

Churning the Milk Ocean Collected

Writings, 1993-1994

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Satsvarupa dasa Goswami

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Churning the Milk Ocean: An Introduction

The pastime described in the Eighth Canto of *Srimad- Bhagavatam*, where the demons and the demigods churn the milk ocean, strikes me as a metaphor for my own creative process. I hope that doesn't sound puffed-up, "my creative process." Actually, all any of us can do is to speak with whatever power God has given us. Anyway, I hope you know what I mean. If you don't, I mean the way I use my tiny free will to be an instrument for Krsna. For me, that specifically means my writing.

Last year I published a book called *The Wild Garden*. The title of that book came from a different metaphor—from the kind of overgrown, untended garden that grows in anybody's backyard in the country when he or she doesn't mow the weeds down. That garden is full of weeds. Weeds? But what are those weeds? If you look at them, you'll see that they are really just different kinds of wild flowers. They usually have their own unsung beauty, and in some cases, their own unsung poisons, but most of them are filled with life and individuality and usefulness. Once you look at them, you realize their value. They can even give you solace—some of those rye grasses. My free-writing is comparable to a wild garden because it also produces varieties of living, and we hope useful, things.

Now I am thinking of the churning process. Of course, we know that churning milk gives us butter. That would be an example of a good result from churning. In the *Bhagavatam* pastime, however, churning produced both poison and nectar. This is an intriguing concept when I apply it to my own ~~writing~~ ^{writing}. Often when I am writing, which, after all, is not so different from churning, the first thing to come up might be an old memory from my pre-Krsna conscious life or some other undesirable thought. I don't reject it: "Okay, this is on your

mind. You want to get it off your chest? Go ahead, write about it.” This is the poison.

We also know that in that *lila*, many beautiful things were produced. The demigods and demons didn’t know what to expect when they were churning. They had a goal in mind—the nectar of immortality—but they didn’t know what to expect before they were successful. Sometimes good things resulted, and sometimes bad things. There’s an attitude or a way to deal with the things that come up, which is advised by Krsna in that pastime.

Let me remind you of the details of the *lila*. The *Bhagavatam* begins its narration in the sixth chapter of the Eighth Canto, “The Demigods and Demons Declare a Truce.” But I’m jumping ahead here. If we really want to trace out this *lila*, we should remember the earlier descriptions of the demigods appealing to the Lord for protection. The demigods and demons are always fighting. When the fighting gets too intense and the devotees are being harassed, Krsna descends. That’s one of the reasons Lord Ramacandra descended, and the demigods appealed to Krsna to descend and kill Kamsa.

This is always going on in the history of the universe. Because the demigods were cursed by Durvasa Muni, they were defeated in battle with the *asuras*. When the demigods were deprived of their heavenly kingdom, they went to Lord Brahma’s assembly house and informed Brahma of what had happened. “Then Brahma, along with all the other demigods, went to the shore of the ocean of milk and offered prayers to Ksirodaksayi Visnu.”

That’s what leads up to this next chapter. The demigods offered prayers to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and He explained to them how to make a truce with the demons. The truce involved churning the milk ocean.

Back to my own use of this pastime as a metaphor for my writing. This pastime comes about because of strife between the devotees and the demons. I can compare this to my creative process in that my writing is an imperfect person's attempt to serve Krsna. Imperfect means that the devotee in me is still battling with the demon in me. We are spirit souls and pure devotees, but our perfection is covered up almost entirely, especially during Kali-yuga. Prabhupada said that in this age, the demons are almost all within our hearts. Still, no one is by constitutional nature a demon. Everyone is pure spirit soul. Of course, some people are so stubborn and hard-core that they will not even try to uncover their spiritual nature for many lifetimes. Neither will Krsna reveal Himself to such a person.

I was rescued by Srila Prabhupada when I was twenty-six years old. Under his influence, and by the discipline of chanting Hare Krsna, I was able to give up the sinful activities I was immersed in. Still, I continued to carry the impression of years of demoniac habits, not only from this lifetime, but from previous lives. Therefore, as I try to express myself in Krsna consciousness today, some demoniac traces – *aparadhas*, and *anarthas*, offenses and unwanted bad habits – still block my attempt to taste the nectar of the holy name and to serve Krsna selflessly.

When I write, I become aware of the battle between demon and devotee, between skepticism and faith, between hardheartedness and love. Therefore, the Lord's advice to the demigods on how to overcome the demons intrigues me.

Here are some relevant verses from or about this pastime:

"Of horses know Me to be Uccaihsrava, produced during the churning of the ocean for nectar. Of lordly elephants I am Airavata, and among men I am the monarch." (Bg. 10.27)

Purport: "The devotee demigods and the demons (*asuras*) once took part in churning the sea. From this churning, nectar and poison were produced, and Lord Siva drank the poison. From the nectar were produced many entities, of which there was a horse named Uccaihsrava. Another animal produced from the nectar was an elephant named Airavata. Because these two animals were produced from nectar, they have special significance, and they are representatives of Krsna."

One interesting point is that the creatures produced from the nectar are listed as identical with Krsna. When we think of them, we can understand their relationship with the Supreme.

Let's go to the Eighth Canto itself: "Although the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the master of the demigods, was capable of performing the activities of the demigods by Himself, He wanted to enjoy pastimes in churning the ocean. Therefore He spoke as follows." (*Bhag.* 8.6.17)

The first thing the Lord said was that the demons had the upper hand because they were favored by time. Therefore, the demigods should be clever and make a truce because through this temporary truce, the demigods would later be able to triumph. This is the logic of the snake and the mouse. Once, a snake and a mouse were both trapped in a basket. Snakes usually eat mice, but why eat when you're trapped in the basket too? Therefore, the snake made a truce with the mouse and encouraged the mouse to gnaw a hole through the basket so they could both escape. As soon as the mouse made the hole, the snake ate the mouse and escaped.

We may be surprised to hear Krsna giving such strategic advice to the demigods. I identify with that advice though. I also have to make a truce with the demons within me. There's no point struggling for repression or battling them into non

existence. Some of them may be favored by time. Instead, I trick some of them; I let them gnaw a hole in the basket and then I get rid of them. Sometimes, that's the only way to overcome demons.

"Immediately endeavor to produce nectar, which a person who is about to die may drink to become immortal. O demigods, cast into the ocean of milk all kinds of vegetables, grasses, creepers and drugs. Then, with My help, making Mandara Mountain the churning rod and Vasuki the rope for churning, churn the ocean of milk with undiverted attention. Thus the demons will be engaged in labor, but you, the demigods, will gain the actual result, the nectar produced from the ocean." (*Bhdg.* 8.6.21-23)

Prabhupada writes in the purport: "It appears that when different kinds of drugs, creepers, grasses, and vegetables are put into this milk and the milk is churned, as milk is churned for butter, the active principles of the vegetables and drugs mix with the milk, and the result is nectar." The nectar didn't come haphazardly, but by first putting in the special ingredients before the churning.

Kṛṣṇa advised them not to be angry, but to agree to whatever the demons proposed. He said He would be with them. They had to be aware that when they began to churn, "A poison known as *kalakuta* will be generated from the ocean of milk, but you should not fear it. And when various products are churned from the ocean, you should not be greedy for them or anxious to obtain them, nor should you be angry." (*Bhdg.* 8.6.25)

Purport: "It appears that by the churning process many things would be generated from the ocean of milk, including poison, valuable gems, nectar and many beautiful women. The demigods were advised, however, not to be greedy for the gems or beautiful women, but to wait patiently for the nectar."

My purpose in writing is to produce the nectar of *krsna- hatha*, *krsna-upadesa*. I may become entranced from time to time with the vividness of the images that come to mind or the power of expression, but the Lord advises that I don't become attached to any of these things. I shouldn't try to cash in on the results of the free-writing process, but keep going. In my case, when the nectar does come, it's not for me anyway. It's something that I will offer to Krsna. I will take His remnants, and may it make me a better servant of the Lord.

"Sukadeva Gosvami continued: O King Pariksit, after advising the demigods in this way, the independent Supreme Personality of Godhead, the best of all living entities, disappeared from their presence." (*Bhag.* 8.6.26) The demigods thought over what they would do and they approached the head of the demons, Bali Maharaja. They sat with him as he was surrounded and protected by his leaders.

Bali heard Indra's proposition and agreed. The first task would be to carry Mandara Mountain to the ocean of milk, and this would take their combined strength.

Although it appears that the demigods and the demons were in agreement, Prabhupada explains that both parties were planning on cheating the other. Bali Maharaja knew the demigods were weak; he was convinced the demons would be able to take all the nectar for themselves. The demigods knew that they would get the nectar by the grace and power and patronage of Lord Visnu. It was all diplomacy, but Lord Visnu was on the side of the demigods.

Then together, the demons and demigods uprooted Mandara Mountain and carried it to the milk ocean. The mountain was heavy and it was a long way to the ocean. Gradually, they lost their strength due to fatigue and many of their party were crushed beneath the mountain. Lord Visnu appeared, glanced

over both demons and demigods, and brought them back to life. Then He lifted the mountain in one hand, placed it on Garuda's back, and took it to the ocean of milk. Garuda placed the mountain near the water and then Lord Visnu asked him to leave the place, since Vasuki was to be the churning rope. Vasuki wouldn't come until his enemy, Garuda, was gone. They coiled Vasuki around Mandara Mountain and began to churn the ocean.

"The Personality of Godhead, Ajita, grasped the front portion of the snake, and the demigods followed. The leaders of the demons thought it unwise to hold the tail, the inauspicious portion of the snake. Instead, they wanted to hold the front, which had been taken by the Personality of Godhead and the demigods, because that portion was auspicious and glorious. Thus the demons, on the plea that they were all highly advanced students of Vedic knowledge and were all famous for their birth and activities, protested that they wanted to hold the front of the snake." (*Bhag.* 8.7.2-3)

The Personality of Godhead accepted their proposal and He took the tail of the snake with the demigods following Him. It didn't matter to the demigods which end of the snake they held — they just wanted to be with Visnu. All the advantages gained by the demons would be of no account in the end.

The next problem they encountered was that Mandara Mountain, the churning rod, had no support. Although the demons and demigods tried to hold it afloat, it was so heavy that it sank into the water. "Seeing the situation that had been created by the will of the Supreme, the unlimitedly powerful Lord, whose determination is infallible, took the wonderful shape of a tortoise, entered the water, and lifted the great Mandara Mountain." (*Bhag.* 8.7.8)

As we hear the narration, we also hear about being on one side or the other, demons or devotees, and the differences. What need is there to cooperate with the demons? Why not have nothing to do with them? But that's not always an option. When the demigods were weaker, they could not simply brush aside the demons, but had to work with them in order to defeat them in the end. Part of the victory meant first leading the demons on. Risky business. But this pastime also shows that Krsna protects us in the face of opposition from demons. If we're not afraid and face the demons while taking shelter of Krsna, Krsna will protect us.

I don't need to make a tally of each point as if it applies exactly to my own situation. I am taking this pastime as a general kind of symbol to show how the churning process can produce both poison and nectar, and how sometimes you have to declare a truce with your internal demons and then engage them to get at the nectar. It also points out how important it is to align yourself with the devotees, even if you happen to be "working with" the demons. In the instance of writing, that means not taking the viewpoint of an asuric free-writer who lets "everything" come out with no regard to what it is and what its implications are. An asuric free-writer writes for sense gratification; I want to write for Krsna.

So again I am saying, when I start writing and powerful things appear, part of me may want to go with their energies. I don't go with the energy in order to become a great writer or to revel in powerful imagery or because I think I've discovered some great universal secret; I trust that I know what to reject and what to accept, what is favorable for Krsna consciousness and what is unfavorable, and I trust that Krsna will protect me. I also accept that this is Krsna's plan for me that I work in this way.

Ah! How can I say that my churning process is ordered by Visnu? The demigods were able to work confidently because they had received a direct order from Krsna. That's probably the weak point in my analogy, that Krsna has ordered me to free-write. But I'm aware of the weakness. I'm always praying that I'm doing what Krsna wants. Somehow or other I am churning, so I pray to Krsna that He will guide me and protect me and that in the end, He will be pleased by the nectar that results. Krsna has not exactly appeared in my writing to enjoy His *lilas* with His devotees, but I am just one tiny, crippled servant who has found a method to write and who wants to serve Him with it, although it produces both poison and nectar. My whole life is based on the principle of trying to serve Krsna and my spiritual master. Therefore, when I serve, I have to apply my energy to serve. Whatever passion is in me comes out. Whatever ignorance is in me comes out. Whatever goodness is in me comes out. Then the transcendental nectar will also come and I will offer that to Krsna. Krsna will help me.

Aside from this specific image, the Vaisnava *deary as* have given evidence that when we perform devotional service, weeds grow alongside the *bhakti*. Lord Caitanya painted that image for us in His explanation of *anarthas* and *aparadhas*. When we perform devotional service, side by side with the auspicious spiritual growth of our devotional creeper, inauspicious weeds grow up. If we're not careful to protect ourselves by distinguishing the weeds from the devotional creeper, we could allow the weeds to choke the creeper and fall down in spiritual life.

Becoming famous as a devotee—and attached to that fame— is an example of a weed growing with the *bhakti*. But let's examine how it comes. The devotee applies his energy to performing devotional service and there is some immediate result

in this world. People may praise his piety or give him money. He may see other devotees with more facility and envy them. He may grow to like being worshiped, or to expect to be worshiped. Those desires were not part of his original intention to serve Krsna, but they are by-products of his activities. All devotees have to learn how to deal with these unwanted desires. Krsna gives us the process by which we can learn devotional service, and it is filled with these kinds of tests: can we distinguish the weeds from the creeper and can we stay fixed on our watering of the creeper without being deviated by our love for the weeds? By Krsna's grace, we can.

I'm satisfied that even though this metaphor is not a perfect description of my own situation, it speaks to me. Let's hear more of the actual *lila*.

The churning went on and on. It was hard work. Both the demigods and the demons became tired. Lord Visnu then entered into them according to their mode of nature. He entered the demons in the mode of passion, the demigods in the mode of goodness, and Vasuki in the mode of ignorance.

Mandara Mountain was so tremendously tall and heavy that Lord Visnu took yet another form and appeared on top of the hill with thousands of hands. In this way He helped balance the mountain.

"The demigods and demons worked almost madly for the nectar, encouraged by the Lord, who was above and below the mountain and who had entered the demigods, the demons, Vasuki and the mountain itself. Because of the strength of the demigods and demons, the ocean of milk was so powerfully agitated that all the alligators in the water were very much perturbed. Nonetheless the churning of the ocean continued in this way." (*Bhag*, 8.7.13)

The participants were scorched by Vasuki's many fire-breathing mouths. The Lord then appeared on the sea and brought rain and breezes with Him to give them all relief.

Still they churned. Despite so much endeavor, however, no nectar was produced. That's what it's like. I write and burn and get some relief. I feel Krsna is with me, so I keep at it, although the nectar doesn't come immediately.

Then the Lord appeared in yet another form, as Ajita, and took part in the churning. Because He joined in the churning, everyone was assured of success.

"The fish, sharks, tortoises and snakes were most agitated and perturbed. The entire ocean became turbulent, and even the large aquatic animals like whales, water elephants, crocodiles, and *timirigila* fish [large whales that can swallow small whales] came to the surface. While the ocean was being churned in this way, it first produced a fiercely dangerous poison called *halahala*." (Bhdg. 8.7.18)

Everyone was very much afraid of this poison as it began to spread out. You can just imagine it doing that, like an oil slick from some super-tanker. Out of fear, the demigods and demons asked Lord Siva to protect them. The *acarya* commentators on *Srimad'Bhagavatam* explain that Lord Siva is the representative of Lord Visnu. It's not that Lord Visnu couldn't save them Himself, but He wanted Lord Siva to do this service.

Lord Siva was in a magnanimous mood. He told them all that he would help them. Then he turned to BhavanI, his wife, and said, "My dear BhavanI, just see how all these living entities have been placed in danger because of the poison produced from the churning of the ocean of milk. It is my duty to give protection and safety to all living entities struggling for existence. Certainly it is the duty of the master to protect his suffering dependents. People in general, being bewildered by

the illusory energy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, are always engaged in animosity toward one another. But devotees, even at the risk of their own temporary lives, try to save them.” (*Bhag.* 8.7.37-39)

This is characteristic of the Vaisnava’s mood. Seeing people performing crazy activities that lead only to repeated birth and death, the devotee wants to save them. That is why Lord Siva stepped forward—for the benefit of humanity. These are wonderful preaching verses.

“My dear gentle wife Bhavani, when one performs benevolent activities for others, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Hari, is very pleased. And when the Lord is pleased, I am also pleased, along with all other living creatures. Therefore, let me drink this poison, for all the living entities may thus become happy because of me.” (*Bhag.* 8.7.40)

My response to these verses is this: let me churn my own “ocean of milk” through the writing process, not so that I can taste the nectar and become immortal, but so like Dhanvantari, I can give the nectar to others who are ill due to their identification with the material world. Again, as I do this, there may be a danger that first I will churn up something useless or even dangerous—old memories or whatever. Those things inevitably appear when I am trying to write as honestly as I can. I face them, knowing that if things get too bad, Kṛṣṇa will pick up the churning rope and help me.

But what do I do with the “poison” that is churned? I can’t distribute it, obviously. Should I swallow it? At least I can say that I risk working through whatever poisons come in order to get to the deeper level of sweetness.

Lord Siva symbolizes this risky stage of swallowing the poison for the benefit of others. “Thereafter, Lord Siva, who is dedicated to auspicious, benevolent work for humanity, compas

sionately took the whole quantity of poison in his palm and drank it.” (*Bhag.* 8.7.42) He was so great that he was able to take the entire quantity of poison and shrink it to fit in the palm of his hand. The poison then made a blue mark on Lord Siva’s neck. That mark, however, is accepted as an ornament, and not a disfigurement. “It is said that great personalities almost always accept voluntary suffering because of the suffering of people in general. This is considered the highest method of worshipping the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is present in everyone’s heart.” (*Bhag.* 8.7.44)

In the purport to this verse Srila Prabhupada quotes Krsna’s statement in the *Bhagavad-gita* that one who preaches the message of the *Bhagavad-gita* is the most dear to Him and no one can excel that devotee. Give them Krsna consciousness, the thing that they really want, that they have been wandering life after life for and which they have been unable to find. Krsna is in their hearts, but they don’t know it, they’re so blind. A devotee is kind to raise them to the devotional level. Just imagine how pleased Krsna is when His devotees deliver enlightenment to the ignorant and deliver the *jivas* through *bhakti*, even at great risk. Krsna becomes very pleased. This is what Lord Siva did and this is what I aspire to do, in a tiny way, through my writing: I want to teach devotional service and to exemplify devotional service in my own life.

Of course, I am not Lord Siva. Therefore, how can I drink the poison that is produced from even such a small event as my own churning process? I can’t. I turn to Krsna, to the supreme powerful, and He helps me.

I don’t know if that’s the proper attitude to take. I need help in dispensing the poison and not becoming overwhelmed by it, but I can’t get rid of it all myself. I don’t want Krsna to become

my order-supplier or worse, my garbage cleaner, my poison- drinker. I want to offer Krsna nice foodstuffs, not poison to hold in His throat. As Lord Siva did, I ask Krsna's direction: "Please, Lord, give me some instruction on how to deal with the poison. You sent Lord Siva to take care of that poison, so please give me the intelligence to deal with this poison so I don't become contaminated by it." There are so many thoughts that come automatically to the mind that can poison our devotional meditation—lust, fear, greed, and envy. Perhaps we can meditate on Lord Siva's compassion and take courage from his example. Krsna, please give us the intelligence.

After the poison, nice things were produced. "Upon Lord Siva's drinking the poison, both the demigods and the demons, being very pleased, began to churn the ocean with renewed vigor. As a result of this, there appeared a cow known as *surabhi*." (*Bhdg.* 8.8.1)

This is how it works. First the bad, and if we bear with it, then the good. We don't have to be afraid and run from our own devotional churning. We should simply go on with the process no matter what appears, with faith that good will be the ultimate result. By going through the whole process, we will learn how to recognize auspicious things that can be offered to the Lord and to reject whatever is inauspicious.

The demigods, knowing the value of cows, took possession of Mother Surabhi. The demons didn't contest it. (We will also produce some things which we will know are nice, even though others don't see their value. That's okay. Use them in Krsna's service.)

Next, the elephant Airavata was generated. Then more elephants, then gems, then the Kaustubha gem, which Lord Visnu took. Something so valuable and beautiful was produced

from the churning that even Lord Visnu stepped forward and claimed it as His own. This gives me hope.

