

*The Worshipable Deity
and Other Poems*

1984

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BY SATSVARŪPA DĀSA GOSWAMI

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*The Worshipable Deity
and Other Poems
1984*

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

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Prefatory Poem

Our poem has a point —
the name and form of Kṛṣṇa,
the instructions of the *Gītā*
from a straightforward friend.

A poem has to point
like a branch to see the moon through.
The direction is to Kṛṣṇa,
but this viewpoint
is unwanted by most.

Some like to hear that we are all alone,
yet we can smoke-signal from separate fires.
“This world is all,” some say. “It’s a mystery;
it’s good, but it ends.”

He never said it was easy
in this world of *māyā*
to find a Kṛṣṇa-desiring soul.
But if I point to Kṛṣṇa,
someone will see.

Introduction To Some Poems

If You'll Listen

The kite blows away,
the clouds stay for a day.
A power saw buzzes and is gone.
Even a beach is not forever.
But I'm gathering them together,
phenomenal and noumenal,
in a tribute-recognition
of the Almighty One.

Like threads of a cloth up and down,
everything depends on Him,
like pearls on a string.
Now if you'll listen . . .

To A Disciple in the Hands of the Deprogrammers

Just as with Muktipāda,
Kṛṣṇa will protect you
if you hold on tight;
they cannot rob your devotion.

Sometimes He puts His devotees in distress,
and we shouldn't speculate
or doubt why He does it.
We should simply pray to serve Him.

Pray to remember Him,
and I am praying too:

Dear Lord, this boy has come to You
and he is earnestly serving Your *saṅkīrtana*.
He was on the street selling Prabhupāda's books
when they took him.
He tries hard,
but he is not Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī,
nor am I.
Please direct us as you like.
We pray that he may remember You,
because remembering Your Name
banishes all fear.

Longings

1

When will the day come when I will always personally
remember Śrīla Prabhupāda?
Will the day ever come when I will go to him again
with a heart full of submissive desire to be his servant?
Will I ever attain to love of his lotus feet?
I know that I will always serve my master,
Śrīla Prabhupāda, in the company of my
Godbrothers and other future followers of
Prabhupāda. At least in this lifetime I will always
offer obeisances before the *mūrti* of Śrīla Prabhupāda,
and somehow I will engage with his devotees in the
kīrtana and preaching of the *saṅkīrtana* movement.
But will I ever attain to the pleasures known to the
surrendered servants of Prabhupāda?
When will I suffer on his account and feel his smiling
pleasure?

2

When will I lose all envy toward the glorious activities of
great devotees of Śrīla Prabhupāda?
When will I do his bidding with a happy heart?
When will I be able to take part in the Māyāpura festival,
feeling transcendental bliss in the company
of devotees?
Only then will I be able to see the Deity of

Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa with love-anointed eyes.
Only then will I be able to chant *japa* hour after hour
in prayerful concentration.
Will these things ever be possible in this lifetime?
Am I too polluted by my many years of sinful life and
past lives of sin?
When will I realize that the personal *darśana*
of Prabhupāda is available most intimately to the
preacher who boldly goes out on Prabhupāda's
account and preaches *harināma*?
I am wondering and lamenting about these things
while trying to remember Śrīla Prabhupāda.



More Longings

1

I am longing to be a pure servant of Prabhupāda.
I want to ride in a car with him and carry his suitcase
along with his dictaphone, and I want to arrange his
plane flights and go with him as he preaches
around the world.
I long for the pure consciousness of the servant
by which his eternal service is available.
Then I may answer when he rings his bell, and I may come
before him in readiness, humility, worshiping his
association, and accepting him completely as
my master and best friend.
But for this I lack the pure surrender.

2

I will do as he says, hear what he teaches, and accept
no one else as my *guru*.
I will go to Māyāpura and Vṛndāvana as his follower.
I will study the *śāstras* only on his order,
and through his Bhaktivedanta purports.
I do not care for any other study in the name of scholarship,
or any other austerity or realization — except
what he gives and what he deems to be right.
Yet I lack deep love, and so I remain
struggling in this world,
wanting to be closer to Prabhupāda.

What Can I Do?

I can't even unhook the chains of the porch swing,
and all at once I cannot answer fifty letters.
I am also unable to reach the stage of pure chanting,
and neither can I energetically work
as a problem solving manager for twelve hours a day.

What can I do?

I can chant sixteen rounds of *mahā-mantra* daily,
I do read a page or two,
I help to keep our temples open,
although whatever I do is by Kṛṣṇa's grace.
And I was thinking in the car
en route to Vṛndāvana,
"Let me be honest."

Arcā-Vigraha
(*The Worshipable Deity*)

1
Śrīla Prabhupāda

Because the *mūrti* is somehow him,
therefore it is absolutely him.
And any worshiper has the right
to dress, garland, and feed him.
All are chosen servants now —
if you will receive him with care,
he will stay in your home,
giving purpose to a life.

Some nights I surrender,
and he knows, smiles.
I can touch him
and bow down.

One brother said, "I realized
Prabhupāda was my only friend."
I lectured to him, "No, appreciate others.
You are not alone with only him."
Now I realize how he was right:
when all else fails, Prabhupāda doesn't.

When I was tired of the world,
and no one understood,

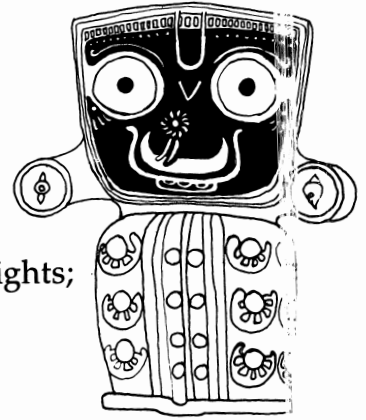
I appealed to co-workers,
"Let us always stay together."
But they joked in reply:
"Is there a threat if we don't?"
"How about a two-year contract?"
Both are true in Prabhupāda —
he is keeping us together,
and he is keeping me together.
This *mūrti* is nice.

2

Lord Jagannātha

Who hears and sees
our foibles, the deadness,
our solitary joy,
who consents to be carried —
my Lord Jagannātha.

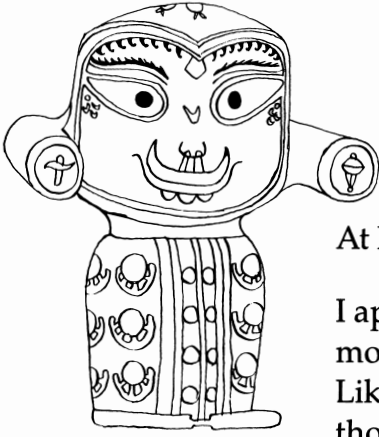
To hold His weighty form,
to dress Him in fine clothes,
to glimpse into His eyes
is the constant rhythm of days and nights;
when LJ rises, I rise
when LJ rests, then so do I,
and His food is my diet.



Crossing past the border guards,
"A small art doll, some Indian statues" —

they don't know they are seeing God.

Lord of the universe, Jagannātha Svāmī,
please accept our fresh water,
please reside in our hearts.
Spread Your rays throughout the world,
or all is nothing.



3

Lord Balarāma

I do not know You well, Lord Balarāma,
but in this world, whom *do* I know?
At least to me You are the Supreme Unknown.

I appreciate You
more than anyone else I meet.
Like the people on this airplane,
though they move, talk, emote,
they have no signs of higher life,
but You have playful, silent, majesty.

Though my devotion unto You
is like an almost-dead battery,
I rejoice to see You anywhere,
while I reject vivacious *femmes fatales*.

Bright-white, red-mouthed Godhead,
I aspire to be Your worshiper.
O Supreme Unknown,
kindly be more visible unto me.

I've seen You for many years,
wherever we go.
When I pray, I don't know
whether to turn
to You or Prahlāda.
I think, "I'm like him, small."
Or, "I want to be like him,
faithful, transcendental,
so let me pray to him."
Yet for shelter he prays to You.

Wherever we go,
we should remember You
when we are afraid.
But another fear
is if You don't appear,
what will that mean?
I am no Prahlāda. Why should You
rescue me from a jam that I deserve?
Yet wherever we go,

we worship You,
and it's not just official;
You are in our hearts,
within and without,
on every temple wall,
and the demons *are* attacking,
like in Baltimore with shotguns,
but by Your grace we were unharmed
and the culprits were arrested.

You are the protector of the altar,
the Deity of the Deities,
the expansion of Lord Kṛṣṇa
to protect us all.

My prayer is to remember You
and to be unafraid.
Let happen what You will,
we pray *to not forget You*.
Yato yato yāmi
tato nṛsimhaḥ.

Miami Beach *Karma*

1

The old ones are sad to see,
as they look out at the sea —
Illusion's last comforts,
a short stroll to the beach,
until the soul departs.

2

And some workers have left a palm tree
lying on the ground.

I thought they would plant it.

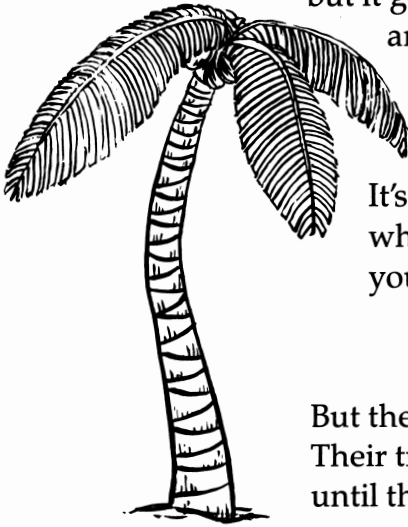
They had a truck to move it,
and shovels and a water hose,
but it got to be 5 P.M.,

and the lights are on now
as it lies overnight, uprooted,
waiting to be planted tomorrow,
unless the soul departs.

It's not as sad as with people because
when you are a tree lying on the ground,
you can't fall down much further.

3

But the young are shouting, trying.
Their truth is flesh and frisbees
until the soul departs.



They're blinded day and night.
They are the most unfortunate,
and so am I;
I cannot make them listen
to a monk like me.

They're too far gone,
woman and man,
into radio and surf —
unless before the soul departs
they get a book by Prabhupāda,
where a single line can save them.

The Place Doesn't Matter

In the cramped office of Guyana's embassy
I read in the *Kṛṣṇa* book how the cowherdsmen
worried over Kṛṣṇa, but by the grace of Lord Hari
they saw that He was saved from witches like Pūtanā.
It was no problem reading there
under the picture of President Forbes Burnham.

Riding downtown past Port of Spain Rastafarians,
whose long tangled hairlocks tumbled in the breeze,
past movie houses showing *Suzanne*,
I heard a tape of Prabhupāda asserting.
"How fortunate," he said,
"are the youth of Europe and America
who have taken to it."

On the last stretch of ditch-marked country road,
I looked through *Perfect Questions, Perfect Answers*.
Now here on the desk is the photo
of young Abhay Caran, with shaved head.
This is in Trinidad,
but the place doesn't matter.
Reading and hearing
makes minute-to-minute
return to Vaikuṇṭha.

Songs of Viṣṇu Dāsa

Viṣṇu dāsa comes before me,
in violet shirt, shaved head.
He keeps writing songs
but leaders laugh;
“No one seems to understand.”

How can I be deaf to you?
Your rhyming rock lines,
songs-with-a-message,
strike you as bright and right.
While traveling in the van
from San Fernando, you feel inspired.
Will the doggerel sell?
Will it help spread this movement?
Should you try to snuff it out?
But it's like a river underground.
I know what you mean.

You want kind response?
Listen, it doesn't matter
if you don't succeed,
just keep on serving,
selling Prabhupāda's books in Trinidad,
and go on writing songs
while riding from San Fernando.

Write, Viṣṇu dāsa,
of the soul and the Supreme

though the patterns are nothing new,
and the verse is not exalted.
It probably won't sell,
yet by speaking of the Lord
and thinking of a song
you stay up late at night to write
and somehow feel you've pleased Him.

Take permission to write
but know the great song writers
have already appeared;
at least you may be humbled.
And maybe one will come out right,
so a person will say,
"It made me glad,
it really helped."

Separation from Kṛṣṇa

Now white gulls rise
like bits of paper
in the buffeting wind.
A girl from the temple
washes pots outside my window.
Only a few palm trees
on the round, brown plain.

To get here, Berbice, Guyana,
we climbed the threatening sky
in a small white Cessna,
and to leave we'll take a taxi
to preach somewhere next.

It's two hours before the evening lecture.
What will I speak?
Which verse from the *Gītā*?
Once again,
I'm alone for an hour,
speaking to a poem,
and far away from Home.



Things I Learned Last Week

1

All devotees are great souls,
and when I think of them I appreciate.
Like we make fun of G.
because he wants a wife,
but in this age to want marriage
is actually renunciation.

2

Some disciples like to give presents
like a pen or towels,
but others give their lives as presents.

3

Travel is good for a *sannyāsī*'s detachment.
You don't remember the women;
you get to speak to more people;
you keep going.

4

In the storm clouds in a small plane,
when being shuffled around in a car,
when entering a new country,
when you have to wait on lines,
when you have to respect ordinary people,
that's good for chanting and for tolerance.

5

It is relishable to be far away from home.
You start to realize that you have no home.
You stay transcendental longer,
and when you come down
you can always travel further and preach.
You see the world as full of opportunity.

6

People are suffering everywhere.
One government has a plan
that the people shouldn't eat much.
They outlaw food and money.
For a government like America
that is unheard of.
They torture people in a different way:
by pressure of conformity.

