety of ways to present whatever Kṛṣṇa consciousness I know. Let me learn more so there's more I can talk about.

As for the act of oral, timed writing, it is easier to get the words out in the flow of speech than to put them down on paper. In some ways it's easier. At least the physical act goes quicker and when I feel lazy or low on

energy, it's easier to talk. Especially if I have a pleasant situation like the morning walks. Take advantage—I don't have to feel responsible to describe the place I am in. Let it function to free me from surroundings and then I speak to my heart's content. Don't worry that I am saying the same things in Writing Sessions or poems. There will be differences and instinctively I can look for new territory or fuller expressions of these in speech. Keep the same attitude as the writing plans at present—not composing for a book per se, just talking freely in a way to enhance my Kṛṣṇa consciousness and that of anyone, any friend, who might listen.

I want to be made firm by reading the Bhakti-vedanta purports. I want to read them with pleasure and with obedience as fitting for hearing the words of the spiritual master. I don't have to think it should be new material. That doesn't matter. I am using my time well if I can read him attentively. If writing freely what comes is Kṛṣṇa conscious *bhajana*, how much more is Śrīla Prabhupāda's direct association in reading. It doesn't need further justification, such as how will I use it, retain it, etc.

I have been up since midnight. That's my routine. But this is a difficult hour. Almost anything I do I tend to drowse.

This is my writing time. Take it indoors. The gremlin is ready: "Why are you writing this stuff? Who do you think you are? This is bogus."

I might escape him if I go outside. Maybe he doesn't like cold weather. But it's too cold and damp looking. So we'll do it here.

We just had our reading together. Kirtana-rasa is a lawyer, so I was telling lawyer stories I'd heard from

Śrīla Prabhupāda. A chatterbox, one after another to entertain my disciple, make him feel good and incidentally teach him. I can do that sometimes. They want to hear from me and usually I am so quiet. Also, they do so many errands for me. Kirtana-rasa cooks two meals a day and goes shopping. I sit here and write "for everybody."

I can keep going. I am not in the fishing boat. Walt Whitman said he was there and I say I am not. I am here in this body, one spirit soul. The Lord is all-pervading, not me. If I say I am, it's a bluff or "poetry" in the sense of merely fanciful words like, "The horses feet were winged as he leaped over the hills."

I am here and the boats are out there in the chill. I am wearing a 100% cotton sweater made in the Dominican Republic, dyed saffron. My feet are on the ground, but the planet is spinning and orbiting at incredible speeds. It seems steady by God's power. Who can comprehend His greatness? The atheists say, "Don't attribute any intelligence to the control of the universe. It is all happening by chance."

Apāni-pādo javano grahitā . . . parasya śaktir vividhaiva śrūyate

The planets spinning by chance and by chance we thought and created and the books were written? (Even *my* books aren't written by chance, although I try to introduce an element of chaos into the writing. I do that only because there's such a predominating tendency toward order and control. Even the wildness or chaos that appears in the universe is part of His plan. His plan includes jungles, man-eating tigers, cancer, meteors that crash, volcanoes, and 8,400,000 species of life. His plan is more than that of an English backyard garden with trimmed lanes. His plan includes the atheists and their arguments. He is the *viśvarūpa*, "Time I

am” and all warriors are rushing into His mouth being scorched by flames or eaten alive.

When I say I want to admit some chaos or randomness into my writing, it doesn't mean less Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It means a willingness to see Kṛṣṇa in all things. If I say that Kṛṣṇa is in certain areas of life, but not others, that is not true. If I forbid myself and readers from even opening certain doors to see what's there, I may create a repressed and too-restrictive God consciousness. Śrīla Prabhupāda taught that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is cosmic consciousness, which many seekers were talking about in the 1960s. We wanted to expand our consciousness, and took LSD for that purpose. See more what God or angels see. See good and evil, see beyond, see what *is*. Break the normal order and routine in order to see the truth. Don't be timid and always keep within the rope and floating barrels that fence in swimmers at the beach. Of course, there are foolhardy ventures also. But if we go with Kṛṣṇa and on His order and for service, we will be safe.

Let us see more how Kṛṣṇa's purpose is discoverable even when I write without direct structure. Śrīla Prabhupāda approved a kind of mental speculation. Kṛṣṇa says He is the taste in water, so let us see in how many ways He is in the taste in water. How glorious and infinite He is.

Green grow the rushes, ho.

Green grow the carrots, Oho.

Irish people are not particularly fond of the color green. That's for tourists. Only ten percent of Irish people are red-haired. Green grow the green-haired rushes, ho

O emperor Parikṣit.

O, O. O. Opened mouthed O. O abstained O. O of zeros looking for a "one" to go before them. O Kṛṣṇa, who is the One to convert all the zero-like conditioned souls. I rest my case. I do like to use the word O, but I think I have to earn it and it doesn't come so easily or frequently. It's not like a beach ball you can just bounce up into the air whenever you're bored and want to amuse yourself:

Now the trivial blood is running in Robert Burns again. Better catch this man before he drops his pants. He is plowing in the fields and he unearths a mouse. O beastie, little mouse, I am sorry to disturb you.

Now calm down. The soul doesn't need aerobics. It does not feel a renewal by raunchy expressions. It is eternally fresh. It's not a jargon-stuffed prose which wants to "validate" itself by pop psychology words or fuck yous to show it's a man or a woman as good as a Stevedore or other obscure talker.

It floats on wings. It runs on fat legs. It can't be cut or dried or chained. The soul is a cowherd friend of Kṛṣṇa; the soul is immersed in *gopī-bhāva* and doesn't know anything else.

As for this soul, it is (me) conditioned still by *avidyā-śakti*. *Avidyā-śakti* is also an energy of the divine and therefore it is divine, but it is separated energy. It doesn't enjoy the same properties as the transcendental Lord and the transcendental liberated devotees.

This is my primitive Kṛṣṇa conscious voice. By that I mean I am a student, or man of books; I am familiar with the Vedic knowledge and key Sanskrit terms. It's natural they will float into my consciousness and also that I will pick them. "*jīva*" will ring a bell for me more than "baseball" or "Marilyn Monroe." Some material

words ring a bell because they got close to the mercy of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. The name Robin George will not easily be forgotten, just as no one forgets Kāṁsa. There are many more like that.

I've told them any words they speak in the kitchen it's just as if they were speaking in this room. I asked them not to do it. Because my ears perk up and I can't help but listen. Are they talking about the firewood?

This exercise is who you are. You are a caboose loose at the end, wiggling your hips as the last car. You are the engine up front. Yes, you are the broad black engine spouting smoke and sparks and wailing your horn, "Beware! Get off the tracks! Know that life is a haunting whistle like this."

Look up and see the bay in cold, sunless Ireland. Not frigid and icy but damp to the bone and even indoors is cold unless you'd like to drink some Irish whiskey or a pint of ale at the pub warmed by smoke and sweat.

So in this morning's 11 A.M. session, I let in some chaos from the cosmos, just a little as befitting, and as I could enjoy with fear that the whole engine was out of my hands and over the cliff.

But life is in no way in my control. I can control my own senses and this "man is the architect of his own fortune." Seeing through the scriptures doesn't mean I'm an old horse with blinders. Neither am I a snazzy "devotee" with black sunglasses. I'm an appropriate celibate, a student of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. But I wanted to open a window and breathe fresh air, thinking my own study might get stuffy and rickety.

Or was it sense gratification that led me astray? (I remember . . . never mind.) Be good; be true. I don't have to explain why I did it. I already did.

I am a one-man band. I am a . . . coming to the end. I am a Cinderella at midnight transformed. I am a dutiful monk writing in my own pen whatever was written before, without changing a bit of it, except to write in the margin (as one medieval monk did)—It's terribly cold here; I hope we have good hot soup, may God save this soul.

We want to see the human monk. We don't want to see him fall down in illicit sex, but we want to hear his human thoughts, how he at least considered temptation and then put it aside. ("Get thee behind me, Satan!"—Satan visited Christ himself—we want to hear what the lure was and how the Master was steadfast and pure.)

Are the monk's clothes tattered? Are they well tailored and a little too stylish and comfortable? Does he eat too much? Does he have the brahminical habits of cleanliness? As he transcribes the scriptures in his own hand, what does this nameless scribe think about? How do we value his sincere remark on the margin?

We want a faithful monk, one who prays with tears in his eyes. We want a real monk, austere, jolly in renunciation, kind to all creatures. And you can tell us how he's human, all too human, and how he regrets his excesses (maybe a bad temper, or nostalgia for the old days before he joined the order) and his shortcomings—never was a bold preacher.

O monk, we love thee. We like the ink stain on your forefinger. Let it be. We like your bowing down and your regrets that you can't offer your heart to God—although you actually do, yet you don't know it.

We love your mode of life. We cannot do it fully, eat only two *capātīs* and no more, refrain from all sweets except on Sunday, never even dream of women, never doubt the scriptures. We want you to improve. And you will. Grow up, grow old, mature, monk. See God's glories in a better voice. Die in the right way, but not yet. Live fully the *sannyāsa* life. Be yourself. Be humble and kind and honest. Write your marginalia. Give us your candid heart.

You are the salt of the earth, so don't get wishy-washy, you hear? Give 'em hell, Hare. Give them the boot on the face as your master does. And do it softly and sweetly.

Now I have to go—massage, bath, *prasādam*, rest—more *japa*.

5:20 p.m., Cliff

Kṛṣṇa, Prabhupāda, please draw me to you. I want to use my time well and study the books and seek to know the philosophy better—and more than that, to gain your *darśana*. A little at a time; a little at a time.

Always an anxiety whether I please my master.

This morning I let go and wrote freely. The cliff doesn't promote that? Washing, washing sea. A hand that writes this afternoon. Cut. Cut. Don't tell ordinary stuff, but go where the mind leads.

The sea gull glides.

I write true.

I also fail to write true.

The seagull doesn't seem to make as many mistakes as I do. He dives and glides unerringly. Yet he has to wait a long time before getting any food. There are

birds that mostly live at sea, on the water or in the air. They only come to land to wait and rest.

The water is like a huge saucer filled with a drink. I imagine my subtle form rising off this cliff and going out over the water. But I don't want that to happen so I hold it in check.

I am coming and going filled with sensations. But I pray. Now I pray, please help me grow in devotion; please place on me the blessing Paurṇamāśi asked You, which You agreed to. And I pray for later—when I go back to the house and wherever we go, I serve You and get absorbed in hearing and chanting. Writing is secondary to that. I pray. My pen prays. I'm hiding against the wall for this. I'm hiding from the wind for this—to compose a prayer.

As the sea washes in, let it be my witness. I sign this document with solemnity. It is a vague prayer document, an ambitious application form. Please make me a praying devotee.

Please give me a heart. I am tired of being a Pinocchio made of wood.

Wind ruffles the sea surface, blow out from shore to sea, as if it could turn the waves backward. Nature's strange sights.

But I'm persistent in prayer, though I don't know what it means. I look inside and though I find some melodrama and poetic pose, I find a kernel of sincere desire and I offer that. I press the button and hope for the best.

Time to go inside. Prabhupāda. Milk. Prayer. *Gāyatrīs*.

12:40 A.M.

Please don't mind if I write this way in my own notebooks. It's for me.

Yes, but your time and mind belong to Kṛṣṇa. You should serve Him even in your private notebooks, in your private time. Or do you have a separate interest other than devotion to Kṛṣṇa and His pure devotees?

No separate interest. But I'm not so pure yet. I still have impressions and desires to "work out."

When I read in *Bhagavad-gītā* that *yogīs* in karma, *jñāna*, and yoga still have separate desires and their devotion to Kṛṣṇa is not even their primary interest, I ask, "Is this me? How does my writing of self-interests line up with this estimation of the mixed (*jñānī-miśra*) *bhaktas*? Do I have to give it up or change it?"

I'm on the road, changing. Aspiring. It seems I'll die while still considering and not completely all these issues.

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare. Soon I will stop this Writing Session and go to chant. Yesterday a little spark of prayer came to me at the cliff. At least I kept writing the words pray and prayer. It was a prayer for the state of prayer.

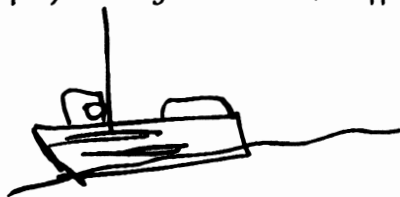
I pray Śrīla Prabhupāda will continue to guide me in my evolution. I crave his attention and affection. I need his assurance. I don't want to leave Swamiji.

Simple devotion, memories of times with him, these are still there, though there is some change. Not everything changes. It's not hypocritical of me to ask, as if everything is still the same, and revel in Prabhupāda nectar, Prabhupāda meditations, etc.