(I know I'm audacious to keep making this comparison. I hope that whoever is reading this doesn't misunderstand.)

It's a fact that the creative process produces something independent of its creator. For example, a writer may produce a book from his internal churning, and it may be a personal book, but once it is produced, it has its own life. The writer may have an opinion of it, he may feel that it's part of his life, but once it has been produced, it has an independent existence. People will take it and make their own interpretations of it. Some will like it; others will not.

Similarly, the demons' and demigods' churning was being rewarded by Krsna's will and according to the scientific process established at the beginning. Remember how they threw certain ingredients into the ocean before they began churning? This would bring about the appearance of certain beings.

In our case, we're not the supreme controller. We throw in our ingredients and then express ourselves according to our level of creativity. Something may be produced. It may be great or it may be poisonous. We're not in control. Krsna rewards us in His own way. The creative process is a powerful thing. It releases forces beyond our limited selves. That's why people become so enamored by it. Lord Brahma wants to be a creator. Creators sometimes think they are God. How else could they manifest so many products that suddenly take on an independent existence? But the devotee is intelligent enough to know that he's working for Krsna, as service. He hopes to produce something so nice that Krsna will want to step forward and claim it for Himself.

Then the *apsaras* appeared, then Rama, the Goddess of Fortune, who is absolutely dedicated to the Supreme Personality of

Godhead. There is an extended description of her personal beauty and how everyone desired her—demigods and demons alike. She is the source of all opulence. Everyone wants what Lakṣmī-devī can give, but few people want to possess her so they can offer her to Kṛṣṇa. That's what happened when she appeared. They didn't think, "Here's another jewel to put on Kṛṣṇa's chest," but, "Let us enjoy her."

She was so powerful that nobody could take her, although everyone tried to worship her and gain her favor. There's a description of how sages came forward and performed an *abhi-sekha* for her appearance, the demigods played music for her pleasure, and the elements themselves came forward and offered her presents. She then moved among everyone there as a princess examining the princes who have attended her *svayam-vara*. After looking everyone over, she saw that none of them was supreme. Some had good qualities, but lacked other qualities. No one possessed everything. "Someone who has undergone great austerity has not yet conquered anger. Someone possesses knowledge, but he has not conquered material desires." (*Bhag.* 8.8.20) Indirectly, she indicated that she was looking for Kṛṣṇa. When we find that person who has all qualities, that is Bhagavan, God.

Finally, she approached the Lord, who was there in several forms. He was there as Ajita, He was there as the tortoise, He was there as the thousand-armed form on top of Mandara Mountain. She went up to Lord Mukunda, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and wanted Him to be her husband. She placed a garland of lotus flowers on His neck. "Then, expecting to get a place on the bosom of the Lord, she remained standing by His side, her face smiling in shyness." (*Bhag.* 8.8.24)

We can learn from this part of the pastime. If any fortune appears in our churning process, we shouldn't be among the

fools who try to enjoy her as their own. We should be among the devotees who bring her as quickly as possible to her eternal Lord. The demigods were happy about her choosing the Supreme, and they chanted mantras to glorify Kṛṣṇa. It became a real festival. As a result, however, the demons became morose. They couldn't relate to the demigods being jubilant to see Rama with Viṣṇu at all.

Then more people were produced—a girl named Varuṇī, who was captured by the demons. She's good for controlling drunkards. And finally, a wonderful male person appeared, Dhanvantari. He was holding a golden pitcher filled with the actual nectar that was the goal of the churning.

At this point, I would like to review some of the points. As I have said, the metaphor as it applies to me (us) is not perfect, but I would still like to use it. First, though, I would like to say that there is another equally valid use of the word "churning." That is, when we hear of pure devotees churning the topics of Kṛṣṇa. In that sense, it's not that the churning is being done by opposing sides, but by two devotees who want to discuss *kṛṣṇa-kāthā*. I think of someone like Śrīla Prabhupada churning, for example, or the Six Gosvamis of Vṛndāvana, or even us when we actually sit down and discuss *kṛṣṇa-kāthā*.

I remember, in fact, that the night before Prabhupada's disappearance festival in Vṛndāvana, the temple president asked the devotees, especially those who had association with Prabhupada, to get together and discuss Prabhupada's pastimes. He called that program, "Churning the Nectar." One person after another would start right in with nectarean stories of

Prabhupada's pastimes. In this way, the nectar was churned. I wanted to include this point in my essay because we should acknowledge that by staying on topics of Krsna or the pure devotees, the nectar gets churned and everything becomes more and more wonderful.

My use of this pastime as a metaphor does not necessarily describe that type of churning. I chose it because the churning is being done by opposing elements. In the pure nectar churning, we have all good elements and we get only rare, wonderful jewels. In the other kind of churning, both bad and good are produced, and the good elements have to face the fact that the bad elements exist. Not only face the bad elements, but defeat them. The good elements can't simply ignore the bad. In fact, the bad elements are often stronger for the moment, even among those of us who are practicing Krsna consciousness. Therefore, this pastime can teach us how to confront our demons and to overcome them.

Where do we get these bad elements in the first place? We are products of Kali-yuga. That is our conditioning. If we had been born in Satya-yuga, we would have had good conditioning. In that sense, our conditioning wouldn't limit us. Rather, it would have been favorable. Instead, we're shaped and confined and contaminated by the influence of the age in which we live.

For example, how many of us began eating meat practically at birth? How many of us learned from childhood that we were our bodies and that life was meant for sense gratification? All values are reinforced by the family and society into which we are born. They become part of our subtle make-up. Only when we go through intense pain and suffering, or we get the association of pure devotees, do we recognize our Kali-yuga conditioning as poison and desire to reject it. Still, that purging doesn't happen overnight. It takes time. Seeing his situation, a

devotee may approach the Lord and ask, “Can I churn myself whereby these things will come out? Will You protect me?”

We shouldn’t think that it’s invalid to create a metaphor out of one of Krsna’s pastimes in order to gain something in our Krsna consciousness. Krsna’s pastimes are deep. They have many layers. Seeing them metaphorically does not imply that they are mythical or allegorical. It’s just another layer of His pastimes. For example, Krsna kills demons for His own sport and to delight His friends in Vraja, but Bhaktivinoda Thakura has seen how devotees can learn lessons from the killing of the demons and apply that killing to the demons within us. Kaliya symbolizes the tendency to speak negatively about others. Certain demons personify deceit or envy or lust or gluttony. Krsna and Balarama can kill them all.

Krsna will also protect us. Krsna will cheat the nondevotees and favor the devotees. But the first thing that happened was that poison was produced. Immediately, things appeared to be out of control. It looked bad for everyone. We may also lose heart when we start something in our service and come face to face with our *anarthas*.

Most people newly coming to Krsna consciousness don’t look at their *anarthas*. They right away think they have become pure devotees. Everything else has been left behind. Many of us even become a little dramatic about this. We leave behind our apartments, our girl friends or boyfriends, our record collection, our art or writing or career. We just walk away from it all and move into the temple. I did that. I walked out of my wretched apartment on Suffolk Street on the Lower East Side. The place was so wretched that the landlord didn’t even bother to collect the rent. As you walked in the building, water would drip on you from the ceiling. Even my friends wouldn’t visit me there. I left it all behind, I was in such a renounced mood.

It was external and too extreme, although it did get me to 26 Second Avenue and to Prabhupada's lotus feet. I left behind a valuable stack of long-playing records that I could have sold. I abandoned my cats in the hallway. I never went back.

We all do that, and it's important too, to step through the door of the material world into the spiritual world and to enter a new phase of life. It becomes a milestone in our devotional career. Even the theatrics with which we do it are important. They underline it for us. They make it serious and irrevocable. They tell us that we have burned all our bridges. We act like that to ensure we won't go back.

However, there were still these things in us that didn't get burned. We don't always see them right away—we're too taken up with our new direction. But then there they are. We all notice them eventually. That's where the churning comes in. Churning means facing who we really are—people with conviction to be devotees but who are still carrying around some material attachments. It means facing that we didn't leave all of our old selves behind.

That can be an overwhelming discovery, just as the demigods and demons both so much feared the poison. But Krsna will protect us. He will see us through to the beautiful things. In the milk ocean pastime, those beautiful things, the horse, Uccaihsrava, and the elephant, Airavata, are considered manifestations of Krsna.

At that point, we will have to deal with other problems. The question of proprietorship will be raised. Who will possess these strange, exotic, useful, and beautiful products of their own churning? Should we possess them ourselves? Can we claim credit for their appearance? Will people recognize us as the creator of beautiful things? No, they are simply to be used in Krsna's service. Krsna Himself may come forward and possess

something or He may not, but we will continue to offer the results of our devotional service to Him and not claim them for ourselves.

Then Dhanvantari will eventually appear, holding the nectar. Dhanvantari is described as a plenary portion of a plenary portion of Lord Visnu and conversant with the science of medicine. When He appeared, He gave no indication what He was going to do with the nectar. In the famous ISKCON painting, Dhanvantari is holding His hand in the *mudra* of benediction. As soon as He appeared, the demons unceremoniously snatched the pot of nectar and ran off with it, leaving the demigods morose.

Like children, the demigods approached the Supreme Lord. He told them, “Don’t be aggrieved. By My own energy I shall bewilder the demons by creating a quarrel among them. In this way, I shall fulfill your desire to have the nectar.”

This is how the Lord deals with demons. The original quarrel was between the demigods and the demons; now the Lord will incite the demons to quarrel among themselves because each of them wants to be the first to drink.

In his purport, Srila Prabhupada says that this is typical of what’s going on in the world today. Almost everyone is a demon and they are all competing with other demons for supremacy—one country against another, one terrorist group against another, splinter groups, super-powers, big nations, small nations, the United Nations—it’s all confrontation of one group of *asuras* with another.

I like to think of this part of the story because it shows me how the Lord has everything under control, even when the demons are in possession of what is actually meant for the devotees.

Then the Lord assumed the form of an extremely beautiful woman, the Mohinl-murti incarnation. In that form, She cheated the demons and rewarded the devotees. Krsna will protect us.

On Genre

I remember when I was in college, one of my English professors taught Oscar Wilde. He pointed out to us that Wilde wrote in several genres. He wrote an outstanding drama ("The Importance Of Being Earnest"), some significant poems, a novel (*A Portrait Of Dorian Gray*), and a confessional, philosophical book (*De Profundis*). My professor wanted to impress upon us that Wilde's diversity was a sign of his opulence as a writer and that such opulence was unusual.

Other scholars and critics appreciate authors who write within a particular genre and who don't stray from it. Robert Frost has been called a "pure poet" because he didn't venture beyond poetry into prose. Emily Dickinson didn't write novels. Some critics think that these authors expressed their literary opulence by dedicating their lives to one genre and working it for all it was worth.

Thus there are two approaches: a writer can range out into many genres, or write within one genre. Psycho-physical nature, talent, and other factors, all come into the decision each artist makes to either confine him or herself to one form or to explore many forms.

In Western literature, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, authors began to break away from the critics' restrictive definitions and create new genres. Samuel Johnson, writing in the 18th century, declared that it was an illusion to think that an author could create new genres. He said that the classical genres had already been developed, and that an author's task was to write excellently within them. This statement

The word *genre* simply means "kind, sort, style, or classification." In its artistic sense, it means a particular type of performance, such as the novel or symphony.

opposes the more romantic idea of an artist forging his own genres and finding for himself the full expression of his art. Such an artist would respect and admire the legacy of the past great writers, follow them in essence, but search for a more personal method of expression, establish new genres, and pass



those genres on to future writers.

The English language is a particularly flexible language. It allows for the invention of words and phrases, and for the inclusion of idiomatic speech in serious writing. The modern age lends itself to experimentation. Artists want to break out of stifling, traditional models and defy the categorization of their work. All this has helped artists develop genres that are meaningful to them.

I like to think I am developed in my own structures and genres. Of course, whatever a devotee does, he wants to glorify Kṛṣṇa and express the *parampara*, and that is a devotee's ultimate "genre." Śrīla Prabhupada approved of diversity and fresh expression in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He called it "putting old wine in new bottles." In his purport to *Bhagavatam* 1.5.16, Prabhupada writes that Lord Caitanya's followers show great dexterity in presenting Kṛṣṇa consciousness in dynamic ways for preaching. Therefore, I feel that developing writing forms

* The genres of English literature are derived from classical Greek theory. From the Renaissance to the Romantic period (16-19c), the classical genres were regarded as fixed and virtually part of the natural order of things, with boundaries that should not be crossed. Later, this was considered restrictive. The growth of the novel (an entirely non-classical genre) challenged the assumption that new genres could not be developed. One scholar writes, "Like grammar, genre is held to be more descriptive than prescriptive. Though probably deficient in some respects, a description is likely to aid attempts to talk and write intelligently about literature."

outside the traditional Sanskrit style has a place in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I am a Westerner and expressing myself in the Western idiom. Although Vaisnava literature is most often written in Sanskrit according to the grammatical rules of that language, the *ācāryas* expressed themselves with diversity. Rupa Gosvami, Jiva Gosvami, and Visvanatha Cakravarti all wrote dramas, philosophical works, poetry, and songs. Śrīla Prabhupada also wrote newspaper articles and poems as well as his Bhaktivedānta purports and summary studies.

Although the modern age, and certainly the West, is full of defects, and its literature has certainly become degraded, there is the blessing of freedom. A poem no longer has to rhyme or be metered. A writer no longer has to confine himself to the classical definition of tragedy or comedy or drama or satire. Authors are free to discover themselves as artists as they write.

I do not accept Samuel Johnson's judgment that original writing is an illusion. Does that classify me as a "romantic"? I believe that if an artist has no hope of expressing himself as an individual, why should he bother to write at all? If all writing means is filling in a generic blank in a predetermined structure, then it becomes more clerical than artistic. Writing should be creative.

It is true, however, that no one can write without being influenced by the whole tradition of great writers. Serious writers study others' writing models, try to imbibe them, and then go forward as individuals. Prabhupada said about writing for *Back to Godhead* that we should assimilate Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy from his books and then "make a literary career."

Śrīla Prabhupada did not want us to merely parrot the philosophy. He wanted us to speak the philosophy in our own words. Taking up a literary career, therefore, may include learning to write in our own idiom, in our own voice, and not in

imitation of Srila Prabhupada's voice. It would be superficial to think that original or creative writing cannot represent the *parampara*. For the first time in history, Krsna consciousness is being spoken by people raised in the West. These people naturally have new angles in their expression of Krsna conscious realization. By their making those expressions, the *parampara* philosophy is simultaneously honored and expanded.

What does this mean in practice for a devotee-artist? T. S. Eliot writes, "If you examine the words of any great innovator in chronological order, you may expect to find that the author has been driven on step by step in his innovations, by an inner necessity, and that the novelty of form has rather been forced upon him by his material than deliberately sought."

A devotee-writer is not a slave to tradition as much as he is a servant of the essence of tradition. A devotee-writer also allows his art to be formed by tradition—as it works upon him and drives him into the depths toward his personal expression of tradition. A devotee-writer works from his inner necessity, not from any externally applied constraints. Thus, an American-born devotee may find himself writing in American English rather than the flowery language of the Gaudiya Math. He may find himself writing without following the strict grammatical structures of Sanskrit drama. He may write free verse poetry instead of rhyming couplets. And he may find that his American-born audience more readily identifies with his words than if he had kept to the letter of the generic law.

Of course, the devotee-artist is interested only in glorifying Krsna. As Krsna expresses Himself in a variety of ways, so the devotee may also. The goal of the devotee-artist, therefore, is to glorify Krsna with heartfelt expression.

Writing Sessions

Introduction

Writing sessions are my daily bread, my writing staple. Writing sessions are rough-hewn free spirits. They are rich, like a forest filled with trees and undergrowth and wildlife. They are my “wild garden.” They are my way to “churn the milk ocean.” They are my exercise for the spirit, my way to relax, my prime writer’s duty. They are my way to fill notebooks. It’s practice.

Writing sessions return to the same themes over and over. In that way, they represent my life and they are true to that life. Writing sessions are the matrix from which other things may come. I keep returning to them, heeding the little voice in my head that says, “Isn’t it about time you get to working on writing sessions again?”

Writing sessions cannot really be defined in terms of genre. Having said that, I will give a simple and stark definition of what they are: they are timed (usually one-hour) writings in which I write whatever comes.

Here are some other statements about them that I have culled from the sessions themselves:

“I am performing this [writing session] for myself, for my betterment, so that I may come to praise and serve guru and Krsna one day, and not for my selfishness.”

“A desire to think over alone what has happened.”

“Don’t write to explain yourself to an objective reader so that no one will misunderstand you. That’s a bore. You’re not in a court of justice. Just speak as the flute blows.”

“You mean you go on writing even when you don’t have sober intent of a Krsna conscious topic in mind?

“Yes, because the loss of control helps me to get access to material without the censor-editor.”

"Every sentence proclaims a sorrow that I am not Krsna conscious and that I have to die and that all these people are here ... we don't seem to be doing what we should, not enough. Can't say it. Can't feel it. Can't even dream it."

"If you ask me what I think of something, I say, 'I don't know. I'll have to do a writing session to find out.' That's a joke, but there's truth in it."

I began the journey toward my present writing around 1977 when I read *Writing Without Teachers*, by Peter Elbow. He taught "free-writing," something I later discovered was being taught by a whole generation of writing teachers. In 1977, despite its popularity among writing teachers, free-writing was still a challenged concept. Now it is taught across the writing school curriculum.

"Free-writing" means writing whatever comes to mind within a certain time limit. As a method, it is meant to free a writer from writer's block. Writer's block paralyzes a writer when it makes him unable to write and stifles him when he gets stuck on the surface, writing with competence but no heart.

Therefore, free-writing was intended as a warm-up to other writing. Elbow suggested a writer give himself a time limit and then write without concern for grammar, punctuation, spelling, or coherent communication. He said that the free-writer shouldn't stop to think at all, but should write whatever comes to mind, even if that means writing repeatedly, "I can't think of anything to say."

He said that free-writing should not be used to produce publishable writing but should serve only as a warm-up. He also said that an author would write some of his best lines during a free-write session, but that it would be laziness or even cheat

ing to scoop from those lines to develop a finished piece. Then he described how although he was once interested in what his free-writing produced, now he simply throws it in the trash.

I remember when I first started free-writing, I was living in Los Angeles and working as editor-in-chief for *Back to Godhead* magazine. I was interested in the technique because I was trying to improve my own writing. At that time, I was trying to write a book on *varnasrama* to fulfill Prabhupada's request that I write something called, "All Things Fail Without Krsna." At Peter Elbow's advice, I started to use free-writing as my warm-up. But I didn't find it satisfying. It seemed too roundabout and I couldn't get to the point. I thought I couldn't discover what it was I wanted to say simply by writing and writing and writing about it.

Free-writing didn't have a real impact on my writing until almost ten years later when I read Natalie Goldberg's book, *Writing Down the Bones*. Goldberg calls free-writing "writing practice," and she gives it rules: keep the hand moving, don't think, go for the jugular (go for whatever is filled with energy), don't be logical, use first thoughts. Her emphasis on how to be free of the internal editor, her dedication to writing practice as a way of life, and her definition of writing practice as something more than journal-writing were all helpful to me in my own writing.

That's when I coined the phrase "writing sessions" for my free-writing. Not long after that, I wrote *Shack Notes*. (*Shack Notes* contains definitions of what writing practice is to me. If you would like to read those definitions, they're gathered in the Introduction to that book.)

Writing *Shack Notes* was exhilarating. I wanted to see whether expressing my feelings in a relaxed way throughout many sessions during a concentrated writing time would help

me discover myself. I wanted to know whether the actual person I was was different from the person I knew I was supposed to be according to institutional expectations. It was one of the first times in my twenty-five years as a devotee that I allowed such release from the strictures and asked myself whether I wanted to be a devotee of Krsna.

We are often afraid that if we let our guards down, we will fall into *may a* and leave Krsna consciousness. We have all seen devotees who have maintained their guards fall down suddenly. It's almost as if they discovered some latent or repressed desires. I wanted to know whether I really wanted to be a devotee, whether I was spontaneously attracted to devotional service. Writing sessions were a good way to carry out that internal search.

I wrote the *Shack Notes* sessions at different times of the day, starting at one o'clock in the morning. I would write for more than an hour before stopping and then go on with my morning *sadhana* of hearing and chanting. Later, I would go out in the shack behind Samlka Rsi's house and write again, and then again in the afternoon. During that time, I was writing for about five and a half hours a day.