7

Without being up to date in the news
you still get by.
If you are absorbed in something better
then when latest news catches up,
you just say "Oh," and you
go on talking about Kṛṣṇa.

Brahma Muhūrta

1

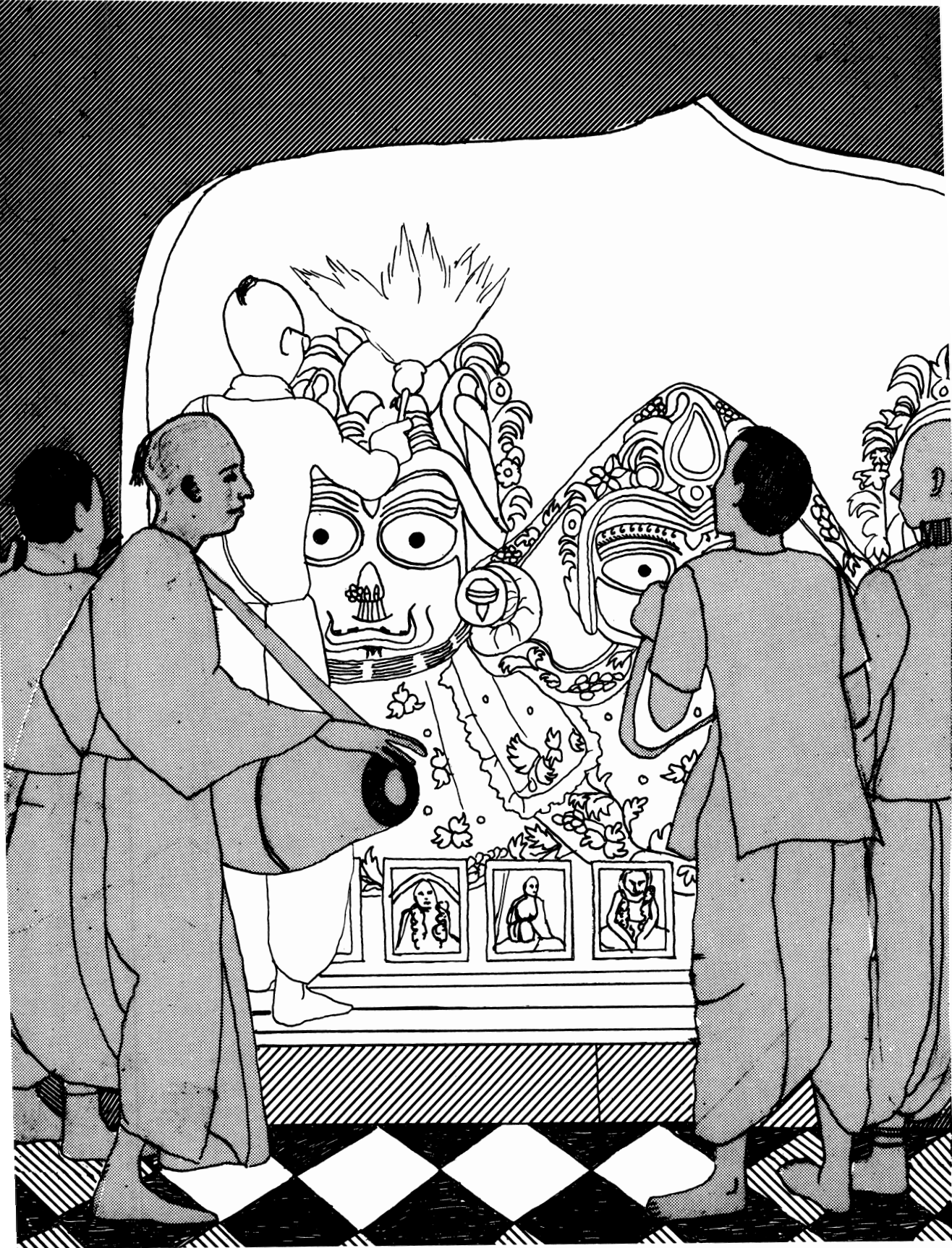
Get up, friends, disciples!
Get up, you who are in the clutches of bad dreams!
Get away from the atheists.
(Do not say you cannot.)
Rise from the bones; rise from the flesh.
Assert the spirit soul.
You can.
You must.
In predawn, eternal love awaits —
if you will rise. If you don't,
how much you will regret it!
"He called, but I did not get up!"

2

The next demand is to chant.
But first where is your shoe?
Grab it and beat the mind a hundred times,
then speak and hear (tongue and ear)
the Hare Kṛṣṇa *japa* —
O if the mind would listen to God's Name!
The dodging, bucking, swerving mind.
Try again to return to the Names.

3

Then join with others
as a cheer goes up before the opening doors.



Brightshining are the multiforms of God:
Mother Harā and graceful Kṛṣṇa,
triumphant, upraised Gaura-Nitāi,
smiling, sturdy Jagannāthas.
Bow and rise.
Here is the yearned-for:
His lotus feet.

At Maṅgala-ārati Kīrtana

I am not dead,
hand me the cymbals.
I'll sing the first line alone,
then drum and *karatālas* join.
We're swaying, building rhythm,
until everyone is dancing.
Enthusiasm flows,
a river of love of God.

It is hard to make it
in spiritual life,
but singing and dancing are easy.
Full of wavering thoughts,
we admit,
"It's hard, but it's worth it."

We're not always in the blissful light.
We sink in the non-eternal,
but when we chant and dance,
contaminations run
like filth washed off
in the swift, flowing river.

Stories

Best of all is the life of Kṛṣṇa,
and lives of great *bhaktas*,
and each devotee has his own.
And there are stories behind each window,
lives that never woke up.
Also the life of the soul
told analytically
is a general tale of woe,
how they ride *samsāra's* wheel.

There is also the epic of the universe
which takes place in the winking of Lord Viṣṇu's eye.
But except for Vyāsa's mature narration
and the story of how we came,
all in this world is temporal,
all unreal.

To wake up the lost, sleeping souls
is the story of the preacher —
adventurous, true accounts of the *guru*.
Let us hear and remember them;
And make our own come true.

Blooming

He starts finding fault with the fallible devotees,
his scorn reaching all the way to Kṛṣṇa.
Material desires, once thin,
fatten like bedbugs in Spring.
“Let me try again,” he thinks,
“to wander the fields of enjoyment.”

For a while he retains Kṛṣṇa conscious words,
“You would say I am in *māyā*.”
But when he bloats as good as dead,
he awakens into a nightmare as
when a soul leaves human life
to take the body of a snake.

He has come back again into the age of disasters,
into species of pain:
“It doesn’t matter. We’ll forget.”
He stops before the mirror
and thinks he sees himself.

Backyard Meditations

Noon, May 30, 1984

After two days of rain, suddenly the sun came out,
and I hurried to the backyard,
onto the green, shining grass,
to silently recite my *gāyatrī mantra*.
As I held my *brāhmaṇa* thread
and began to repeat, "*om bhūr bhuvaḥ . . .* "
a low-flying cloud
covered the sun, and it was darkness again.

But then a sliver of silver light
exactly like a new moon
showed through the cloud and seemed to move
quickly across the sky,
pushed by the brisk May wind.

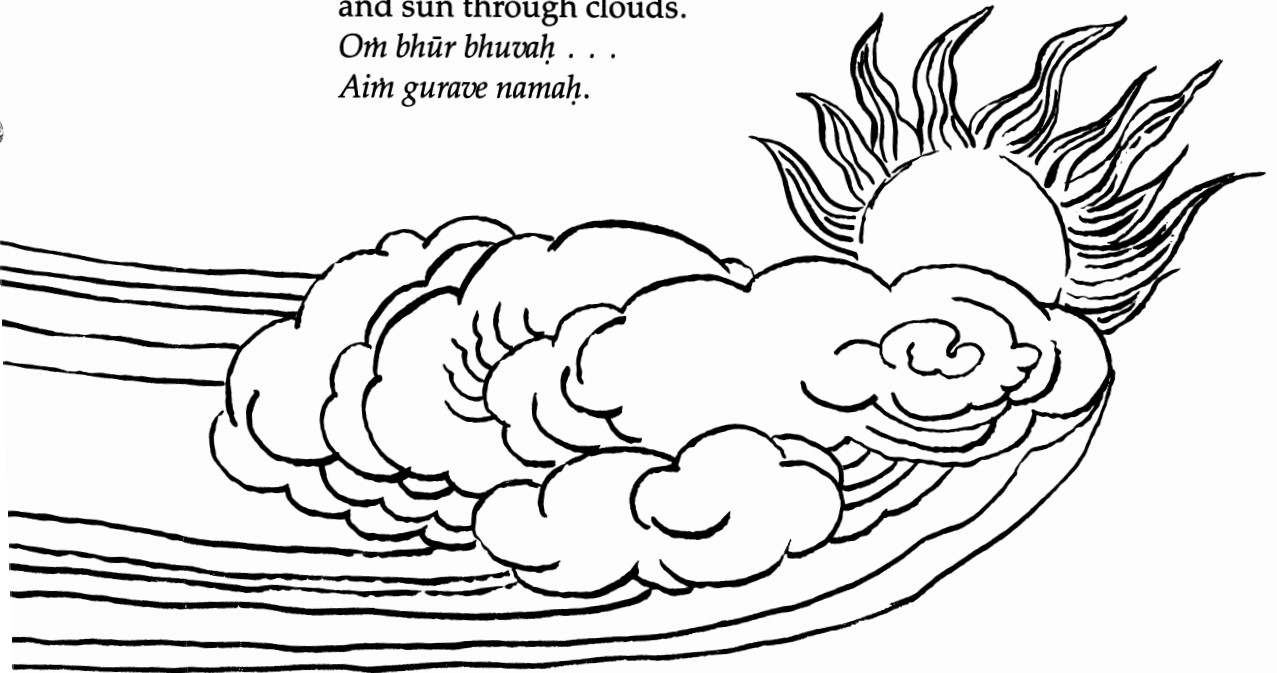
For a moment I thought it *was* the moon,
but as the cloud uncovered,
that silver crescent lost its shape
and it blazed like the heater of the universe.

From my tiny patch on earth, I could perceive
how the sun was filling everything with light,
and without it all was darkness.
As in a natural lab, these simple facts were shown to me.

Suddenly I wished I could see
so simply and scientifically Lord Kṛṣṇa,

just as I had seen the sun —
But did He not appear?
Did I not see the hand and eye of God
as clouds and sun passed close overhead?

And the rain is also Kṛṣṇa's,
and the green, covering forests.
But my pleasant vision of the sun had turned
to somber meditations: death, the temporal,
human greed, and forgetfulness of God.
These also passed into my thoughts,
like clouds over sun
and sun through clouds.
Om bhūr bhuvāḥ . . .
Aim gurave namaḥ.



Duties

1

Return to Lake Huntington

Branches criss-cross outside the window.
Gurukula voices, and bells of cows.
Big lunch gathering;
too much to eat.
Then the evening phone —
a call to alarm.
Where is the transcendental calm
of the Vaiṣṇava heart?
Or is anxiety the right response?

2

City Duties

Riding 60 miles an hour,
I drowse over *Bhāgavatam*,
but in mind's-eye faintly I see
Lord Kṛṣṇa greeting His 16,000 wives
on His entrance into Dvārakā.

Horns honk on Commonwealth Ave.
Māyā's millions await relief.
Do I cringe from regular duties?
Where is the Vaiṣṇava's compassion?
At night, in group reading we recall
Prabhupāda, who selflessly gave.

3

Debts of the North

While in Puerto Rico's ideal clime
 on the hill of Kṛṣṇa Balarāma
 all is happy in glow,
 and I think of D.C., Philadelphia,
 and the farm in Pennsylvania
 where the overhead runs high
 and the income is not enough.

Strolling the flower-petaled way,
 receiving a footbath of honey and milk,
 suffering head pains, hearing bad news,
 I carry the debts of the North.
 Duty cannot be avoided.

4

Things I have to do

Driving down the snaky hill,
 even though you may get carsick,
 chanting in the crowded plaza
 even though you may get a headache,
 talking with whoever wants to meet.
 Sincere smiles, earnest to help others,
 slipping into the cooling lake of philosophy
 even though at first you don't want to do it.

Sometimes you have to sit back and see

that Kṛṣṇa is fully in control.
But you also must lay your free will on the line
and *act*, as did Arjuna, in your own Kurukṣetra.

A car is waiting.
You have to go.
But do it for Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa Conscious Poems

1

Leaves twitch and raindrops sparkle the creek
with millions of Kṛṣṇa conscious poems.
Beyond these words which grope,
the real Kṛṣṇa conscious poems
stream down straight from heaven
like cold tears.