But I'm also on guard that sometimes ISKCON promotes a one-sided view of Śrīla Prabhupāda and exalts

him as a figurehead—with more attention to institutional progress than to *prema-bhakti* or to his eternal form in Kṛṣṇaloka. I must not automatically berate these efforts—the printing of every word Śrīla Prabhupāda ever spoke, the worship of him by all who come to ISKCON . . . If some of the Prabhupāda Centennial glorification is immature or even motivated to achieve less-than-pure-ends, then let me add my little influence for the good. Don't stand back and quip while you stroke your chin as a distant onlooker. Improve yourself—sometimes in retreats—with the idea that I should help introduce a deeper and purer and evolved appreciation of Śrīla Prabhupāda. I will not minimize Śrīla Prabhupāda's image in the photos, memorials, collections of his letters, and lectures and use of his name for all manner of preaching projects—but I will also try to learn of his eternal nature and the practice of *Vraja-bhakti*. Keep myself in ISKCON, improve myself, offer all to His Divine Grace. And don't forget the happy days at 26 Second Avenue. And the happy days with Śrīla Prabhupāda that await us in Goloka.

Approximately 11:20 A.M., Cliff



Notebook #10 begins on a mild sunny day at the cliff overlooking a tide-out sea, pocked-holed rocks on the shore. The grass is still holding jewels of water drops from the overnight rain, but in a few hours they will all be dried out.

All right, all right. We read the philosophical portion of Lord Caitanya's deliverance of Sārvabhauma. Usu-

ally we talk between the readings, but not today. For me it was enough to keep alert and understand what was being said by Lord Caitanya and Śrīla Prabhupāda in the purports. You could say it was stiff. Afterwards, Kirtana-rasa exclaimed, "This is a wonderful chapter for defeating Māyāvāda philosophy." He has a positive outlook about everything in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, at least in my exchanges with him, so I like to reciprocate. I made a point of thanking him for the cooing and praising the individual preparations. I'm not lying—they're good. It takes a little effort to praise, but it's nice. However, it shouldn't be forced; you shouldn't think, "He is expecting me to praise him because I did it yesterday. If I don't praise him today, he'll think I don't like it."

Wash, waves. Come in rough and gentle. Today gentle, yesterday rough, tonight maybe something else, but always coming in, ending the ocean in these bays by washing your wave-ends on the shore.

It's so low and so clear in sunshine. Still, I can't make out what that rocky bump is on top of the otherwise flat land of one of the islands offshore. I guess it is man-made, but maybe not.

We read and now Kirtana-rasa is cooking and M. is going to phone America.

A small seabird singing as he flies low horizontally over the calm waves. Is it because of sunshine? But sometimes you hear them calling in the rain.

The seagull's call is a classic and evokes feelings in us all, even unconsciously. It may provoke unhappiness, since so many memories are unhappy. But because it is associated with the sea, there is something more haunt-

ing than the sharp discord and botheration we feel when we hear the black crows.

I'll go back inside and continue my schedule of activities. But I still have fifteen minutes. Something I'd like to write?

5:20, Cliff

Today I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda lecture on Govardhana-pūjā, 1966. He described how at first Nanda wouldn't tell Kṛṣṇa the meaning of the Indra-yajña. Kṛṣṇa said *sādhus* don't keep secrets, so please tell Me. Śrīla Prabhupāda enlarged on this, saying *sādhus* don't have private lives. I liked this and thought it supported my confessional writing. A teacher's life should be open, not that we accept him as a "brilliant," teacher but don't know his private life, which may be abominable. Śrīla Prabhupāda mostly meant the teacher should be exemplary and therefore there is nothing scandalous to hide. But it can also mean he tells you what's in his heart—even when it breaks the image of him as an all perfect saint.

Behave well, strictly, so you are worth listening to. Not like Jay Albert (Rāma dāsa) who wrote "Confessions of An American Guru" about his sex escapades and cheating meditation. But still you'll want to confess. You won't disappoint those who trust you. By Kṛṣṇa's grace, you'll stay in line. Pray for it.

But you'll regularly admit you are only a beginner and that you have to carefully guard yourself against lower tendencies. You're not at the top. You admit it.

The waves are your witness. They pound on the nearby rocks and say, "The truth! Tell the truth." And I respond, "Yes, I want to. Please let me do it for my betterment and as a way of teaching."

Kṛṣṇa is the Absolute Truth and He doesn't like liars.

I say this as one who can't face the truth, but I know I want to.

The water is rising. I leave here in ten minutes. (Professor says, "Finish up, only ten minutes left for exams.)

Then this: I admire the retreat. I like sitting alone in rubber rain gear, big feet stretched out to the edge of a cliff. I write for friends like Gītā-nāgarī dāsa, even though he doesn't like me to berate myself. I write for those friends and for people I don't know in Russia and anywhere. I like a retreat (going alone) for that.

Stretch out. Know it takes patient courage to not take up passionate duties or sense gratification, but to stay in a house by the sea day and night following a self-imposed schedule with not even ten minutes unaccounted for.

The waves pound in. No engine sound is louder. God's sky is gloriously proclaiming itself. But don't get carried away by impersonal splendor.

Vraja, your place. Prayer, your business. Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra your work.

It's getting better, not many drowsy rounds. Keep alert.

The time has run out and I have nothing to say to finish it.

Dear professor, when you mark this Writing Session, please don't use a red pen. I couldn't do better because that's who I am. It's up to Kṛṣṇa. Another time He may let me flow more.

Please chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, whoever you are.

12:40 A.M.

I become peaceful and fixed up when I can read *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. The notes of translations of the commentaries helps me study Śrīla Prabhupāda's purports. When reading outside Śrīla Prabhupāda's books brings me back to his books with fresh eyes and eagerness, that's good reading. I've been giving the first half hour of the day for this. Some prime time like that is required—in addition to other kinds of reading and writing and researching for seminars.

About writing: I don't "need" to write a certain amount of books per year. It's not publish or perish. I've done enough. I'm engaging a number of press workers—editor, typist, sellers. It's a business, a devotional project. But there's enough stock for now, certainly for the sellers. If I continue writing, then there's work for the editor and the typists.

My point is that I should write from deepest needs and pleasures and a loving service attitude. Not to write another book for the commercial ISKCON market. At present, I'm writing in that way. If something turns into a book, that's fine. For me, a book is an artistic creation as well as a publishing event. A new work to inspire devotees. Lesser reasons are all right, provided they are purified, like wanting to keep up my reputation as a writer, or wanting to demonstrate that I am a preacher and my department in ISKCON is producing.

But I shouldn't think that I have to produce X numbers of books per year. We ask ITV, "What *new* film do you have?" We ask Food For Life, "How many plates do you give out each week nowadays?" But if I am "gestating" or studying or chanting, then that is sufficient. Have confidence that by my nature I am a writer and I

will do my work. Be confident that this kind of unmotivated, non-project writing is worthwhile. And even if I write less, provided I am vitally engaged in *śravaṇam-kīrtanam bhajana*, then there's no harm.

This retreat writing produces its own kind of pressure for quota of pages. That means a pressure to come up with subject matter, with sentences, words. I look around and say, "The clock is on the desk"—not because I want to say that or think it's important, but I'm a writer and I have to write. What is that? Oh well, it's the writer's life, I say. I laugh and shrug it off. Perhaps I think if I stopped writing, it wouldn't be good. I'd become lazy.

Foul-mouthed. Prejudice. Straw. Symptoms. These are some words. A writer deals in words. Get the feel of them. Mattress. Buttocks (I don't like that one). Presents (abstract). Gifts (better).

I write what I think. When the diary produces pressure for me to produce copy (for my unpublished daily newspaper), I notice more where the stuff comes from. A main source is to tap into something I recently thought. As a writer, I flash to the moment when I had the thought and re-create it now as a literary expression. "While the car moved toward the house after my morning walk, I began to fantasize what it would be like if I lived here as a hermit."

There is no harm in this, but the thoughts should have their own space to live and breathe when they come, not that I immediately think how I'll write them down. I'm all right about that. I know when I go to write I'll take from recent thought events. No harm. That's what being a writer means. I lived and thought and now I write about it. It's a holy act. Writing isn't

unholy or exploitative or goofing off. *Therefore* I can take from my own life or from others life, without shame.

This morning's session has been self-help, taking stock. It was what I wanted to say. That's the main thing.

A deep faith that many needs are fulfilled in writing practice, even if I'm not feeling them all in any particular Writing Session.

Regarding "diary," I think of diary as reporting what has happened to an imaginary audience. Sometimes the obligation isn't so good—a dull sense of duty. Twiddling thumbs. This morning's session was better than that. I write not exactly to make a record, but as a way to think. I think on paper. If it leaves a record and if that record can be published, that's extra. The main thing was to think aloud on paper. Now if that's what "diary" means, then I like a diary.

But it also should be free enough that any verbal playfulness can come, or any "push-up" type exercise. It doesn't have to be "this is my diary and someone will read it later, so it should contain only good and readable things. Don't put lecture outlines in here."

Now it's time for an equally important function, *japa*. Let me switch some functions. Put away the pens, take up the beads. Don't express in words, but hear the mantras. Don't remain silent, but utter. Move along quickly with each round. The functions are different, but both writing and *japa* (and reading, lecturing, etc.) are devotional service, *sādhana*.

Dear Lord please protect me so I do not fall down. Please save me from even the subtle falldown of trying to enjoy with women.

11:20 A.M.

We were reading together, a wonderful section about the conversion of Sārvabhauma. I thought ahead to this writing slot. I felt that I have nothing valuable to write compared to the vital *kṛṣṇa-kathā* found in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* or in continuously chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. But I knew I would come here anyway.

Let that feeling direct me to write nicely. I shouldn't be intimidated by the value of Kṛṣṇa consciousness so that I write trivially on purpose thinking, "I can't write like Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja; I can't write scripture." I can't write like them, but I can write in *paramparā*.

After reading, we spoke of references to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement in modern literature. I said mostly they are slurs which reflect the mass cultural opinion of Hare Kṛṣṇa. We're surprised that the deep-thinking, "liberated" authors have such a shallow impression of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It hurts. But we don't let it hurt too much. Kirtana-rasa mentioned a rock singer and his favorable impressions of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

I asked Kirtana-rasa to write about his brother.

Okay, now what else?

I am here and we are here. They are cooking some extra preps because it's Sunday. This is our little *āśrama*, where we read and discuss.

By next Sunday, we're scheduled to fly to Italy. Before that, I'll close out these "Writing Sessions while on a *japa* retreat."

I could write here some of the comments made during the reading, but although they are more directly Kṛṣṇa conscious than what I'm writing here, they would be "studied." They should flow from my pen, not be cranked out. We read of Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya, how after he was converted by Lord Caitanya he

spontaneously took to the processes of devotional service. He honored *prasādam*, and danced and sang in ecstasy. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that Sārvabhauma "was following the principles automatically, without being pressured." I'm writing without being pressured. What comes. And when I find a yearning for attaining Kṛṣṇa consciousness, I want to rush for it.

Sārvabhauma's conversion inspires us to think we too can change. He got the mercy of brother-in-law Gopinātha Ācārya, who wanted him to become a devotee. As a result, Sārvabhauma got the mercy of Lord Caitanya. Lord Caitanya broke Sārvabhauma's false pride. He had to give up his Māyāvāda and bodily conceptions. If we want to receive Kṛṣṇa's mercy, we too have to give up all these.

Kirtana-rasa said he's reading *Seymour* (at my request) and he loves it. I felt it would help him write about his brother. Kirtana-rasa says, "J.D. Salinger lives as a recluse in Vermont. Have you ever thought of writing him?" I said *because* he's a recluse, I don't think he would want a letter. Kirtana-rasa said maybe he'll send him my chapter on *Catcher in The Rye* in *My Search Through Books*. But that famous seclusion of Salinger will not be penetrated, I think; not by me.

Just the mention of it . . . three months ago a God-brother teased me, "(Seeing you), it's like seeing J.D. Salinger. He temporarily comes out of seclusion and then returns."

Sunday. No one comes around here. That's how we like it. Enter the world on our own terms and withdraw from it in order to fashion our tools for better work.

Sat in the cold little room on the rug because some sunlight feel there. But then it went away and I stayed.

Sunshine in and out and my attention was also in and out. Even now it's happening while I write. The writing is supposed to catch the "errant" thoughts, but I find myself pausing, not writing them. They would take too long to explain into a context, and to be Kṛṣṇa conscious material.

But the writing process says—write what comes, from peak to peak.

I want to tell Kīrtana-rasa to follow those basic points in his writing of his brother, as found in *Seymour*: it's a diary by a writer who's telling us he's going to write about his brother. He tells anecdotes bit by bit as he is able to bring out the overwhelming emotions.

(I could stop right here and *tell* this to Kīrtana-rasa, who's in the next room. But I think that would break whatever little concentration I have. This is a domestic time slot; life in the house. That's why it's good to go to the cliff, good to turn my back on everyone for awhile. Then automatically something more personal comes. But even the cliff holds old memories, writing blocks, etc. Accept where you are and keep going for twenty minutes.

The bolt of iron bars. The music of Swansea poet. The bulge under the chin of Dylan Thomas. The . . . stop. It's too groping. No, why? Let me do it. It will churn up something.

But I'm not writing a book. If I were doing a book, we could label this "free-writing section" and let all hell break loose (devils skating, wearing red pajamas). But it's "Writing Sessions during a *japa* retreat."

Oh? You make it sound so formal. Like you're in a quiet Emersonian mood, writing elevated thoughts befitting a prayer retreat. That's a pose in itself.

No mail here, no phone. No other duties. Write in that way, with free time. But when you come alone to a "romantic," isolated spot of old sod, if you don't write thoughts befitting the prayer mood, then why not admit it? Therefore I say, let some chaos in. Open the steam valve.