When I first began free-writing in earnest, I spent a lot of time battling the inner censor and critic. These internal voices ordered me to stop free-writing, to stop writing at all. The censor tried to convince me I wasn't writing devotionally enough. The critic had a slightly different angle. He said I wasn't writing anything valuable. It took a lot of energy to fend these voices off. I dialogued with them, argued back and forth, and tried to kill them off for good, but they are still there, always ready to attack. I doubt I'll ever be free of them forever, but I no longer mount such bloody, frontal attacks that

consume entire writing sessions. Just by writing regardless of their opinion is triumph enough.

Baladeva Vidyabhusana dasa was helpful in getting me through those initial attacks. He helped me to divide my writer-self from my editor-self by suggesting I designate someone else as the editor. Then to remove myself from the censor, I stopped reading what I had written.

When *Shack Notes* was published, I received a letter from a devotee who questioned the process: “This sounds dangerous, as if you are allowing even the non-Krsna conscious side of yourself to come out and speak whatever it wants. I thought devotees were supposed to discipline themselves. If we allow ourselves to think anything, won’t we meditate on illicit sex, intoxication, meat-eating, and gambling? Isn’t that why we practice *vaidhi’bhakti* and do exactly what the spiritual master wants us to do?”

I responded to that letter—I don’t remember my exact words right now—but I told that devotee that I don’t suggest they allow themselves (nor do I allow myself) a license for nonsense. When I write, and at all other times, I follow the regulative principles, chant at least sixteen rounds, and try to live the life of a devotee. I don’t break rules in the name of freedom. We attain freedom through discipline. On this, we all agree.

In the writing world, however, I need freedom. There is a famous purport where Prabhupada says that freedom is the pivot of all our activities in devotional service. Devotion to Krsna doesn’t come by living a mechanical life, but when we reach a stage of expressing ourselves freely, with love. Mechanical Krsna consciousness is not attractive to Krsna. He is more attracted to affectionate, free expression.

If I see that my free expression is tending toward *may a*, I steer to Krsna. This expression, “steer to Krsna,” is an impor

tant inner signal for me, and when I give it to myself, I immediately and deliberately try to do just that. In that sense, it could be called editing while writing, but actually, it is my spiritual survival instinct. I do want to be a devotee, and therefore I live within certain boundaries. My desire to be Kṛṣṇa conscious is a gut feeling and I always respond to it.

One of the things I discovered in *Shack Notes* is that I don't want to be a madman. I don't want to take drugs to stimulate my writing as I did in the past. I don't want to write page after page of nondevotional thought. I don't want to be a writer for its own sake, but as my devotional offering. I want to write in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and I want to share Kṛṣṇa conscious writing with devotees. For me, that means not only direct recitation of the perfect philosophy, but showing how a person sincerely tries to live the perfect philosophy in his life. When he attempts that, it doesn't always come out just right. He cannot be perfect, although he tries. Thus writing sessions have good preaching potential—showing people that devotees are honest and are not simply parroting what they have heard the *parampara* teach is good preaching. The writing session commits me to this honest life.

Peter Elbow said that a writer shouldn't expect free-writing to bring final results, and that statement has continued to intrigue me. How could he advocate freedom in writing and then suggest that the results of that freedom have no purpose other than to loosen up the writing hand? I understand his point, of course, but I don't agree with it.

Goldberg didn't take such a direct stand on this point. She encouraged her readers to use what they learn in writing practice to write anything they want. She said the writing practice could become the basis of stories, novels, or essays, but the writing practice itself would be something separate—a base to

which writers can return when no other forms of writing present themselves.

When she spoke about rewriting, for example, she said that writing practice could bring out the information we need from ourselves to complete the rewriting. If someone were writing a novel and saw, in rewriting, that he or she wanted to explain more about the character's hat, the author could say, "Okay, go for fifteen minutes and write about the hat." The author would do the writing practice, following the rules Goldberg laid down: keep the hand moving, don't think, go with first thoughts, and so on, and then use that material in the novel.

Of course, I am only interested in using these techniques in Krsna consciousness. I don't believe in writing for writing's sake. Writing has to be done for Krsna. That's what it has become for me. In that sense, writing sessions do not represent for me what they represent for Natalie Goldberg.

For me, the writing session comes before all genres. It is not merely one of the genres being featured in this book, but elemental writing itself. The essence of it is devotional service. The writing session method is good for me because it allows me to write the best material of which I am capable. Thus it is fitting that we begin this book with writing sessions, because they are the basis of all the other writing.

Another point I should mention is that I don't like to rewrite. My unwillingness to rewrite is firmly rooted. Not all writers rework their pieces endlessly. One writing teacher suggested that the best way to improve writing is to write better in the next piece. Some critics, however, consider that sloppy. Some of them even say that free-writing is avoiding the actual work of writing. Writing to them means rewriting. I don't think that improving draft after draft is a productive use of my time or will necessarily make me a better writer. My

discipline is to write as much as possible, to lead a life dedicated to writing, to omit pieces that aren't worthy, to take a humble attitude toward writing and life, and to keep going.

I have been writing like this now since 1986, and over these nine or ten years, the writing sessions have gradually become their own genre in my life. They have become part of my life and a way to keep in touch with myself and my writing art. They are written with very little structure. I usually write for an hour and don't think of them as publishable. They are writing practice. Later, I select from the sessions and publish what I think is worthy to share.

I have come a long way from Peter Elbow's description of free-writing as a private warm-up. I'm sure he wouldn't dream of his free-writing being collected and published. But why not? If it's good, if it's the best an author can do, then why not publish it? I have been publishing whole writing sessions in "Among Friends" to honor their natural and organic shape.

I have always been interested in the writing process itself. Questions such as "Why do I write?" and, "Where does inspiration come from?" are intriguing to me. You could say that these are philosophical or aesthetic questions and not the usual stuff of story-writing. Still, I like to explore these questions and use them in my writing – the story of the man who wants to be an artist, how he struggles with the mundane world, his desires for happiness, and how he frees his spirit.

Another product of the writing session has been what I call "timed books." (None of these books appear in *Churning The Milk Ocean*.) A timed book is a free-writing book which starts on a particular day and has a predetermined date upon which it will end. I haven't published any of my most recent timed books, but writing them has helped me to be more in touch with myself as a writer and the writing process. Although someone

could look at a timed book and think it is simply a collection of writing sessions, it goes further than that. Timed books enter deeper into exploration than individual sessions.

A few years ago, I wrote *What Shall I Write?*, a timed book about writing. I went through various stages in writing that book and in exploring the topic of what it was I wanted to write, but at one point, I accepted various assignments. I am not a commercial writer and I accept assignments only rarely, but I used the assignments to help me frame a structure that didn't confine me. *What Shall I Write?* was intended as a book. It was groping and painful work. I felt like a soul in darkness begging Krsna for help. Eventually, I threw off the assignments and went back to the elemental writing session. I realized that this was my genre. This was the assignment and the structure that I would accept.

Since that time, writing sessions have become my writing base. Whenever I am finished with other writing, I return to them.

Writing sessions are not deliberately communicative. I don't write them focused on my audience as a hunter sights an animal along the barrel of his gun. I focus on myself. This is a different form of persuasive writing, where the author shows himself, his real self, and is able to do so because he is not writing for an audience at all, but for his own purification. Krsnadasa Kaviraja writes that self-purification is the real reason for an author to write.

Therefore, writing sessions have become part of my Krsna conscious *bhajana*. I know this process will lead to better and better things. I am writing process-centered rather than production oriented pieces, and that's part of the excitement. I don't know what will come out as I write. I simply take my pen and tap my inner resources.

Writing sessions also allow me to improvise. The word *improvisation* usually reminds us of jazz. Eighty percent of jazz is improvised. I don't want to conjure up jazz imagery here — especially what we imagine jazz to be in America — because those images are overused. Instead, I would like to present “jazz” as an analogy.

Improvisation means being a real person because we all improvise our lives. We don't live in a world of rehearsed or theatrical relationships complete with scripts and backdrops. Everything happens to us extemporaneously. Let's face it, most of us live our lives without any deep sense of where we have been, where we are now, or where we are going. Our lives are lived-out experiments performed in unconsciousness. A devotee, however, wants to become more conscious and discover the meaning of his life as he lives it.

There is real charm in improvised writing, in the poetic flow of words. Readers appreciate real people and so does Krsna. No one is as interested in prepared but not quite honest speeches. For an artist to succeed, especially a devotee-artist, he has to learn to speak his heart. He also has to learn to steer toward Krsna from his initial misstarts, fumbling or awareness of material desires. He doesn't dwell on any of those things, but goes beyond them, unafraid of the flow of his own interaction with life. He practices flowing with his own Krsna consciousness, improvising and expressing in a myriad of ways his understanding of and love for Krsna. It's not such a sensational concept — we're all already doing that. Writing is no different from life itself.

Writing sessions are improvised in that they are a potpourri of prayer, talk about writing, Prabhupada-Jcatha, *krsna'katha*, personal probing and groping, and playfulness. A session can switch from one topic to another without warning. There is no

beginning, middle, or appropriate denouement. There is only the flow of devotional service. If I come to the end of one topic, I simply skip lines and start on the next. It's a congenial way to write.

Vrndavana

(Sorry, dear diary, I have no time for you today and no time to go alone to Srila Prabhupada's rooms. I met with disciples at 10 A.M. and I'll be meeting with them again at 4:30. In between that, I've been recovering from a headache and have to prepare for two different lectures.

Preparing lectures is like studying for an exam, and giving lectures is like writing the exam. The examiners sit in the audience and give you your grade. It's definitely a performance. I'll have to give my first lecture the day after tomorrow. The purport to the verse covers two topics, Supersoul and education. I look over references and hope to find something I can care enough about to lecture on. I'm not so methodical in my study, so what I say will probably be already known to the devotees: Krsna conscious education means education in *bhakti*. A devotee should understand both theory and practice. Theory is in the books, practice is in the preaching and the Deity worship and the *sadhana*.

There are three kinds of education: material (which makes a man an ass), *brahma^vidya* (which makes a man a Mayavadi), and *bhakti* (real education). *Bhakti* education consists of the nine processes of devotional service. The main point in *bhakti* education is that one should approach a bona fide spiritual master and that he should be honest.

Govinda, Govinda, Radhe.

I don't have the ideas organized yet, but I always remember that as soon as I give the lecture, it will disappear into the ether.

The second lecture I'm supposed to give will be on Radh- astaml. I'm planning to speak on Srla Prabhupada's presentation of Srlmati Radharanl.

Govinda, Govinda, Radhe.

^What did I see while I was on *harinama* in Vrndavana today? I saw bangles, cheap necklaces, pictures of Balarama embracing Krsna, big Sanskrit books for sale, and a *gurukula* kid opening to one of the pages and looking at it. I saw a wizened, dark-skinned mother giving water from her jug to a few *gurukula* kids. One drank long. I saw mighty monkeys up high on the roofs, and people up there too, and flags. I saw a fat man with a pockmarked nose, drinking *lassi* from a clay cup. A man smoking a hookah – an amazing sight. An old store with bad

lighting and no decoration or even much to sell, just a few unshined *murtis* of Radha-Krsna and Gopala. Cars and jeeps tried to get past the *harinama* procession. The police in their drab brown uniforms didn't interrupt.

The pantheon of sights bewilders the boss (tiny *isvara*) in my brain. When I returned from town, I saw the white tower of clouds way up in the sky and the blazing gold of the sun behind it. I thought, "This is the land of Radha and Krsna who are somehow behind and in the beauty of the sky."

The white-haired *sannyasi* smiles and
holds his *danda*, politely walks —
look!
Take a roll call, we is all
here. Take a snapshot, we
are together. Love the white
tower clouds and the sun behind them.
We are not worshipers of everything.
But Krsna
and Radha
in the dust lane chaos of
Bhauma-Vrndavana.

■ s long as you give me pen cartridges and the typists are willing, I shall not quit. "Forty-eight hours of certainty." I can't be certain of the next minute, although I am certain to fail to call on the Lord. With all my imperfections screaming in my ears, still I will immerse myself in *harinama*. The body

will never be at ease, or else why would it die? It will not end gracefully either.

I have so much to forget – Thoreau and primrose paths and English literature, sordid times,

The New York Times,

I've got a conscience, so don't lure me out. No more beer for me. I prefer to be alone in room 42, sitting out the group functions and praying and resting and happy.

Prabhupada, I pretend to love you, but I actually do.

cZsktRs

c/Vtaking plans, delicious plans for travel and study and to be among friends and family.

Dr. Panari said, "Don't worry, you are a *sannyasi*. You are surrendered to Krsna. I am 110% sure these medicines will cure your headaches." The tea tastes vile (*tapasya*) and I have a new array of pills and powders.

does Srila Prabhupada say about the Supersoul?

"To those who are constantly devoted to serving Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me." (Bg. 10.10)

"A person may have a bona fide spiritual master and may be attached to a spiritual organization, but still, if he is not intelligent enough to make progress, then Krsna from within gives him instruction so that he may ultimately come to Him without difficulty." (Bg. 10.10, purport) The devotee has to be

always engaged in Krsna consciousness with love and do his work with love.

Srlla Prabhupada's books are full of instruction and inspiration. We have to slow down to read them.

We are interested in reciprocation with Srlla Prabhupada and Krsna. I do believe that Krsna will help us progress. He will direct us, through our spiritual master, to the higher topics of Krsna consciousness. Srlla Prabhupada told me that I was sincere and that Krsna would reveal to me how to understand the *Bhagavad'glta*. I trust that that will be true. Please, Prabhupada, let me realize these mysteries.

2

Gitd'nagari Farm

^Tomorrow I lecture on the “let the calamities come” verse by Queen Kunti. Today’s lecture seemed to go well. We chanted the *slokas* together, then played excerpts from Srila Prabhupada’s tapes, and of course, we read from his purports. It is an all-Prabhupada presentation.

I’m trying to dive in more to Srila Prabhupada’s actual presentation. When I answer questions, I like to be able to give *his* answer, his mood. That happened today when someone asked, “Do the parents and friends of Krsna want to raise themselves to become *gopis*?” Srila Prabhupada teaches that all the residents of Vrndavana love Krsna – the boys, the *gopis*, the parents, the trees, the water, the hills – and then I imitated Prabhupada’s voice and said, “Everyone!” It felt good.

Two classes tomorrow, *Srimad'Bhdgavatam* and then the seminar class. I am as ready as I can be for either.

Life is peaceful and I am doing my duty. I could do more and I want to, but more meaning along the lines of writing and reading and rising early and chanting – that sort of thing.

Another year beginning and we’re doing the same thing we have done for the past two Januarys. That is, the January Institute and disciples’ meetings. I have to find time to read and write. I have stopped reading while I am preparing for the lectures. Not stopped reading, but stopped “unmotivated” reading. That means I am reading only to find what I need for my lectures and not for my own purification. There is a difference between such “motivated” and “unmotivated” reading. Unmo

tivated reading is most satisfying. It allows me to enter quietly and gracefully into the mystical dimensions of hearing from Prabhupada day after day. I am hankering to get back to it.

^Dreams. Do I really believe there is a dream-self, a sub- person, who sends me dreams? Well, if not a person per se, a side of my personality. The dreams sometimes carry creative inspiration. It makes me think of body-building. I can exercise and my muscles will strengthen day by day. Similarly, I can pay attention to the dreams and day by day my capacity to understand their creative message will increase.

Dreams come uncontrollably. They are what I am on an unconscious level. I record what comes out of them, and although I don't always make sense of them, they all say something to me.

I'm also trying to write little stories or poems — honest pieces. I don't yet understand the place of fiction in my writing. It is too involved a craft. Poems are different: I evoke something from my life and experience, and it either works or it doesn't. I suppose fiction could be written in the same way, but right now, I can't seem to justify spending time on it.

c

^Veer:

The recent events in Saudi Arabia. Kalki dasl says some devotees in New York City said that Srlla Prabhupada remarked that in the year 2000, people won't see the light of day. The devotees were wondering what this means. It can be taken to mean that they are all in darkness. Also, many people already can't see the light of day, especially those who live in the

cities where the buildings are so high that they block out the sun. It may mean more than that, but we can only save the world through Krsna consciousness. I know our movement seems tiny and ineffectual, and devotees spend time fighting with each other instead of fighting to save the world. Still, how Krsna consciousness, ISKCON, can save the world is beyond reason. We have to hear it and fulfill it on faith.

LJ hear so many things when I am among the devotees, and they fill me with potential things to write about. Just the release and freedom I will feel to get away from the contact with so many troubled lives will be a topic in itself. Life is treacherous. It's treacherous driving in the mornings when there's ice on the roads. Marriage can be treacherous too. Having children. So many things. Hearing all these problems pulls me out of my reclusive self.

The dreams function like that also. They pull me out of my reclusive life and open the door to the world of subconscious associations. They mix my past with my present and remind me of things I still want to understand about myself. For example, I have many dreams of being forced to walk through crime-filled streets, or dreams of being in the Navy. It must be a symbol for *something*. During my waking hours, I spend my time trying to enter the inner world of the *Bhagavatam*. I want to learn to work through whatever these dreams want me to know and then enter into dedication to *Bhagavatam* in my dream life as well. If I could only chant Hare Krsna in my sleep! And worship the Lord of the senses. And follow my

spiritual master. I am tiny and insignificant, but I have to give importance to devotional service and to myself, the one who wants to perform the service.

3

Saranagati Farm

LJ'TW up and it's cold. Open stove door, red coals, feed a piece in. Smash old wood until red coals burst into flames. My teeth are chattering. Face in glass looks back at me shyly, then looks down. He wears a shoulder-padded maroon coat, maroon knit cap. Where is he going? No curtain on the window. From across the frozen lake on this full-moon night, the bears (if they are up) could look and see me writing behind this desk. Puff and sigh of the log as it's consumed.

When we read *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and when we write alone, the mind and body resist. The world is neutral. If you run your ship into an iceberg, it will sink. If you put your hand into fire, it will be burned. Years ago, a boy climbed the fence at the Bronx zoo and got into the polar bear's den. What did you expect would happen?

I have no particular joy to impart this morning. That's not the point. Where is Krsna? How can I praise Him? If it's not transcendental loving service, it's rebellion more or less. I wish to turn to You in *my* chosen way, not in the Catholic tradition or as a neo-Taoist or Buddhist or Dervish or agnostic writer who is writing for art's sake (the grim annihilator of the self with a hangman's humor). I wish to write in Krsna consciousness according to the teachings of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvatl, and my own Srlla Prabhupada. (Pause—load a log into the stove.)

In India they wear scarves and shawls over their heads and shoulders in cold weather. They sit around a wood fire. I hear a deep drone, but what could it be? There's no highway nearby. A

plane? A truck approaching? I've hidden my passport in the bookshelf.

When I asked Jaya Gaura about the robbery of a nearby cabin, he said it was "sad." They deal with realities here. Here's another reality: a man and his wife came to Saranagati, worked hard to buy a share, built a house, moved in, conceived children, but then she left him and the whole thing was ruined. He put his share up for sale and wondered what to do next. As we drove onto this land yesterday, one devotee said, "This is not my idea of an ideal place to live. It's too isolated and the members become familiar and there's in-fighting. It's not like Vrndavana." I told him that there's in-fighting in Vrndavana too, but Vrndavana is his goal and it will be perfect there. I didn't bother to explain to him the surface tension which makes Vrndavana difficult for me. His experience may be different. After so many years of money-making in the West, he wants a *sadhu's* life.

It's black out there. Looked up and saw only myself writing and the stick-shaped light bulb. All night, *all night* I promised I would write. Now please write something acceptable. It takes a lot of writing to fill one of these pads.

Freer.

Dream of actors in a film. Acting within, acting within, acting — where is the reality? I woke at 9 P.M. and the dream hung around me in the unfamiliar moonlit room. Was I being haunted by the dreams of those who have stayed in this yurt before me? I'm new here. The cold, vast outdoors, long stretches of unpopulated, undeveloped land.

"I like Saranagati because it's every man for himself," someone told the city temple president. When the temple president heard that, he thought, "That's not what I'm looking for. I want all for one and one for all."

Hmm. What would I want? Shelter in a land of houses with plenty of space between them. No group program I'm required to attend. To be able to roam over the world of Krsna consciousness in my thoughts. Although I myself am a quiet person, I would like to know that if I bang a log in the stove, no one would hear me.

(What is that drone? Is it the imperceivable chariot of time, the creak of stars in axis?)

This is not what I wanted to write. Vidura didn't at first inquire from Maitreya about the Lord's pastimes, although that was his intention. He first asked more common questions. I'm writing like that. But I want to get past common questions. I want to enter spontaneous Krsna consciousness with the Lord as *caitya*^guru, and guided by guru, *sastra*, and *sadhu*. Gradually sink into it.