2

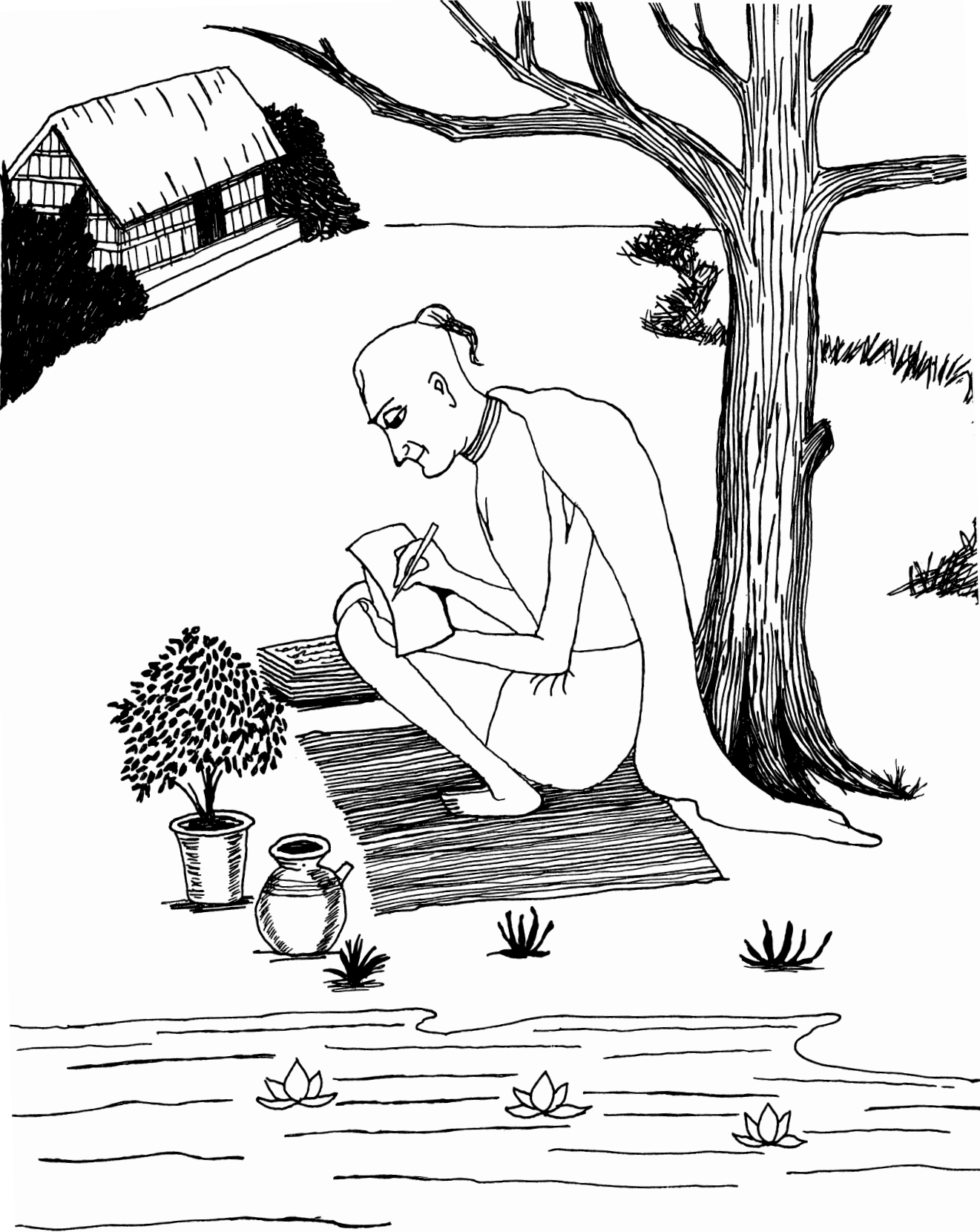
And the original *Kavi*
is the Supreme,
from whom all poets spring.
His Vedic songs
hold out to humankind
the clue to spirit-self,
with rituals for the greedy
while to the fortunate He gives
pure Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*.

The poems of Rūpa Gosvāmī
please the Lord Himself,
written like rows of pearls,
“ . . . and as soon as He read it
He was overcome with ecstatic love.”
His Kṛṣṇa conscious poems
penetrate the heart
and cause the head to spin:

"I do not know how much nectar
the two syllables *Kṛṣ-ṇa* have produced."
But it takes a pure heart.

For us the Kṛṣṇa conscious poems
of Narottama and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura
pray for us and lift us up
as we "try to enjoy the holocaust."
Their Kṛṣṇa conscious songs, like "Gopīnātha,"
even when sung by a neophyte
purify us today.

How dare we continue after them?
Because he said we should write,
and the rain is still falling;
and we are still fallen.



A Worldwide Movement

We are required to be *all* things —
spiritually, mentally, and physically pure beings.
No wonder we sometimes waver —
the aspiration is so great.
These songs are inspiration
for soldiers in the cause of the Absolute,
for fighters against the mass of ignorance.

Fools fight as black against white,
as workers against exploiters,
but *all* are a union in blindness,
unaware that after a life of fervid allegiance
the next life will bring an ironic twist
as the black becomes white,
the woman, a man,
the cat, a dog,
the naked, a tree,
the prisoner, free?
No. No one is free;
birth after birth they repeat
their blindness.

This is the one work
that will release us:
the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement worldwide.
Let there be one scripture for the whole world:
Bhagavad-gītā As It Is.
Let there be one God who is

proven Bhagavān by His words and opulence:
Lord Kṛṣṇa.
Let there be one hymn, one prayer:
the chanting of His Name.
And let there be one work:
service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Whoever can help is great and good and blessed.
If one can set the example of pure chanting, he is great.
If one can distribute books with a passion, he is great.
If one holds a Kṛṣṇa conscious managerial office,
or loves to preach, or cook, or build, or raise children —
he is great. All are great, down to the humblest,
who chant and dance, who sincerely join
the Kṛṣṇa conscious union worldwide.
Never mind that some come and go.
They also play a role
in the ongoing movement,
and they will return.

But every devotee must endlessly improve
within the few years we are each allotted.
Spread the encouraging word —
what Prabhupāda said, what he did.
Revive the memory of the first days.
Make the vision for the future,
and stabilize the Now.

We will lead when we follow.
As Lord Kṛṣṇa says, *"In all activities*

*just depend on Me
and work under My protection."*

But it will not happen
by moving away with your family,
giving up simple living and high thinking.
It won't happen if we are impure,
not if we keep slipping to the fringe,
moving away from the commitment,
talking against Kṛṣṇa conscious authority
until we begin to sound like anticultists,
becoming young urban professionals
at the cost of our souls.

Or if we are fiery devotees
and call out, "One scripture!"
but we can't stand still to read it,
or if we cry out, "One God!"
but we're too frantic to chant His Name,
then how will it happen?
How will He entrust us?
It has to be a spiritual revolution,
led by saints who work and pray.
They will see the day
of the ushering in
of *bhāgavata-dharma*.

When will the day come?
When will Kṛṣṇa consciousness carry
millions of followers on this earth?

When will the predictions of the *ācāryas* come true
and the high-court judges wear Vaiṣṇava *tilaka*?
When will the aims of this movement
 spread throughout the land?
All will happen on the sweet will of Kṛṣṇa,
but we are meant to give our all,
to carry it through
to the next generation.
Let us give them a successful start —
billions of seeds already planted,
thousands of pure souls already on the move,
and Kṛṣṇa consciousness a deep tradition
in every country of the world.

Traveling Thoughts

1

Driving at Dawn

The highway winds through night into dawn,
and we are headed for a temple
which is greatly in debt.

Anxiety obscures more poetic visions,
as the car rolls smoothly over quiet bridges.

Gradually the sky lightens.

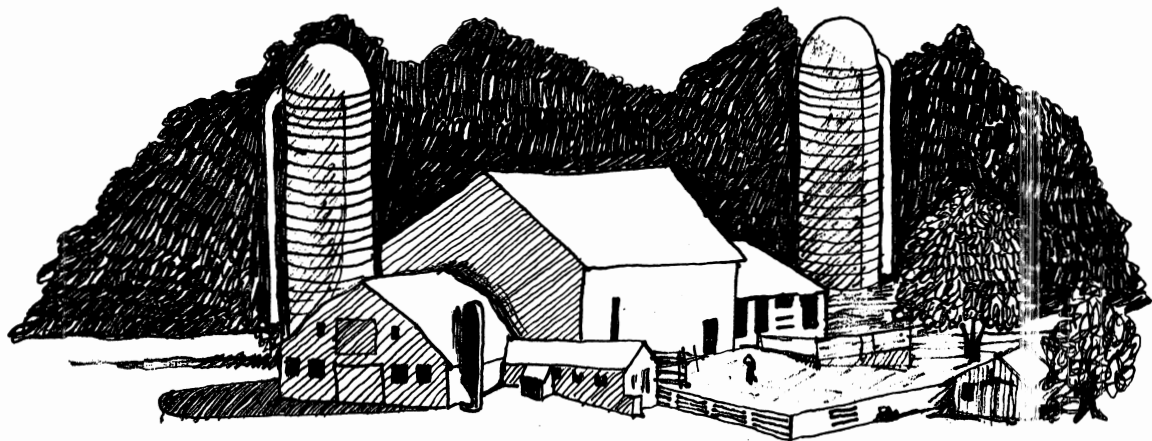
I keep chanting on my 13th round of *japa*
until it seems like a long time.

The rain stops.

A cemetery passes on the right,
and from the left, cars approach us head-on.

If all the silos in the Susquehanna Valley
were on God-centered farms,
this would be a sweet belt of land,
not a slaughterer's valley.

But at least there is one,
where we are going.



2

Turnpike

Looking out the window,
 near Carteret, New Jersey,
 gray sky, green trees,
 oil tanks and overhead wires . . .

Just yesterday our temple was bombed.
 Was that the rocking of the boat by Kṛṣṇa?
 And will there be more
 and more bombs?
 Whatever He wills,
 I pray to be faithful.

3

Overseas

Now going to Europe
 to visit a friend
 and to Ireland for duty.

Carrying my orders from supreme command,
 Prabhupāda's *śiṣya*, a military man.

And I am missing Him
 in this captivated world
 where I don't belong,
 where I am kept for good reason
 until I learn it,
 and then I am free.

Two Poems in Ireland

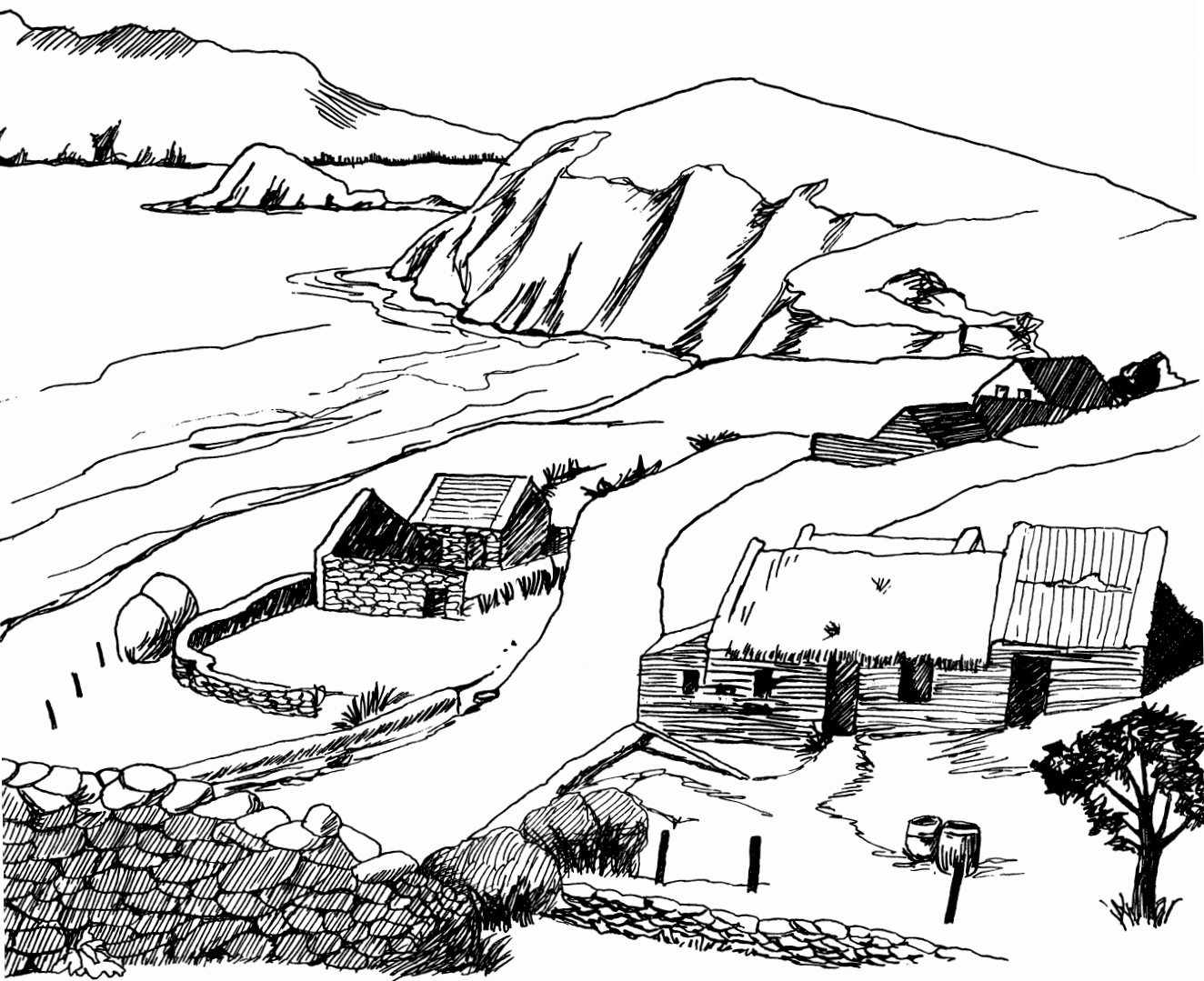
1

Lost Ability

Three days in a house on Bantry Bay,
pleasant June skies, and no telephones,
although there are bumblebees on the porch —
this writing retreat
has been a long time in coming.