Wheweee! Whoooo! The *gopas* let the steam out as soon as they get out of their parents' vision. They mock, jock, whock, breeze, sneeze, somersault, and praise their heroic Friend—in a joking way.

Well, if I try that, I'll be kicked out of the entourage of Kṛṣṇa's friends in two minutes. When I'm unrestrained, all this junk comes out, sorry confessions, hijinks from the material world. I like to have fun, but that's the problem.

I can monitor it so it comes out as good, clean (squeaky clean) Kṛṣṇa conscious fun, but then it's another pose, like saying, "Look, dear readers, especially you nondevotees, Hare Kṛṣṇa people are fun-loving just as you are." Wow, is the public opinion so penetrating into your life? How much of your character is actually formed by the fact that you belong to a scorned cult? It's deep, I think. It's unconscious. What I see of it doesn't seem that deep a hurt. With my intelligence I accept that I am regarded as weird by most people. I also regard them as "*karmīs*," nondevotees. There's a stereotype on both sides.

I write for the devotees and I write for myself. But the people of the world are also on my mind. I can't write to satisfy them. I carry a fantasy (dream) that someday in the future, Kṛṣṇa consciousness will be more acceptable, and then people could turn to my writing and find it acceptable, come to appreciate Śrīla Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa through me. Yes, that would be

a dovetailing of the desire for fame as a writer. It's also a dream of how this private writing could become effective preaching.

I never speak these ideas and hardly even admit them to myself. It's a good "score" that it came out just now. My private dream—that people will read me to gain entrance to the Hare Kṛṣṇa world, just as we read private people like Anne Frank and others and get introduced to a whole culture and world view. Anne Frank made effective *propaganda* against the Nazis, better than any slick or heavy propaganda makers for Jewish rights or anti-Nazism. She didn't know she was doing it. She was just a young girl.

I am an aging monk trying to find my individuality in ISKCON, praying to God on paper . . . the writer's life as a way to surrender . . . the little details of a life . . . the battle with the mind and vanity, false ego . . . Could all of this be of interest to anyone but a devotee?

Externally, actually, I'm not interested in the non-devotee advice. I know I can't reach them with what I have to say. I decided years ago not to even try for it. Technically it's a great challenge, and one could say I chickened out from attempting it. But I don't think so. Whenever anyone advised me what it would take to get the wider reading public to read Kṛṣṇa conscious stuff, I have not been interested in doing it. It's not my talent. I can't hack it. It sounds like a watered-down version of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I want the real thing.

Still, I'm discovering today as I write this, a latent desire that a wider public might accept me *as I am*. But not now, not the way the world is. I can't be a cutting edge to change their opinion by a heart-warming novel of life among the Hare Kṛṣṇas, who are real people. But if other preachers cut that edge, and the world changes and is more open to us, then they might read

me as some typical in-cult expression by a “sensitive author type” among the Kṛṣṇas.

Let it be, let it go. I prefer to write my own way. Ironically, my model is Rūpa Gosvāmī who wrote only for devotees. Even Jīva Gosvāmī is seen (less so) as a parochial writer. A friend called my writing “fatally parochial.” Yet I *don’t* write like Rūpa Gosvāmī because I’m such a neophyte and filled with worldly impressions. I don’t compromise, don’t pander to reach the nondevotee public. We don’t want to gradually lead people to the mode of goodness after two hundred pages, or conclude a book by declaring that God exists. We want to be like Śrīla Prabhupāda and at once say Kṛṣṇa is the worshipable Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Yet I spend so little time saying that! What am I doing? Why not—since you have declared the Kṛṣṇa conscious turf is where you want to stand—why not write *kṛṣṇa-kathā*?

What do I tell? I tell this one person’s life. It’s a truth. It’s Kṛṣṇa conscious. It is what it is.

I ask forgiveness.

I don’t stop.

They’re talking in the kitchen and I hear things sizzling and it distracts me. Anyway, I’m getting through this Writing Session with a few sparks shooting off. But I did not allow myself a wild shooting match of free-writing.

I’ll end here and spend some time listening to tapes before I go to the bathroom. I need to fuel up, not only write my own.

In *Seymour* the author says his story is so vast—that is so overwhelming in *his emotional life*, that he can’t tell it in the ordinary way with beginning, middle, and end. Thus he makes forays into the subject matter. After one hundred pages, he’s given us a lot of his brother. I

wonder how much more Buddy Glass actually has to say about Seymour. In a similar way, I make forays in these Writing Sessions. When I finish one I feel I've only scratched the surface. Each section is like an "introduction" to a chapter that never gets written. Next section I write another introduction. If I could relax and spend full-time writing (I say), then I might be able to follow with a full story. That happens sometimes, like in the two "writing" books I did in February.

The benefit in writing *a book* is that I feel a complete feeling of telling a whole story, as much as that is possible. By the "illusion" of declaring, "This is a book, I am beginning now and I'll be finished in twenty-eight days. This is the working title"—I actually tell a story. I don't have that advantage in these Castlegregory notes. No book illusion. And so less a sense of working at and accomplishing a complete story. I leave it for my editor. It's good to do that sometimes. It's liberating, to not be the author who starts designing the cover of the book by the time he's writing page thirty-two. I'm just doing writing practice, the most fundamental practice of a writer. *Bās*.

I wrote the dream that one day I may be widely read. Now what about a more Kṛṣṇa conscious dream than that—that one day you'll realize Kṛṣṇa consciousness and the holy name? Go ahead, in private, imagine something like that. Imagine alternatives:

(1) Violent, revolutionary changes in the world or in my own life that reduce pride put me through a purifying change of more dependence on Kṛṣṇa.

(2) Gradual descent of mercy and I keep writing, but better.

(3) I don't write so much, but speak and be with devotees more.

5:10 p.m. Cliff

It's Sunday and not a single fishing boat in sight.
Gray sky and no tourists walking.

"Little lamb, who made thee?

Dost thou know who made thee?"

This is not a book, so I don't have to answer or make sense.

Then, why are you doing it?

I don't have to answer.

Each time I write here it seems I have nothing to say but by the time a session is over I feel it was worthwhile. Why is that?

Do you have enthusiasm for something? Write about that.

I'm glad to hear new books are published. I am enthusiastic to gain attraction for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Seems best I skip evening milk today and I'll be better able to take breakfast tomorrow. Give your digestion a break.

On Wednesday, Kirtana-rasa leaves for America.

Not writing for a book, for making a literary effect pushes me further when I ask, "Why write and what to write?" If it's a book, I can write, "We leave here Sunday morning," not because I want to say that, but it seems fitting to start the farewell theme at this point. But then, why write it?

Be careful. Don't get skeptical and say, "Who cares? I don't care. And since no one is going to read it . . . why write it?"

Would you write anyway, just for yourself or with only a faint hope that someone in the future might read it? One scholar of diaries said all diarists have some hope like that someone will read it.

I am quiet. I can't say "Kṛṣṇa" cheaply. I don't so much want to talk. I'm at the cliff. I'm not perfectly situated, I know, in spiritual life.

Thank God I'm not a bored, restless person living around here (or anywhere) who has to turn on the T.V. or turn on with drugs or satisfy the sex desire or rush off to the pub, the street corner . . . When I'm quiet, it's not a desperate sadness.

The goal of life is known to us. Each day we touch it. But we're far away.

That thin-necked back duck is out there floating between and over the waves.

Where is our love? Where is our love for Gurudeva and Kṛṣṇa, for the life of Kṛṣṇa consciousness?

I'm bundled up so the gnats can't get me. I don't have to analyze who I am and how come I'm apart from people right now. Quiet means I don't have to talk about it. But when I get so quiet, then there's nothing to write. I just listen to the sea. I glance to where the sky is lightening a bit . . . I look out at the gray sky and sea and think that this is simultaneously like looking out and looking within.

You can write or not.

Some you write, some you don't.

Go on praying, written or
unwritten

Please protect me,

Please let me serve You.

Please take me and do with me
what You think best.

Those who desire to serve the Lord are most fortunate. They are not selfish; they work for the welfare of others by distributing Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They are *bhūri-jana-daḥ*. *Titikṣavaḥ kārūṇikāḥ*. They are merciful, tolerant, a friend to all, they see no one as their enemy. They are peaceful (undisturbed) and they have all the good qualities of a *sādhū*.

I have come here to chant extra and to write a journal to help myself. I want to get at the essence of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, savoring the holy names and Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. I think if I can remove myself from more outward demands, then I'll be able to see and pray more clearly. It doesn't always work that way, at least not in dramatic breakthroughs. But it seems right to try. And I've become accustomed to it, developed an appetite for these places and giving myself time to write and read.

When I'm alone I feel I don't accomplish that much, but I do write a bit, now 495 pages handwritten plus two poems a day. The writing comes easier; the study is less easy. The chanting I am pledged to. Although it could be much better, I feel it's right to give myself this time. I don't waste it.

Kṛṣṇa is giving it to me as a reward. I want to turn it into service and make an offering to guru and Kṛṣṇa of whatever I gain by coming alone. I don't want to be condemned as one who selfishly takes his own time for his own enjoyment.

No one can figure this out for me. Midway in this three-week retreat, I faced the biggest doubts and overcame them—doubts as to the validity of coming to a retreat. I'm not going to go back over that.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa,
Rādhā, Rādhā . . .

This is not Vṛndāvana, but I can think of Vraja from here.

My gloves have dried out from this morning when they were soaking wet from rain.

This is the quietest of any Writing Session I've had since I arrived here. But by tomorrow I may be chatting away as usual, writing excitedly and quickly, "before I forget!"

It's good to be away from newspapers and letters and all that. Now, what can I turn to, come up with? Free of those influences, and into my third week here, what can you tell us?

Right now, nothing. I'm just sitting here in a comfortable posture to write a few pages. I'm trying to pray.

Prabhupāda wanted to bring us to Vṛndāvana. Therefore he constructed the Krishna-Balaram temple.

Hundreds, thousands of devotees have sacrificed, worked hard for Śrīla Prabhupāda. Many still do. I should respect them all.

Better to skip the milk tonight. Decided in favor of that decision. It won't hurt you, and it's bound to ease your digestion, even if at present you don't have discomfort. You *are* full from the lunch feast. Some herbal tea at night? With a little honey? Yes, I could do. And with it I'll munch a little Chyavan Prash.

The rocks.

I'm thinking I'd like to complete 600 pages and then call it quits and turn to a different notebook and a dif-

ferent mood, more befitting an “on the road” way of life, in the van.

☉ MARCH 29 ☉

12:40 A.M.

While reading *Gītā*, I was regretting the preface I wrote to *Here Is Śrīla Prabhupāda* where I admitted to the free-writing process. It’s my personal business and I didn’t have to tell it and open myself to criticism. Anyway, it’s not false, just maybe “too honest.”

The sober, assuring words of *śāstra* and the *ācāryas*. I want to memorize them, whereas my words are groping. I write affected by material energy. One “enemy” (devotee angry with me) wrote that I’m an offender to Śrīla Prabhupāda in many ways and evidence that I’ve deviated is that I don’t quote *śāstras*, but write whatever thoughts enter my head. That’s what free-writing is. On the surface, it appears opposed to devotional service. Writing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness should be exactly in *paramparā* and not “I think.”

But . . . I tell my whole story, the attempt to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness every minute of the day, the obstacles. In *Mādhurya-kādambinī* he tells of the many obstacles—*anarthas* and *aparādhās*. I write of my struggle with them. You could say *aparādhās* and *anarthas* are recognized territory on the *bhakti* map. They are not *bhakti*, but they are important items to get rid of, and it’s not easily done. The story of our devotional service must include the grappling with and overcoming these obstacles. I tell this as it’s happening, blow by blow. *Ācāryas* sometimes admit they have these *anarthas*, but they do it in a summary way, not in detail.

Objections to my writing: (1) You use this method of writing whatever comes to your head (heart), even if it’s not the Absolute Truth, even if it’s *māyā*. (2) You

reveal too many naked feelings; “too honest.” (3) You dwell on yourself too much. All this makes for a mundane type of literature.

I reply to those who think like that and are sitting back and judging me: “If you read me in that way, that may be the result. If you read me with compassion—recognizing that what I struggle with is also what you struggle with, then we can have a friendly and encouraging exchange.” (Ueland says everyone, or many, should write, and we could read each other in a friendly, loving, compassionate way.) My writing is like an *iṣṭa-goṣṭhī*. In some ways it doesn’t have much precedent in Vaiṣṇava literature. I shouldn’t be puffed up about this, yet humbly persist in it. It is the inevitable Westernization and modernization of Vaiṣṇava literature, now that Śrīla Prabhupāda has spread Vedic culture all over the world. We can’t be expected to write exactly as the *ācāryas* did five hundred years ago in Sanskrit in India, or as the liberated sage Vyāsa wrote in compiling the scriptures.

It’s writing based on Vedic *śāstra*; it’s faithful to Vedic *śāstra*. It’s the personal writing and testimony of a devotee in the twentieth century who’s earnestly applying Kṛṣṇa conscious teachings in his own life.