I have been reading about Maitreya and Vidura in the *Srirnad' Bhagavatam*. I read across the page led by my pencil. By keeping my place as I read, and underlining things that are attractive to me, it helps me pay closer attention.

Vidura inquired about those who inhabit different planets according to their karma. How is the world created and maintained? Then he said he was already satiated by hearing those topics from Vyasa. He now wanted to hear direct *krsna*'katha. "I am quite satiated with these lesser topics and their happiness.

They have not satisfied me with the nectar of topics about Krsna.”

Does that mean it’s all right for us to say we are satiated with these “lesser topics” and to say that we want to pursue the highest topics? All I want to say is let’s not be restless with Srila Prabhupada’s presentation. He is giving us the entire *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. The *Bhagavatam* discusses the world because we live in it and we need to understand its nature in order to improve ourselves. But Srila Prabhupada also gave us direct *krsna'katha*. However, topics like *gopi'bhava* require a special qualification—the freedom from sex desire.

s fire is never satiated by its consumption of firewood, so a pure devotee of the Lord never hears enough about Krsna.”

A small, delicate moth lands on the ring finger of my glove. He doesn’t want to leave—rides as I write and read.

I will want to present this section of the *Bhagavatam* to the devotees. It also confirms my own private practice of reading *Srimad'Bhdgavatam*, and affirms that all devotees should do this. Reading *Bhagavatam* is a direct and easy way to associate with Krsna. “For one who is anxious to engage constantly in hearing such topics, *krsna'katha* gradually increases his indifference towards all other things.” (*Bhag.* 3.5.13) Remembering the lotus feet of the Lord vanquishes all miseries.

Completely full moon through the circular skylight in the center of the yurt roof.

The moth with transparent wings moves across the Bhdga- *vatam* page. He pauses on the word “transcendental bliss,” but he cannot taste it. It’s only light and warmth to him.

aitreya will talk of how the Supreme Lord brings about creation. I have an inkling why this is important for me. It’s an inconceivable topic. We tend to think in an atheistic way, being products of 20th-century civilization. To hear that the Supreme Lord creates and is thus omnipotent and all-knowing, is good for me. It’s healthy and strengthens my spiritual life. That basic understanding will enable me to approach the higher topics. There is no question of my disclaiming the topics Maitreya decided to speak on to Vidura. If Srlla Prabhupada considers them important for me, then I accept that. I can’t say they were important for me in the 1970s when I was a young man preaching in Boston, but now I have grown out of them.

Krsna is great. Although the *gopis* forget His greatness due to the influence of Yogamaya, the fact is that prior to cosmic creation, only Krsna existed. There were no *purusa* incarnations or *jivas* or material energy. Everything was merged into Him. Everything remains dormant in Him in the period between creations.

Srlla Prabhupada writes that the Supreme Lord feels that something is missing when there is no material creation. Why? Because He wants to give the bound *jivas* another chance to evolve back to Godhead. He wants everyone to join in the blissful *rasa*, becoming as perfect as the ever-liberated souls in Goloka, “ . . . because participation with the Lord in His eter

nal *rasd'lila*, is the highest living condition, perfect in spiritual bliss and eternal knowledge." (*Bhdg.* 3.5.24, purport)

^What will I be writing while I'm here? A few years ago I wrote *Prabhupada Meditations*. I can't always capture an entire story of my life in some place, but I should have faith that what comes to me is the essence of it. What does that mean, exactly? Maybe it means that now what's coming to me is the story of my stay here at Saranagati—the reading and the writing and everything else—and I should just tell it as it happens. The essence of the story is that I am trying to be a better devotee.

I am a writer. That means integrity and honesty. It means writing and then not editing out what I don't like, but facing the facts. I may want to appear this way or that, or I may want things to go a certain way, but what I really want is to be honest. For example, I say I go alone to write something to share with others. That's noble, but then do it. When one *sannyasi* was in *maya* (but still acting as a temple leader), he used to listen to rock 'n' roll through headphones while living at Krishna-Balaram Mandir. He also took long rides in his car in America and told the devotees he could think better that way. Lying and cheating—I don't want to be like that.

I have been thinking about writing blocks. Some secrets of the soul cannot be easily gained. But that's only one kind of block. When that type of block arises, I have to face it and just go on writing whatever I can. Follow the discipline—sit and write. My writing sessions are like that. I never know if I am getting close to the secrets or what causes the blocks, but I sit and write no matter what.

It's an interesting tip, that what I'm doing at times like this is proving myself, passing a test. Then suddenly it will come, the secret will be revealed to me. That means I'll write something with power, with Krsna conscious honesty. It will be something that can have a strong effect on a reader. Devotees and newcomers are looking for something, and I want to supply it, but it takes a long and patient endeavor. I'm dedicating this year for that and making sure I dig up gold by reading the *Srimad'Bhagavatam*.

dxsk&s

c/Vtadhu just came in and asked about my night. I told him I woke up cold at 9 P.M. and put on long johns and a sweater and put another log on the fire. I was all right after that.

My eyes sting from the smoke in the room from when I open the stove door. He said it's the same in his yurt. He's staying with two devotees. I'm alone. It's twenty degrees. I edited some poems I wrote last December. I was happy to decide to use them right away in the new incarnation of "Among Friends," but I was disappointed that so much of what I wrote had to be omitted. I wrote them with an open heart. That's okay. I need to write already accepting that what I write may not be used for anything. It's not a reason to avoid open-heartedness when I write. That's what detachment is all about. Detachment means we are rewarded by the service itself, not by the results of the service. That makes our service a labor of love. My service is writing. Each sentence has potential for preaching. A book distributor approaches many people and most of them turn him down, but he can't decide to approach fewer people. He approaches more and a small percentage take a book. I have to go on writing like that.

Freer.

I looked at a book by Thomas Merton the other day, but he's too vague, intellectual, tinged with Mayavada ideas. I'm not going to find a soulmate in these writers. I may find some ideas, some impressive dedication, power, or talent, some interesting syntax or springiness or paring away of layers, but no soulmate. I have to write in Krsna consciousness. Krsna is universal, so I may preach His holy name to all people even while talking of my own life and following of *parampara*. But I won't strain to reach a nondevotee audience by watering down my actual experience and obedience.

I have to keep checking the stove. There's no red glow showing through the glass door. Maybe it's gone out. This is a ritual of living here, along with the sting in the eyes and the wearing of countless layers of clothing.

I'm happy to be here. It is a very good day, this first of my stay at Saranagati. Krsna has awarded me this visit. Now He is watching to see what I will do with it. Something brave? Something quiet and introspective? Something receptive (the way Narada was receptive to the *bhaktivedantas*)? Will I hear with rapt attention?

4

^Dreamt I was being asked to speak up especially for some ISKCON women who were feeling mistreated by their authorities in the San Francisco temple. I wanted to avoid it, yet they presented me with the evidence. Now I'm awake, far from San Francisco and any controversy. I've distanced myself from such things, but is it right?

Keeping this yurt warm is a job in itself. I woke during the night, cold, and added a sweater. Later, I was too warm. It's a little over twenty degrees.

So we are preaching. Canceled *The Radharani Express*. It was the right thing to do. I did it not so much in response to ISKCON conservatives or controversies, but because that book isn't what I want to preach. It's outdated. It's not what I'm doing and thinking.

TH e reason I might want to write slower is that we are old men. I don't know what it feels like to be in the younger generation of devotees these days. I don't claim I can know what Bhakta Kristoff from Poland is feeling, what it's actually like for him to live on this wilderness project. I include him on my list of people I've met here.

live in one large room of this yurt—it's circular and the housekeeping is primitive. This house wasn't designed with an eye for interior decorating. We just put our stuff here and

there and live and work and write around it, and we keep it clean.

I am in process. After a year, we'll take the writing and decide whether or not to publish it, either in *Churning the Milk Ocean* or "Among Friends."

The first day here I suggested to myself that I didn't need to be a searcher or be writing a theme. I can just let it unfold and tell the story of what comes. I'm still with that. I don't take it so seriously when a voice inside me asks, "What book are you writing? What are you searching for in this wilderness place? Are you praying to Kṛṣṇa to please reveal Himself in His name? If not, why not? Are you crying out? Are you attempting to preach through writing? And what is your Centennial project?" I'm just walking and talking and writing.

The main thing I want to accomplish while I'm here is to get in some good studying of the *Srimad' Bhagavatam*. I'm on the section about Maitreya. He tells how creation takes place. I also read the prayers by the demigods. Their prayers are nice, about taking shelter of Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet. Śrīla Prabhupada tells us not to despise the demigods. They sometimes take the side of the demons in order to gain control over them. The *devas* are good devotees and have been given the responsibility of cosmic duties by Kṛṣṇa. Their prayers are faithful expressions.

I do like to read *Srimad' Bhagavatam*. It's not merely for neophytes or mixed devotees. Cheating religion is kicked out at the very beginning of the First Canto.

"The devotee has only to hear about devotional activities, which are as simple as anything in ordinary life, and he also acts very simply . . . the devotees enter into the kingdom of all pleasures even from the beginning of their attempt." (*Bhag.* 3.5.46, purport)

I think of Merton and Thoreau, or that New Age guru, Sakti Gawain, bluffing to tell us how to tune in to the “intelligence of the universe.”

c

r

cSrlla Prabhupada argues on *bhakti's* behalf. He claims that *bhakti* is easier than speculation or meditation and that it brings us to a much higher destination. One might say his argument is not objective, but is simply praise of the *bhakti- marga*, but Srlla Prabhupada repeats what the *sastra* says. See *Srimad'Bhagavatam* 3.5.47: “ . . . but for them there is much pain, whereas the devotee simply discharges devotional service and thus feels no such pain.” (Same in Lord Brahma’s prayers, *Bhag.* 10.14.3, in the example of beating a rice paddy after the rice is removed, and *jnane prayasam*.)

Srlla Prabhupada says devotional service duties are also work, but the devotee prefers to perform those duties rather than be without them. His destination is much higher than the nondevotees, while the means to achieve his destination is much simpler and brings immediate pleasure.

Sometimes our minds are agitated or restless when we read, but when we slow down and hear, we find we always agree with what Srlla Prabhupada is presenting. It is the nature of the intelligence to always want to “balance” anything we appreciate “too much.” That is the nature of discrimination. That faculty shouldn’t be applied here. The more we love what Srlla Prabhupada writes and the more we accept it, the better. Discrimination in that sense means to understand clearly why the *acaryas* are right. Intelligence means using our brain to expand on sastric themes and to find our own agreement with the *siddhanta*.

^TCrsna is unique. He is one. He is unchanged and the old- est. "O Lord, You have no source or superior." He impregnates the material energy with the *jivas* but He is Himself unborn. Atheists deride Him and the Vedic teachings. Devotees either defeat them or disregard them. God is great and I accept Him according to the Vedic conclusion. I pray to live in this truth and to help others understand it.

The *jiva* appears to be a combination of eternal soul and temporary, miserable body. The body is supplied by the material nature because of the soul's mistaken desires, "but the soul is originally part and parcel of the Supreme Lord."

T-hree dogs have become interested in these two yurts. The yurts were empty before we came here, but now there's some action and possibly food. We are not feeding the dogs and they seem more interested in companionship than anything else, but they bark as soon as it starts to get dark. They stop after awhile.

I'm happy to be editing poems for a poetry collection. Now I'll have to write new ones. I can't be attached if many of them don't get published in the end. I just have to keep writing them.

A writing book advises writers to be daring. They should start a project and ignore the voice of doubt. If you are an amateur, but you have a passion to write, and if you work at it humbly, then you will be successful.

For me, I mostly want to write a lot, but it would be nice to know where I am going in terms of form. There are so many writing coaches out there telling me what I *should* do, but what do I *want* to do? Am I satisfied with simply recording my

experience while I'm here? Is it right to face the inside ache every time I write and then go ahead with wherever that takes me? Or do I want to take up a topic?

I'm not exactly sure what daring means for me, but one thing is certain, I am writing for disciples, in Krsna consciousness, and therefore, I'm not an ordinary writer. It has to be honest. It has to be from a life spent fully in Krsna consciousness. I am not writing for entertainment, but to give those who have left the world of nondevotee writers' inspiration.

The thing about this kind of writing is that it doesn't remember what has come before it. I mean, it's not consecutive. I don't know what I'm building and I don't even look back to find out. That's what I mean by being in process. Every session starts from scratch.

The other thing about this writing is that if I keep at it often enough, I tap hidden resources and find something to say. That becomes the success of the writing sessions done over a period of time. I become more able to sustain one-hour sessions of continual writing. Neither are the sessions filled with gibberish. They contain sincere attempts to confess, pray, understand Krsna consciousness, explore my free will, etc.

I have to concentrate. It's not easy. Combining writing with reading *Srimad' Bhagavatam* is nice, but I have to write on my own also. There is a pond in front of my window. Every time I look up, I see that pond. I may record that information hundreds of times before I leave here. I don't want to stop that up. Everytime I stop something up, it prevents me from going to something beyond it. That's what daring means to me – to keep going through everything until I get to what's beyond.

(*Srimad'Bhdgavatam* 3.6 is "Creation of the Universal Form." Admittedly, some rough going. I'm always wondering why I need to know all these details about creation. I'm still hazy about the relationship between Visvarupa and Garbho- daksayi Visnu, which sometimes sound the same to me.

In Vrndavana last year, I resolved to turn more intensely to Srila Prabhupada, especially by reading *Srimad'Bhdgavatam* and by worshiping a Prabhupada *murti*. I'm doing all that, but I don't want it to be an empty or mechanical prayer. Mechanical prayers feel like the thick ice on a pond. What can I do to unfreeze it?

5

Italy

^esterday, we did a lot of driving. Madhu prepared lunch on the road. I answered a big batch of mail and finished it. Satisfied with that. We hoped everything would hold up—our hearts, the tires, the nation we were in, the planet earth. If something failed, we could turn in earnest to chanting the Hare Krsna mantra.

I have no desire or special interest to pursue any other religious path or psychological method other than what Srila Prabhupada has given me. I don't say this as a claim to exceptional purity; I say it with relief and gratefulness to Krsna. Please, Lord Krsna, may I always stay at Prabhupada's feet and may my devotion for him ever increase.

Devotees wrote to me about the importance of the holy names in their lives. One even thanked me for emphasizing chanting in my preaching. Thank *you* for reminding *me*. Enthusiasm is contagious. All I need to do is read a few lines like that of sincere appreciation for the holy name in a letter and I'll remember that I too want to chant purely. Good intentions are not enough, though. We all need to keep trying.

Bhakta Ron said he didn't keep a diary in India. Not writing helped him to experience and meditate better, he said. He thought writing might rob from the experience. He asked if I ever feel like that about writing. No, I don't. I live and I write; they are two separate acts. Writing doesn't steal from experience for me; it enhances it.

Oh , the dentist. I'll tell you. John Franco decisively said *all* my teeth have to come out. Irreversible pyorrhea. We'll be occupied with that. Looks like a week at Prabhupada-desa, then we'll go to the dentist and get started. We may spend a few weeks at a campground while he pulls my teeth, then go back to Prabhupada-desa for a week. By the end of April, the dentist says, I'll have a temporary denture in. I've arrived, as he said, "At the end of the road." When he said it, I thought of Ray Carver's poem where the doctor tells him he's got terminal cancer and Carver shakes his hand almost in thanks. I appreciated that poem today in retrospect.

Told M. I am not able to share with him or anyone my thoughts about fiction—where I want to go with it. By saying that much, something gelled and sent me further along. I need time and daring to be a writer and to live a writer's life, but I want to do it as a devotee.

I started a new notebook which I've called, "Only fiction." I'll try to write in it once a day. The other notebook will be for those unique pieces I was doing in South Italy. I also plan to write writing sessions for at least an hour in the morning.

Time is going so fast I can't catch it. There's no sense trying to decorate it with a garland of words. I'm telling myself, "Please leave behind the care of how this looks." That's the fastest way to writing power and that's what I want—the power to distribute writing to readers.

But I thought power comes from Krsna.

So it does, and this is a way to seek it from He who lodges power in my soul. From my soul, that power goes out to all parts of mind and body and gets stuck. I'm trying to free it.

Is that the devotional way?

Yes, why not? Devotion is not only a polite prayer and then waiting. It's going after the mercy Krsna has already granted to us and shaking it loose from the blood where it's clotting.

^Drop the dialogue and just write.

Dialoguing is recommended by Peter Elbow and company.

Are you going to be cute instead of wholehearted? Or is part of your power sarcasm and irony?

It was cold in bed last night without a water bottle.

Now, Sylvan, dear friend of my youth and life, step up to stage center and tell the folks. Come on, speak up.

Dear folks, I shall have all (yes, all) of my teeth removed by the surgery of John Franco, who is a devotee of Krsna and who also has a picture of Christ on his wall. And mind you, I will not make any attempt to save them because I am not a saint whom others think his teeth are worth saving. Instead, we'll throw them in the trash like old underwear.

After that, I'll sport a shiny, complete set of upper and lower dentures, like shiny chrome Cadillac bumpers,

like the head of Chrome Dome (H. S. principal),

or like tears in the eyes.

It's good, I said at last. He said, "Yes, you won't be preoccupied with it anymore, and the good news is that the pyorrhea will go away."

I laughed, "No teeth, no problem." That's one way to solve the problem. Finally the patient dies, and all his problems are solved, including his unpaid bills. But if and when you're born again, you're born with no teeth and you have to grow new ones with much pain.

So I wish I could go back to Godhead, as I told the audience last night, but if you glance even at a woman with lust, then you'll have to reincarnate, despite being situated in the lecturer's seat and intoning *sa vai pumsam* in your introductory talk.

All right, now why not write something a little slower?

Because this is a fast-paced session. I even intend to stop it soon (12:07 + 30 = 12:37)

and switch to stories. Is that another lust?

No, a story is an attempt to serve the Vaisnavas. It's a different kind of writing.

The field. The trees. The green trees with their few stout branches. They are trained—you could say tortured—by the farmers to yield the maximum crop of olives and grapes. It's spring—a foreign spring to me—but these dwarfed trees, each with a trunk and stout branches and twigs, are all about to bloom.

LJ suggested we read *Caitanya'Caritamrta* in the morning for the next week, since it's almost Gaura-Purnima. It's a friendly temple, and they agreed. I'll do it and awaken my soul's little Krsna consciousness.

Nayam atma pravacanena labhyo. God reveals Himself to whomever He pleases. It's not attained by our austerities or expertise, but by His will, His mercy.

Ju leave this page in four minutes, after only half an hour, in order to write in the story notebook. Why not try some method of free-writing? Shall it be all fiction or whatever I like?

Why not whatever I like and later in the day, try the pure “white lie” of fiction as an automatic pulse?

I needn’t question the writing session’s right to exist. It always serves me well. It provides a true warm-up.

“Collected Writings” like big hay bales on a truck in spring for the animals. I mean, the hungry palates of sensitive reading human beings.

6

<D ear Lord, I pray You will give me the health to continue my active service of reading and writing, writing and reading for some years to come, but You know what is best for me in my coming back to You.

I'm a weak and delicate link, I know, but Srila Prabhupada gave me mercy and somehow I am linked to him. All his followers are linked to him, and most of us have some problem or other. Mine is that I can't interface with them so much, so I try to do it in writing.

Let me be humble in relation to others.

adhu said the best thing I can do is read Srila Prabhupada's books and hear his tapes. He and Nanda-kisora were talking about how faith is rare and needs to be protected. My disciples have faith in me. The best I can do for them, and also for myself, is to give them a link to Srila Prabhupada. That's what they want and what they come to ISKCON for. They need to get it through a guru (as well as directly from Prabhupada). Therefore, the guru needs to be linked to Srila Prabhupada—not just in the history of his past services, but in the present. Otherwise, what could he give them?

I plan to keep up my two hours a day reading his books. I pray the Lord will let me do it without undue drowsiness, although I won't defy nature and will try to get enough rest in a day.

^Don't get self-conscious about free-writing. Simply write. That's part of the reason why I like to write a certain quota of pages. I won't be judged for my daydreams about writing, but for what I actually wrote.

Writing sessions are a writing act in themselves, but they are also meant to lend their strength to other kinds of writing. The stories are a direct off-shoot of the sessions. I can produce plenty of material by two sessions of story-writing a day, just as I did in South Italy. That brings me down to a one full-hour writing session in the early morning, maybe a half-hour later, and another half-hour at night. Perhaps a little more. It depends on overcoming drowsiness from the travel and how I manage to balance writing with reading Srila Prabhupada's books. Here I haven't experienced much drowsiness.