With a carpet of buttercups, clover, and daisies,
the yard slopes down to the calm bay;
and we are surrounded by red-blooming fuchsias.
Assistants, pens, bread and butter —
now everything is complete.

Yet something is wrong.
Was the plane trip too tiring?
Restless, I pace the floor.
Then the wrong comes into view:
Śrīla Prabhupāda,
my memory,
my ready affection for you
has drifted far away!
Sitting silently,
I pray for the spark of life:
the ability to praise.



2

By the Third Day

Now whenever I walk outside,
anecdotes assemble in my mind —
When Prabhupāda was in Māyāpura . . .

Write them down before they fade,
the stories of His Divine Grace,
as given by his disciples.

By the third day I am at home
in the gorgeous beauty of the mountains,
where wild irises nod in the meadow.

But I want to come out,
carrying a new *Nectar* book,
ready for the pummeling
of a thousand different shocks,
back in the U.S.A.

Reflections, Potomac

Arriving at the temple, I find letters.
One wife doesn't want to return to her husband;
one man has harsh words against another,
and some letters are lighter,
expressing joy in devotional service.

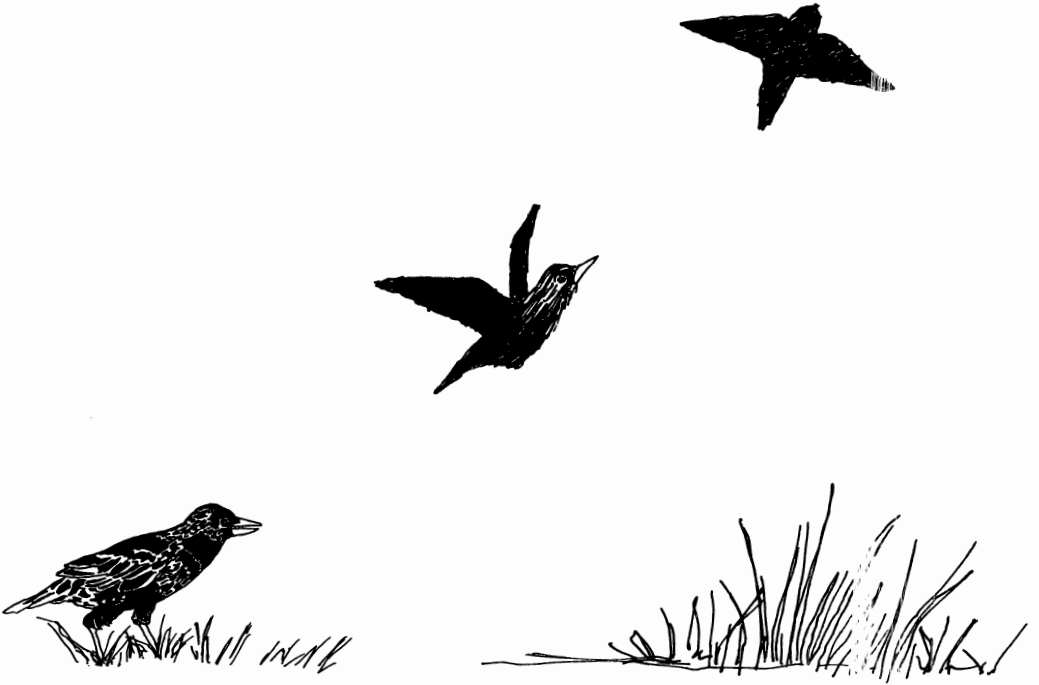
From my cabin window I see
green grass turned yellow.
July 3rd sun blazes down;
I sit with *candana* on my forehead,
and I try to make a poem.

Sometimes I think I should go away
to be alone, to chant and hear,
but I know I cannot do it;
I would sink in lust and perish.
There is no point renouncing real duty.

Some mornings are so difficult
I want to throw in the towel,
but time turns and Kṛṣṇa shows
it is quite possible for me to go on.
When I think of the austerities of others,
I gain conviction.
And the expert way provided by my spiritual master
turns me toward a better view of things.
Like suddenly coming to a clearing,
I dance and feel young again.

In the Field

Starlings in the grass,
how long will we last?
Flyers, black bobbing heads,
what is our fate?
If the sky rains down nuclear destruction,
even then it is up to us
to cleave to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.
Always remember; never forget.



Past, Present, and Prophecies

1

Past

It was bad sometimes, I remember.
I couldn't stand up to it.
I can't remember other species
of life in the past.
But I was also a bird, I heard.
Once I lived underground.

I remember pain —
giving it, taking it.
Darkness, killing, killed —
horrible past!
Trying to make it sweet with fleeting moments,
but always dying — death, dead,
reborn again in pain.

"Forget the past that sleeps . . ."
Now counts. But why don't I
leap like the lion
into the Kṛṣṇa conscious Now?

2

Present

The backyard now.
Bus noises from the nearby road,
I read a young student's letter:

"Kids here are into heavy metal."
The heart-shaped plant springs up.
Clover like a rug. Green tomatoes.
Summer girls moving downhill,
and two black boys with a basketball —
"Hey! Harry Krishna!"
Chant while you can.

3

Prophecies

It will rain any minute now
on this page.

There will be a late afternoon
to surrender to Kṛṣṇa.

I will throw off temptation
and not think of women.

The worms will eat the cabbage.
The marigolds will come and go.

Kṛṣṇa will reveal Himself
only to His pure devotee.

Why I Write

1

Why I write:

For B., a non-literary worker
with strong, grubby hands,
who clutches my book.

He has read, "One must follow
the order of the *guru*."

It pains him to come
and admit he's on the slide.

For Nṛsimha dāsī, and
her husband Śārṅga,
who are leaving my zone
for an easier way.

"But by the potency of your books
we feel we are with you."

For Annie Lennox,
who read without stopping,
Life with the Perfect Master.

For a drug addict in Amsterdam
who is desperate to find *Letters from Śrīla Prabhupāda*,
which he thinks can cure him
by awakening his spiritual life.
And for the people who will come
in a hundred years from now.

2

For my purification

and in hopes Śrīla Prabhupāda will be pleased.

For Mrs. Murphy,
who likes to read Kṛṣṇa conscious poems.
For Steve Leonard's mother,
who thought devotees were devils
until she read *Back to Godhead* and changed her mind.
For a small black lady in a Manhattan grocery
who said, "I read about the Swami!
He was so brave!"

For Prabhupāda's disciples who hardly knew him
and who appreciate the written-down memory.
And for his long-time leaders,
like Paramānanda, who read *Līlāmṛta*
with a headache,
but felt it as ecstatic bliss.

3

For the Bombay life members
who want everything on Prabhupāda.
For the Africans, who read carefully,
and pass the book on to a friend.

For Brahmānanda, in hopes that another book
may move him to write me another encouraging letter
which drives me on.
For Ācāryadeva, the writing *ācārya*,
just so that I don't give up completely
before his superior output.

For Bhagavān Goswami Gurudeva
who saw *Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* as guided by Prabhupāda.
For Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Goswami, who advises me to write
for the transcendental pleasure of writing.
And for Śrīla Viṣṇupāda who is
very fond of remembering Śrīla Prabhupāda.

4

I write for purification
and for giving evidence that a lifetime can be spent
praising Śrīla Prabhupāda in many books,
so that followers can know his way
even after those who knew him go to join him.

Prabhupāda, I write to fulfill my own ambitions,
but you have saved me;
I have placed my effort at your lotus feet.

Please accept me
as a small bird singing
in the treetops of your spiritual forest.
Let me catch sight of you now and then.
Let me know
if it is right what I am doing
or tell me clearly, "No!"
Please direct me,
for you must be my guide,
for you I write,
to please you.

A Prayer for Spiritual Survival

For that simple survival I pray
because falling down is a nearby act
like driving along a cliff-side road
or walking on the women-filled beach.
At every step there is danger.

If we are steady,
when we finish with this body
then the soul goes triumphantly to Kṛṣṇa,
leaving behind a helpful boat;
but if we fail in duty
that is worse than death.

I pray to survive
in spiritual life,
and Prabhupāda has told us how —
by chanting and hearing the holy names,
by constantly reading his holy books,
and by sacred service in *saṅkīrtana*,
which takes many forms:
like placing a *tulasī* at the Lord's lotus foot
or facing off with your family as your foe.
To see it all as *bhakti*,
to never flee,
I pray for survival
in spiritual life.



One Competent to Speak

He is not a great saint so he cannot
speak of the lotus feet of Rūpa Mañjarī.
Although he knows the lotus feet of Prabhupāda,
he lacks the devotion to say,
“Those feet bloom in my heart all day and night.”
And he honestly can’t lament that a javelin
of separation has pierced his heart —
only petty desires, hesitancy,
and his *sādhana* report.
Where is the Gosvāmī hero?
At least he can read from the sacred books
and speak out loud what they say.

An ex-*mleccha* still reeling
from *anarthas* of the past,
yet he steps up and speaks into the transcendental mike:
“Foolish people, it is a waste of time.
Life without Kṛṣṇa is hell.
This Supreme Lord is the highest Godhead.
Learn it and quickly taste
the transcendental life of chanting.

“Come under this umbrella
held by the lifter of Govardhana Hill.
Come out of the weather,
which rains down ice and fire and stones,

and take shelter under Govardhana with us.

“Take shelter within the spiritual bliss!
This knowledge is absolute,
and our preceptor is most kind,
a far-seeing lover of Kṛṣṇa.
And he is the General in the fight.

“Come under the shelter of Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma,
come into the orbit of Rādhā-Dāmodara,
stand under the shower of *harināma*,
and take this blessed nectar of relief.
Take shelter at His lotus feet.”

So spoke a disciple,
one competent to speak.

The Price Is Your Desire

They are dancing in Vṛndāvana
while I sit here in the rain.
How can I go there
when I haven't paid the price?

Kṛṣṇa is dancing and Narottama is there,
while I fret and fear.
How can I go there
if I haven't paid the price?

There is Lalitā, and Viśākhā, too,
and Lord Caitanya's topmost men —
all out of reach for me.

My only claim is that I know a great saint,
acclaimed for his work in this middle world.
But I haven't fulfilled his hopes for me,
so how can I aspire?

Give me a little mercy, I pray,
or the beating I deserve,
but not yet Vṛndāvana —
I haven't paid the price.

Criteria

See the last light before night?
Above the forest,
see the pale blue sky?
Yes, but give us Kṛṣṇa please in every line!
That is the criteria set by Guru Mahārāja.
Give us “Kṛṣṇa” and “Caitanya,”
and then you have a poem!
But it has to be spoken by a real devotee
who regularly chants Their holy names.
Give us *his* company every time
and not the company of mundaners.

Allow us to follow
those who follow in the footsteps
of the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.
Let us hear the best sounds —
the names of pure devotees, like Rūpa and Raghunātha.
And let us hear true preaching plans
by devotees of Lord Caitanya.
That is more valuable than anything else.

And if in this lifetime we cannot reach Goloka,
at least let us next be born
where “Kṛṣṇa” and “Caitanya”
are sacred, household words,
and where hearts stand fast to Him,
even at the time of death.

Prayers to Śrīla Prabhupāda

Empowered Teacher

1

Empowered teacher of Kṛṣṇa consciousness,
you are very great, you are Kṛṣṇa to me,
because I know Him only through you.
You bring Him to the world,
and so I pray to you,
begging to be kept in your service.

Kṛṣṇa is in my heart,
but I do not know it.
Kṛṣṇa is in His Name,
but I do not taste the sweetness.
The world of matter is all false,
but I seem to be attracted.
And there is nothing to fear,
but I am always afraid.
Only you can solve these shortcomings.

This material body
of skeleton, muscle, nerves, and brain
is a fine machine
in which to realize God,
but not so great for happiness, or eternal life.
And this body is always conjuring false hopes,
and it is prone to a million diseases,
and my mother and father cannot help me,

and the government cannot really help,
though they put me to work
for their false-based goals.

But you are my true father,
leading me to my spiritual form,
and you are my mother,
giving me the milk of Vedic truth.
And you have given me nourishment and growth
and taught me to become disentangled
from the illusions of this world.

2

You have taught me that this body
is a network of paths unto death.
And you have taught us
that a family is for self-realization
or else it is a family of cows and asses.
You have taught us that a nation should be
under God's laws,
or else it is a pack of thieves and robbers.
You have taught us to reject religions of blind faith,
and in their place you give us true love of God.

You have taught us to work
to bless the world with Kṛṣṇa consciousness,
to change the world from a barren waste
to a place of *brāhmaṇas* and kings,
to end the slaughter of innocents,

to change the sinners to saintly,
to change the factories
into places of sane work.
These bold plans I pray for
as I work to carry out your mission.

Jagannātha *Darśana*

While talking on the phone,
I glanced over to the bright-crowned Lords,
standing before their Chinese backdrop
of tall mountains and trees,
and especially I saw
their bright, jutting arms.

Only a devotee can know
the arms of Jagannātha
and happiness a million times.

I felt like Lord Jagannātha was speaking,
"I am the beautiful *kṣatriya* Lord,
and My brother and sister, We rule.
We are happy, and to you We extend our arms."