You thought this morning, Maybe I’ll wind down the amount of writing time I do each day. Only four days left here. I could spend more time reading topmost literature rather than producing my own inferior brand of writings. But I can’t seem to give it up. I want to improve what I do, so I keep practicing it. And in back of my mind I hope I’m producing some things which can be shared with others.

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is exciting news. The attempt to live it is a great challenge to each of us. We want to tell about it to our friends and fellow devotees.

I think of Ananta dāsa who went to Gaura Govinda Mahārāja for *śikṣā*. Accept it.

So you make mistakes. You keep going ahead anyway? Vaiṣṇava literature is not supposed to have mistakes in it.

Sorry. I am mistaken. It's a mistake that I came to this world. At least I let you know, This is a mistake; I am mistaken, not perfect. But I always point to the perfection. The perfect person exists; I am not he. The perfect world exists in Goloka. Here there are mistakes and miseries. Let's go from here to there; let's face realistically the obstacles and work to overcome them.

I hesitate to play the game of free association on the page. I thought maybe I could do it and then edit really objectionable parts out before giving it to the typist. It's a fact that I hesitate because I don't want her to see it. There's a censorship involved, which is, of course, against the spirit of freedom. Freedom, we believe, will lead to deeper admissions, not only of dirty things, but that will in turn drive us further to seeking the pure state of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

We will see the *anarthas* and discard them. "We have met the enemy and they are us." Unless we are willing to confront and fight, how will we overcome? (Possible answer: fighting with my demons on the page isn't necessary. Just accentuate the positive and everything will take place, the demons will leave.)

But sometimes I do it.

I am afraid readers (even a typist or editor) will think that if I write a nonsense thing, that means *I am that*. If I use an obscenity that I am an obscene speaker, right?

The eagle flies. The words unexpected land in your head or straight on the page like a plot of bird shit from above. Suddenly you're splatted. You wipe it off.

In the pure world of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa pastimes, there are no bad vibes. No demoniac, agnostic type of people are allowed entrance. Those who want to pursue their own sense gratification stay in the worlds of ignorance where *māyā* gives them a false hope and always raps them, pierces them with her trident and the three-fold miseries.

In the same book where I want to praise the all-pure Supreme Lord, how can I include dirty things? Alas, my reply is, this mixture of madness, degradation and saintliness. I don't want it to stay that way. I want the godly to prosper in me and the ungodly to go away. That's happening too, by a gradual process.

Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is the key to prayer. Ask the Lord to allow you to pray as you chant. Ask Him to deliver you from nescience by enabling you to hear *harināma* as you utter it.

This session is nearing the end. I didn't cover much ground, mostly defense and consideration of the writing process which allows good and bad to enter. I defended and yet stopped short of actual free-writing.

Hesitancy—which doesn't produce good, strong writing. Whatever readers have accompanied me this far are willing to sort out with me, the good from the bad. They're not afraid of getting spattered with a little mud if it's for the good cause of getting rid of *anarthas*.

You see, if I open up to any association of words and thoughts, then foolish images intrude—because of my background and latent desires. That embarrasses me and it may embarrass you. I don't want to do it just out of bravado. It may be done for a serious good reason, not just as an exercise.

But, conservative Prabhu, even one paragraph of free-writing may help to kick off some scum covering your ghee-boiling and then you can get on with the pure process. We don't identify with the scum. The scum is the world. The scum is in you too. You want to get rid of it, and sometimes it helps to mention it—to mention what went into me: I am a victim of scumization. I admit, this went into me as a resident of this world; I got this from my mother, I got this from my father and schoolmates. It hurts me, it dirties me. Now that I have left them all behind, this still clings to me and prevents me. I even still have a curiosity for it. I want to mention this to a sympathetic ear; I went through this.

I didn't go through a worse scenario, but a pitiful, small time, small town contamination. I *don't* have to confess it all, I know. But I seem to yearn for some therapy. Maybe just to prove to myself I can do it and that I don't want it anymore.

The whole world salutes you. You stand up and salute the American flag every day in P.S. #8, one nation under God. Boys like Mickey Kelly and others and you, hanging around a small pond not far from school. They point out to you what they call "scum bag" in the pond and they tell you what it is. But you are too young to actually understand. Your twelve- and thirteen-year-old friends tell you they are masturbating, but you can't do it yet. Someone said he "laid" a girl,

but you can't imagine doing that. The town is full of rumors and jokes about sex and the T.V. too. Dirty jokes. Bob Hope on T.V. tells a dirty joke. There's a record album of them. And you know and tell them. Even your own sister tells some. You and she tell each other jokes you've heard. Clark Gable and Betty Grable, two movie stars, become fictitious characters for a series of dirty jokes.

Shovel it all out. Dump it out. Pump it out and flush it. I am willing to go on with this, but now I've run out of time. I'm going to chant *japa*.

Maybe later I'll do some freer free-writes, to close out these four days. It's important that I express my desire to do so and some warning (and asking for understanding) of those who may read this.

11:22 A.M.

One of the purposes of writing is to inquire into how I'm doing in my writing service—what books I may want to write. Even if I don't write to publish, that shouldn't make my writing unimportant. It's not a trick or game (deception) when I say I want to write without thinking of an audience—even though I expect to share it with at least a few people. I mean what I say.

Writing on this retreat has been an opportunity for me to try this kind of writing. It has gone all right, although it has been a struggle sometimes. Even today while we were reading *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, I thought, "What do I do next on my schedule?" When I remembered this 11:20–12:10 writing slot, I had a heavy, sinking feeling, as if it were a duty I didn't like. Now that I'm here writing it's okay, but why so heavy?

The morning session ended as I began to do *freer* writing, admitting the desire to tell of things that have contaminated me and how I retain some curiosity for

them. I asked typist and editor not to mind. The stage is set for allowing uncensored free-writing. Don't be afraid.

Of course, I'm the fastidious clerk, photocopying the pages, counting how many I do, being careful to mail them off.

This cliff will fall down into the ocean. It's eroding slowly.

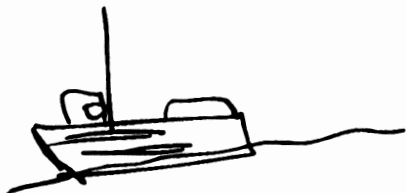
I think of devotees with whom I correspond. This morning was difficult, walking in the rain and wind. I went back to the car and spoke there into the tape recorder, while M. stood outside in the downpour. Then buckwheat for breakfast and we're still digesting them. A little world.

Lord Caitanya's *līlā* unfolds in the *Caitanya-carit-āmṛta*.

The sky is fair with some clouds. The grass is filled with beads of rain clinging to the green blades.

I am hiding, my shoulder against the stone boundary wall. No one can see me from the land. The fishing boats may notice me, but so what? I am left alone here for a few days more.

Lord Caitanya told Sārvabhauma that His brother, Viśvarūpa, left home as a *sannyāsī* and He had to search for Him. Lord Caitanya knew that Viśvarūpa had already disappeared from the earth, but "A pretense of ignorance was necessary" so that Lord Caitanya could go on His preaching tour of South India. I laughed when I read this and said I also sometimes tell a lie about my movements so that people will not impede me. Kirtana-rasa smiled and said, "I won't tell anyone."



The fishing boat is bobbing.

O you who tell lies, can you tell the difference between the truth and a lie, or have you lost that ability?

When you write something, it may be a fact, but you don't feel it deeply. That also is a kind of lie. These are not good white lies like those told to avoid relatives who can't appreciate your *bhāva*. Ordinary lying is a bad thing, especially lying to yourself.

I wrote something like I want to live in Vṛndāvana. It's true and yet it's not true. If I wanted to live in Vṛndāvana, I'd stay there all the time.

For example, I say I want to serve my Gurudeva. That's true. But I also want to sleep, eat, live without the pressure of duties, be respected, sneak around in my van, write poems . . . If in writing or speech I portray only some of my character, that is a false presentation.

Examine why—or at least admit I do it—I do “other things.”

Following a schedule is important to me, as is being orderly and not being bothered by people. Admit this as truth.

Justification. Rationalization. Self-defense. I try establishing a truth even when I'm not sure of it. I *explain* why I act in a certain way and I do so to support my activities. This can also be less than truthful. It's the creation of personal propaganda, as the politicians do. America and Western Europe need Kuwait's oil. When Iraq invades Kuwait, the West says, “This is an abridgment of freedom; we must liberate the Kuwaitis.” This

rhetoric is a lie. America cares only about the oil, otherwise why don't they go to war to save other countries when they are invaded. Sure, it's complicated. Politics is so complicated that you can't tell the straight truth. Diplomacy, duplicity.

I am nonpolitical in ISKCON; I have no vote, am on no committees, thank God. But still I lie to myself in subtle ways. How important is it to root this out?

Is the free-writing a way to attack personal falsity? When I break the image of myself, is that an act for truth? Not always. Breaking, destroying, killing is not always the truth.

I can be truthful just by a bold act or by being candid and outspoken. It takes time and patience and practice.

One writing practice (by Miller) is to find what you actually loved during a day, and what mattered, and write it down, even if it wasn't in tune with your official image. She discovered who she actually was. I like that. At the same time, it doesn't mean I endorse all things which I currently hold dear.

Try a few. What did you like from recent experience?

I liked how Aer Lingus Premier Class escorted us to the gate and right onto the plane with no delays in the waiting area. But I didn't like the Premier lounge, where they kept us until they were ready. The benefit of one was canceled by the other.

I like Madhu and Kirtana-rasa's company and the way we are living here by the sea.

I like my new coat and M. likes his. Likewise our boots.

I like hearing production news from Kdd, and about book sales.

I like being away from America and the threat of being drawn into the crisis at Gītā-nāgarī.

I like the fact that I've been able to write so many poems, and each of them of considerable length.

I like having an appetite.

The routine, how it flows; I follow my watch.

When I am able to think of the meanings of *gāyatrī*.

The fact that I don't sleep too long; getting up at midnight.

Writing something that pleases me.

An assurance that my editor will do something with this.

Madhu's policy for me to find time for being alone to write, study, chant, etc.

Life. The life Kṛṣṇa gives me.

Reading books aloud.

Listening to Śrīla Prabhupāda with meals.

Not getting headaches since we've come to Ireland.

The daily fifteen-minute massage.

Not judging myself by saying, "Your life is selfish and stupid, you write too much, etc."

Free-writing in notebooks.

Being encouraged.

Getting my mail and getting it answered, the job completed.

Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

I can go on describing what I like. But truthfulness also ascertains *how much* I like something. I have run out of time now. Seem to be writing less nowadays; never a full hour.

5:15 P.M., Indoors

A letter from Manu dāsa at Inis Rath. He says I am a reporter with news from the spiritual world. He ex-

pects some written nectar will come from the present retreat.

M. just read to me the kinds of impediments that plague a devotee whose *bhakti* practice is *aniṣṭhitā*, unsteady. These are Viśvanātha Cakravartī's classic definitions of indecision, war against sense gratification, inability to follow vows, a beginner's puffed-up enthusiasm, and *tarāṅga-raṅginī*, riding the waves or enjoying the material facilities that one is offered when he performs *bhakti*.

Then under the heading of troubles that come when we practice *bhajana-kriyā*, is laziness, spiritual indifference, inability to enter *kīrtana* because you're thinking of sense gratification, etc. The presentation of these obstacles never fails to get a rise out of a devotee audience. Viśvanātha Cakravartī so expertly knows the minds, and the duplicity and hopelessness, of the neophyte. He also shows us the way out of it if we persist and get the mercy of the Vaiṣṇava.

Some of the *aniṣṭhitā* symptoms happen to me in regard to writing practice. For example, I speculate back and forth whether I should do free-writing, and whether I should listen to inner and outer critics and whether I should please my spiritual master by another type of service.

M. and I know we have to be careful of *tarāṅga-raṅginī* and not mispend the travel fund our supporters send us out of their paychecks. We are able to travel around the world and take retreats and use a van and buy what we need. Be careful you don't make this your main goal, to enjoy facilities that come in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and thus miss out on the real goal of loving devotional service.

And spiritual indifference. It occurs when I don't feel like writing.

We talked some about upcoming travels in Italy. The boat trip to Greece would be so long. Not sure at present what we will do, where we will go.

Use these last days, please.

Rounds were clearly better this afternoon, awake and driving steadily through the quota with no long delays. And fixed on the importance of the *japa*.

So you're not writing a book and you nurture it. No obligation to develop subtle literary effects like the "farewell." Imagine if you created a fictive device just to give the book a good ending. You know, a story has to go somewhere so you don't disappoint the readers.

He went on a *japa* retreat, so what happened? Did he improve?

You feel obligated to say, "Yes, I'm doing better." You look within yourself to see if it's true and you say, "Sure, it's true." You go ahead and write it that way, but there is some subtle "story-telling" going on. Thus the artist lies, as they say, in order to tell a higher truth. He lies.

When you don't write a book, you don't have to do that. But there's a lack of purpose. Yes, the book writing gives you more of a sense of accomplishment. Although there may be some slight fibbing to give it some shape, a momentum develops and you write along with it. You shape, you blend the different elements. For example, in *Here Is Śrīla Prabhupāda*, I deliberately read *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* with the devotees each day and inserted that. I tried to think of Śrīla Prabhupāda. That was directed free-writing. Even *Shack Notes*, which was a more "pure" and first time free-writing effort, was always a book. That made it an exciting adventure for me. It might be compared to playing a nine-inning game of baseball or just batting a ball around. The

agreement to play nine innings creates excitement. You exert yourself; you play to win.