^Tomorrow after *Srimad'Bhagavatam* class, we move to an apartment about a half hour away from the dentist in Brescia, if Krsna desires. I will start a new notebook series. I was thinking of calling it, "Brescia Notebooks," but it isn't Brescia. Then, "While visiting the dentist," but I don't want to psyche myself up too much and focus on the dentist. I'll have to find out the actual name of the place, or maybe call it something like, "Writing sessions near Brescia." I like that. The "near" Brescia implies we are near the dentist, but that it's not the overwhelming event in our lives.

°Writing busily on the surface. Things on my mind. News items.

This is a sorry world I'm in, Srila Prabhupada. Madhu and I have been appreciating Srila Prabhupada's preaching to his disciples through letters. We're going over my letters from Prabhupada and making a second volume to that book I did years ago, *With Srila Prabhupada In The Early Days*. It's a worthy project, certainly. I don't want to put it off. I don't want to put off *anything* important because I'm almost fifty-five years old. If I was worried before what people might think, I have to overcome that or I'll never get my boldest dreams up in the air.

ans for editing and returning manuscripts to GN Press. I'm waiting patiently for the production of books and "Among Friends." We plan to build "Among Friends" up to fifty-six pages.

Jr a child touches fire, he gets burned. The example can be used for the efficacy of chanting the Hare Krsna mantra. It also applies to our contact with *maya*. We are in the cycle of birth and death (*kala-cakra*) and can't get out so easily. Face the fact that I may not go back to Godhead in this lifetime. Yearn to go wherever Krsna wants to send you for Srila Prabhupada's service. We don't live for sense gratification, but to serve our spiritual master. Serve him in any capacity or department, but with your whole life.

It's time for me to think about the next life. My subtle body may still be attached to matter at the time of death and I may not be feeling love of God. I need my strength, then, to make the best use of a bad bargain in the next life. Go to *sadhus* as soon as possible and follow the path of the *mahajanas* by practicing and spreading Krsna consciousness. I want to pursue service to Lord Krsna, the Lord of the *gopis* and *gopas* of Vrndavana, my Lord.

I'm reading about Daksa's *yajna*. Sati wants to go to the festival, but her husband says no. In the *Srimad' Bhagavatam* lectures book, I'm reading the First Canto ones on *srama eva hi kevalam*. Nearing the end of *Renunciation Through Wisdom*. I like to read books that carry Prabhupada's authentic presence. *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* is good for that. *Isopanisad*. Later, I'll read *The Nectar of Devotion*. *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* is an early favorite. Srila Prabhupada's presence is strong in that book, in the summary study mood. Don't forget *Bhagavad'gita As It Is*. Some may say it's mostly a translation of Baladeva Vidyabhusana, but Srila Prabhupada is there as he wrote it in 1966 and as he lives eternally. Why don't I read a little *Bhagavad'gita* every day?

More than that, I would like to select favorite passages and use them in prayer.

When I get to Ireland later this summer, what will I do during my walks? Maybe more radio shows. They are like

Letters from a Sannyasi. I want to develop the art of the monologue. Or, I'm not sure yet that I do. Maybe I won't know that until I set my foot on the path.

How to pray with quality? I used to take a book with me and read out loud. I would recite it and let it live in me. I could do that again. A praying man outdoors. I am reading quickly indoors and that's natural, but outdoors, it's a different story. My walks in Ireland could be prayer walks with Srila Prabhupada's books, concentrating on certain sections and receiving Prabhupada's *darsana*. In that way, it could be like doing Prabhupada recall. Prabhupada recall means approaching Srila Prabhupada through memory. This could be another way to approach him—deliberately, slowly, reading his books and praying to Lord Krsna for understanding.

I heard of Bede Griffith's passing away (1993). Didn't read it, just saw that there were articles about it. He chanted the Jesus prayer and lived as a Christian *sannyasi* in India. He tried to bridge two cultures. He is an example for those who want to do that. As far as I know, though, he didn't worship or teach anything about Krsna or Lord Caitanya. Christ and what? Brahman? Hinduism? He never met Srila Prabhupada.

I care for the integrity of the writing session and wish to preserve it. I pledge to give my early hour to it and to not get carried away with story-telling at that time. The writing

session is my home base, it's where I live. A desk in any apartment or room, or the van, wherever — the writing sessions take me to myself.

Integrity of writing what comes. May I be able to do so. Be grateful for the time allotted and the books that are being published from them. *The Wild Garden* looks like a good one, and now others. Soon we'll see *The Daily News*, a poetry collection, and more "Among Friends." Then *From Copper to Touchstone*, and at the end of the year, we'll harvest more from the writing sessions and other writings and make a book we'll call *Churning The Milk Ocean*.

The demons and devotees took to churning the milk ocean. First, their churning produced poison and Lord Siva held it in his throat. Then, many wonderful things came out. What about Vraja *bhakti*? Will my milk ocean have His Vraja in it? I am churning the milk the way *yogis* churn milk to bring out butter for Krsna. Ma Yasoda chooses the best grasses for her cows so they produce the best milk. Some of that milk she boils down into sweets. She also gives Krsna her own breast milk. My milk ocean isn't only the ocean of Karanadaksayi Visnu; it's not the same one churned by the demigods and demons. It's the pure nectar *bhakti* essence we want, but we know that strange objects will come from it first — objects from our subconscious and from the choices we have made in this life.

(J^Ill glories to Prabhupada. Three or four minutes left. Writing sessions are to be the source of stuff, so don't give up on them. They

(1) Serve as an immediate release and generator of ideas.

- (2) Serve as a way to practice writing.
- (3) Provide material for “Collected Writings” and “Among Friends.”

Keep up the habit of writing them.

Okay, end this one, trooper.

7

3 used to write first thoughts; that's one kind of writing.

Words were coming out and I had faith they would line up in a way that would merit attention because I am a devotee of Krsna. I never asked myself to stop or criticized what I was doing. Do you remember that?

A tan moth has landed on my gloved hand. He's not satisfied; he flits about. I can't wait for him to move.

I am reading the Fourth Canto these days. On the cover of this volume, Lord Visnu is coming to supervise Prthu Maharaja's *yajna*. Prthu accepted Indra's obeisances and embraced him.

I dreamt I was in San Francisco. I was some kind of undercover devotee; I had lost any status that I had.

It's been a long time since I had such a writing block. I don't even know what that block was. Did I lose faith in the writing process? I want as much Krsna consciousness as possible (that's good), so I took to reading all the time when I could have been writing.

Where did my "Prayers of Dhruva Maharaja" go, and where is my intention to use them in my own prayer?

(JTont Vella mineral water. Madhu stays up and talks with his friends. I do repeat, folks, the charter don't matter. There are words I'd rather put down to substitute for the actual ones. Look at *Mexico City Blues* for how a jazz musician free-blows his words onto the page?

Lord Visnu asked Maharaja Prthu . . . He preached to him. I could look again at what He said to better retain it. On his '76 American tour, Srila Prabhupada was lecturing on the Ajamila chapters. I could read that too. I do wish to be in contact with the pleasure of hearing and reading him.

When I was small, I always wanted people to do nice things for me, although it rarely happened. It was a pleasure when someone did something nice. Did my character form by my parents' teachings and examples? They taught me to "shape up." I later retaliated by going to New York City and the Greenwich Village book shops. I was a nice kid who didn't want to get into trouble, but the inner flame of the spirit soul is real life and no external posing is going to alter that destiny. Srila Prabhupada says a pure devotee (as expressed in Lord Caitanya's *na dhanarh na janarh na sundarim*) is willing to undergo calamities birth after birth as long as he can serve the Supreme Lord in loving devotion. For the conditioned soul, calamity means long forgetfulness of Krsna. It means thinking that sense gratification is the goal of life and then being forced to carry that deep impression around with you life after life. Fear and sense gratification keep you moving.

Dear Lord, I don't want to lose my concentration on the real goal of life. This writing shouldn't take me away from You. Instead, let this writing become a way for me to attain the goal. I know, however, that nothing can help me as much as *Srimad'Bhagavatam* and *Bhagavad'gita*. It's just a matter of being able to contact them.

Out the van window when we were stopped on our way here, I saw a bare-chested truck driver in the early evening. Later, he put on a T-shirt and I saw him folding clothes – is he lonely?

^"When you're deep into a writing session, where do you go? What's happening on the subconscious level? My energy is low right now, but that's not so bad, as long as it remains constant. Remember how the tortoise beat the hare?

I want to do some experimental writing, like what I did in India last year. There's something to be said for exploring that kind of freedom. In India, it felt like revving up and then letting my brain unwind. I was also conscious that the experience was going to be used for a book I was writing. It turned out well overall.

I can do a simpler version of that kind of writing now by taking time to write parts of a story. I have to see it as a serious purpose and allow it to express a part of myself, something that is fun and creative and that gets at the life of a devotee.

L/ t's raining. They had only one day of good weather over the long weekend here. It ended last night. To be honest with you, I'm glad their football games got rained out. It means there'll be no tourists and local fun-seekers around.

I thank you, writer of this session, and for all the sessions you thanklessly write. O writing session, I will return to you. You are a good friend. My pen ran out here at ten and a half

pages (plus many small spark notes written during the hour). I want to thank the writing process and anyone who has helped me on this path. I thank Madhu for bringing me here and the midnight hour with rain on the window. Of course, who is the source and giver of expression? It's Krsna, my best, well- wishing friend. How am I able to dovetail my writing desires? By Srila Prabhupada's grace.

8

Ireland

The “BF Stories” are gradually developing and becoming more interesting—art and Krsna consciousness and personal expression. It’s a cultural form meant to win peoples’ hearts by honesty, literary value, and personal accounts.

We never know the tangible results of all our preaching. We may build up a tangible project and then over time, see it collapse. Therefore, “tangible” has to be measured in how much something is pleasing to Krsna and in how much we exert ourselves to spread Krsna consciousness. In that sense, we can say that the tangible result is that we preached to one person—ourselves—and increased that person’s surrender. Not only that, but we left an example that others can follow. Success can’t always be measured by always getting the point across to others. The kind of preaching I am talking about stresses the actual state of the devotee. Everything else will take place automatically or not, as Krsna desires.

Do we try to figure things out in our own cases? No, we take help. We want to be authorized, successful, upbeat, and we can’t always trust our immediate moods. If we did, we would become bewildered and indecisive from moment to moment. We might wake up and judge or doubt our own service but then realize that we’re always prone to that. At other times, we may feel more confident. The truth about ourselves and our capabilities is more complex than can be ascertained by snap judgments upon rising. Yet we have to remain vulnerable and open to our moods and the moods of others. If we don’t, we’ll become petrified while living.

Last night I dreamt of being with Sacinandana Swami and his men. They didn't know all the ways and words of the foreign country we were visiting. They were using some kind of object that was made with special chemicals as *sankirtana* paraphernalia and they had a large amount of chemicals left over. They were afraid that the police might wrongly suspect that they were making explosives. Later, I was trying to walk to a safe place in the city. I had only a few blocks to go, but derelicts were blocking my path. I ran to get past them, as a football player will run and duck through the opposing team to the goal line. The police were watching all this casually from a tavern and commenting on my progress . . . Dreams like that go on and on. You work against the clock (I think in this case, literally, because I was aware that I had to get out of the dream and get up so I wouldn't oversleep).

LJ do feel good about writing and the simple truth the act carries as I try to be honest and remove falsity, but it shouldn't become self-advertisement. I am not writing to leave an "authorized" and favorable version of myself to counter other opinions. "Let them see that I was actually a wonderful fellow." No, I am writing so others can read Krsna conscious writing. I will produce it, and people can sort it out for themselves whether there is anything here that can help them. The books will go off and find their homes and hearts.

What satisfaction do I want? Do I want to know what I am actually worth? Do I want to know where Srila Prabhupada is and how to reach him? Do I want my *bhava* for him activated and focused? What is the price of that? I am not an exile.

Orlla Prabhupada, you are leading me through your purports. On the one hand, an objective observer may say that I am starved for friendship and socialization and when I deny it, I'm covering it up. It's only a partial truth. I am not suffering from an all-consuming loneliness. Srila Prabhupada, you were also somewhat skeptical about too much dependence of one brother upon another. You encouraged us to simply follow our spiritual master according to our own convictions and not to get carried away with other people's convictions. That seems realistic. When we are following our own convictions, we tend not to expect so much of others. We also understand that no matter where we go, we can serve our spiritual master. No one can decide for us what our convictions should be, except in a very general way.

"Man is the architect of his own fortune." Srila Prabhupada used to quote that. He could boast that he had started the Krsna consciousness movement with only forty rupees and that now it had become a worldwide movement. His "boasting" assured his followers that Krsna would take care of us. Srila Prabhupada himself was proof of that fact. Srila Prabhupada saw us as "proof-hungry." He tried to assuage our doubts in whatever way he could.

That's because he was compassionate. The world is in a state of pandamonium, he said. He faced the chaos and blamed the demons for it. Krsna consciousness is the only answer. But no big persons of the world heeded him. His movement remains small among world religions, yet it is spreading and does have legal status. ISKCON is full of intelligent devotees who are earnest in their attempts to organize and preach. Thousands of people want to see Krsna consciousness influential in the world, but there are millions who are just as earnestly pushing drugs and Communism and nationalism and sex. The various

causes fight for supremacy, but all agree on principles opposed to basic Krsna consciousness. It's hard to expect good fortune for the world.

As lecturer and writer, I needn't hesitate to express my own disgust with the present civilization. I don't want to simply parrot my spiritual master's criticism of the world; it will sound false or rhetorical. I want to stay true to his vision, and that means feeling the disgust and hopefully the compassion for myself. He's right, of course, in his estimation of how bad civilization is and what is wrong with it.

9

Italy

This is what came to me. M. just walked into the room with a few items. He says he's feeling a dull ache from his malfunctioning liver. He wants to know if I'll be going to the van for the rest of the day. I say, "I don't think so," but does that mean I can't go if I want to? I feel lonely; no one to talk to, and I can't even go to the van without Madhu's permission because he's going to be rebuilding the interior. I could stay put and do something worthwhile.

It's all part of one contiguous life, a string of moments or breaths. I could listen more to Narada's words and then pay attention to writing here.

LJ seem to forget the days when I did three separate writing sessions for an hour each. Sometimes I did even more than that. Now I have to talk myself into a second one, as if it's a concession to do it.

I'm looking for something pragmatic and tangible. Prove to me that the writing session will be read later by a hundred thousand people and will have a good effect on their Krsna consciousness. Prove to me that it's pleasing to my spiritual master. Show me exactly what dirt it will remove from my heart. Guarantee that when we do a word count on the computer, the words "Krsna" and "Supreme Personality of Godhead" will have a high frequency. I don't want to waste my time.

The picture of Srila Prabhupada I have in the frame doesn't work. It's too dark. I'll have to wait to get a better one. I like to have formal shots where his lotus feet are clearly and fully visible. I like pictures of him in his kitchen at Radha- Damodara.

As I write, a mosquito is going after my flesh and I am slowly groping after him in self-defense—chasing him off (as cows do). Bring us to Krsna consciousness. Tell us *krsna- upadesa*, *krsna'katha*.

What does Narada say? I can't recall right now. I do remember that he was talking about how the subtle body carries the soul from one body to another. Materialists are doubtful how a person can take on another gross body after this one dies. They don't know that the subtle body consisting of mind, intelligence, and ego carries the soul to the next life. They simply don't know.

It made me think of how my own gross body is wearing out. I say I don't want another one. I'm not eager for young sex organs or strong eyesight, good chopping teeth or legs to run and play. I want a spiritual body. Having a spiritual body means wanting to serve Krsna. That's the purpose of the spiritual body. It's not so we can enjoy perpetual youth. Do we qualify for one? I am not very interested in having a young body for material enjoyment, but I don't seem to be desperate enough to serve Krsna and thus be awarded my *siddha-svarupa*.

In that case, I may just have to accept another material body to be used in Krsna's service, but also for the mixed purposes I harbor in my heart. The material body, even of a sage, has to grow old, wither, and die.

The perfect stage of liberation in devotional service means being awarded the eternal form of a servant in the spiritual world. Lord Krsna says that one who knows the transcendental

nature of His appearance and activities does not, upon leaving this body, come back again to this material world. “He comes to Me.”

plan to drive to Austria and Poland. We plan to arrive. Then we plan to return to France and give lectures. We plan to stand before the temple Deities and Srila Prabhupada *murtis* and feel sorry that we don’t feel devotion. A Vaisnava is supposed to feel his own shortcomings. That’s how he can improve. He’s also supposed to be unhappy at the unhappiness of others. Despite all that, he’s always blissful and attracted to Krsna’s holy names, pastimes, and *dhamas*. I don’t feel the emotions. Mostly I notice the trains of thought in my mind and the flickering mixed nature of those trains of thought doesn’t please my conception of what I’d like to be.

Innocent days of serving Srila Prabhupada in separation, but present days with awareness in writing which I never imagined before. Present stage is something to be grateful for.

cSrila Prabhupada spoke with that Buddhist—it took up two tapes. The man was speaking too much. Now Srila Prabhupada is speaking to a teacher who also makes an awkward personal presence as we hear it. I listen and worry that another listener might not understand Srila Prabhupada and why he cuts off the other person. I understand and I become uneasy only because these people raise objections and don’t submit to him. They don’t let him speak as guru. It’s *they* who cut *him* off. It’s

they who behave uncivilly and who don't know how to relate to a Vaisnava *acarya*. They speak on their own terms and don't accept his analogies, yet he's kind to them.

LJ could tell myself how to get beyond petty dissatisfactions, but right now I'm listening to the gentle sounds of the rain which enclose us even here in the outdoors and surround us with quietness.

Breathe easy, friend. Did you finish reading another book? Do you go from post to post like a fly? Is your life duration like his, limited, even though you live longer? Yes, a-brahma- *bhuvanal lokah*: from the highest planet to the lowest, all are places where repeated birth and death occur. Even Lord Brahma, who lives a fabulously long time, must die.

We all face these existential moments where we try to create devotional meaning out of our internal emptiness. We just have to accept ourselves. We are limited. A pure devotee could swim in *Srimad' Bhagavatam* all afternoon or churn out direct Krsna conscious passages or write a useful letter defending Krsna consciousness or . . . Life gets smaller and smaller. Then we stumble on something.

Dear Supreme Lord, I dare to address You because I know You are with me. I aspire to hear of Your activities from the lips of Your self-realized devotees. I aspire to serve You in my life with my talents and tendencies.

Dear Supreme Lord, please let me chant Your holy names patiently and use my words to describe You.

I've heard from the *sruti*. This is the perfect method of knowledge. There is no other way for a conditioned soul to know of God. He needn't remain unknowing. We have to accept this

process, if you want to know who your father is, the perfect and only process is to hear from your mother. Therefore, it is important to hear from *sastra*. Narada tells us we must become free of sin and become knowledgeable of the Supreme Lord and the self as distinct from matter. Above that, we must understand how *bhakti* is the supreme path.

Dear Lord, this boy is restless and plies this writing trade in a straightforward way, surrendering to a process where you write down whatever comes. I offer it to You. I request to become more Krsna conscious and to use my tendencies in *bhakti-yoga*.

Dear Lord, You award us the desires we hatch, even in forgetfulness of You. At the same time, You remind us of what is best. I request You to give me service and strength to read *Srimad'Bhagavatam* and to write in a way that's directed to You.

Often we drive to an airport or get onto the highway and head for an ISKCON temple. The journey home. Bowing down to His Divine Grace, we pledge ourselves in his service. We also detect that we are selfish and that we want our own world with its thousands of personal amenities, medicines, notepads, and other paraphernalia. We can laugh at ourselves. Or cry. Or just keep trying.

It's now five after four, so I should wind up this session. I am abstaining from all food for the rest of the afternoon. I plan to read after this is over. Gradually, the day winds down with promises to start early again tomorrow.

10

France

c^mprovisation—there's a difference when your aim is Krs- na consciousness and not Beat generation "Zen lunacy." Trying to become a devotee includes shaking off those old heeby-jeebies.

I'm still reading *Bhagavatam*, now the Fifth Canto about how Rsabha put stones in his mouth in the forest and was consumed by a forest fire.

'Don 't trust the mind. It is dangerous and needs to be beaten a hundred times in the morning. That's because so many false notions can come into it and you can find yourself absorbed in sense gratification or extensive plan-making. Better not to allow the mind such freedom, but that doesn't mean becoming mindless. Therefore, when I write, I encourage freedom—first thoughts—but that's not the same as trusting the mind over the *sastras*.

Rsabha says when you capture animals, you can't give them their freedom again and expect that they won't run away. Similarly, the mind. Why, then, do I write like this? To see the full extent of the mind in order to train it to become my friend?