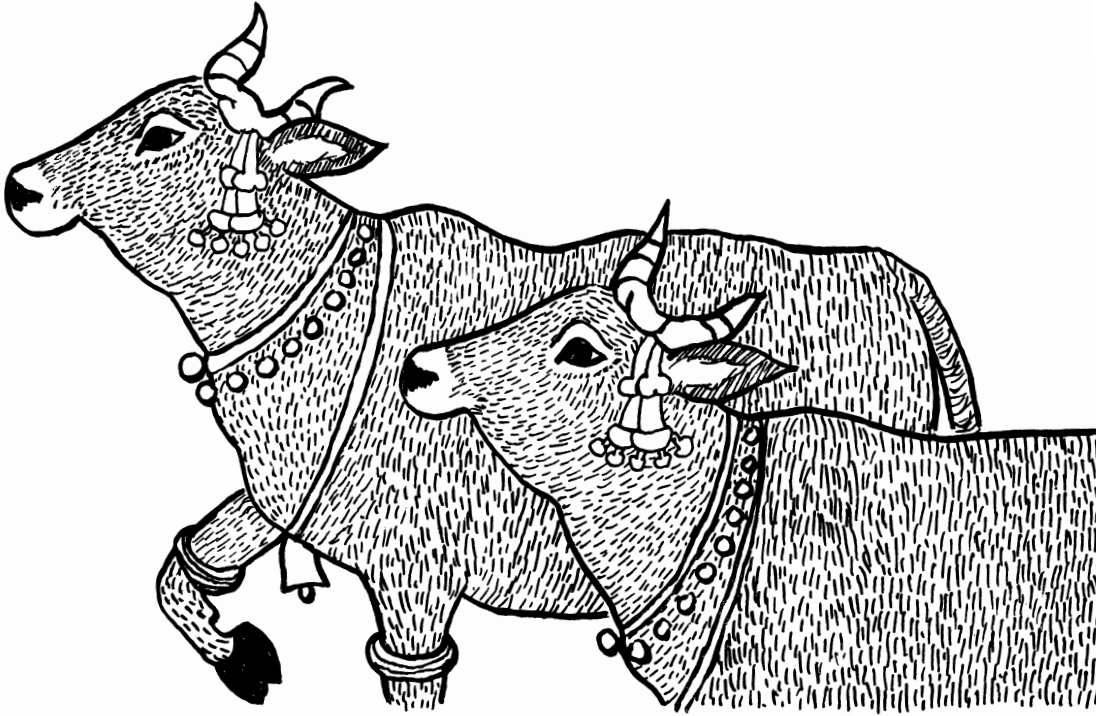
On Leaving Gītā-nāgarī

Today they drove the cows past my window,
their hooves thudding heavily on dry earth,
their innocent profile, eyes and muzzles,
like Indian paintings of cows in Goloka,
headed for a clearing in the forest,
led by Doobie the three-legged dog,
and Śrī Kṛṣṇa dāsa and Ray and Vaiṣṇava
hooting and coaxing and bunching them in
to keep them on the path. And me at the window,
preparing to leave for a month.

When I return it will be October.
Pumpkin may be ready then,
and if we are lucky,
they will put up enough vegetables,
by drying and preserving, to last the winter.
I hope no one leaves; I hope I will return.
And I pray the main pillar, Paramānanda dāsa,
stays well and lasts.

“Let my books get done and published,
and let the world live on,
and let this movement persevere.”
But that is my smallworld’s view —
what about the larger issues?
Our devotees number a handful,
while almost the whole world
is made of *asuras*.

What are we doing to offset it?
How can we prevent the slaughter and wars?
At least by this:
protecting these cows,
driving them to a clearing in the woods,
working as the Lord's devotees
on a Kṛṣṇa conscious farm —
and for a *sannyāsī*,
traveling to a new place,
writing another book.



Dr. Furillo's Wisdom

I liked his natural healing,
advice to breathe, walk, and eat,
but in the spiritual realm
his eclectic mind tripped.
Yet even that I took in a way
different than his concocted words:
“When in conflict between the subconscious (gut)
and the conscious (*māyā*) minds,
the subconscious eventually wins out.”
Two days later
after I arrived here in Puerto Rico,
where I am breathing and walking and eating
like he said,
I figured what he meant:

Be true to Śrīla Prabhupāda,
be confident that you love him,
that deepest truth I know within.
And let go *māyā's* lure.

Devotional Pictures

1

Hanumān in the Kitchen

The cook sees him, and I do too
as I peek in at this late hour
to surprise a mouse or a roach.
Pots are hung nicely,
fruits in bags so no rodents can reach,
and Hanumān is carrying the mountain.



2

Kṛṣṇa Kills Kāmsa

The nondevotees cannot see
 why Kṛṣṇa punching Kāmsa
 is a pleasant scene
 worthy of the dining room.

But for me, as I lie down
 in the next room,
 I see Kṛṣṇa is protecting.

Heroic blue, golden aura,
 His scattered, curly hair;
 the crowd is cheering,
 His right fist swinging —
 Smash him, Bhagavān!

3

Looking at a painting of Lord Caitanya

It is a dark jungle scene.
 Lord Caitanya's arms are moving,
 and words come out of the lion's and tiger's mouths,
 "Hare Kṛṣṇa! Haribol!"
 Wreathed around Him,
 the wild beasts chant with joy,
 as I lie tangled
 in the jungle of my mind.

If I aspire to dance with Him,
 I must rise up
 and beg for the Name.

On Gurabo

Like a glass hammer striking a glass spike,
by 5:45 P.M., I hear
the first frog's *co-qui, co-qui*.
Deep breathing under mosquito nets
in a room without pictures,
I think to the bottom of my unwanted things,
my nonspontaneous love.

The orange *flambollans* are falling from the treetops,
canario blossoms shine like stars in the green.
I have pills, and time to read,
but by exercise and stronger health
can I become what I am not,
a bold-roving, overflowing *bhakta*?

Quiet Days in Puerto Rico

1

Upon Seeing School Children

At 3:15 I saw school kids going home
and felt how far along are my 44 years.
These yellow-shirted children have so much to go!
First the arduous school years,
the family-firm illusion,
then they choose their dreadful jobs,
and only one in ten thousand will be saved.

Because I chant the *mahā-mantra*,
I'm a fortunate soul
but unfortunate still,
because my mind is uncontrolled;
I think of friends, prestige, power,
even while I live alone.
What will it take
before I chant in loving service
with "Kṛṣṇa" at every breath?

2

At Night

Sitting up in bed with a flashlight,
next hill over, there's singing and guitar.
The frogs are deep into the revels of the night.
Lights sparkle from distant San Juan.

Now I lay me down to rest . . .
Dear Lord Kṛṣṇa I pray
let me be enlivened by Your Holy Name.
Let Prabhupāda be pleased with me.
Let me realize his purports.

3

Crimes of the Island

Entering the intimate family life
of the cows, on the path before dawn,
we see a just-born calf sucking its mother,
baby bulls butting heads,
a dappled brown-and-white in the grass,
a black bull curious of us —
all of them meant — by God — to be loved,
but all of them doomed — by man — to be killed.
The cows go quietly,
but intelligent pigs screech,
blocking out the cries of roosters
and silencing political songs
until their bloody screams are shut
by those ignorant of the soul —
good Catholics in a truck.

4

Reduced

My list of "Things to Do"
falls to the side.

All I do is rest.
Yet one cry to Kṛṣṇa
is worth a hundred days
of marching in pride.

5

Patience: sitting on the veranda

*"The entanglement of this material world
is compared here to a banyan tree. . . ."*

I look up from the book.

Here comes a car.

There goes a hawk.

Soft winds through lush trees.

Why am I here? You are sick.

Why? Will it go away

like an unwanted guest?

I'll explain it in a letter:

"I am simply waiting on Kṛṣṇa's desire.

That's all."

Morning Walk #1

The clouds, like knobby heads,
stick up over the mountains
as we walk past barbed wire fence,
stepping on cow dung, uphill, down-dale,
with Prabhupāda, by Walkman, in the ears:
Kṛṣṇa is the Absolute.

For health I walk,
to make myself a servant fit,
to work again and take on troubles
without collapsing like a deck of cards.
For soul-strength in a body fit to serve.

Morning Walk #2

Round the house I walked,
the hill track too wet,
and while my girded ankle ached,
pure Prabhupāda told of the Pāṇḍavas' woes.

They tried to disrobe Draupadī,
but Kṛṣṇa saved her,
especially when she gave up
trying to save herself.
Later, her sleeping sons were killed,
and when Droṇācārya learned it,
he died of lamentation.

Fierce-fighting, bighearted *bhaktas*,
they endured all loss, exile, fire, poison,
and I heard it again,
assured by my only master
that this was no fiction.
As I quick-squished over the rainy grass,
the history of greater India purified my brain.

Gray Sunday

There is no mind-body problem.
The alert ear of spirit-soul
hears the perfect sounds
that awaken six senses
in loving interaction with Supreme.

The only problem is me, us.
Why am I morose? Is it the rain?
Why am I distracted? Rock music from the hill?
Why, even on a gray Sunday, do the neighbors
nonchalantly load a black-white cow
into the back of their pick-up?
Where are they taking her?
Why do they pass a hundred times a day
blaring a false slogan?

These are problems.
Otherwise, the whole world is *Vaikuṇṭha*,
for a devotee,
and his senses are like serpents with broken teeth.
He never laments or desires;
he is full in service of the Lord.

And when he chants the Name of *Kṛṣṇa*,
his heart is not steel-framed;
he cries tears like rain.
The only problem is me,
the only problem is us.

A Prayer for Self-Realization

Within this body there is another,
undaunted by disruptions.
While the body bursts at every seam,
and demons may torture it,
the soul is undamaged
by bullet, knife, fire, flood, wind, or
by agony of mind. It is eternal.

Dear Lord, let me realize.
Give me the spark of surrender;
light up my life.
Let me see the need to help others.

Let my heart beat strongly for You.
Push me into the fray,
give me song-ability, capacity to serve,
give me greed to want Your service more and more.

O Supreme Controller,
allow me to control my tongue,
belly, anger, eyes, and mind.
Please God, let me see
Your form as Kṛṣṇa,
and banish the lust
of a woman's embrace.
I'm praying You will grant me
devotion unto You.

A Preaching Trip

1

Briefcase inventory

Passport is essential,
& *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*.
What about the latest ISKCON protest?
I've got that too.
& *The Spiritual Master and the Disciple*
for one who aspires to be both,
& *Back to Godhead* for that someone special
whom you should look for on the plane.
Lock up, let's go to Santo Domingo.

2

Thoughts en route

In 50 years who will remember
the anticult movement?
In 500 years who will remember America?
But *now*, we who live ask,
where is the Kṛṣṇa conscious civilization?
Where is the honor unto *brāhmaṇas*,
where is protection of cows and women,
where is widespread knowledge of the soul?
As our ISKCON movement struggles within,
we reach out and find this solace:
"Make one pure devotee
and it is worth the whole mission."

3

En el templo

Preaching isn't just talk,
 it is desire to save them,
 an attentive temple-full.
 They question, "If the soul is intelligent
 to surrender to Kṛṣṇa, then why
 did he come here in the first place?"
 I answer, "We are fools."

Upstairs, a newspaper lady in a white dress asks,
 "How can I see Kṛṣṇa consciousness
 through the eyes of a Christian?"

"Be a *better* Christian."

"What about sex?" she laughs. "Why
 do you shave your heads?"

During *siesta*, it rains
 while a boy sings with harmonium,
 "Yaya, Prabhupāda . . ."
 In the evening I'll read
 from *Prabhupāda Nectar*,
 its timeless joy.

4

Meeting with a Catholic priest

We waited until dark,
 sitting on the balcony in bamboo chairs,

and when it looked certain that he would not come,
we held, instead, a meeting of Dominican *brāhmaṇas*
who know the meaning of *prabhu-datta-deśa*
and who assured me they would save their country,
provided they can save themselves.

"You can do it," I assured them.

"You must. There is no one else,
and Lord Caitanya said,

'Become *guru* and save the people of your land.' "

It was a solemn, but happy pact,

sealed with *samosās* and milk,

and a prayer to Prabhupāda,

"They can do it, they must;

please save us."