That has been lacking. I've mentioned a plus and minus to the writing of more detached "Writing Sessions." What does it mean? Do you want to do a book next time? When will you take another writing retreat?

You make a book. It can be for yourself with a plan to share it with a few. *Why I Write* was that, and *Writing In Gratitude*. You write the book you want to write, but it is a book shaped by a time limit and by perhaps no more than the determination that "this shall be a book."

You could send these notes to your editor and say, "Edit this into a book." But your intention so far has been that she can take from it for a collection. But what is a collection? How can you write for that? Maybe I should write a travel journal on our way to Greece. Yeah, but you have to have some external, justifiable reason. Well, in my case, the reason is I'm going there is to preach.

When I wrote *Lessons From the Road*, the writing shaped my life. I went on *harināma* and visited the restaurants etc., just so I could write about it. It didn't come off, I think, as a false imposition. The reader could accept that he wants to know what the temples are like, he wants to taste devotional service and preaching in ISKCON, and he wants to report to us about it.

This is getting exciting. I think I'm getting somewhere. That is, what shall I write about next?

I feel like stopping these notes and going to speak with M. about it. I'd speak to Baladeva and Kdd if I could. But think about it myself.

Maybe I'm "chickening out." I have evolved to this point. If I go back to creating the type of book I've

done since *Shack Notes*, it might be not facing the implications of freedom in writing which I'm now pursuing.

In *Shack Notes* I asked myself, "Do I want to write? Will I be able to write if I do it spontaneously and write what comes and not just what you're supposed to write?" Now half a dozen books later I'm asking myself, "Do you want to write even if it's not a timed and planned book or subject?" The answer on this retreat has been yes. I'm up to page 524 in legal pads. But "yes" to what, exactly?

The Writing Session. The individual writing slot is the ultimate element. You enter it, write as best you can, and then leave it detached. You try to be Kṛṣṇa conscious in each Writing Session. On one Post-it I wrote, "You keep writing in any session until you get the *darsana*."

In the books I've been doing, I insert some *sāstra*. I take on some reading project and report on it so my book has substance and so I actually study while on the writing retreat. That seems artificial. But then, art has some shape. It's not wrong, is it?

Not wrong, but now I've been writing without that need; I read, but I don't feel obliged to blend it in here. *I don't need to impress anyone that what I'm writing is Kṛṣṇa conscious* and so I don't insert *sāstra* passages just to prove that.

So I'm not sure.

This retreat is okay.

But shall I continue like this? And the poems have been an overflowing bounty. If that's a result of this new approach, then bravo.

12:44A.M.

If I had my mail here, I could work on it in these last retreat days, also edit a manuscript. But I don't. So I'm free to keep writing in this "purposeless" way. I discussed with M. about yesterday's notes: what should my future writing be? He likes to support my doing what I like to do, or writing as *bhajana* without it being pressured to become a book. He hints, however, that I may also take up more disciplined traditional writing again if I'm inspired. Free-writing, with some sharpening to it becomes a book and I expect it to be edited into one and published without too much change. But the sort of writing I'm doing now makes it different. The editing is more up to the editor whether and how it can be published. I am less concerned with that.

Let me not worry about this so much, such as how Kdd will turn what I do into a collection. Keep writing as a daily function; try to make it good and helpful to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and especially honest. The shaping and presenting it are external. I'm more concerned with being truthful and helping myself.

Soon the pressure of other events will be on me. I can't expect to write much at times like that. So don't take it for granted that I can write as I am now able for three or four more days. These are important days for me to free-write. Don't lose interest just because I am not writing the closing pages in my last chapter.

I spent half an hour looking at the outlines for a five-class seminar on Rāmānanda Rāya. Some main themes could be presented even in a three-day seminar like: (1) the "conflict" between external religious activities and the internal, as shown in Lord Caitanya's rejection

of Rāmānanda Rāya's external points; (2) *jñāna-preya-sam*—the importance of reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books without speculation or knowledge for knowledge's sake (*jñāna-miśra bhakti*). This leads to *prema-bhakti* as the philosophical topic which we are always interested in. And finally within that, is Kṛṣṇa in Vraja. How other topics lead to that, but we shouldn't dwell on them; (3) Can I give a whole lecture on the *gopīs* as our teachers? Yes, I think so. Therefore I can do a three-day seminar.

I turn to writing. Don't be afraid. Challenge: you are idle and your pursuance of non-pragmatic writing is idle.

No, I am free of other duties, so I can explore more basic subjects which most people have no time to explore, yet they are vital, personal for all. I can do it as a service to others.

Busy people may see me as idle. I should be busy in my own way, but not attack their sort of busy-ness in the name of defending myself. Whistle my tune "care-free" and happy. Yet be aware they will want to stop you.

It's partly an act of defiance. I can't pretend I'm innocent to the fact that some will see this as idle and unnecessary. Therefore I unconsciously or indirectly build a defense, an argument against criticism. But if I get into this too much, I become belligerent. People who do read me to get relief from the belligerence and pressures of coping find that I too am caught up in self-defense survivalism. I should go ahead into my new territory and find good news to share. Yet I shouldn't see myself primarily as an entertainer. Write for more purpose than that.

Jñāne preyasam.

I'm developing a lecture on how the *gopīs* are the teachers and the most exemplary devotees—inspiration for all ISKCON devotees. Collect verses which demonstrate this. Their ability to purely appreciate Kṛṣṇa's beauty; their unalloyed concern for Him; unconventional devotional service; gave up everything to serve Him; highest form of love—that which is actually pleasing to Him. (He's not much pleased by official service and prayers and liberation seekers.)

Yet I don't want to write here a collection of dispensable notes, do I? When I want to write "Daytimer" type suggestions to myself, or messages to my servant-secretary, or letters to devotees, I do that separately. That indicates a feeling that these Writing Sessions should be used in a pure way. Other service may also be pure, unmotivated.

I mean, this writing shouldn't be a place to get chores done, to deliberately sketch out lecture outlines and write first drafts of notes and letters. Why do I feel that way? It indicates I want to "do art" here or speak with "no strings attached." I respect writing as a pure service.

But then why not carry this further? Shouldn't writing as pure and unmotivated mean also free of psychological self-help and little sketches of surroundings? *Ahaituky apratihātā* implies, doesn't it, that the topics of *uttama-śloka*, *param dhāma*, are straight Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy and *līlā*.

You know my answer to that. The purity I seek needn't always be expressed in the recitation of straight Kṛṣṇa conscious *siddhānta*. It's pure in telling what's on my mind, or what is true for me now. Pure in that truthfulness. I try, however, to push through, getting

past lesser states to some direct *darsana* or contact with the spiritual world.

That's the beauty of writing. That, even if you don't feel so great and you are not so realized, still, you can touch Kṛṣṇa consciousness by using the words. You can write a paraphrase of a *śloka* and say something about it in a primitive way. I want to do this primitive writing more. I mean, don't worry whether it's relevant for an audience, or who the audience is, or whether the audience is sufficiently learned—and don't try too show off and use expert rhetoric, etc. But write what comes. Use the same "first thoughts are best thoughts" principle, but applied to direct Kṛṣṇa conscious writing.

Kṛṣṇa conscious topics are satisfying. I like to see Kṛṣṇa in a verse. Sometimes it's hard getting through the externals of the verse. If it's not Śrīla Prabhupāda's book, sometimes it lacks that certainty for me. I think, "What am I doing out here?" But even when I read Kṛṣṇa book, sometimes I can't enter a description. I've read it "too many" times. I am not calm and pure enough, not feeling the need enough, not pure enough to receive it.

If I can at least write something primitive, it can help me, especially at times when the exalted verses don't work for me.

Kṛṣṇa wore the blue *karmikāra* flower behind His ear. One flower and not two has special meaning. He's always talking—even by signals, by dress, gesture—in the language of love.

Why not be with Him in this?

M. said it becomes like a game when I say a piece of writing is not for publishing, but actually I think it is. On a certain level, this can be a kind of foolishness or vanity, but on another, deeper level, I'm making a cru-

cial stand. That is, I write for myself and yet I'm aware that I want to share whatever I find. I don't see this as hypocritical or game-playing. I keep pushing past the boundaries to seek further sincerity in this. I have decided there is no harm, but rather good, in letting readers overhear my private praying. It needn't rob my prayers of their honesty before God.

I admit there is a "trick" to this. It comes from the sold-out dedicated nature of a writer, to give all to others. Strange, but the writing life is reclusive and yet public. I think of someone like the Pope who when he prays, is often televised. That's his duty to be the leader and pray publicly. By contrast, a writer is not so much seen. He doesn't go on his balcony and bless thousands of people in the square by raising his arms to them. Yet he does a similar act alone with his pen. Unless he deliberately throws what he writes into the fire (as the Kotzger did), he's aware that his private work is also meant for others.

It's *both* for himself and others. He doesn't see this as contradictory. It's not. This is especially good for a follower of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Prabhupāda wants us to always be thinking of the welfare of others. I may do this even in my private moments in writing. And when not writing, there too, I may gain a realization and then later I write it and share it.

Dear Lord, you know this. Is it all right? I don't want to "steal" from You or give a secret away. But I've learned (the example of Rāmānuja and the mantra) that if you give something nice to a devotee and he shares it with someone less fortunate, You are pleased. But he has to take this duty seriously, and some things are best kept confidential and told only in a simple way or told to qualified persons.

11:20 A.M. Indoors

The sky is clearing, but still gusty. As I write this, Kirtana-rasa is taking photos.

This is the last session before he goes off to copy them and take them to the USA. But I'll continue writing until Saturday.

This is like "normal" life, coming to the page cold with no project-momentum.

Freer.

It's free, but you have to pay for it. Write with a pitch ax on coal. As if your life depended on it.

Gradually I will put the seminar of Lord Caitanya's talking with Rāmānanda Rāya into shape. It would be a good time now to answer letters, but my mail has all been forwarded to Italy. These sentences are, I hope, a clearing away so we can get at something underneath.

Polite and social, censor your words because someone may read them at the photocopy place.

I keep taking this heavy, gray sweatshirt off and on and off. Be present to write egolessly. (I just glanced at Goldberg's chapter on "first thoughts" and the rules of writing practice, the timed exercise. I don't think I'm her disciple that I have to do it. Who am I as I write? It flashes through my mind that I might have different faces, like masks. I could be the temple president in Newcastle, England; a rubber mask of a gorilla which I bought as a kid at Time Square. Seeing someone wearing a mask—the shock of it, at Halloween. Who is behind the mask? The Lone Ranger and Batman and Robin—masked.

Masked and naked. I could be . . . but I am myself. I don't wish to walk down paths where even a few steps make no sense. At least not now. Why should I always call it "resistance" or "block" or internal censor? I'm

free to not hear that little voice within, not heed him. I'm not sure he's the best I've got. Sure, a voice can supply words constantly, but why listen and write?

I do so with faith that it constitutes a process worth following. Another school of writing might call this spineless. They want to re-write everything five or ten times to get it right. They are writing something structured like an essay or short story.

You mean you refuse to just let thoughts come like be-bop-a-roo?

Yes, that's what I mean.

Then what will you write?

I'll write that the weather is clearing up and Kirtana-rasa is cooking. The electric power went off earlier, but now it's back on. I'll write that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Those who are too materially attached cannot know Him. He is the *sum-mum bonum*.

I'll write that I want to be a devotee. I accept my spiritual master. I told the immigration man at Shannon airport, "Yes" when he asked, "Are you here on vacation?" He stamped me for three months in his lovely country. It's a vacation of sorts—from pipe dreams and pipe holders (there you go) and from choosing—income tax reports—giving into the seduction of allowing words to come, and telling myself, "Go ahead it's not illicit, you don't have much time left to write—speak from the heart."

I'm a man who wants quiet and peace. (I wrote, "I'm a man who mans quiet and peace." I mans quiet and wants.)

I were, was, and do. I go off like a be-bopping trumpet. Why? I don't mean you have to do this, but maybe I've heard too many jazz performances.

I want to write despite my blocks. That means blasting through. Hell, if you blow a few riffs, so what? You're not gonna do that for ten pages. The black birds with "similar" white eyes just landed right outside the window—great, beautiful sight as they land on grass and then rise again. I'd get up and go for the *Birds of Ireland* book, but I don't want to break the flow. They're a common crow. They have discovered the buckwheat pancakes Kirtana-rasa left out there. Very smart birds. Saw it while passing by and descended.

What was I saying? I was saying I don't want to write like jazz but do want free expression—if it will get me off my rear end and into some vital expression.

You couldn't take much (talk much) on walk. Wind. And besides, you are talked out, empty. Walkie-talkie WWI.

The poems of William Stafford—subtle, dreaming, what is he saying? He thinks it's an insult if poems are too clear. I like to be clear and say I saw Kirtana-rasa's muddy boots in the hall. If someone asks me, "Why do you write that?" I don't have to explain. I'm not always so clear either.

College freshman. Umbrella. In a poem by Stafford.

Let go and don't care so much to communicate or be "just right." Breathe and go.