On the other hand, you can't *always* rein in a horse. You have to give it freedom some of the time. The same with a child. You can't always impose the strictest discipline. At some point, you have to become friends with the child. Allowing freedom is another kind of training. It teaches responsibility, such as when you give an animal a longer rope.

I am not indulging my mind outside of Krsna consciousness through this writing. I'm still following the four rules and chanting sixteen rounds. I'm not looking for material freedom.

This idea appeals to me, this giving of responsible freedom. I say (I know, it's a cliché) that a devotee has to avoid presenting the philosophy "correctly," dogmatically; he should consult his heart and realization.

Praghosa in Ireland objected to this point when I discussed it in *Shack Notes*. He questioned giving free rein to the mind, trusting the spontaneous urge. He asked, "Don't we always have to curb that evil or left-wing tendency to do as we like?" He feared I was giving license to the lawless, lower self. I said it's not like that, but his point brings up a challenge. I shouldn't write beatnik prose. A Vaisnava writer wants to come out with straight, Krsna conscious expression. To find that expression that touches the heart, he may have to test his own limits a little. You know the saying, "The sky is the limit." *Srutismrti'puranadi*: trust is settled and fixed in Krsna consciousness. But what if I am not settled and fixed yet? Therefore, I ask, "All right, what's on your mind? How do you feel?"

are in France, keeping cool behind the closed shutters. I am too cool right now, but don't want to pause to put on warmer clothes. I hope the satisfaction I feel in being here is not sense gratification. I hope to be able to unwind and go deeper. I hope to discover truths. I hope to find permission within myself to write something else—I don't know what, but something to help me and to share with readers. I just remembered how Machado said to his readers, "I don't owe you anything; you owe me for these poems."

What is the price of original thought? What does it mean to sing in *parampara*? Do others see me and snicker or frown? I know and my writer friends know and Lord Siva knows we are exploring the mind – a foolish endeavor. I can only say that my writer friends may not know the benefit of this as a dedication, a workout. If I am a slave to a mundane writing process, that's not good, but I'm not. I am working out as a writer and that can't be bad.

Delight of free words coming alive. Not pride, but joy in expression. Real lines given to us by Lord Krsna. My dear friends, don't deny me this or the full right to practice my explorations, and I'll give you the golden eggs at the end. Explain more? I really want to be a devotee, I am a friend to myself, it's a kind of therapy, a kind of poem,

writing itself a relief from the vacancy and official crap we have to swallow in this institution, a way to let off steam harmlessly,

a brave endeavor not to go to hell, but frontier seeking . . . blah, blah, blah. Discovery on paper what I want to do and where to go next in a sincere attempt to surrender. Please free me from the grip of my own falsity. Raw writing. Give us raw writing.

I don't want to write a dumb book the way any old person could write, but a sincere expression of my own self as he tried his best to untie the knots of material desire according to the instructions of his Gurudeva. Secretly, I wish others would make those expressions too.

To be true. False ego, they said, gets smashed and bruised and cut off dead. That's good, but what about real ego? And what about the fact that we are tender and need care? When he gets smashed, he may react way inside and want to get out of the Krsna consciousness movement and not love or follow his guru. That has happened. I want to take care of myself, listen to my inner voice, allow freedom of expression and be happy in Krsna consciousness.

Or maybe we should be more stark and self-punishing. Maybe we should perform austerities like Rsabhadeva, although we don't want to imitate.

Please understand. I'm not imitating and I'm not trying to glorify myself. I am trying to find the self for Krsna. I see so many pushing on Krsna consciousness in the external way; I want to do it in the internal way. It's subtle and hard to express what this means exactly, but writing to know the self and express the self as a writer is part of it. Maybe that's a crude description and too limiting. To "be a writer" isn't the whole story. It's a way of healing, of staying apart, it's a statement, it's my way of surviving ISKCON politics. Today I'll celebrate my complete freedom to read and write because I want to, to be myself.

Whatever strength and beauty nondevotee writers have— and freedom—I want to claim it for my Lord and put Krsna conscious writing into circulation that will knock their socks off.

Can I knock off socks and achieve excellence by this writing method? Why not? It's a way.

°When this hour is up—yes, I’m going to keep writing for an hour no matter what—then I’ll read for forty minutes and take some notes. I’ll feel warmed by the *sastra*, and I hope I will discover the burning desire to stay in the *darsana* of the Supreme Lord and the light of the *Bhagavata*. I shall feel that eventually. I don’t have as much idealism and optimism about it as I did last year, but the knowledge that if I keep reading, I will feel it, pushes me forward into reading Prabhupada’s books several times a day.

11

LJ dreamt of art—brilliant paintings, seeing into them, investing them with meaning by creative appreciation and expression. I was encouraging artists to find more images from life and put them into their paintings.

Themes should be Krsna conscious, but many devotees are afraid that art could lead us astray. Our artistic expression shouldn't be made at the expense of Krsna consciousness. Don't miss substantial Krsna consciousness.

Truth is eternal. Lord Caitanya said to always read *Bhaga-vatam* and glorify Krsna. God is not vague. He is Krsna, the possessor of six opulences. Srila Prabhupada told the professors that although we can speculate on God forever, we can only know Him when He tells us who He is. Lord Krsna says who He is in *Bhagavad'gita* and *Srimad'Bhagavatam*.

I realize that it's important to learn Prabhupada's arguments in order to preach effectively, but these days, I'm just listening to him and absorbing myself in his presentation without storing it up for future debates. I am relishing his examples and analogies, and his insistence that Krsna is the original Personality of Godhead in Goloka as well as the Maha-Visnu who creates the material world. Right now, I'm trying to concentrate on hearing with *sraddha*. Hearing from authorities is the best way to acquire knowledge.

Sraddha carries us beyond debate. I can go back step by step and trace out how I came to accept these things that Prabhu- pada is saying—that's just as much a part of my life story as anything else. The *Vedas* are right, and I'm their spokesperson. The real point, though, is that somehow I do accept Prabhupada's teachings and I want to live in such a way that I am preaching with every move I make.

I believe the *Vedas* are right because Prabhupada convinced me. He gave me the *Srimad'Bhagavatam* and the Hare Krsna mantra, *prasadam* and his way—his way. I can explain this to an audience the next time I go to 26 Second Avenue. I'd like to—how Swamiji taught us and convinced us. I'll plan for it.

Back to my dream of art. I've lived long enough in ISKCON, and seen and read enough, and now I want to process the "data" and come out with it in "paintings." In my dream last night, I was an art teacher assessing the students' paintings. I was looking not only at the symbols, images, colors, and designs, but encouraging them to go deeper within themselves and come out with more.

Of course, I am not a painter, but a writer. We all want to see explicit Krsna conscious imagery: Krsna with His flute, Radha and Krsna together, temples, devotees. We don't want to leave any of it out. But we want what is implicit too—the heart of our own Krsna consciousness should come through.

When we left the Czech farm, Tattva-darsi rode with us through the sparkling sunrise into town to show us the way. Then he got out of the van and took the train back to the farm. The train looked like a toy. It stops fifty meters from the ISKCON building. He lives in that pristine world of fertile fields. His service is to translate Srila Prabhupada's books from English into Czech. I gave him a big garland of flowers when he left us in town. Tattva-darsi is cynical by nature, but he is faithful, and I hope he is happy for his whole life in Krsna consciousness. His temple president, Turlya Prabhu, called him, "Problem-free."

Who could express the freshness and well-wishing of that morning? And me in our van, living another moment of auspiciousness, driving off as a preacher to visit the next place, full of freedom and hope in Krsna consciousness. If you take away all the nice things in this material life, you could not take away what is nicest, and that is our Krsna consciousness, our allegiance to and endurance in the chanting of the holy names.

As an artist, can I describe that morning? Can I capture the sun rising over the farm in June in Eastern Europe? I can't do it fully. All I can say is that the fields were green with wheat and grass. There were cows. Not many modern amenities. Czech Republic is a backward, simple country, with less crime and extravagance. The Krsna consciousness at that farm is simple and hard-working. The temple room has unvarnished wood floors. They worship Gaura-Nitai simply. The women are the *pujaris* while the men tend the cows. Two bull calves arrived from somewhere in Europe while I was there. The devotees sit under the tree in the yard for *prasadam*, which like most ISKCON temples, is distributed from buckets. The president, Turiya Prabhu, works as hard as the rest. The devotees appear to be in good health, although Turiya warned me to watch out for the sun's rays. He says they can be harmful.

(So much of my writing seems to be the deflecting of blows from the material nature. I broadcast the news of a private life and say we are staving off the three-fold miseries, but some of them attack us in this way and that. I write of life in this world from a transcendental perspective. We read of Goloka and see before us the material world, but we don't see as a *karmi*

sees. We see attractive women as dangerous to our spiritual commitment. We see flowers as God's creation, although we know the flowers in the spiritual world are a million times more beautiful. We see our mind as the enemy, although we try to engage it in Krsna's service.

LJ want to tell the success of my own attempt in Prabhupada's mission. I am an ISKCON reporter, but not a journalist for *IWR*. I write my own newspaper from my own point of view.

Last night I looked at the painting of Kali-yuga where light is coming from Vyasa into the darkness of sin. The light pours down, but few receive it. (That painting could be the cover for *All Things Fail Without Krsna*.) A ray of light in the darkness. Kali-yuga is a tunnel of horrors, but there is a way out. The painting shows a running man and a blazing fire. Chant Hare Krsna and get out.

I *will* chant, and I will pray to concentrate on the holy names.

Dear Lord Krsna, please have mercy on this sinner. My dear Lord Krsna, please have mercy on this sinner. That's the Jesus prayer. *We* mean, "Please engage me in Your service." That prayer comprehends and includes all. Mercy for the sinner is included in the gift of service. "Please engage me in Your service," includes, "Please make me strong to preach," "Please let me have faith," "Please don't let me fall down," "Please let me do right," etc. Please engage me in Your service—hear the mantra and reflect on it.

I feel good this morning. This is the way to write early in the morning, by throwing off sparks of Krsna conscious things that come to mind. If my words are not Krsna conscious, let them come anyway. Soon they will become Krsna conscious by the power of transformation. I mean, by the fact that I have chosen Krsna consciousness and it is always available to me. Lord Caitanya says, "Here I am, take Me." If I don't take Him, I am a hopeless fool. I want to be a taker.

Even if I start with nonsense, I can drop it and drift into the Krsna consciousness available.

^jDreams seem more expressive in art and daring. *However*, they are less directed in Krsna consciousness. Therefore, the waking stage is better. Also, I don't write in the dream state. When I do capture a dream, the drama of it is usually not sattvic enough for my taste. The lead characters may be devoid of Krsna conscious expression, so I don't like it. I want a lead character who is trying to be a devotee, just as I am trying to be one in my waking life.

Madhavendra Puri said that he had resolved to be a devotee despite everything. "I have resolved to think of Govinda . . . " He didn't need any other rituals.

O Govinda, Lord of truth,

You wave a baton in the *rasa* dance.

You play a variety of flutes. You dance and sport with Your many devotees and never tire. Sometimes Your sport includes fatigue, and You lie at the root of a tree or on Balarama's lap while the boys fan You and one sings for You, and You are happy in Your boyhood and adolescence. Your mother always waits for You to come home. The *gopis* wait for You in the

kunjās. This is Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana. At the same time, He's always God.

I will hear of the Lord from my spiritual master. I will "limit" myself to his presentation. I can't know Lord Kṛṣṇa otherwise. He sent Śrīla Prabhupāda to me. All I have to do is be faithful.

The clock has a black background and white hands. It says I have twenty minutes to go. They know my limits and don't expect much. Even if I wrote fifty years nonstop, I couldn't exceed my limits. A dwarf leaps to catch the moon. A fox leaps to catch the grapes and finally gives up. I leap and sing, "*Haribol!*" and fall back like a puppy.

The Lord of art and experience is Govinda. Perhaps He will throw me a morsel. Maybe a poem will come out of it as an evocation of sincerity.

May all devotees overcome their problems and be lights to the world. That is what the world is lacking. Of course, devotees are already doing things much better than their nondevotee contemporaries, but devotees have a vision of a land free of trouble and filled with happy people. Is that a kind of impersonalism? We want personalism, but that inevitably includes quarrels among individuals with different opinions. All right, that's better than pretended friendliness. Let's express ourselves in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and try not to fight so much. We can do that by observing Vaisnava etiquette.

note to a friend: don't resent that you gave your youth to Krsna. It didn't go in vain. Don't resent it. Don't be angry and resentful. You are flaming up like those electric wires we see in India.

J7H otorboat sounds like it's farting. Bad aching backs. It's spine, it's vertebrae, it's braying, it's conniving and fear. This flailing body encases the bewildered self. The nerves pinch and he hurts, so he runs off to a chiropractor, consults a head shrink, is taken away by police, taxed by government, victimized by what he reads in the newspapers. He meddles in karma by eating meat. He dies saying, "I didn't know any better," and that's a fact.

I have come to write the obituary for everyone. I am speaking the funeral speech for a man I didn't know, telling the relatives that his soul isn't dead, the guy whose body is in the coffin. In a gentle way, I tell them it's foolish to lament and that they never knew the real man. He's not dead, not the real person. They'll look at me and wonder if they dare to believe what I'r.i saying.

Let them believe or not.

I'm speaking at my own funeral. I am watching with Huck Finn. We're having a laugh. Socrates said, "First you catch me, and then you can put me in the grave." Emily Dickenson: "A fly buzzed when I died." Zen death poems are ignorant of what comes next.

Krsna conscious devotees know they have a next life. They know where they go, or they don't know for sure until they die. But they pray to Krsna to have mercy on them and they trust that He will.

Now it's time for me to go and read *Srimad'Bhagavatam*. Let this writing session join the rest.

12

The truth comes out of jumbled words, anemone and others. Boy Scouts in Normandy, 1994- On a brown Red Cross truck from 1944, "6 June, 1944 *musue*," picture of GI Joe shouting. "Come on in and see the mortars and shells and helmets and dead Nazis." Come and rest in an off-the-road campground shelter.

The *Bhagavatam* is open for later. I'm aware that this is not pure *krsna'katha*, although that's what I should be doing. This is for approaching Krsna consciousness, digging to know the truth of myself.

All Pilot pens drift. The truth is in the mantra. Carefully, I wrote some favorite passages on cards. What they mean to me might not be something I can express to others, but I pick them out and plan to speak on them. He said of yearning, this is the way it is, you want to be a devotee of the Lord, you want to render service to Krsna.

c

LJ wanted to be a devotee truly, but there were impediments and I couldn't overcome them. I sat at the wall and couldn't get over. I sat there and chanted and wrote this piece. My writing is a form of imploring the powers that be to please let me get over the wall. Could they please come and pull me over?

Keep calm. I'm nearing Le Havre and preparing for tomorrow's ferry crossing. Today is for calm and rest, and tomorrow for all-day transit.

I don't mainly read or mainly write. I do both. O Krsna, if it rains, I can close the skylight. I will be safe here, as You desire.

The poetry gets written one way or another. Muse attracted or waited upon.

When I speak, am I searching for something? I know I'm always desiring to be a better devotee and all that, but how much deeper, how much more relaxed do I have to get before I understand what I'm looking for? Similarly, I ask myself, "What is it that you want to do in these writing sessions?" It would take me about twenty-eight days to write say, fifty sessions. It would take me twenty-eight days to write twenty-eight short-short, improvised stories. What is it I most want to do? I want to be true to myself and to this period of my life. When we read an author, we are grateful when he or she is not posing, even if the writing is quiet and ordinary. It's not as moving to read an author who heightens the mood for effect or discusses profound themes without really living or feeling it. When I read a book, I want to see the layers of the author's life.

I have sent tapes across the sea to be typed. One contained intros and prefaces to a private compilation of writing sessions.

Harvest time. Wheat lies in dry piles, ready to be picked up, but if it rains, it could cause a problem. Rain at the right time is what the cultivator wants. Does he pray for it?

Valmiki down and write. The next *Bhagavatam* chapter describes the descent of the river Ganges. Don't even speak to those cynics who take the *Vedas* as myths. Jan Morris didn't say anything about "Hinduism." He didn't seek a guru. He

focused himself as too honest or knowledgeable and modern to be a fool like that—expecting anyone in barbaric India to be able to teach about God since even in the West, we despair of inquiring into such a subject. Life is something else, some justice or just being yourself and writing travel books, getting at the heart of each place and people after visiting there awhile as an American with a checkbook.

He glared at an Indian bureaucrat.

I glare, I accept what *Srimad-Bhagavatam* says and don't write to convince Jan Morris otherwise from what he thinks as a meateater.

I will get through by reaching out to my immediate congregation. I write to them. Devotees distribute books and hold festivals, and a net goes out and captures some people. I am part of that organized preaching. I depend on that first wave of attack by the soldiers. I then approach those who are already softened, who are already curious and willing to hear more. Therefore, I am tied into ISKCON's preaching efforts. I'm not exactly a free-lance preacher.

at will I write next? I can't say yet. I know that it will be inch by inch writing. I'll have to pay for it. That's how it goes.

the distance — sounds like firecrackers. I'm in a neutral mood. M. said,
 "Isn't it good here?" I agreed and waited to see

what would happen. Wrote a schedule I hope to follow and didn't commit myself. Waited to see how the day would go. Sun wasn't so bright.

I have to prepare five morning classes and five evening ones for the disciples' meetings at Inis Rath in August. I have already prepared quite a bit, so I needn't worry. The rest will come.

It's a good meditation to contact Krsna in the books through the barriers of the mind. For example, I'm in Normandy and I can't help but come up with war images. Then I think of the war I go through with my mind to read about Krsna in His absolute forms as He presents Himself in *Srimad- Bhagavatam* and the holy name. I read for "mystical" reception, to be with Srila Prabhupada and Lord Krsna in the reading encounter. Seek that quality and try to convey it also. I don't indulge in much criticism or argument against atheistic attacks on *sastra*. I just go in and hear and try to lower my own defenses. That doesn't mean I'm mindless, however.

Farewell, my friends, as you fly off to India. "Repair your *sadhana* and gain inspiration in Vrndavana," I told her. She said thank you. Wish them well, those who wish you well and are so kind.

If you want food to taste good, use butter and sugar. Alas, that's not good to eat. Okay, then settle for less than palatable foods.

“Age life expectancy average,” Srila Prabhupada said, “is thirty-five in India and seventy in America.” Thoreau lived into his forties, barely. Shelley and Keats died young. Wordsworth grew old and they criticized him, “You grow old, Father William.”

The days of early autumn are not so far away. Seeking to love and accept, seeking to be encouraged vicariously by another’s truth, we read books. Reading, we extend ourselves and love the writers. They give us something.

Someone gave me an anthology of East European poets. After all, I travel so much in Europe, I might as well meet their poets. I’m not a provincial Bostonian who knows only the Boston Commons and the mobs of college students.

A dry, whitish moth on this page.

LJ feel my relationship with Lord Krsna deep in my heart. I expressed it in a book and gave instructions how it may be edited. I have nothing more to say about it right now. The book is out of my hands. It will become a small book for general readers.

Seven minutes left. Call on the last energy of this session. Krsna. Krsna. I declare I will tell *krsna-katha* to the others and tell how a disciple should be satisfied with the basic practices, yet be anxious to improve his or her service. Prabhupada said he was pleased not by someone giving him a large amount of money, but by a disciple following the rules and regulations of devotional life. That’s what pleases the guru.

13

Ireland

To be totally honest, I don't have to write down the details of my life here. What I need is surrender to God. I don't need to give you a blow by blow account of the wrestling match between me and the forces of doubt. "The structure of the universe" has always been a difficult one for me to read. I mean, with its ocean of liquor and billions and billions of miles between mountains and islands and oceans and peaks and names that are hard to pronounce.

I need to write permissively right now. It's good for me. I don't want to worry what people will say. I'm planning a book — a story of my next few weeks. It may want to come out successful and nice and neat, whereas the actual story isn't so. Therefore, I'm going to write separately in these sessions where I simply keep the hand moving no matter what.

0>ick up where the radio show left off. I went to the Krsna conscious yearning stage. Hope to be able to talk with Super- soul. Don't want to mock these efforts. Respect the pure desire to know and serve Lord Krsna. I spoke of Dhruva and Kardama and others.

The body wants Krsna consciousness. Mine yearns for that satisfaction; the soul wants it too. The relaxed, off-stage person wants it. He eats and sleeps to feel refreshed. Why? So he can do this higher function. Little arm with wrist and hand, grip

pen and try to bring us where the voice took us, and carry us further along.

Or do you feel a need to go backward? Pure devotees attain Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Pure reading and submissive aural reception in chanting—these are right here now for you. Try for them. That’s the purpose of human life.