Morning Walk #3

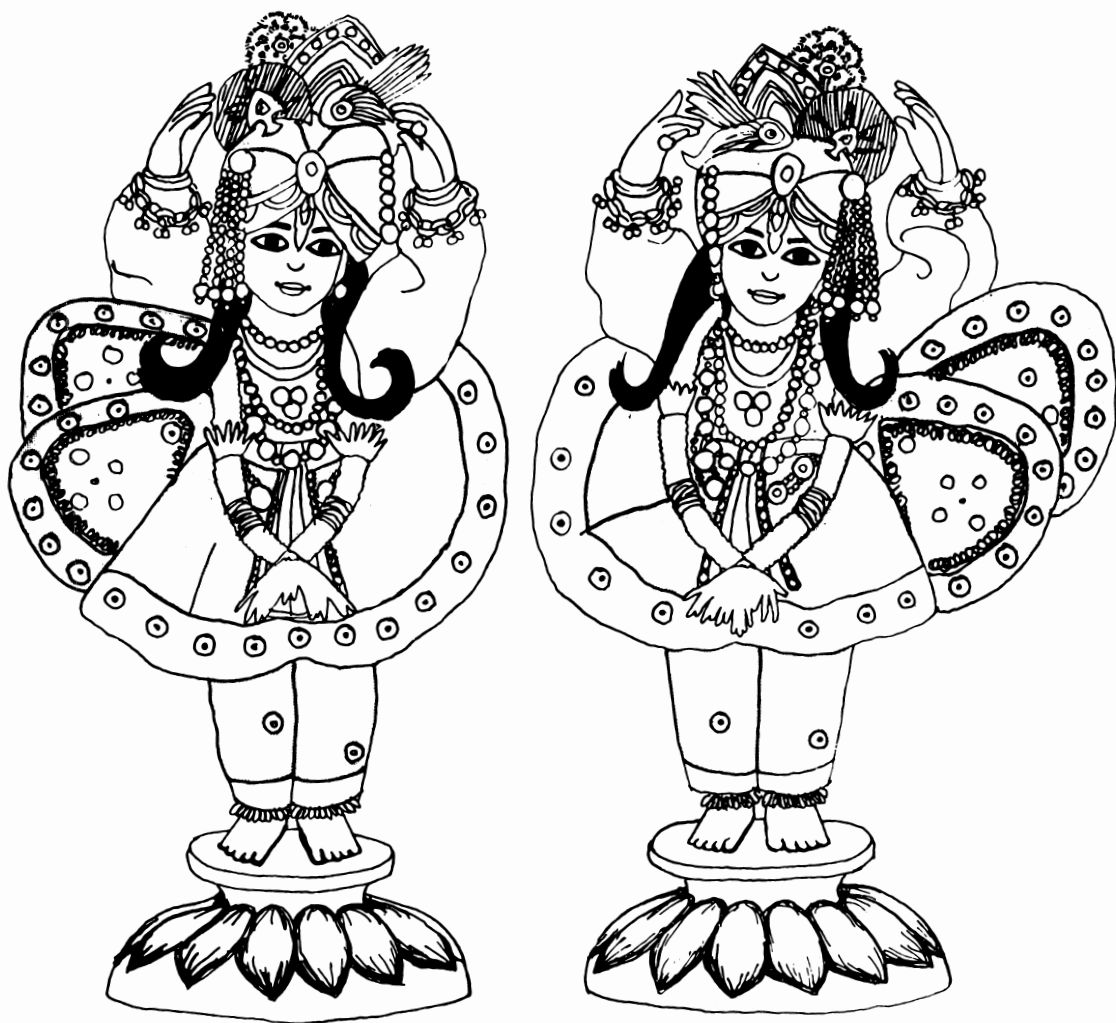
Walking fast through *El parque*,
dark pines and palms behold us,
and Prabhupāda explains, on a tape,
why the souls go into the bodies of trees;
they were dull and earned this place from lust,
now they stand up naked and wait.

If they are suffering,
why do we find it nice
to walk among the trees?
Why are we at peace,
while they are wretched?
I go on hearing
because without the *guru's* message,
the simplest thing in nature
is a riddle in hell,
& darkness hides a covered well.

Overtaking city workers,
winding our way back to the van,
there we change from pants to *dhotīs*,
maneuver through traffic,
and return on time to see
the *mūrtis* of Gaura-Nitāi.
Wrapped in a simple cloth *cādar*,
the golden form of Prabhupāda assures me,

humble worship will win.

By *saṅkīrtana*, at least some humans
may be saved from the fate
of the inanimate trees,
and even the trees.



Writing Credo

Poems fill the backyard air — I mean,
the opportunity to write them
seems to ripen like palpable fruit.
If I choose to let it pass,
I can invest the same auspicious moment
in chanting or reading the *Gītā*.

But when I talk with friends,
it's never so intimate
as this alone-voice, thinking aloud
which is the poem:
it speaks the quiet truth,
it recreates the best,
it confesses, it soothes, pleases.
Yet I suspect it, am wary,
because at death
I must be in direct devotion,
not hankering to write about it.
And in life also,
direct service has to be
the function of the poems.

Thoughts on a Birthday

Observing birthdays according to the moon
puts me out of touch with Dec. 6, 1939,
that cold afternoon in Queens County Hospital
when I squeezed out of my mother's womb
in a body described by a Southern-drawling nurse
as "a little yaller," with an asymmetric head.

That was but an illusion of birth.
I was spiritually born in July of 1966
at Prabhupāda's lotus feet
in the Lower East Side storefront.
So this Sagittarius-reckoning of 44 years
leaves me unmoved. It's just another day
while I struggle to recover my health.

What to make of this?
I look out through window slats
to the blue-white sky,
but I cannot see the explanation
why I'm sick.

Guilty in illness,
I would rise if I could,
embarrassed that my "pastime"
is disease and pain.
Sincere followers stand at the door,

waiting for my strong return.

There are three transcendental reasons
for a *guru's* illness,
and all seem beyond me.

1. Ecstasy — like the *gopīs'* belching,
reeling, and turning red?
Distracted and quiet,
I lie on the bed.
2. Am I ill to give disciples service?
But don't they have enough of that?
3. Suffering from the sins of followers?
That may be. But I cannot see,
neither do I know exactly how
I suffer from my past.

I have often complained
of too many meetings, duties, and "headaches."
Is this the Lord's reminder
that He can take away the pains of duty
and give me instead the pains of disease?

I pray to Lord Kṛṣṇa for a resolute will:
if You want to make me well again,
then give me the mental strength
for honest work without complaints.
Or else, even with health radiant
I'll fall to "stress," "apathy," "fatigue,"

and other losses of pure devotional strength.

“Remember Prabhupāda,” a brother reminds me,
“how he suffered on the Jaladuta but persisted.”

But I cannot reach that greatness.

They say these headaches

are my assets,

earned marks for service.

Is that what it is?

I need to surrender.

I have to get better

to live many years

as a workable servant,

if He desires.

While awaiting the cues,

I’m pinned down on this birthday.

November 19, 1984, in Trinidad.

Walk #4 (Gītā-nāgarī)

Dry-cry? Not even that,
but I desire to breakthrough.
No more
poet-posing,
devotee-posing,
lust-fantasizing,
self-defacing . . .
Walk, walker, walk.

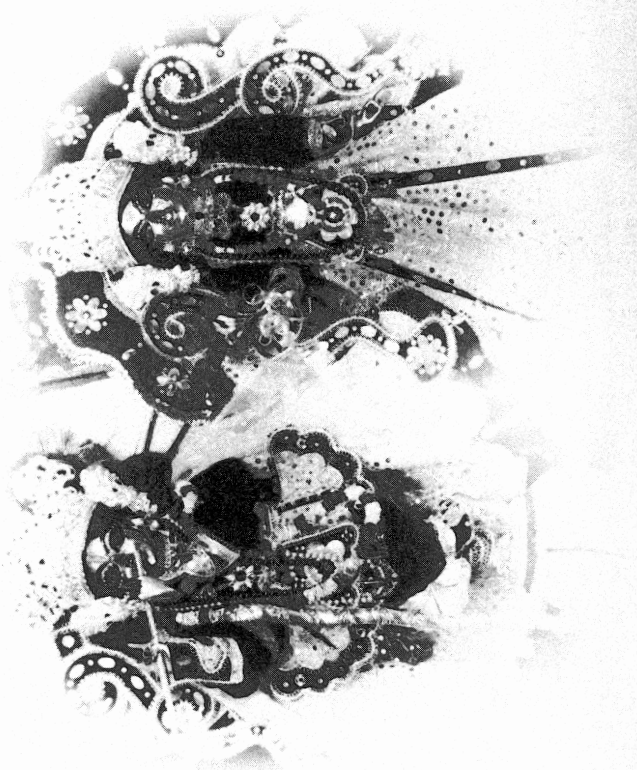
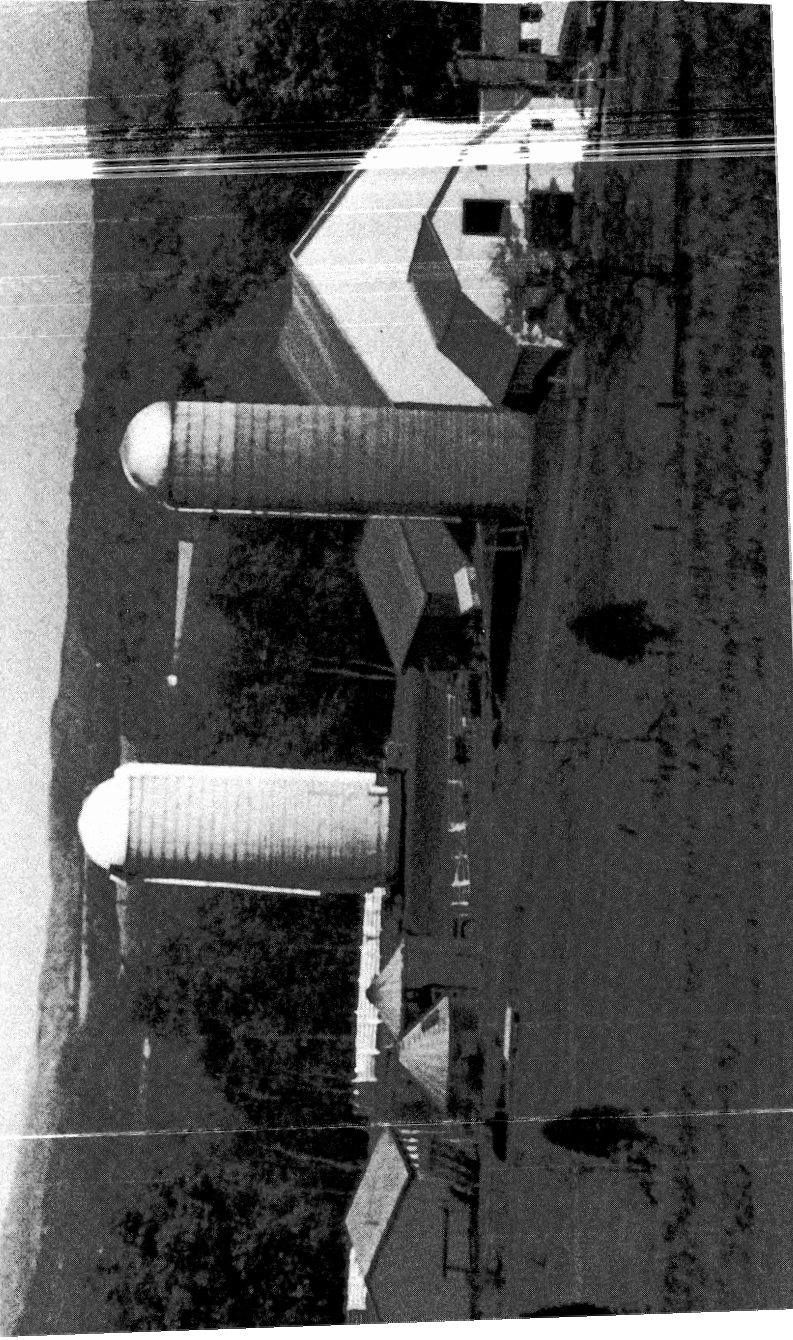
Will it all come clear?
Will I break it loose
on one of these walks?
But so much time is lost,
and it seems nevermore.
Will I return to full force?
Inspired fighter?
(never was)
strength-for-others?
(when was that?)
long-hours-worker?
doughty *bhakta*?

It's so subtle, I can't find the thread.
Evasive illness drives me to bed.
"Brother, are you a
faith-heal, prayer maker?"
No, but I am praying to Kṛṣṇa

to cure it all,
material and spiritual.
“But is that a heal-prayer?”
Well, shouldn’t we pray?
Or should we only endeavor?
Without a prayer
all I’ve got is pills,
patience, *haṭha*, rest.
No, I’ve got to pray, too —
for strength —
to surrender.

O skyblue gazer of pink-into-night,
sit back and wait;
you’re not cured yet.

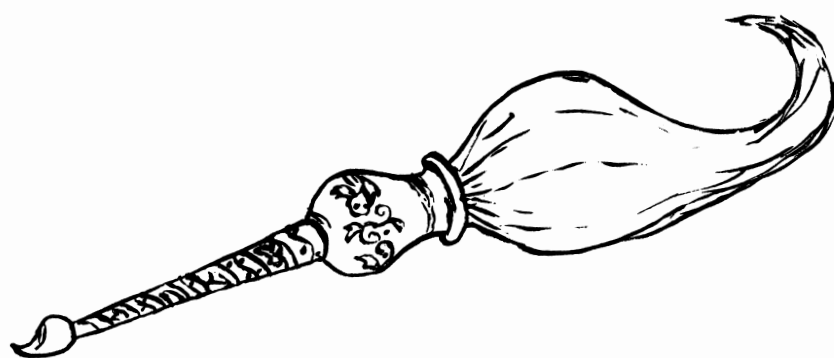
Lord Kṛṣṇa, I pray,
just make it clear.
So I don’t trick myself.
Let me see Your signals,
let me do the right.



The Worshipable Deity

Stanzas of Praise to Rādhā-Dāmodara





*To the devotees of Rādhā-Dāmodara,
who inspired me to write
of Their Lordships.*

1

Golden Kṛṣṇa, You
first appeared on a rock-opera roadshow,
& gave people *darśana* on crowded city streets,
rode happily on a Greyhound bus all over the U.S.A.,
Your name linked in history
with *brahmacārī* preaching.
Rādhā-Dāmodara, You are
living now on the Gītā-nāgarī farm,
as dancing, playful
Protector of the cows.

2

Gathered for *maṅgala-ārati*
are children, mothers, men —
it's cold outside, dark A.M.
Inside, Rādhā-Dāmodara is
brighter than the warming sun.