Prabhupāda.

I write them. Some things again and again, without feeling them. If I am to feel, then it may have to be wild.

I like Jagannātha-Kṛṣṇa's taking up causes at Bhakti-vedanta Manor, but he shouldn't tell people I approve. They'll come to me and complain.

If you want to write a book you'll have to exclude things.

Keep writing just to fill the page. Immortal words of bard of Brandon. No brandy, no Mortan, no Mortan Spike, or Spike Jones , just be a devotee, please.

The foolish.

The bishop who did it with a lady.

Forbidden twit, I pray to never,

Deathbed saint with hands folded on chest. But Kṛṣṇa knows he didn't do much.

You'll get people to say, "You're okay. We like what you're doing." Others will say You are a terrible offender.

No way out, so be what you can be and serve your spiritual master. He accepts even imperfect offerings. Don't disobey him.

A goal of first thoughts writing; you don't write to cover up your emotions, "Writing what your mind actually sees and feels."

"They are not a cover-up for what is actually happening or being felt."

I wish I could pour out more confessions of pre-Kṛṣṇa conscious times. My position as a guru necessitates certain caution. Sorry about that. I just paused and wrote some liberating sentence in another pad. Let them stay there for awhile, a forbidden book. It's getting on five to twelve, I'll have to stop in fifteen minutes.

Just starting to warm up. I'm not in Vṛndāvana. Not thinking of it much.

Take off your sweatshirt.

Pray—that this afternoons *jaṇa* session will be okay, on the level that I mean okay, alert, on time—and some prayer content. *Gāyatrī* too.

I'm sorry this is all I can do.

The fire is going down.

Wind hatchets, Mafia broadcasters, and news floods in the pure brain. He tries to memorize everything from *śraddhā* to *prema*, but that doesn't mean he has attained any of it. It just means he can answer a question someone may raise at the end of a lecture. Big deal.

Give us someone who may not know all definitions, but who is a lover of Kṛṣṇa or at least an honest person who does pray to Kṛṣṇa, Please give me the mercy to realize Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or else what is life for?

You'll have to stop. Take off the sweatshirt. Take care your head doesn't get pressured.

Be who you are. And keep your fires of digestion simmering. Lunch is just a stock up time for belly and body; it's not a heaven. Some cooked food eaten and enjoyed in fifteen, twenty minutes is not *Vaikuṇṭha*. But you have faith in *prasādam*.

The little King, Christ in robes is blessing us from the cabinet. He stands among the coffee cups and saucers.

One of the shepherds is an old man. I can tell by the way he walks stiffly in his Wellies and jacket. He's trying to . . . reach the little lamb?

All right, this has probably been the least substantial of my sessions. Nothing for her collection. But you are free to write the worst junk.

To release yourself.

I can't say, and that Kṛṣṇa conscious too—it's *acin-tya*. You can't say, just Kṛṣṇa is God. HE IS SWEET, Rādhā is sweet, we can hear of Her with hearts that are becoming pure by association with Her pure devotees.

I don't have to say.

I can't. And don't know. I'm not a Staten Island Catholic son of a fire captain. I'm not a shmuck—or Kosher Gentile in a college of Jews. I'm not on the subway infatuated by pretty girls. I'm not plotting my spir-

itual demise like Celine or Shelley or Greta Garbo. I'm a man. I'm not living near the George Washington bridge.

I am free, not going back but forward. Yet sometimes I feel for my own past—I feel sorry. Self-pity—and maybe regret that those days and habits (marijuana, LSD) are holding me back now. I could pour out my tears for *that*. Sorry for what I was, but it would be maudlin, better be okay and help others who are suffering now worse than you were with no sign of hope.

Help others.

On the roof.

No, be here now. Be a *sādhaka*. The exact position don't matter. You are practicing somewhere in *śraddhā* or whatever and you will make progress.

You pray to serve. Give lectures. Do what they want you to do and sneak off to write crazy when you can.

Are you "ruined" from writing in the orthodox way? Maybe. Maybe all I'll do is this madness to help myself. Stop for now.

5:15 p.m.

I don't know what to write, but it's all right. I just did a memorization session, trying to grasp the elements of *Mādhurya-kādambinī* in outline. It was fun.

I'd like to look at a map of Europe, but we don't have one. I want to think out and talk with M. about how we'll spend the next four months. It's difficult to figure out all the factors in advance. For example, how much temple visiting and lecturing should I schedule? Sometimes I schedule it, but then feel I am a slave to go from one temple to another with no breaks in between. Or I make a schedule and later discover that

there's no time for a writing retreat. And I want to fit in certain places for sure, whereas others are optional.

Then there are factors like the length of time and mode of travel (road or boat) to get to Greece, and whether we want to go to certain places like Czech. We can discuss a little of this at a time. I was thinking of doing it right now instead of writing. A good excuse to get away from the page. But I'm here.

The examples of unsteadiness in *bhājana-kriyā* (*aniṣṭ-hitā*) are "knockouts." I want to know them and use them in lectures. I recognize myself in the one called "indecision." He speculates as to what he can do, what would be best—between crucial alternatives like whether to be a *grhastha* or *sannyāsī*—and spends much energy in that.

Should I go to Vṛndāvana? Should I preach in the West? Should I write books or write non-books? Should I? *Can* I? Am I doing right? How shall I change? Where shall I go? Can I be different? What is advisable?

Rain and rainbow. Pretty scenes as the white and black seabirds fly up toward the sea—I see them flying and the sea and the rock islands and the rainbow above. The rain tinkles against the window. The sheep are out with no shelter.

Maybe this retreat is getting too long. Take this into account for the next one. M. encourages me. But I have to decide myself. I have very few equals, God-brothers, with whom I have a trusting relationship. Almost none recognize me as a writer or know—or even talk about—the depth of my commitment. When I'm with them, it's assumed that my main activities are *saṅgī* duties, disciples, and yes, "writing," but they don't know about the frequency of retreats and, because only one or two of them even read my books, they don't know of my free-writing path. I have offered

them my underground books, but they don't read them and don't even mention that I gave them to them. As for the books I publish, they are mum to that. If you don't talk with a friend about his main life-activity, what kind of friendship do you have?

Yet I value friendships even without this dimension to them. I don't want a critic for a friend. I want encouragers. My disciples are friends in that way. I'm not going to find fault in them for not being more critical. Just noticing and remarking on another salient feature of my life—few Godbrother friends, and very little friendly recognition that I write poems and creative books.

I have reasoned this out to the conclusion that it's even better for me to be neglected in this way than for devotees to make me an object of interest. I mainly want enthusiasm and freedom to do my work. One devotee recently wrote me that she gave her temple president some forms to sign to vouch for her for at the immigration department. He signed and made no comment, except, "All I can say is that you've passed (as one passes an exam) over the years." She remarked to me, "I'm glad he didn't take a personal interest in my life." If he were interested, she's afraid he would have tried to control her. It's like that with me. Let me write. Let me be known as one who used to be on the GBC, who now gets headaches and wanders around with no set project, elusive figure probably not doing as much as he could.

Therefore I need to know myself by myself. Even among those devotees who are "my" disciples, I don't have many intimate relationships. Mostly they approach me about their problems and interests and I try to encourage them. They are not involved much in *my* interests. But those who are intimate friends, M.,

Bal., Kdd, Ldd, others, yes, others. I should be a friend to all. I wrote a note that I liked how the “underground” instructions are developing, as long as it doesn’t make for jealousy or elitism. But a teacher should be able to teach more confidential subjects to some and not to all.

It hurts if one thinks he’s not among the more confidential ones. Certainly I felt left out if Śrīla Prabhupāda mentioned any group of important disciples and my name was excluded. I shouldn’t do that. My mention here of a few names wasn’t meant to be all in all. Other devotees serve in their own ways, even when not connected to my writing. Or they may be connected by reading the books, even though they are not involved in helping me write them. That’s all I meant.

The shepherd is busy with his stupid sheep. They follow him around, unaware of his final intentions. I look on from a distance . . .

I have to chant *gāyatrī* soon. But can keep writing for fifteen more minutes.

“But if you run regularly, you train your mind to cut through or ignore your resistance. You just do it. And in the middle of the run, you love it . . . Writing is like that too . . . You learn to trust your deep self more and not give in to your voice that wants to avoid writing . . .

“You have to give yourself the space to write a lot without a destination.”

Writing practice. Don’t keep asking, “Is it Kṛṣṇa conscious?” You can ask, but not in a nagging way. Help yourself. Switch into a more Kṛṣṇa conscious gear, just as when in *japa* you notice you’re drowsy and too slow or deep in a distracting train of thought.

Hills and sky and water and land. Bay things. My thumb joint; a little thing. The washing machine two rooms away from here.

Maine woods (a state of mind).

You write whatever comes. Monk meets Mulligan. Mulligan meets Monk. Who is the senior person?

There you go, back to those years. Do you want to hear old sense gratification music? I know you don't. You want less distraction, more focus on Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But you write down old things when they come up.

This writing is uncentered. But maybe it has some good qualities if I look at it later.

Breathe and move on. You are determined to write until six and it doesn't matter what you write. You don't regret the retreat, the writing, but you regret you are not a better devotee. Maybe you'll do a poem tonight.

Just consider: all day you didn't read a single page—not true!—I read for forty-five minutes in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. And aside from that, I spent half an hour on seminar outlines, which is at least related to study. I listened to Śrīla Prabhupāda for about thirty-five minutes. And thirty-two rounds. And an hour memorization session. But yes, I admit I'm not doing a lot of reading as one might expect since I'm on a retreat. Some devotees read five hours or more in times like this.

Several pens are getting stuck. Keep picking up a new one, then go back and try the stuck one again.

12:40 A.M.

Reading for half an hour just before this in *Bhagavad-gītā* commentaries. Why people can't come to Kṛṣṇa. They are after material desires and approach Kṛṣṇa for that. Or they go to demigods for fulfilling these desires. Some worship the impersonal and cannot know Kṛṣṇa. He is covered by His Yoga-māyā. But He's not covered. Those in dualities of love and hate (sense gratification in this world) aren't qualified to know Kṛṣṇa. They have aversion for Him, but those whose sins are mostly eradicated by pious deeds, if they get the association of a pure devotee, can know Him in truth. Those *jñānīs* who want liberation, get it, but they don't attain to pure devotional service to Kṛṣṇa.

Why not always write like this? Because, I've already explained, this note-taking is not personal enough. It is for *sāstra* study and is useful, but I want to know myself better and my mind's workings. Ha, ha. A devotee will laugh at that proposal. Sounds like you are fully engaged in a kind of psychological therapy or self-obsession rather than studying Kṛṣṇa (*Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*), which is the true object for our attention and writing.

Maybe the ultimate in writing what I want can come when I write simple notes about Kṛṣṇa and *sāstra*. I may come to a point of thinking there's no use in going on and on every day to write about how I think and feel. I will transform into a devotee when I'm fully absorbed in chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and hearing *sāstra* from devotees. No need to further analyze it or tell us of your past.

Maybe. You are challenging my free-writing process. My answer is that I'm a writer and keep writing about my foolish self because that's who I actually am.

Bhūrijana might say, "This is all right, but it may involve an indulgence on your part, a fascination with your own heart and soul that will keep you away from approaching Kṛṣṇa." But I see that *study* of *sāstra* sometimes engages only my intelligence and is not fully satisfying. I can't deny my senses and mind in their enjoyment with the world. I try to see it through the *sāstra*.

Writing a lot without a destination—N.G. says a writer will have to expect to do that. Writing practice. Or I might say, "Be prepared to write a lot that doesn't get published, which isn't an essay teaching the perfect philosophy."

Writing practice, will it lead to or help me to approach purer Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Inherently, it doesn't seem to do that. It's used by nondevotees and devotees alike. Only a devotee can make the best use of it, just as with other universal functions, like breathing and living.

Yes, you should always think of Kṛṣṇa and always write of Him. But when you go to write, you find you are impure and distracted, which also happens when you go to chant. This is because I am not yet on the stage of pure devotion.

I'm throwing myself into the effort of dealing with this. I question myself repeatedly and ask my mind, "Why don't you surrender?" I allow the mind to answer me whatever it wants. Then I preach to the mind about why he should surrender. This is one example of how writing can be used. You force yourself honestly and you preach to yourself earnestly.

Writing has value for personal life. When you share this personal writing with other devotees, it makes for personal relationships.

You are questioning, however, whether time spent in this is as valuable as the half hour you just spent read-

ing Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and then Śrīla Prabhupāda. It's not as valuable, in the sense that my mental life isn't as elevated as theirs. But it *is* valuable because I get to know myself and how I need to improve. I'm in less delusion about myself as a result of personal writing.

You ask, "Doesn't the study of the pure philosophy cover everything that you cover in your personal writing?" I think it doesn't cover personal details and feelings.

But are those details worth pursuing?

It might be answered, "It is not possible to repress or deny those details. It is who we actually are now, a combination of perfect teachings we've heard, plus the conditioned person who we are."

Why do I put myself through this?

I enjoy self-expression?

But does it lead to love of God, back to Godhead?