Read in a way that you are praying to the Lord and *Srīmad-Bhagavatam* and Srīla Prabhupada and your own self, “Please let me enter here with my material sorrows. I want an improved state. Please let me do it, Lord. Let me enter *Srīmad-Bhagavatam* with full faith.”

I want to show myself I can enter states of progressive receptivity in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Once I show that I can do it, then it’s just a matter of staying with it and going into it more and more. I can quote the verse on the cowherd boys who played with Lord Kṛṣṇa as their friend after heaps of pious activities throughout many lives. Successful devotees inspire me. I too can become successful. I can love Kṛṣṇa and desire to please Him with my devotional service.

No one can do it for me.

This is a trail I want to be on. The day has passed its peak. I’m aware my physical energy—my powers of concentration—are waning, but I speak to the Lord in the heart not just for a peak experience, but with promise for a future rendezvous—tomorrow and tomorrow after that. I want to enter the prayer state with *Srīmad-Bhagavatam*. Better I plunge into it. Be aware that there are barriers to cross, and ask Kṛṣṇa and your own self to help you cross them. Those barriers are skepticism, feelings that I’ve read this before, etc.

Tall trees at the edge of the yard stand as sentinels. They wave. I noticed them when I began to write out here. Now they are watching me silently, me, the more evolved and sophis-

ticated life form, as I try to speak with the higher knowledge I've been exposed to. I'd help you, trees, if I were more advanced. I could become your well-wisher and sing *kirtana* in your presence, but mostly you watch me when I grow forgetful of communion with you and take up communion with Lord Krsna in the heart and what I can do on the writing page.

dxzk&s

^Present influences. Not so much outside reading in God- brothers' books. The self-image of writing self. I influence myself to be a loner and dig at this writing. Dig at it like a road laborer. Old influences are still with me that would see this alone work as "off." I read Prabhupada's purports and am influenced by them. I'm influenced by growing older, influenced by

my body. I seek reciprocation with those who encourage me to go on writing.

Just me and his books and my pen and what I can make of it.

In a note, I ask myself to be relaxed and write for longer periods, “without expectations of Krsna conscious performance, be yourself, and write what comes.” Okay, but I just had this nice radio show where I built up to a yearning for a Krsna conscious state. Once you induce that, it seems better to keep going in that direction.

I feel some throbbing in my head right now — it’s starting behind the right eye. If that persists, I’ll have to obey it and go inside and relax. I can’t seem to relax deeply while writing. It requires too much muscle action and brain action and the flow of thoughts and words onto the page.

I’d like to do another session, this one, to the full hour without damage. Plump and pert pens in black box outdoors. You’ve eaten all you’ll get today. Only some water now. You have a hat for the sun if it comes out. I’ll walk with you. Seems we can’t keep going on the strength of where the radio show left off. That was what it was and I’m here now.

LJ can’t understand what the hell Simic means. Write my own plain sense. I need to know what a person is talking about. Please make some sense. Are you talking about what it was like in World War II? Maybe that’s it, huh? “She bore me swaddled over the burning cities. . . . The high heavens were full of little, shrunken, deaf ears inside of stars.” One tries to make an essence instead of plain description. Well, I don’t care for it.

Sometimes I write just for myself. That's a different thing. It's not a prank. I lose control in order to get further into Krsna consciousness. If I can lose the hold on my immediate conscious Krsna consciousness, then maybe I can regroup further down the road by getting past the boundaries of ordinariness. I'm willing to take chances like that because I can trust myself. This playing field of the notepad isn't going to hurt me. I don't want to blaspheme or hurt anyone. Especially I don't want to hurt my relationship with Srila Prabhupada and Lord Krsna. Still, it's not something to keep preserved in a box. I have to test it sometimes and build it up by effort.

Cross through patches of briars and memories of Jaya-tirtha up to his losing his head. All that happened. But it's not true Krsna consciousness.

"Lose control. Be honest. Don't be afraid to fail." These are notes from two years ago. Well, my head is throbbing. Can I stretch out this last half hour? Is it worth it? A very good day it's been. I've been so wealthy. Didn't even stop to celebrate. Opened the door of the *tulasi* house like a man on business that absorbs him. When I discovered it was 100° F in there, I backed out and went down to the field and picnic table. All day I made golden hay. Now I've got to cool it.

LJ don't know. The world? I just know life in the attic room of a little house these days. M. is tearing out the inside of the van and building a new interior. He wants to bring everything down to a lower center of gravity in the rear so we can go faster. He also wants to clear the clutter out of his space and the kitchen. He's occupied with that and also busy buying tickets

for future travels. Therefore, I have free time to develop my own ways.

The world? I don't know. This I do know: there's nothing wrong in telling this story. I am writing to communicate, but not to perform according to others' expectations. I am not even looking to read as interesting, compelling, profound, or realized. This is the only life I have, and I have faith in its value.

My dear Krsna, can I write of You? I can describe You as I meet You in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. I cannot imagine You or tell anyone what You think, but I can pray to You.

O all-merciful Krsna, hear my prayer. I am not the creator of whatever I do, these words that appear independent of You. Fools think like that—*prakrteh kriyamandni, gunaih karmani sarvasah*. They think they are the doer, but they are actually moved by the modes of nature. Even Simic, although he won the Pulitzer Prize, may, if he's not Krsna conscious, be moved by the intricate modes of nature. We think we are outsmarting someone, but we are outsmarted. Srila Prabhupada says we get entangled by *mdyd's* complexities. *Maya* outsmarts us.

LJ'UI looking at old photos. I remember coming home from work to the storefront. Jadurani would be sitting and painting. She sat on the floor (on a mat?). Those days are all under the bridge now.

Stones thrown at the window. I had the courage to go outside and say, "Go away!" Then I called the police. No, we won't fight. I won't fight, wrestle, punch, or use a knife. If you force me, I might pick up a club.

^Deep breaths for my budding headache in the outside air. Bottle of water on table. Feet growing cold, and legs in thin *dhoti*. Back straight. I better go in and do something to relax – maybe listen to a tape.

14

("T^irds chirp—I don't know their names. Garble and mix the message from brain. Burn feeling in region of heart. You can't burn in love yet for Lord Krsna. Talk about it on morning walk.

I read a writing session I wrote last winter. It was really a note-taking session, expressing an emotion that I was writing fiction, but didn't know if I really wanted to do it. I didn't like it as I read it now. After all, I was agitated by the visit of the muse. Later, I refer to this as a "fit." I was almost forced to try story-writing and it has produced interesting results over the months, although it's dormant now. I'm sure it will come again when it likes.

Now I am more dedicated to the writing sessions, especially since I'm able to read them again. Maybe that's why I feel

miffed that I used my writing session time to express feelings of whether or not I should write fiction. It was honest at the time, but I would have preferred it be done in a work pad and then the writing session would have been allowed to go . . . where?

Facing who you are. The effort to turn to Krsna in the heart where soul and Supreme Lord are seated as two birds. Seems that analogy from the *Upanisads* could be a motto for the writing session effort: the *jiva* bird gives up his preoccupation with sense gratification and turns to the witness bird, his friend and well-wisher. Why is it so hard to give up the lonely preoccupation with the fruits on the branches of the material body? Can't you see it's getting you nowhere, as the *Upanisads* and *Srimad'Bhagavatam* and *Gita* tell us? Those fruits are all sources of misery, and you go to them for joy.

Who me? I'm a sanrryasi. You must be lecturing to a general "you," myself not included.

You do love palatable food.

But it's *prasadam*.

dear friend, don't you remember Me? I am your unknown friend, *avijnata*. You didn't consult Me in the past, but now I have appeared again. We are like two swans. So said the *brahmana* who appeared to Vaidarbhi at the time when her husband died in the forest. Following the order of the spiritual master is tantamount to seeing the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the heart.

Read in *Festivals*, Srila Prabhupada's lecture on Gundica day, 1970. He told some of the *lila* of Ratha-yatra involving Lord Krsna's being the cowherd boy beloved of the *gopis* and

gopas of Vrndavana. After He left Vrndavana (to kill Karhsa), the only business of the Vrajavasis was to cry in separation from Krsna. He sent Uddhava to pacify them. Finally they got an opportunity to be with Him at Kuruksetra during the solar eclipse. Srimati Radharani and the *gopis* asked Krsna to return to Vrndavana. That mood was observed and lived by Lord Caitanya 500 years ago during Ratha-yatra in Puri. That's the meaning of Ratha-yatra for Lord Caitanya's followers — Radharani bringing Krsna back to Vrndavana.

Bly wrote a poem about snow and a man in a black coat who turns. Mystery of life, thoughts and snowdrifts compared. The rich imagery. But what is a poet? Why doesn't he so yearn for God that it comes out nakedly in each poem?

Or do you just play that role? I discovered in *Shack Notes* that there's a difference between what we in ISKCON publicly say that one *should* do and what one actually feels. We have buried our feelings, thinking they may be inappropriate. I was trying to unearth them in that book. That process is not a onetime event. I continue it if I think it's worthwhile.

Are you one who calls out "O my God!" all night?

No. I hope to sleep soundly for at least three or four hours and I do. Then I get up and write, beginning "Captain Smith, reporting for work."

God knows all; He's in the heart. May He see a drive for God consciousness (Krsna consciousness) in me and my efforts.

LJ dared to come to write this one in the *tulasi* house. Although I'm all the way over here, I can still hear M. and A.'s voices. "Brother . . ." If I could hear their actual words, I would leave here and go down to the table in the yard. It was a risk coming here. All my books and papers are on the floor now, but it would take say three minutes if I suddenly stopped and went down to the table. No, longer because I have to get the sponge to wipe the table. No, that takes only ten seconds. I know where it is.

Here's the sunlight. You can stick it out. Uddhava said he'd prefer to keep Tulasi outdoors if he could, in summer, so as not to coddle her too much. Makes her strong to face the colder months. Hadn't thought of that. So I write here and prove I can go deep even if there are voices and construction noise nearby.

^What is deeper? It's Krsna consciousness, of course, but my own version. Dear Lord, why can't I serve You better? I read the transcript of a 1970 lecture by Srila Prabhupada, but I read it cold and like one going through an archives manuscript, not like one sitting at the feet of his guru and receiving Krsna's *darsana* through his words. He told the *lila* of Yasoda looking into Krsna's mouth. Krsna says the boys were liars. The manuscript says, "devotees laugh." That's far removed from actually being there in a crowded room with Swamiji and yourself smiling and laughing as he speaks. I thrilled to it twenty-four years ago.

It's expected we get old and fat and even die over that amount of time. Youth cult over.

The burn in heart area. The guys talking. Go ahead.

My personal feeling for Krsna stops short. I open a book and read something and there's an intellectual appreciation which we can call spiritual. I appreciate *bhakti*.

Talk, talk, I hear them, but keep writing. You can talk too, unhampered. Be strong. Sounds like Patri and M. jawing away. He really should let M. work on the van, but they have a yen to talk.

I talk alone. How is my talk better and less gossip, and not a waste of time and air? If I go deep.

O Moses,
 O whale-catchers,
 O dreamers in sleep,
 go deep into it,
 O sex mongers, you too try to go
 deep and drug addicts, and
 anyone . . . but deep into hell is
 not what I mean. (You just wrote
 deep into "shell" by mistake.)
 The man is talkin' but now
 maybe he'll leave M. — and me — alone.
 On your own. Strip off a sweater.
 "Oh, I didn't know you were in here."
 Yes, I am getting the benefit of Tulasi's
 association and writing my . . . your what?

My affidavit to testify that I saw the Rose of Sharon, but didn't know its name. I testify that I was out walking from five to six in the morning and thought soon maybe I'll stop this answering of questions on *japa*.

"Brother . . . " More talk by the van. I am a *tulasi* silent watcher. A cool breeze on the head.

When you can concentrate, you go down again and say, “What feelings do I have naturally for God? What if I have doubt or distaste when I hear His IHa?” Oh, you can overcome it.

The Irish talk, the way they talk. I like it.

But you see, direct *sastra* is, to say the least, helpful. “I am the source” (I am writing this like a medieval monk in a big book in a monastery, copying a church manuscript) “of all spiritual and material worlds.” (Stop and consider who is speaking and what he says. Daruka dasa is talking about “the post office” —he repeats that word again and again.) Srila Prabhupada says that if an ordinary person says, “I am the greatest,” then you won’t believe it, but Lord Krsna is the Supreme Person. It’s right if He says He is the greatest. “Everything emanates from Me. The wise who perfectly know this engage in my devotional service and worship Me with all their hearts.” (Bg. 10.8)

I’ll have to give up coming to Tulasi’s house as long as M. works on the van, it seems. If I mention it to him, it may be of no practical purpose. Do I want him to restrict his work hours or not talk to people or to move the van? No, I have two other places. The bench outdoors as long as it doesn’t rain, and indoors, which is okay any time.

Indoors is in. In. Go in, go in. If you meet a blank wall, just keep going anyway.

Krsna says “I am the source of all the spiritual and material worlds.” One who hears this from right authorities in Lord Caitanya’s line and who believes it knows that Krsna is the origin of all and he engages in His service with firm determination, “firmly fixed in devotional service.”

Nistha means that when people speak nonsense and deny Krsna, the devotee isn’t swayed in the least. “He can never be

deviated by any amount of nonsensical commentaries or by fools.” (Bg. 10.8, purport)

Many *sastras* uphold that Narayana, Visnu — Krsna — is the source of all.

“There is no supreme controller other than Krsna.” Shall I just read and note and wait, or is there something else, like a pause to pray, “Please let it be true in me and live in me. Please give me revelation.”

The devotee doesn’t just sit with eyes closed (he’ll fall asleep), but he “engages all his energies in Krsna consciousness and becomes a truly learned man.” All others are fools. He shouldn’t be bewildered by the fools and their interpretations of *Bhagavad'gita*, but proceed in Krsna consciousness “with determination and firmness.”

There is a little taste of *sastra* and Krsna. My Lord. My book. You bring yourself into it. Your question was how can I enter real Krsna consciousness? I say it’s the *sastra*.

M. is running a power saw. He’s alone. He says he’s “hyped up” (in a good sense) to work on the van. Says at times like this, he can’t pay much attention to anything else. Similarly, I take advantage of the writing sessions as a time when I’m not disturbed by other engagements. Free — for what?

Free to ask myself a question. How to keep writing into a heart.

But what’s in there? It looks like a Mickey Mouse hat or a baseball catcher’s mitt. No, it’s a donut hole into Nothingness — a fashionable meditation. It’s an Aghasura play. None of the above.

But you care and feel.

Again he asks, "If I take a moment and feel, what is my actual state of Krsna consciousness?" That's why writing sessions are important; they at least let me be aware of the search of innerness.

Sounds like you are echoing the Orthodox Christian prayer men, saints, and ascetics. Go in, go in.

Take a hop in
inner, inner, and what do you see when you go way, way, way IN
THERE!?

Srila Prabhupada said (to a crazy boy in Buffalo who later became his Kusakratha dasa): "I do not know. You know."

In the silent gloaming of poets, dull and bright fire eyes, tree hole an entry place for black snakes. Eye of the storm, pull yourself in and what do you see? Ugh, it smells fishy. That's his intestines.

Why
you makin'
fun of inner life, bro?
I threatenin' you now with my fist, Don't make fun of Inner Life, you hear?

He puts his black-face-tough-guy up close to mine. I have challenged his group.

I back off. I don't care. Inner or outer, it's all the same to me, as long as I can go on writing. I have nothing at stake. I'm just a creator snake charmer like a pizza maker performing in public. He punches the dough and twirls it around, throws tomato and cheese and olives and peppers on it and plenty of sauce. Then throws it into the oven.

See folks, I made da pizza.

jZeak in the roof. He runs. I was looking for a serious man. Well, I am the man. But you look different. I'm the man, but I have separated my beauty secrets into pots. Want to see them?

(Can't get a hold of this guy, elusive *sadhu*. He may suspect me.)

I hear M.'s drill from several directions at once. Put on your Salinger hat or your white-brimmed Yevtuschenko brand musing oracle.

Put on your Rasta hat
and heartily go uphill.

No, I want to cut this train of thought right here, skip lines, and read the book on writing and then come back here more sober. What's the time?

Yikes! Time is up. No time to look at the writing book. Go ahead, ask pardon for your nonsense. Two birds in a tree and you the little one. But you *forgot* Visnu. You got carried away like a mad peacock spreading its wings. You tripped on the word "inner."

No, hold on, there is something worthy in the elusive *sadhu*. He was protecting inner life from your prying eyes. It's *you* who are not serious, and he saw that.

Asked several times, "What is my actual unrehearsed feeling toward Krsna?" Got varied responses. One side said we won't know until we read and quote *sastra* and that's the only way to introduce respectability to our writing session. Another side said just look and be honest and do look and find *some* prayer, because God is in you. And that got hard to do. Voices and motor from the van didn't help.

I asked several times. The asking is good. Then finally when I went to ask again, something popped and I just started to make fun of the word "inner."

I like this better than that Saranagati session where I took notes for whether or not to write fiction. At least I come to face my Krsna consciousness or lack of it. And even if I find the lack or zero, I want to open the *Gita* at random (10.8 is great) and put Krsna on this page.

Dear Lord, witness bird, I want to pray to You and not be deviated by fools who say, "Brahman is all. There is no Krsna. Meditate on the void."

15

On the road through England

(Strange dream that Krsna gave me the strength not to reveal my secret thoughts even when others were prying. I was freed from the desire to be the #1 disciple of Prabhupada, a disease which, at least in the dream, seemed to plague others.

That desire is always troublesome—to compete and to feel no humility. Can I do something wonderful for His Divine Grace? We’d all like to. It can’t be done, however, by fighting one another. For me, it means spending time alone and writing as honestly as I can. What am I afraid of (aside from mice and rats and terrorists)? Krsna can give me the strength required to overcome my fears.

Sik&s

Th is will be a time of many practice attempts. Success is when you can write in Krsna consciousness naturally. One step is to get away from the problems of others and face the problems of all—I mean, the answer to all problems is to become Krsna conscious, spiritual, and not attached to women, fame, matter, etc. Face death and beyond that, face Lord Krsna and the spiritual world.

Sadaputa Prabhu said that the first nine cantos of the *Bhagavatam* give us an understanding of reality so that when we hear of Lord Krsna in the Tenth Canto, we don’t mistake Him as ordinary.

Bhagavata Purana is going to Vrndavana for five years to join the twenty-four-hour *kirtana* group. He can sustain and

deepen his taste for *harinama*. He said he's going because he sees devotees burn out and leave ISKCON. He wants a deep attachment to the holy name, which he doesn't find is often given by the daily temple routine. I think his plan is good and I wish him well. He may also learn to love Vrndavana in all seasons.

I am finding Vrndavana in my remembrance. Right now, we're off the main road and it's quiet. It wouldn't be like that for me in Vrndavana.

^ou, Ajamila, saw a couple embracing in the public street, her arms thrown over his shoulders. She was blond, he wore Wellington boots. After looking at them kiss and stare into each other's eyes, all other sights were unsensational in comparison. The young man walking alone across the street looked unnerved. The bookstore seemed beside the point. A red-faced old man didn't know that a young man and woman were embracing two blocks away. He was unaffected. Poets and other secular madmen praise lovers. Others see their public spectacle as a nuisance. Those who know them will judge the longevity of the romance. It's *may a*. They go to "associate with sense gratifiers, who are compared to monkeys. Again they revive their sex and intoxication, and looking at one another's faces, they are thus satisfied. In this way they pass their lives up to the point of death." (*Bhag.* 5.13.17, purport)

Gradually the images of travel will fade. Farm yards in this area are disorderly, although the view of the hills is great. The land is so green and full of forests.

I plan to pray with *Bhagavad'gita* for the next few weeks. I want to hear Krsna's words as He speaks directly to each of us.

When He tells Arjuna He will teach him the sacred science of Krsna consciousness because Arjuna is His *bhakta* and friend, I'll pray to be included in that conversation. I plan to pray with those verses while I walk.

This area reminds me of the old Irish farm in Glengarriff. I remember those days with Prthu driving me around in his Range Rover. Those days are gone.

Lord Krsna is Time. I can sense His presence when I think of how time has passed.

improvises from a cluster exercise on the word "practice." Practice — Coltrane blows his horn. Sonny Rollins practices his sax from the Williamsburg Bridge. Or you go into a wood

shed where the pieces of wood are stacked and you toot-toot your horn there. You can practice prayer too, or write a poem.

“Practice makes perfect” – in what?

By practice you get better. What’s it for? To play a better Krsna conscious game. You make some epic, you gain strength, you show prowess. You simply get better by practice. The main thing is to believe in the process.