3

The curtain behind You

is an inexpensive rug
pictured with peacocks,
Your throne, walnut, homemade,
seems fine to me.

4

See golden metal
or God's form sublime?
He's Kṛṣṇa,
but according to your mind,
what you see
depends on your devotion.

5

Tomorrow again I will see You,
Queen and King,
unless I die tonight.
I doubt *that* will happen,
but tomorrow morning
will I fail again
to see You with love-anointed eyes?

6

Over the years I don't have
a close relationship with You,
but I'd like to start now
with real feeling
and praise You in a hundred heartfelt stanzas,

even though they're poor and of little form.

7

Rādhā-Dāmodara, I am living
in Your home,
in the last days of the year,
supposedly sick, but recovering.
All of us have but a few years
in which to attain pure devotion
to Your Lordships.
So before it's too late — I pray —
please help me.

8

You are too elusive for photos.
One has to come and see You in person.
Your eyes especially
defy the camera lights.
Even our eye-sight is not enough:
we have to come in reverence and awe
to see Rādhārāṇī
standing by Your side.

9

This year I did not attend
Your June Swing Festival,
and I was away during Kārttika
when You rode on a palanquin

and when You oversaw Your servants picking mung plants.
I also missed seeing You when
You went to bless the cows in the barn.
But I'm here now, and each morning
it's another full festival
to see Your red soled feet,
red *tilaka*, upraised finger,
and the right red palm of Rādhā.

10

The fact that You are in conjugal mood
should exclude,
yet kindly You welcome
we who are trying, and even the *karmī*.
We happily behold this well-dressed Boy and Girl,
Godhead and Expansion,
unknowable now, yet real to us now.

11

Śrīla Prabhupāda scorned —
"You are seeing the Deity and
thinking of loving some woman" —
inattention while worshiping —
our inevitable, but sorry state.
I wanted to praise You,
but here I come begging —
allow us first, pure attention at Your *darśana*.

12

We should build You a great temple,
but it seems yet far away.
Your collectors make just enough
to pay our wolf-at-the-door bills.
Yet they love You and work hard.
We simply are not mighty yet,
though we protect Your cows and bulls,
teach Your children, and train Your men.
Surely in the future,
more opulence will come.
Please, until then, accept
our daily attendance,
our twenty-four hour *bhakti*,
our following of the rules,
new clothes and crowns for You,
and bright marigolds daily.

13

On Your altar
You are flanked by two *gopīs*, who came via Texas;
and smaller Rādhā-Kālacāṇḍjī, who looks like
He's going to dance off the altar;
Gaura and Nitāi, who are
intoxicated with bliss;
and Śrīla Prabhupāda, regal with *japa* beads.
Although there are costlier and more exacting

arrangements than these pink-veined marble steps,
these forms are installed incarnations,
and so absolute, all-perfect.

14

How to connect everything we do and see with You?
It's a fact You are the Lord of all,
and the Lord of true devotees' hearts.
Let me desire and practice,
then surely I will see You
and think of You wherever I go.
As Prabhupāda has said,
"When a man works in the factory,
he thinks of his wife and family.
So a pure devotee thinks of the Lord."
Man-manā bhava.
Rādhā-Dāmodara is in our hearts,
provided we *want* to love Him.

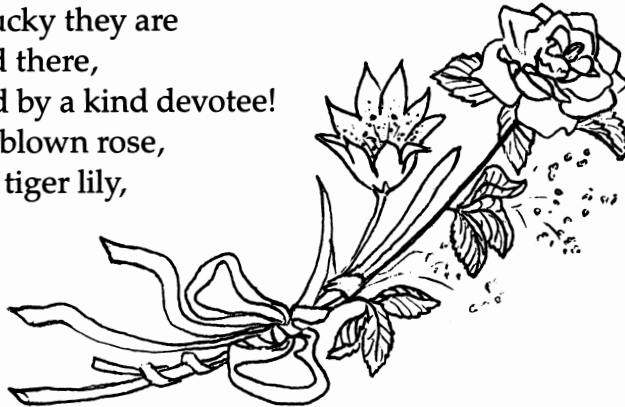
15

Waiting at the velvet curtain,
why doesn't my heart pound
like a lover's?
At least I sing, "Jaya Rādhā-Dāmodara,"
and hold the hands of little boys.
Then curtains part, all bow down,
the first notes of *Govindam* sound,
and rising to our knees, we see
our dearmost Friends.

We join together to see Them,
yet each of us is with Them alone;
that is Their mystic art.

I want to see Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa
alone, close up, with no one distracting,
yet we worship in a community of souls,
and by harmony only can we properly approach Them.
They are dressed by groups of servants —
one combs Rādhā's hair and braids it,
one cooks Their meal, one shines Their trays,
one makes Their crowns,
and others labor for Them
in different acres of the Gītā-nāgarī farm.
Coming together as community
is just-reward for labor —
is real *darśana* of the Lord.

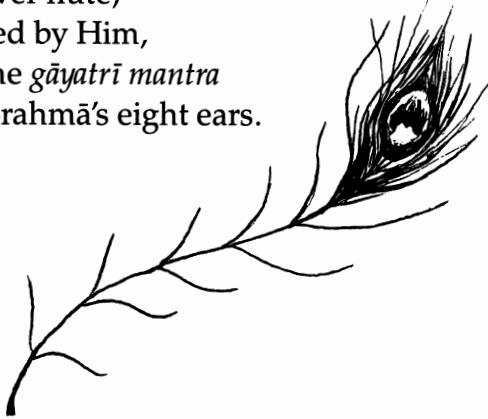
Flowers in Rādhārāṇī's hand —
how lucky they are
to land there,
guided by a kind devotee!
A full-blown rose,
a wild tiger lily,



their stems wrapped in silk,
offered to Dāmodara.
And the soul within goes to Him,
even after the body's wilting.
To be a *puṣpāñjalī*,
a whole life offered,
guided by a thoughtful hand
into the hand of the Queen of Bhakti,
for the pleasure of the Supreme Lord Dāmodara —
don't we all aspire to that?

18

He is a naughty boy
needing to be tied
but remaining untied.
He is a young dancing actor,
with lilacs and peacock feather in His crown.
He's bedecked with pearl necklace
and His silver flute,
when played by Him,
can blow the *gāyatrī mantra*
into Lord Brahmā's eight ears.



He allows us to encircle His lotus eyes
with *candana* decorations,
and He wears a *tilaka* of jewels.
His cowherd's stick of silver
is to rest on during play,
and around His shoulders He has accepted
our garlands from the *tulasī* plant who grows just for Him.
He is the Lord of the universe
and the friend of the poor.

19

The perfection of the eyes
is to soak in His beauty,
but the price is your soul.
The perfection of art
is to decorate His form,
but it takes a pure artist.
The perfection of labor
is to sweat and toil for Him,
and then to go see Him
and offer your obeisances.
The perfection of a life
is to live and die for Him.
And perfection of song
is to sing for Him.
Perfection of wealth
is to give it to Him;
and perfection of family
is to bring your children to His feet.

Perfection of community is
to serve Him together;
and perfection of education
is to teach in His words.
He is the perfection of perfections,
Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara.

20

"In this world of trouble,"
someone may ask,
"why do you worship your Rādhā-Dāmodara?
To help the starving and suffering, I have heard
you Kṛṣṇa conscious people have your 'Food for Life,'
but that seems in small degree next to your
6 times daily *pūjā* and singing of His Names —
Why do you worship so much? In this world of trouble
what good does it do?"

The answer: nothing can be done
to change the *karma*, unless you please the Lord
and return to pure life. If Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa *pūjā*
were a huge affair, as in the days of Ambarīṣa,
there would be no want or needless war.
A social night would be to see Him,
gorgeous on a golden throne, and to offer Him,
grains in tons, ghee, and gold.
Young and old, all could gather
to see the Lord of the universe,
if *pūjā* were widespread.

False-ego-me,
 while looking at the Deity,
 thought, "Ah yes, wherever I turn!"
 As if my consciousness is the sun,
 shining on everyone, and
 Rādhā-Dāmodara just happen to be
 the objects of my gaze.

It's illusion only when I think
 that I can be kind to Dāmodara,
 who is the beginning, middle, and end of all that be.
 Actually, He is giving me —
 who am a fallen, burnt-out spark, —
 the chance to return to life,
 reviving me from almost-dead,
 through the mercy of His Prabhupāda.
 Of all the sins,
 lust, love-lack, anger, etc.,
 this false pride seems the essence.

An etched, curved, silver cane;
 small butterflies of gold, blue, and red;
 bumblebees, yellow and black, whose beady eyes
 sometimes befuddle the *pūjārīs*;
 multi-colored, threaded belts,
 against His softly curving belly;
 ankle bells that attract our eyes

to His red-soled lotus feet;
rings, mostly for the little finger
of His aristocratic right hand;
long and dangling earrings of pearl and rhinestone;
many gold and silver *jārī* crowns;
strands and strands of lovely white pearls;
wide bracelets,
many, many turbans . . .
These are all *tadīya*
connected to Lord Dāmodara,
and Lord Śiva says
they are as good as He —
increasing the ecstasy for the followers of Dāmodara.

23

The opulence of the farm
is milk and grains and garden-fresh produce,
and to offer these to Dāmodara
is Kṛṣṇa conscious perfection.
"No one goes hungry in this village,"
said Kṛṣṇa to His pure devotee,
and so Dāmodara decrees,
"Offer all to Me
and I will bring what you lack
and protect what you have."
By His grace, what do we have?
Our daily offering to Him:
kṣīra, sweet rice, *rabrī*,
freshly churned butter,

barfī, *perā*, yogurt, curd,
ghee-cooked *sabji*, hot foamy milk —
all from His brown Swiss herd.
And from His own golden harvest comes
bread or *capātīs*, pastry or *purīs*.
And in garden time
beets, carrots, lettuce,
strawberries, spinach, peas,
cabbage, peppers, eggplants,
and many bushels of many others.
They are prepared and cooked in His kitchen,
carried in on silver, and placed at His lotus feet,
whereupon He mildly smiles.
It's our loving exchange,
feeding this Boy
who feeds His devotees
who serve in His village
where the *Gītā* is sung —
an example in devotion
for the blind, mad world.

24

I have been pretending
to be a Deity lover,
but it just won't work any more.
I don't have a pure heart,
I don't possess love for Rādhā-Dāmodara,
so now I am turning to others,
and asking them to lead this *kīrtana*;

pūjārīs who first met Their Lordships in places like Oregon,
where They stayed under a house of roses
arranged by Viṣṇujana Swami;
devotees, who admire the swashbuckling
road years of Dāmodara
but who are grateful that They now have accepted
this simple Vṛndāvana village,
which Kṛṣṇa likes best.

Devotees, to whom strange things happen in
connection with the Deity, — while serving Him
glass fell on them and they weren't cut,
or they fell but caught His hand.
Devotees, who notice the little things,
and who are moved by His smile,
and who really look forward to the special holidays,
when they see the Lord changing hues in sunlight,
who rush to join His oxcart rides, who remember the times
when He went into the barn, three years in a row the cow
Hiḍimba leaped forward and tried to chew His garland;
Devotees who draw near to Him,
I should hear from them.

25

When the schoolgirls start thinking too much
which boy they want to marry, prematurely, distractedly,
their teachers suggest,
what about young Dāmodara, why don't you become attracted
to Him? Who is better than He for looks and strength

and fame and wisdom? Our young girls admit
it is hard not to do — serve Him by cooking and looking,
like *gopīs* helping Rādhā.
Marriage will come later and later it will go,
but this love is eternal.
Navanīta Taskara writes, “Her eyes are like lotus
petals and they are just trying to drink the nectar
of the nectarean looks of Kṛṣṇa.”
Who am I to doubt or weigh these words?
“In the morning when we are in front of Them,”
Mohinī says, “sometimes I feel like Rādhā-Dāmodara
are looking right at us, watching what we are doing,
and seeing if you are really Kṛṣṇa conscious.”
If I call that a girlish sentiment,
then it’s a pity I’ve never known it or outgrown it.
Jāhnavā says, “When I see His sweet, smiling face,
it reminds me of when
He was a little cowherd’s boy.
It also reminds me of when He used to play His flute,
and it attracts the minds of the *gopīs*.”
Of course, she has heard all this from her elders,
lucky girl!

26

Everyone wants to remember the old days —
“When and where did *you* first see Rādhā-Dāmodara?”
Gour Hari came out of Macy’s, 34th Street, Manhattan,
and there They were on the sidewalk with Their men.
Puṣpavān first saw Them in Philly downtown,

where suddenly it rained and Their servants
picked Them up and ran into the subway.
Viṣṇujana Swami sliding in his socks
the full length of the Baltimore temple floor,
singing, "Jaya Rādhā-Dāmodara, Jaya Rādhā-Dāmodara,"
and singing it amplified on dozens of college campuses,
magnetic performances drawing thousands to *darśanas* . . .
Prabhupāda saw Them again and again, gave Them
Their Name, because he heard the naughty boy
must be tied so He wouldn't fall while riding the bus,
but Harikeśa Swami says once Rādhā slid right off
from the altar into his arms, knocking his face
with blissful pain.
Police came on a rumor that a boy and girl
were being tortured with flames,
someone's version of Rādhā-Dāmodara's *ārati*;
the cops got to see Them and said, "It's okay."
I saw Them too, enviously,
when They came to our Boston temple,
upstaging our Gopīvallabha on the same altar.
Even after Dāmodara's coming to the farm
Kīrtanānanda Swami was overheard to say,
"Let's steal Them for New Vrindaban."
Tense guards waited with kidnapping feared,
but Prabhupāda said, "New Vrindaban has their
Rādhā-Vṛndāvanacandra. Let Dāmodara stay
at the Pennsylvania farm."
These exploits could make a whole book —
"Was it wrong how They were moved and treated?"