I need to be careful not to assert this too much—attention to myself rather than to Kṛṣṇa—or it becomes a philosophy or way of life. It may be that some renunciation of self-expression or interest in self-improvement is good. One throws up one's hands like Draupadī, and depends on the execution of *bhakti* to deliver him. This personal writing might be seen as my method of therapy. But any therapy, astrology, "Twelve Steps," etc., isn't as important as direct application of oneself in *śravaṇam-kīrtanam*.

Yes, but by personal writing I clear the way for that. I also say that by writing I provide instruction and interesting reading for many devotees who are struggling, like me on, the *bhakti* path. I am thus serving them. (I hesitate to say I am entertaining them.)

Some readers balk. They say, "Why not write what we can accept 100% as the Absolute Truth? Why express so much your own doubts?" Others say, "We like the way you write ('candid and delightful')—which enable us to see a devotee in the act of trying to improve himself."

I go on writing. Someone said I'm a reporter on behalf of the spiritual world. I also report on the less than pure activities of a *sādhaka's* mind. I don't repress the less than pure thoughts that come. I don't endorse them, but I express them—don't repress them.

I appreciate this gentle kind of dialogue or question and answer writing where it's not a fight, not the "gremlin" versus "the free-writer." I allow doubts to be raised by the devotee-self and I answer in favor of my writing, but I'm leaving it open to possibilities. I'm not blindly defending free-writing.

The question began because I just did half an hour of *Gītā* study and wondered, why not continue that for another hour? Why this instead? How is this a more worthy pursuit?

I don't have a pat answer. But I know I crave to do this kind of writing and get the satisfaction it brings.

I've been facing myself in writing. Facing my mental life. And now not claiming that whatever I write should be published, *yet still it's worth writing*. (This has been M.'s point of view.) My intimate disciples have been gentle and submissive with me about this. They don't want to censor their spiritual master if he's writing. They want to encourage him in what he thinks is helpful for his *bhajana*. But I—and they—should assess what to do with these writings. Up to now we have mostly published all of them. I have shaped them as books, as adventures in self-discovery which people can take as

diary reading, etc. I have employed a sense of art in doing this.

But with these *japa* retreat diaries in March 1993, I am going a step beyond writing a book of my self-discovery intended to be shared with friendly readers. Now I am more free to write just because I write. To see it more for what it is as a raw exercise—and not at that same time try to shape it into usable literature in the form of a book.

The artist has predominated in other free-write books.

Now even he is taking a back seat. Writing is writing itself.

If I want to write, I will; if I want to pause and not write, I will—I like to think I have those options. I'm not driven to communicate or express. I'm free. (I shouldn't hold on to a "romantic" or even "tragic" or "heroic" image of myself as an artist-writer who is impelled to write by a higher source of power.)

I'm going a step further. But still a writer. Just doing it as *bhajana*—I hope it will be acceptable to Kṛṣṇa as such.

Kṛṣṇa says about Himself (am I not interested?) that He covers His form with a curtain of *māyā*. He covers knowledge of Himself with *Yoga-māyā*. Only those who are pure and who hear from the attractive devotees about Kṛṣṇa, can know something about Him.

When we go to a Vaiṣṇava he doesn't talk so much about himself. He tells us of Kṛṣṇa, the *tattva-jñāna* and the actual pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. He thanks us for asking him about Kṛṣṇa so that he is able to think and talk in that way. Thus we all become merged in *hari-kathā*, which is the topmost engagement.

When someone comes to me, however, I don't want to see him. I'm busy writing—something for his benefit. When I do speak with devotees, it's usually not all *hari-kathā*, not when we meet informally. That's because they are interested in something else, their own struggles, etc., and also because I am not so interested in *hari-kathā* that I overflow with it.

Acknowledging this, it may be best that I not publish so much writing that is less than *hari-kathā*. My God-brothers know I write less than this, and that's why they are not interested in reading it. They prefer to read scriptures and comments on them by the pure devotee.

The things I face are not easy to face. I like it though—the plunge into confronting the issues, “Why don't I surrender fully? Why don't I always think of Śrīla Prabhupāda and serve him better? Why can't I have Kṛṣṇa right now? What am I thinking now?”

Not easy to face. It may seem like an over-endeavor. There's fault in the process, but Kṛṣṇa says don't give it up.

There is “heart” in these writings. I want to be better and more pure and not so concerned with lesser things. My writing is open admission of my being on a lesser stage. It's embarrassing, but I don't stop just because it exposes me as lesser. Indirectly I challenge other brothers to be as truthful as I am and admit they're on a lower platform. I don't mean to challenge them and they needn't see it that way. We want to be kind to each other.

The *sannyāsi* who distributes books is also indirectly challenging me, “Why don't *you* perform this austerity?” Let's see the individual efforts more as contri-

butions we can learn from and respect rather than something to completely challenge.

I have to leave this session. Again, let me state it: I'm writing for my own purposes. Trying to help myself in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I trust the writing process. I write honestly *what is with me* and, of course, I desire to improve. But I can't imitate or imagine I'm on a higher platform than I am. I dig up truths in this way that I couldn't discover by not doing this. Studying scripture by itself wouldn't *express* this. I must study scripture, but take the time to express how I feel about it.

I'm writing in this way, for my own improvement, and not worrying further as to how it may be published. I'm giving therefore more creative work to my editor.

Enough for now. Go and chant and pray to Kṛṣṇa. This writing requires humility and *japa* does also. All arts require humility and honesty. I am begging for attraction to the holy name.

There's nothing to say except, "Please help me." Other than that, I'm saying to myself, "Here are some ideas how to help yourself." And I'm saying, "Here are some obstacles." And I'm saying, "This is what is happening" (when I write as a *reporter on reality*).

10:55 A.M., Cliff



High point in morning, now I have to follow it up. Dry chanting 10:30-11. Kirtana-rasa left us, his cheery

countenance, willingness to cook, sense of protectiveness of another one in the house—I sit in “his” room and feel his absence. I wish him well. All friends moving here and there under Kṛṣṇa’s protection, but death is inevitable. He wishes me a safe journey to Italy.

I don’t write this only for effect.

The blue page and over it, the moving shadow of my hand, a strange lumpy shape.

The tide is high, but water is not rough, sun coming in and out on the water. At the end of every sentence is silence and a potential stuck point, admitting we’ve run out of gas.

I want to hear those tapes. At breakfast (*upma*) we heard Śrīla Prabhupāda talking to devotees in a room in India. They laughed like children at his strong logic, defeating an atheistic argument. The challenge was, “They say no one knows anything.” Śrīla Prabhupāda replied that if they say that, then they also don’t know—therefore they are wrong when they claim, “No one knows anything.”

He spoke how imperfect suggests the existence of perfect. A devotee spoke: “They say Indira Gandhi knows.” Śrīla said, “Yes, she has chastised the Pakistanis [this was just after the war of 1971], but she has not chastised the cow slaughterers. Pakistan killed only a few men and she took stern measures and went to war, but thousands of innocent animals are being slaughtered, why doesn’t she do something?”

He spoke of the relative world and the absolute. Indira Gandhi is relatively strong. Therefore India could conquer Pakistan. But if America or China had entered the war against India . . . our strengths are relative.

I retain this here by putting it in writing. I like such preaching. I also want to hear what Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa

are doing. It is all one philosophy. I need the foundation—the argument against the atheist who threatens the entire structure of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It is not mythology. Śrīla Prabhupāda will protect me from that. He will also take me to Vṛndāvana.

He spoke of a preacher's compassion. He said we may not be compassionate, but someone else is—the preachers who are concerned for everyone, who want to give out Kṛṣṇa consciousness as the solution to misery.

Hear the whole spectrum. Write some of it here.

You mean it's just like notes in a diary?

I mean writing practice. Practicing to trust the mind and write deeply, what comes, unafraid.

The waves beat in. I no longer have bad habits of illicit sex. I gave that up along with intoxication in 1966. Strictly observe.

Skip lines. Skip over the past. You don't need to confess your past sins on this page. You have been forgiven, rest assured. Don't overdo this thought that you still suffer from impressions of sins committed many years ago. Yet it's true, the subtle desire for sex life still lingers with you. But by Kṛṣṇa's and Prabhupāda's grace, you are able to control it. You know you have to watch it or it could re-appear in your life. I don't want it.

I was happy this morning to declare to M. that I'm enthusiastic to take time in Europe, in between temple visits, for hearing tapes, writing, etc. My *bhajana-kuṭīr* life. I'll also have to prepare for a seminar. Time out.

We'll plan for it. I'm enthusiastic for it, but I have to expect ups and downs within any day. The steady desire to engage myself remains. Gull glides slowly and

lands on the water. He can do it, in the Atlantic bay. Some of them do it way out at sea. *Acintya-śakti*.

The islands in the sun. I hunched against the sheep wall on the last edge of land over the rocky shore.

M. has to cook now that Kirtana-rasa's gone. It's a chore for him, one he's not confident in or expert at as he is in driving and maintaining a van. Tomorrow we fast for Rāma-navami.

From *Bones*: "We must continue to open and trust in our own voice and process. Ultimately if the process is good, the end will be good. You will get good writing." I'm willing to be patient, as I am in *japa* (despite my laments). In *japa* I have no doubt in the process. *Śāstra* declares it as the *yuga-dharma*. Lord Caitanya and Śrīla Prabhupāda teach it as foremost practice. I don't have the same full faith in writing the way I do, and I express this often. Brothers don't encourage me. M. said for me, writing is one of the nine processes of devotional service, but most devotees don't even know I take it so seriously. Very, very few practice such a *sādhana*. Almost no one at all. I'm alone. But that doesn't make it wrong. It's my service. We all have service and this is mine. In that sense, I'm not alone; I do what every devotee does. We pick a service and work at it wholeheartedly. Mine happens to be writing. I write books. And I write to write. I practice in order to keep fit in writing and fit in devotional life.

When doubt comes, I may think I am following some American, permissive, spirit technique. Something merely psychological. That doubt will be hard to shake. I am in league with teachers of a process. But what they teach is universal. It's there for whoever wants to take it and it can be used for any aim. I use it in Kṛṣṇa's service.

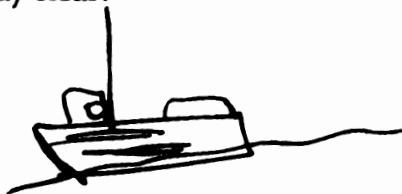
That's how I answer the doubt—today.

Rocks, shelves of them, heaps of them, immovable and resting on the earth. Kṛṣṇa holding them; them with souls inside. No one knows. The water rubs against them and over many years the rocks wear down, but they are very enduring. The sea seems like more of a changing thing, but it is also enduring. I observe this.

The devotees with Śrīla Prabhupāda in India, 1971, asked, "The scientists may ask, 'You say we are wrong, but how can you prove *you* are right?'" Śrīla Prabhupāda said we have *Bhagavad-gītā*. I want to turn to the *Gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* with faith.

Kinds of unsteady *bhajana-kriyā*: false enthusiasm; indecision; sporadic practice; war against the senses in their desire for uncontrolled enjoyment; inability to keep vows (every day he promises and every day he's unable to keep it), enjoying the material facilities offered to one who practices *bhakti*. Learn all these facts from *Mādhurya-kādambinī*, including facts of *ruci*, *āsakti*, *rati*, *bhāva*, and *prema*. And in *prema*, *sneha*, *māna*, *pranaya*, *rāga*, *anurāga*, *mahā-bhāva*. Even when I don't realize it, it helps to at least know the facts.

The cruelty of people in the world. Cruel to each other and to animals and to the earth. Violent. In ISKCON we have a saner world. Still there are wrong dealings, sad failures. The temples in the US are deserted, some of them. M. warned me not to get into the grip of bullies who would manipulate me. Yes, I try to stay clear.



I said I'm ready to leave this retreat. I am satiated with living in this house and the sea and isolation here. This usually happens to me wherever I take a retreat, after a month. But I shouldn't mistake this symptom. Mistake: "I want to get out and do lots of active, outgoing preaching. Visit in succession many temples and give lectures and feel what that's like. Swim in mainstream, contribute in that most recognizable way."

That's a mistake because when I do re-enter that program, I soon feel fenced in and want to get away for another break. What I grow tired of in one retreat is those specific circumstances and that specific time. I just need a break from it and soon I'm ready and eager to go to a new hideout, make a new calendar with days to check off, days in which I can accomplish a new project.

My main mode—if I had my way—is living alone, and to refresh myself, I like to get out and preach. Also, I have to preach and travel for other reasons—including keeping a suitable profile and to satisfy devotees who want to see me. Teaching seminars is a good way to do this.

I'm writing honest stuff here for myself, and you can tell by reading it. It's serious, but it's private. I also say things about me and ISKCON that are confidential and not suitable for a book. I mention this as a recognizable symptom of this "no destination" writing. There will be less of it that can be published. But it's all worthwhile, part of the process. I *need* to discuss these things. Paper is a good place for it.

At most, fifteen minutes more in this session. Try to find a more comfortable sitting position so you can stay with it.

Goldberg advocates that writing practice is like a warm-up. You can use the voice you find here for other writing projects. You should, however, never give up the practice That makes sense and I'm sure everyone finds it agreeable. But I am writing *only* practice. I can't bear to write in some other discipline or way. I want to put everything in here. She says you can use what you gained in writing practice to write a novel, a memoir, a PhD thesis, a business letter. Letters I still write, but other than that I want the writing practice (with slight adjustments) to be my exclusive genre of communication.