No, it was Their mercy,
those wild days.

27

Servants' realizations,
thoughts culled from thousands of service hours:
"Sometimes Dāmodara seems to smile
in a mood of reciprocation,
awakening my desire for personal, intimate service,
as when I approach Him to adjust
His crown or flute,
or in the offering of the *tulasī* leaves
on the *prasādam* plates.
There is a sense of great friendship with the Lord."
Some serve and like to speak of it,
and some don't talk much
only "duty," or "my service,"
or "Dāmodara is demanding."
But it is helpful to hear,
bringing us closer
to conscious, nonmechanical acts
of service to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

28

Sometimes from the back of the temple
you can catch a shining glimpse of the jewel on Rādhā's nose
when you stand or move in a certain way.
And the way Dāmodara's *cādar* flows

in a swinging motion from His arms,
and the way His pants' cuffs go down around
His small ankles, enhancing our view of His gold and red feet,
and the way His shirtsleeves are puffy,
and His walking stick partially hidden,
the way Rādhā's arms shine when She is wearing
a shortsleeve blouse, and when Her necklace
reflects colors under Her chin,
these are ways we can meditate
on Rādhā-Dāmodara
to purify our minds and senses
for going back to Godhead,
where They reside eternally,
with servitors in pastimes of love.

29

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Goswami, an original
devotee and patron of Rādhā-Dāmodara,
brought Their Viśākhā and Lalitā
as continuation of His loving service,
and especially he ignited the *saṅkīrtana* spirit.
Go out, he said, as Gītā-nāgarī *pūjārīs*,
as go-between from Kṛṣṇa to the lost souls.
Engage the victims of Kali-yuga horrors
by accepting their offerings to Dāmodara.
It's relief for those who give,
and brave service for those surrendered,
who return home with their offerings
and find their *bhakti* soaring.

Now with deeper gratitude
than when they first went out
they see His warmth and beauty.

30

Traveling months away from home,
a *saṅkīrtana* devotee likes to hear and speak
of Dāmodara's preaching exploits:
"As You were compassionate to travel,
giving audience to crowds in parks and streets,
so You may be compassionate on me
who am trying to assist You now
by raising funds for Your project.
No one can rightly say Your Gītā-nāgarī
is not a place of preaching spirit
if You two preaching Lords reside there,
Who used to command teams of 50 men
to go out daily and distribute books.
If now You want us to collect for the *dhāma*,
where You are worshiped in the fields and with the cows,
then *that* is vigorous preaching,
as visioned by Your Prabhupāda,
and for that we also are inspired and prepared
to go out door-to-door,
taking risks for Your Lordships."

31

The song of a seamstress:
"I remember sewing late at night,

hearing those insects in the trees
with their loud din that goes in a pulsing pattern,
thinking, 'This is the hour when Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa met,
this is the hour when all others are sleeping,
and I am sewing, unable to sleep,
wanting to complete one more shirt, one more skirt.'
Making an outfit of yellow, blue, red, and white,
with aprons, shamrocks, *fleur-de-lis*,
that makes Rādhā-Dāmodara resemble
a Swiss Alpine cowmaid and cowboy
yet just in a mood suitable to Them,
but not knowing how it will really look
until the intense moment —
after months of endeavor —
when the curtains are opened
and in breathless anticipation we see
Rādhā and Dāmodara smiling,
and the Vaiṣṇavas pleased —
then all labors are rewarded."
And she wants to sew another and another,
and never stop this sewing *saṅkīrtana*.

32

The song of a cowherd boy:
"They drink from the streams,
and they eat — not in a muddy feed lot —
but by moving from field to greener field,
and sometimes we've seen them grazing with deer,
and we are like their calves,

massaging their udders 'till they let their milk down —
which is what I've heard Goloka cows do,
their milkbags dripping to the grassy ground,
when they see Govinda and Balarāma.
Our whole life is with the cows —
we are with them at their birth,
with them when they give birth,
and with them when they die.
And always they are dependent.
And there is ecstasy working with the oxen,
when they pull Rādhā and Dāmodara
to the top of Govardhana Hill,
and the cows come milling around
with devotees chanting *kīrtana*.
And I feel real close to Rādhā-Dāmodara
when cutting Their wood,
getting it down the hill with oxen and sled,
picking out nice pieces for Their fire,
to warm Their water and heat Their room."

33

A visitor's song:

"I don't say here it's overdone, but where I come from
the Deity is more worshiped in awe.
Here They go out on Dāmodara sports,
cavorting down the factory lift,
or crashing through the tall cornfields
without a thought that it's strange or rough!
I get the feeling He loves to play,

and somehow He's conveyed that to His servants,
who provide such times — and *that's* special.
As Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the Lord walked the earth,
and also as Dāmodara the same is true —
you can see and feel His oxcart's tracks,
the chains for His swing hang in the tree,
and He's seen and been seen everywhere.
Rādhārāṇī goes too — for the fun — both wrapped
in Their sheep-wool *cāḍars* when it's cold
and Their gold auras outshine the beauty of the skies.
I heard once Prabhupāda came here too,
and he drank clear water from Dāmodara's spring,
tasted the same burnt-dark *capātīs*
and said they were "ecstatic."
So even when He's not out there in person,
it's His friends who are walking, working, and playing
in the fields of Dāmodara,
with Dāmodara's bulls,
and Dāmodara's cows."

34

Researching the wondrous essays of Prabhupāda
written in his hand before he came to America,
we found "Interpretations of the *Bhagavad-gītā*"
from 1949, about the cheaters who misuse Kṛṣṇa's words,
and Prabhupāda eulogized his own Guru Mahārāja,
who wanted the *Gītā* as-it-is widely told
and wanted his students to work in that spirit.
In this old-days essay Prabhupāda wrote

of “Gītā-nāgarī” (the village where the *Gītā* is sung),
 and he said it should be a worldwide mission,
 but he also meant it as a plan, a place,
 like a farm somewhere, and there
 the four rules against sin would be strictly followed,
 and everything would be done for Kṛṣṇa.
 In this village they should distribute *prasādam* to the needy,
 and they should make strict *Gītā*-conscious men.
 A Deity should be in the center, a Pārtha-sārathi,
 Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and the Kurukṣetra scene,
 and the village should serve as a hospital
 for the sick of the world — meaning everyone.
 Why did Prabhupāda predict
 a Gītā-nāgarī place and then give the same name
 to this Pennsylvania farm?
 Devotees call it “the Gītā-nāgarī prophecy,”
 and as everyone studies his prophetic words,
 even the night guard is pleased to note
 that Prabhupāda has written there should be police —
 and schools, and printing, *brāhmaṇas*, *vaiśyas*,
kṣatriyas, *śūdras*, traveling groups, a business . . .
 So much yet to manifest.
 How will we create it?
 The prophecy is there.

35

When to Gītā-nāgarī I first came,
 day after day I took walks with Paramānanda
 and imbibed his deep conviction —

for the farm life, cow and ox work,
how it is as vital as distribution of books.
When I asked about nuclear destruction,
he said, "I try not to think of it;
I only can work as Prabhupāda wanted."
He's unflinching in conviction,
because he heard and saw Kṛṣṇa conscious *dharma*
in Prabhupāda's words and symptoms,
living close to Prabhupāda for a month in New Vrindaban.
Various instructions in the care of bulls and cows,
advice about the land, he got from Śrīla Prabhupāda.
Sturdy as the biggest tree, deep rooted,
hard as a rock,
simple in profound trust in Kṛṣṇa —
that if we use things in His service,
He will supply what we lack, and protect what we have.
He can answer every question
with the essence of *siddhānta*, from Prabhupāda, from his books.
Some have hit up against him like a brick wall,
or he has come down on them like a ton of bricks
when they went astray.
The heavy center of Gītā-nāgarī,
Ben Jenkins, liked and respected in town,
as hard-working, someone you can trust,
strong in body, like other farmers,
in overalls like them, but with soft heart for the cows.
The *karmī* farmers cannot comprehend,
but he tells them, "The cow is our mother.
She gives the best food. Why should you kill her?"

His hobby is to take color slides
 of Rādhā-Dāmodara, cows and oxen,
 and green fields, and ploughed rows, and growing corn.
 He knows first-hand how to plant, harvest, milk,
 preach, advise in *saṅkīrtana* business,
 raise a family, be detached,
 fight, worry, sing sweet and heavy for Dāmodara,
 play harmonium and drum, lead a strong *kīrtana*,
 laugh and be relaxed when the pressure gets too great —
 dependence on Kṛṣṇa is his all-in-all.
 He wishes my disciples could be more surrendered,
 wishes I could inspire and push them
 like Prabhupāda moved him,
 but he forgives all shortcomings,
 if one is sincere
 and tries somehow to serve.
 But don't try to cross him.
 Prabhupāda, when he came here
 was assured: "Our Paramānanda is here."

36

Of Rādhā-Dāmodara, Paramānanda opines:
 "I see Them as waiting —
 as I am waiting — for things to improve.
 Yet They always look so beautiful,
 no matter how slow we are
 to make Their doors, or to bring Them
 greens and flowers from our land.
 I think of Them in longing separation

from what we cannot give Them yet,
and I am hankering and lamenting.
Are They special? I don't know.
Are other Deities as attractive while waiting?
It is not unusual for Rādhā-Dāmodara
to be in the barn or fields,
or in a simple temple — They always seem at home.
I think, 'They can't be satisfied with this,'
but in higher sense They are.
They are willing to wait
until we go through our purification.
They will still be around
when finally we get it together
to worship Them as we should.
Devotion is the biggest thing,
but I'm not satisfied with ours.
They are supposed to be the center —
that's the science, I know —
and everything improves
as we worship Them more.
But there are so many troubles
to manage and raise money!
Yet I feel pacified
when I see, every day,
that They are patient."

37

Here is my confession,
and I have to call it that,

if I tell you what attracts me
to Rādhā-Dāmodara.
It's the woodland, creek-side setting,
the rural peace and quiet,
at the heart of this village
where I write and rest from travels.
As a swami, I should prefer
the thick of urban battle,
preaching for Prabhupāda.
I *do* go out — I *want* to —
to drive and fly to hostile lands,
but this home to return to
is Their mercy on me.
The rustic cabin has its comforts
(tho' no shower, and an outhouse),
but its riches are the highest,
clean air, pure water, affectionate friends,
who protect a writer's solitude
and who encourage me to churn out *Nectar*.
When I come to the temple or walk with disciples,
they are spontaneous and eager to hear.
I confess I love Gītā-nāgarī's hard rain,
although I know it causes erosion,
and I hanker for the snow, "Kṛṣṇa's picture,"
although it serves no practical purpose.
I especially love the backwoods path,
where I walk chanting or thinking
to a spot Paramānanda pointed out
as the quietest center of the farm.

I like to go to that spot and then return
to a Gītā-nāgarī lunch
made from garden-fresh products,
prepared by devotees who want me to remember
it is all direct from Kṛṣṇa.
There is in sight no great temple,
and the bills are overdue.
I contribute what I can,
gathering some men and money,
but I'm not so much empowered.
I know I could do more.
Thus my "praise" becomes "confession" —
I love this place of Dāmodara,
and I want to serve it always,
but I have to pray to Them
and to all Their devotees,
"Please keep this place, protect it,
and let me go on serving You."

To be continued.



Year End Prayers

1

Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Dāmodara,
I can't come see You today.
I'm bedded with *karma's* pain.
But at one A.M., as I wake from the worst,
a yearning arises to be Your devotee.
I pray for New Year's remembrance of You.
Please impel it by photo or Name,
or by attachment to Your village.
I cannot ask You to appear in my dreams,
but in waking service, in non-*sahajiyā* vision.
I must travel to see You as Madana-mohana,
as Gopīvallabha, Śaradbihārī, and the Controller
of Trinidad, Ireland and all points east and west,
wherever You send me.
It's hard for me to see so many Kṛṣṇas,
or even One. Please bring me back always to You,
in pain or joy — because it's all joy,
if I glimpse service
at Your lotus feet.

2

Dear Lord Jagannātha, Subhadrā, Balarāma,
in your service
I've descended to a steady low,

but kindly You spare me
from eating lumps of sin.
You have never been “installed”
yet I accept that You are God
in a very simple way.
I love your altars in far-away places
where suddenly You transform into *Vaikuṇṭha*,
a wretched hotel desk, or a bare niche.
Please let me go with You next year,
through tens of thousands of preaching miles,
and let me not forget to make Your bed each night.
I can’t promise increase,
but I promise not to leave Your service.
Please, don’t leave me behind.

3

My *Prabhupāda mūrti*,
you are the dearest of all *mūrtis*.
You were my guide through *Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*,
you are the solace and the savior,
you ease my growing separation
and bring me close by touch of your form.
I could not properly care for you,
so now you sit with *Rādhā-Dāmodara*,
bringing all devotees bliss.
Why should I alone be your worshiper?
Let them meditate daily on your *cāḍars* and hats,
let them bathe you and bring you gifts,

and let them see you as worshiped and worshiper,
just like Viśākhā and Lalitā,
the intimates of their Dāmodara.
Prabhupāda, I pray please send me out
then bring me back with good results,
please keep my head at your feet.

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