I use it to write memoir, autobiographical novel, my *Shack Notes* type books. At least that's the roll I'm on since *Shack Notes*. It feels okay. And it's evolving now to the point where I just want to do it more as pure writing practice for the aims Goldberg mentions as the main ones in writing practice.

At first I "used" the practice skills more to get my aims. Now I'm practicing more without aiming at a book I want to begin, work through and complete in X days at X writing retreat, for editing and publishing as soon as possible. I've gone beyond that, and this three-week period in Ireland is the declaration of independence. My collection of Writing Sessions here is up to 575 pages on legal pads and going strong with at most three days left.

Five minutes left. Finish your exams, students. Write quickly what the teacher wants. But say it with feeling, because you believe it; you believe also in the academic system. Thus you are an ideal college student. Well behaved, ambitious, yet quiet. Going for all "A's" in English. Wanting to be praised, of course. Wanting to actu-

ally love literature and to write it, like the greats do, D.H. Lawrence and everyone.

But those days are over. Do I still have those “achiever” traits? Want Gurudeva to like me and give an “A”? Want to love Kṛṣṇa in the *paramparā*? No harm. Purify it. Become an ideal *śiṣya*. But you have to do more than listen in class and do homework. You have to work for Gurudeva’s mission and live with and cooperate with his followers. Take on burdens for him and face bravely the opposition to Lord Caitanya’s *saṅkīrtana*.

I work in the department that purifies the system, *sannyāsa*—for renunciation and devotion and learning.

Green water, blue water, white foam—proud that *I can see the colors, I’m always proud of myself*. Get rid of that, *trṇād api*, if you want to chant constantly.

Sit on rug, sunshine there.

Stay awake and push the beads.

I love you for that.

Say what Kṛṣṇa is and what He does. This is an obvious thing: a Kṛṣṇa conscious person will not write so much of himself, even as a servant, or of his service—but he’ll write of Kṛṣṇa. He may write of his service, yes—but always in a practical way, to serve nicely Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and Gurudeva. And always he thinks of *Him*. The *gopīs* did that. Keep this in mind. Let’s see Kṛṣṇa writing here.

5:05 p.m.

Indoors. Just did memorization work with M.—states of *prema*, *sneha*, *māna*, etc., up to *mahā-bhāva*, *madana mahā-bhāva* of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. Gradually I put together the theoretical knowledge.

Rainbow.

Tomorrow we have no car, so I'll have to take a morning walk in the backyard. It was nice having three people. With just two I'm aware that if M. breaks down, I'm on my own. I discussed this with him last year and he graciously referred to it later, "Say, I get shot by terrorists . . . " Well, I'd still be able to phone our friends in various parts of the world. Unlikely scenarios and if they take place, they are what they are and needn't be imagined beforehand.

I live out scenes like this in dreams every day, when asleep. Girl behind me on shuttle airplane, New York bus. When we were delayed an hour and thought it could be two (or more), she phoned her people from her seat and described it as "a nightmare." She had a baby with her which made it difficult. The baby—Allison was its name—started pouting, so the woman got off the plane while we were delayed at the gate. It turned out to be only a one-hour delay, but she saw it as a nightmare and chose to get off. She may have undergone just as much inconvenience by not sticking with our flight.

I've said enough, some part of me says. You can't expect me to just turn on and come up with fresh, vital issues. It's getting late in the day. I am not in a mood to agitate myself just because it's time for a Writing Session. After all, it's not that I have to produce a certain amount of pages, or force myself to keep writing if I don't want to and if I prefer to do something else.

I agree. Yet when you haven't finished your thirty-two rounds you keep going, don't you, even if you don't feel like it? True.

If I don't write during a Writing Session, I wind up feeling guilty. But I see a certain point where it is coun-

terproductive to keep pushing myself if I'm not prepared to surrender to writing.

Machado in the book box, and Robert Lowell. I have a use for them, but not this time. Christian prayer seems far away; unlikely I'd busy myself with Teresa of Avila because I think, "Why be reading this instead of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmi?" *Entering* was just published, second edition. I have to appreciate it in its historical context. How do I feel about the devotees selling it, introducing new readers to it?

Wind, wind. It has been a very good place for quiet and no interruptions. The shepherd's act is distant, no words or looks exchanged. We sit on the edge of the land facing the Atlantic and my room is heated. A good place. I didn't accomplish some book as I've done in other places. But I've got this, twelve legal pads of sessions. And I'm ready for more.

Do not slight Rāmānanda Rāya, thinking him to be a *sūdra*, a man of the world, said Sārvabhauma to Lord Caitanya.

I look up and see M. in the far meadow. He's looking for a gap or low point in the fencing where I can cross over when I go out tomorrow morning for my walk.

It seems strange that after such pure doses of *kṛṣṇa-prema* I get in reading in *paramparā*, I still go back to the "State Fair" or consider reading something nondevotional. Well, I don't "go back" in a voluntary re-investment of time. It just comes upon me. I do defer, I say, "Thanks, but no thanks" to Merton's *Desert Wisdom*, to Miller on Rimbaud, etc. I check such thing out as quickly as possible, like a soldier who defuses bombs. I

look at it, and put it aside. Sometimes it takes several sessions of ten minutes or so before I'm rid of it. I'm not going back, rather I'm dealing with what I already am. I don't hate it, don't hate myself or my past—it all leads me to the present auspicious place.

I should regret, but I don't. At least I'm not going to sentimentalize by re-investment of time. One exception is my requesting to hear *A Love Supreme*. Even that will probably be a matter of hearing some of it because I keep thinking about it, then letting it go. You can't just cut off all these things. There's an art to letting them go. Kṛṣṇa will ultimately let you forget it all totally.

For now I dream—that I am supporting my father against criticism. I feel pro-Dad. How does it come? It just does. It's my make-up. I'm a devotee with links to Śrīla Prabhupāda, but I was something else; I was in illusion. That is what must be dealt with and dropped in the most effective way.

Mostly it's a matter of pursuing the present Kṛṣṇa conscious opportunities and by *ruci*, I won't want to hear, see, touch, go—to anything except the higher taste of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I won't see Kṛṣṇa consciousness as Indian and myself American; I won't insist that I have a Western heritage and roots. I won't see Lord Caitanya's culture of music and art and religion as Bengali.

It's true I'm always a bit Western—more so when this body is in the West, but in India also. Deal with it. Be a Hare Kṛṣṇa devotee in the style of Prabhupāda who knew (only he knew) how to allow people to be members of nations, not repressing it, but using it to help their nation come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I'm an international Hare Kṛṣṇa member, speaking and writing American-English and all this can be used in his service.

But don't cry for or with Judy Garland. Don't re-invest. Be a *sannyāsī* inner and outer as he should be. Even if you like to indulge in past culture, don't do it. If you ever do "for research" or "relaxation" be careful. Don't "O.D." on poison. Better to be safe than sorry.

Soon I'll be going to Italy. I can have pasta *prasādam*—pizza, spaghetti, the works. It's all possible—but no sin. Keep the sense gratification down. Serve your lord and master.

And writing practice? You know better than I. Keep writing true to Kṛṣṇa consciousness

☉ April 1 ☉

12:45 A.M.

I am meeting the challenge of being motivated (inspired) to write in full Writing Sessions during a retreat, even though I am not achieving a book as a result.

This means I'm giving up the subtle development of themes for a book as I've done in my "narrative" thread in the other manuscript books done in retreats. (Or out of retreats, but over a period of time and pursuing a theme—as in *Lessons*—or a "story," as in *Before It's Too Late*.)

I think it's okay. I start from scratch with each Writing Session. If there are themes and narrative developments, I'm not pre-determining them or shaping them.

I may ask, "How long are you going to keep this up?" Indefinitely. I may at some point again do a book during a retreat. Or I may publish what I write—that is, the editor may make a collection of a year's writing. If my worry is—"If I write like this, how will I be able to publish and satisfy my readers and the need to publish, which is the function of the author and of GNP?"—

The answer is "Don't worry, you've already written enough works that are being readied for 1993. And don't worry because out of the mass of Writing Sessions you're doing now, new book(s) can be put together."

I believe this and I'm going forward. I'm establishing deeper in myself the conviction and practice that daily writing is my *bhajana*. I hope to develop the ability to enter deeply into such practice at any time and any place.

The only way is to write what is urgent, be honest, and steer to Kṛṣṇa. Leave a trail of such writing and send it to the typist. Later you can decide what to do with it.

Sometimes your topics seem not so "urgent." But it is what you have to say at that session and honestly it's all you can think of to say, all that Kṛṣṇa will allow you to say. By this process I get a better feel for how ability to write comes in cycles and how it is not within my power. I can only serve as the instrument. The process should enable me to feel (experience) this more; I am not acting as a controller when I write. I just write what comes and I hope it comes under the higher dictation of Kṛṣṇa.

It's like a letter to the world (as Emily Dickenson said of her work) because writing involves communication. It's . . .

Write and photocopy. I am thinking of "ending the Castlegregory Writing Sessions" and sending them as a unit to America. But I needn't think so much in a compartmental way. I can continue writing in these legal pads and mailing them as long as they physically hold up in the mail, which I think they will. I can change to other notebooks (spiral bound) if it suits me and gives

me a nice feeling, and reserve the legal pads for retreat times. The main thing is to keep going. Thus the "blue legal pad series" will end in a couple of days when I leave this place, simply because we will run out of that supply.

Similarly, with the poems. I didn't write a book of them here. I wrote happily, prolifically, on big sheets of newsprint and dictated them onto tapes. Yes, I expressed feelings of being here and now leaving here. That's only human. But it needn't constitute the shutting down of inspiration and practice, even if I actually start to write in a different way once I leave Castle-gregory. Any selection for publication which captures that series flavor, can be done later by editors.

Chilly during the night. Rather than put on a sweater, I zipped myself up into the hood of the sleeping bag and added a second blanket covering the bag. It was okay. I don't know if I can continue to rise at midnight once we visit temples. But why automatically give it up? Why not continue to try for it as long as my body doesn't seem over-tired? Maybe my physical system has already accepted it. See it as a sign of advancement (not needing so much sleep) and humbly accept it as Kṛṣṇa's mercy on me. Don't take it cheaply as something that doesn't matter one way or the other. It is significant to get this extra hour and I very much appreciate it. But if I start to keep later hours in the temples, as is likely; then I have to adjust it.

Soon we'll be living in the van again and not spread luxuriously through two rooms. And without the feeling of physical security I get living and sleeping in houses. Staying parked at a temple is more secure, but then P-rest stops on the highway . . . It's coming up, so

get ready for it. I can't expect the peace and ease of my present routine. See the good and advantage in what I'll be doing.

Write and be detached, even if something gets lost. Be prepared. In his list of most essentials, Jack Kerouac has "Accept loss forever." We don't lose because any service done for Kṛṣṇa never suffers loss or diminution. So I request you always write in devotional service. Don't get carried away with the concept or identity of yourself as a writer, but always a devotee who is writing.

Diary lines. Don't be shy to write some diary sentences. They are excellent springboards and also need no justification. But don't stay only with them.

I did more outlining on the seminars this morning. Each day whenever I can, add something. In this way, it will develop. I'm planning four seminars all on the same topic of Lord Caitanya's talks with Rāmānanda Rāya: three days at Villa Vṛndāvana, four days at Inis Rath, twenty-lecture seminar at VIHE, Vṛndāvana, and then seven days at Gitā-nāgarī in January of '94.

There will be time. In that time I am making choices. Don't assume my choices are correct. Yet I have to go ahead boldly and act. Try to correct and adjust. Regret the mistakes. When appropriate, ask forgiveness and make amends. But there's no guarantee against making mistakes as long as we are fallible in this world. Writing and publishing are not an exception to this. The main thing is sincerity to make a presentation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Or, sincere work. Honest writing. Kṛṣṇa will see the good in it. In every work there is imperfection, just as in fire there is smoke. Don't abandon your duty.

What does end here is the *japa* retreat of thirty-two rounds. For better or worse.

Today is Rāma-navami, appearance day of Lord Rāma. We are not in a temple and will have no formal observance except to fast from breakfast. I here offer my humble obeisances to Lord Kṛṣṇa in His form as Rāma, *rāmādi mūrtiṣu*. I remember reading the *Rāmāyaṇa* in 1967 and liking it so much that I wrote "The Glories of Rāmacandra" for *BTG*. I used to sing to Hanumān at night in my perch in the Boston storefront. I wanted to be a *brahmacārī* and to be brave against the demons in my world—to be strong and yet an obedient servitor of Lord Rāma. Hear the exploits of Hanumān, hear the ideal leadership and responsibility of Rāmacandra. Everyone would like to be guided by an ideal Rāma-rāja government but it's not possible without Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Bow down to Him. My "*bhāva*" is to worship Kṛṣṇa in Vraja, but I see how Rāma is attractive to His followers. I will not have occasion to enter *rāma-līlā* today, except maybe we will have a reading. That would be nice. Don't just eat and feast.

Coming to the end of this note pad and this session.

Kṛṣṇa is the proprietor. All work and its results should be offered for His pleasure. You are so careful to always tell us how *you* feel. Please also tell us how Kṛṣṇa feels.