If I read *Srimad'Bhdgavatam*, I’ll get the direct *darsana*. Lord Krsna is the controller and my life is His. Without direct study of *krsna'katha*, these sessions would careen through the countryside, an external vehicle rattling and expending engine power for a material trip lost by time.

16

^The truth is hidden in dreams. A girl rock star with a pearl at the end of her nose. How is it that an ordinary person becomes famous? She was a devotee, but there was a quarrel/ rift between her and the movement or local temple. "Don't let the public know that this nice girl has been misused by the cult." In another episode, I was protecting the rock star girl from intruders in the audience. It seemed I was being over- protective, so I stopped clapping hands in rhythm in a way that kept her admirers from their personal interaction with her.

Strange dream.

How quick can I get to Krsna? What is the obstacle? Try to go there, to loving service unto the Lord and His pure devotee. I relish Prabhupada's mission, the way he teaches Krsna consciousness. He emphasizes preaching so much I ask myself how I will preach on his behalf. Mostly I decide to do it by visiting the temples and lecturing and encouraging the devotees.

We are recalling 1970s days by reading his letters to me. That period where things went wrong. Who's to say what it is? And what happened in 1970? Something went wrong, and it only comes out later as a history I have related in *Srila Prabhupada's lilamrta*.

Fabric of an authoritarian movement has collapsed in America. At least it has to change shape in order to continue. Small groups and individuals outside the main control of GBC. Gradually, they will come together. Who is relevant? Who will survive? North American GBC passed resolution: we know some people don't agree with us. Let them come forward and state their gripe, within the bounds of Vaisnava etiquette.

My personal message comes through in the Castlegregory poems that I want to travel and do my thing and have it accepted as a contribution to ISKCON. I don't want to be roped into committees and meetings. Better I be a spreader of pixie dust.

Imagine him claiming like that.

Oh, he's all right. He's just going to die like the rest of us. Wants to be left alone to write to his readers and speak *Srimad- Bhagavatam* without being hassled. I don't blame him. Of course, we can't all be like that.

Death shall level all privileges.

You write with sense, huh? The walk in the dark before dawn. It's sometimes raining.

What is Krsna doing in the spiritual world? At night, He goes to the *rasa* dance. Even His parents don't know. I want my Srlla Prabhupada to bring me to that understanding through the books he left us. You surrender to guru and Krsna mostly through *vaidhi'bhakti* and the preaching efforts. Then at the end of your life, if you are free of material desires and you desire only to serve Krsna and guru, he can take you to Him where He is in the spiritual road show and you may do direct service. Or, some say Srlla Prabhupada said he'll be preaching somewhere in the universes and his sincere devotees will join him for more of that. We'll have to see where we shall go.

I read that pure devotees in this world don't ask to go to the spiritual planet, they feel humble about it. They feel they aren't pure enough for that and they have to recycle into the material worlds. In that case, they pray that they may associate with the devotees. Maharaja Pariksit prayed, "If I have to take birth again, let me have unlimited devotion to Sri Krsna, be friends with all living entities, and serve the pure devotees."

Try to form your whole life into an active service prayer like that.

Poems, stories, and books come forth and that's important, I say. If I can do it, read nicely, I'll stay protected. Sometimes in the name of associating with devotees, we socialize too much or get into quarrels among ourselves, and the struggle with the material energy in its various forms makes preaching difficult. Those who persist in associating with devotees and maintaining Kṛṣṇa's temples and preaching movement are favored by the Lord. They don't fall away from spiritual life.

I have my role. I try to state what it is and carry it out. Man proposes, God disposes. Not, "Man proposes, and the committee shall decide what he actually may do to please Prabhupada."

Seek sanction. All I need is some money to travel around and the barest sanction. No edicts against me; free to publish. Don't close down on free enterprise. There's a free spirit like that. The struggle continues in America where individuals and communities have opted to operate not quite under the instructions of a GBC. I'm not up to date with the struggle and don't want to become an ISKCON sociologist to try and figure it out. I just want to stay simple and positive-minded about chanting and hearing and tell others the same.

The message comes through what you write, clear enough.

Did you think it didn't?

Show me a passage in your book.

You've got to stand up for what you believe and broadcast it, even in a gentle way.

O forebearers and forefathers and ancestors and those who come after you. All seeds pouring out of a bag of mustard seeds. They're countless. Some *jivas* are greater than others. Some liberated souls have powers like God's powers. But in these worlds, all is temporary and miserable. The wise person doesn't

lament because he doesn't identify the self with the body or the travails and temptations of the world.

Senses form attachments, even for eating. Even a so-called *sadhu* gets absorbed in trying to satisfy the tongue and goes here and there, searching for satisfaction. Everyone fears. In the advanced stage, one is completely detached from that. An advanced devotee engages in sense gratification only as necessary and he doesn't put his heart into it. His main occupation of body, mind, and words, is glorifying Krsna and telling others about devotional service. He moves in the world unhampered by the miseries of the three modes. He lives that way until the spirit leaves the body, and then he goes to Krsna or the next life, thinking of Krsna.

The Lord prescribes *man mana bhava mad-bhaktō*: "Think of Me, become My devotee, offer your homage unto Me. Absorbed in devotional service to Me, surely you will come to Me. You are My dear friend."

Whatever I do, let it be the most Krsna conscious thing I am capable of. Don't tend too much to bodily needs and wasted times and words and fears. *Bhaja* Govinda. Go on hearing about Krsna in *Bhagavad'gita* and *Srimad'Bhagavatam* no matter in what condition of life you find yourself. Remember His lotus feet.

e

(She couldn't answer the phone. "She's on the altar." Very nice place to be, serving Radha-Damodara, Radha-Kalachandjl. Only a few devotees left there. I've got to keep moving. Do what I can.

It was nice to spend a few days at Gita-nagari for the meetings last year, but if I can't do it again, so be it. I'll spend my life in one place or another.

Details. Hare Krsna Hare Krsna. It's good to keep moving, I think. You will be all right that way.

LJ do seek honest voice in poems. Attempt it.

I talked of a world that soon
 vanished and ants and humans all
 spilled off the plate when Supreme
 Sarikarsana breathed fire and death
 for all planets and it scorched and flooded . . .

That's not until a long time from now, right?
 We still got time to eat peanuts and cashews
 in our rice and sniff out sweetrice on the
 stove before it's offered to God and eat so
 much, the T.V. is on, we still got time, the
 President said, if we can just tighten the
 economy, control the terrorists from
 throwing their own nuclear bombs. We got
 time to enjoy at the mart and mall, buy a
 record album and another Christmas, got to
 make enough money to get by and some
 kind of health insurance and the kids, take
 care of them, I don't

have enough time in the day to
meditate on beads, I fall asleep when
chanting or reading . . .

Harried householders and agitated
brahmacaris declare it's war on *maya*
and she's got the upper hand.

Well, yeah, but don't forget Krsna is
more powerful. He can save you.

Don't think you've got time to work in
the rat race of squeezing out pleasures
and duties.

Turn to eternal Govinda, eternal self in your
own body. You really don't need to be
plugged into and fascinated by daily news
and events of nation and family and
fireplace and rueful tales and songs
barbarous. You need only to chant and hear
and think of yourself as an eternal servant
of Krsna.

A pure devotee thinks like that.

X less than two weeks before a vigorous few days' travel to the city
where we'll fly from to India. I'll play the role of a saffron *sadhu* in
transit and hope someone will take care of us when we arrive in
Calcutta or that we can take care of ourselves and get our bodies to
Sridhama Mayapur. You can't carry too many kilos in suitcases, so
don't expect to bring all your

books, just one or two of what's useful and gets you over to the next place you go.

Don't be so afraid of mice and rats and people who are demons. Really cling to the practices of devotional service and get through your remaining years in practice. Practice *anta-kale*, to remember Krsna at the end of life. Hear the words of the Lord in His *Gita*. You've got key verses on cards, so look at them.

I will speak free verse from the heart, that's worth a lot. I love them. Gather them and share them.

Okay, time is up. You talked too much. You are guilty. Krsna can forgive you. Go to read and write simple notes to pay attention to what Narada and Lord Krsna and Srila Prabhu- pada say and how you feel as you read.

17

^Dreamt of being alone, yet I was trying to be Srlla Prabhu- pada's servant and cook for him at the same time. One woman tried to serve Prabhupada raw spinach. She was reprimanded for not cooking it.

Now I'm awake. I can perceive in a dream at night that I have a certain body. It seems real—one may be so afraid that he wakes in fright. I perceive that body, but then I wake up and see that it is an illusion. This is proof that the body changes and the self endures. That subtle body that seemed so real last night is gone this morning. Prabhupada explained all this to us on a walk in Germany. Similarly, the waking body is also temporary or illusory. We will transmigrate after death.

(Electric light flickers a moment. If it goes out, I'll have to give up the writing and chant *japa* instead.)

Prabhupada was arguing with me and others on this morning walk. I played the skeptic for a while, but then stopped. I didn't want to be the demon forever. I accepted what he said. One should not continue being ornery and arguing, "That is only an analogy. One cannot perceive that he lives on after death." You can perceive it, Srlla Prabhupada.

We accept what Krsna says. I took His statements on cards and went out back and read them aloud. I called it a form of prayer and consider it important if for even ten minutes I can allow Him to speak to me while I listen, listen, and then pray back like Peter Calvay, "I have faith, Lord. Please make it strong and release me from unfaith in Your words and presence." I say to myself, "Please continue some practice of prayer like this even when you're in the van or in Rome or on the plane to India. Go inside yourself and hear Lord Krsna speaking in the verses of *Bhagavad-gita*."

^Words should serve. They are not mine. They exist on their own. I use them or someone else does. All glories to the Lord of the universe. Get records, your literary records . . . maybe something will be helpful . . . dear Lord Krsna, You are the Supreme. It is a fact You spoke *Bhagavad-gita*. Your pastimes are recorded in the *sastra*. Arjuna said, "I believe all that You have said and the great sages uphold what You say." Don't doubt it.

As I write my stuff and leave it, and they print it, or I live a life of trying to improve, so the Supreme Lord can also write, leave records, and lead a life. His life is perfect and mine is not.

Please Lord, deliver me from this world to Your eternal nature. There is no truth like the eternal truth.

He came to America. We heard from him. One dollar per lecture he charged for awhile, according to his diary. Then he stopped that.

CAfow let us praise famous men. Let us praise the Supreme God from whom everything comes. Kick on Darwin who theorizes there is no God. Our spiritual master challenges him. The Vedic scriptures explain the origin of creation. The puny man has to hear it from authority and learn that way. He can't gain it by experience in this world or by looking for ancient bones or perfecting technology. The senses and mind and attitude of humans remain imperfect, so how can their knowledge be perfect?

Further and further in. Please keep reading what he has given us. I am thankful for it. Wish to improve.

Let my disciples be proud of me and never ashamed. That will be success enough that I don't fail them. Please, I pray to

Balarama, give me the strength to defend myself against lust and doubt. Let me not yield to the blows delivered by the cruel material nature. Best to stay clear of her blows by sheltering in *bhakti'yoga*, but we are bound to be hit by impious reactions, at least from our previous sins. Expert management of life is to accept what comes without grief or attachment and to go on culturing obedience to and worship of Govinda. In this age, the chanting of the Hare Krsna mantra is the prime way to do this.

LJ get excited to hear what M. will get from his phone calls this morning, lining up our travels. Okay, but my prime duty is to go on chanting and hearing.

Writing is part of that duty. If the inner road is clear, then go on driving. Drive in on and on, further in. That means to worship Govinda. Last days here, so prepare myself to carry on with what I achieved here. It's a matter of taste and discipline and knowing my own needs.

All glories to the Lord.

Here we go out and walk and chant. We try to hear the mantras in ideal surroundings. Still, the mind hasn't attained love or regret. I tell us, "Be encouraged by what comes. Don't be artificial. Pray as you can, not as you can't."

This is not a secular diary. Not a straight diary, but practice. Some are not beautiful thoughts. Some are beyond me. We survived another day.

One day the body will fail. It happens to all mortals. I am an immortal self within this body. Srila Prabhupada explained this to Professor Durkheim in Germany. Durkheim was saying that those who experience near-death may be able to discover

that which lives beyond death. He emphasized the actual experience of it. Prabhupada emphasized that it is a fact, as given by Lord Kṛṣṇa in *Bhagavad-gītā*. just accept it as the ABCs of knowledge, an axiom.

Then we go on from there, whether we experience it or not. The faithful devotee tries to assimilate it. He learns from his spiritual master, whom he serves, who teaches him.

"Please do something useful," I wrote to a disciple.

Thumb is operating now. Churn writing in pages from what you learned.

This is harvest time. This method of free-writing is the quickest way to produce the best of which I am capable. I don't print every word, far from it. I'm not deluded to think my words are all immortal, but some of them stick. From the writing practice, I turn occasionally to other forms.

We have scheduled at least a month in India, so I plan to write what comes while living through a demanding schedule. Maybe I'll write impressions of the *dhṛma*.

I'm not only a writer, not even primarily a literary person. I am first and foremost a disciple and aspiring devotee. From that foundation I write.

I'm thinking of three young men in Baltimore, Bhaktas Dave, Chris, and Glenn.

The porch of the temple.

The mortgages. The few donations.

The vast six-hundred-acre farm and not enough people to live in the communal way and to divide up the work and survive together. They did it right from the start in Wicklow. Gita-nagari is an old ISKCON idea that may not be able to survive. I give money and make gestures of support, but what can I do to help it lurch from month to month? I can't go down with that ship. I'm a wandering renunciate.

However, I also can't live forever by wandering. I am also an old ISKCON idea and cannot go on forever. If Gita-nagari fails, devotees will decide—on the GBC level—where Radha- Damodara will go to be worshiped. Similarly, when my body fails, authorities will decide where the soul goes on to continue its culture of *bhakti* unto Radha-Krsna.

We would like to improve our worship, our mental life. We each try our best in some way, but fall short. But Krsna assures whatever we do is never lost, never lost.

"One who sees Me everywhere is never lost to Me." One good outcome of reciting these verses is that they will live with me. I will recall them in times of need.

I am a cipher. I'm a devotee made by my spiritual master. "Here goes nothing," he says, trying something in earnest.

ISKCON devotees move through the world on Srila Prabhupada's mission. This summer, American book distribution teams traveled in six vans and had great success approaching young people at colleges and concerts. It gave them a new sense of confidence and victory. Share it with them. Hear the good news.

You, old-timer, what can you add to it? Two days in NYC and then you go quickly to the country for peace and early rising. Didn't want to be on the Lower East Side for New Year's Eve. The old guy wants quiet in the cabin, and cold. He may have it. We'll see. To read, to read. They give open classes at 26

Second Avenue. I can go there for two nights and one morning, if my health permits. Or else just once. Can I squeeze in an extra day? Leave it at that, as we planned it last night. Two classes at 26 Second Avenue. Now I'm on my way for a couple of weeks in Mayapur.

Dear Lord, thank You for these wonderful opportunities to serve You by lecturing. I do hope I can actually survive, despite the death-threatening material atmosphere and my not so strong body, and get Your message through.

I have a simple conviction in the Krsna conscious practices. First, one needs to practice for twenty years before he can expect to write so freely. One young devotee I know plunges into self-expression before he has submitted to guru and full *vaidhi'bhakti*. It is a different way. I was first willing to give up writing as nonsense false ego and then gradually write under my spiritual master's direction. Now in old age I write "what comes."

This is what I would say to that young devotee: the main thing is to attract people to Krsna's actual message. Be sure your writings are filled with that *siddhanta* and not just individuality. Will it get across? Is the whole imperfect person necessary, or just the perfect teachings? Different readers accommodate or look for different presentations.

Stories in April

Introduction

The first time I tried to write fiction I wrote *Nimai dasa and the Mouse*. It was a big step for me to take because I had always convinced myself that story-writing, especially fiction, was *maya*. Looking back, I realize what a silly idea that was. Of course fiction can be written in Kṛṣṇa's service.

I wrote *Nimai dasa and the Mouse* thinking of it as a children's story because that enabled me to get over my inhibitions (those voices that told me I couldn't write realistically or build effective characters). Fiction is, after all, a highly developed art. If an author's characters are flat, his story won't be effective.

Joseph Conrad once said, "Art is long and life is short." I have discovered that fiction is not worth my full dedication. Stories usually discuss the affairs of men and women and their problems in this world. (It is conceivable that one could write about stories of people approaching spiritual life.) The fact is, however, that I am not interested enough in the fictional arts to surpass all the obstacles. I am more attracted to improvisation.

Nimai dasa and the Mouse came out easily for me. I wrote the whole book in a few weeks in Puerto Rico. Immediately after that, I wrote the second in the *Nimai* series, then did the third. By the time I wrote *Struggling for Survival*, I no longer thought I was writing children's fiction. It was at least two years after that before I tried fiction again and wrote *Chota's Way*.

Later, I went back to writing nonfiction—*Obstacles on the Path of Devotional Service*, *Memory in the Service of Kṛṣṇa*, *Pra-bhupada Appreciation*, and *Prabhupada Meditations*, but again, the desire to write fiction arose. I started on something I called "Stories of Devotion." The inspiration to write those books

came when a devotee wrote me and suggested I write a story about fictional *Bhagavatam* characters, such as someone related to Prahlada Maharaja. We were traveling through Europe in our van at the time I received that letter. I asked Madhu to stop and set up camp at a campground, and in three days, I wrote *Am I a Demon or a Vaisnava?* Soon after, I wrote *Visnu-rata Vijaya*, a fictional account of Narada's meeting with Mrgari, and *Sri Caitanya'daya*, a story based on Lord Caitanya's visits to South India.

I remember at the time being excited by the prospect of a fiction career. It seemed unlimited, but the inspiration didn't continue. After those stories, I started to see too closely the various strategies by which such books are written and I started to feel constrained by them. To write historical fiction, an author has to take a side character from history and present the historical facts through his or her eyes. An author can't rewrite Napoleon's history, for example, but he can write about Napoleon from the viewpoint of a side character. This is the formula I used in writing *Am I a Demon or a Vaisnava?* I chose the father of one of Prahlada's demon classmates and told the story of Lord Nrsimhadeva's appearance from his viewpoint. After awhile, this formula started to feel repetitious and the stories tended to have the same theme: the conversion to Krsna consciousness.

I'm sure that other writers see these limits, although they either push beyond them or accept them and work within them. But these problems stumped me in my fiction career.

I put fiction aside for quite some time after that and went on with my personal writing. Then another wave of fiction hit me (I call this wave a "fit" because I didn't plan it). I was on my way to Saranagati, Northwest Canada, to be alone and to relax and think in a prayerful way. All of a sudden, I started getting

ideas that I could and ought to write fiction. This time, however, I should improvise the stories.

This “fit” was different than the previous ones. I wasn’t interested in rewriting the stories, but simply in letting them come out as a storyteller would spin a yarn. The stories presented here, “Stories In April,” came to me in 1994 when I was past the peak of that writing fit. The peak came with “Introducing Bhakta Bob,” which appears later in this book. Most of the stories I wrote after “Bhakta Bob” explored the themes of “What is fiction? How is it different than nonfiction? Can I improvise it? What do I want to say? Can I write something I want to write? How long can I go with a character, believe in him, and continue the pretense of make-believe?”

A reader may ask, “What does writing fiction have to do with Krsna consciousness?” Of course, Krsna consciousness is inherent for me in anything I do. Most of my stories are deliberately Krsna conscious propaganda pieces. The “Stories of Devotion” and the Nimai series were definitely like that. These newer pieces are more free-flowing, and it is implicit (and expected) that I want to arrive at a Krsna conscious conclusion. I prefer this improvised form over the earlier form.

If we wonder what the stories have to do with Krsna consciousness, we can also say that the stories are about Krsna consciousness. If they are lacking in Krsna consciousness, then they are aspiring for Krsna consciousness. That’s their validity. They’re not bogus expressions, but a sincere attempt to render pure devotional service.

I’m giving quite an explanation here, but one thing I would like to say is that I like these stories. When I wrote “Stories In April,” I was thrilling to the fact that spring had begun to appear in Italy. I was also thrilling to the fact that the story-writing muse was visiting me in such an experimental way. I

knew it wouldn't last forever, so I wanted to let the stories develop in a lighthearted, easygoing way. I felt playful at the time and I'm pleased by how they came out, although they're slight pieces.

What I like about stories is that there is an obvious extra dimension where you don't deal only with your limited self and your limited adventures, and neither do you run the risk of writing about people you know (because they always feel hurt, no matter what you say). In stories, you can create new people and new adventures and then weave in your own experience or imaginative play. This is what attracts me to writing Krsna conscious fiction. On the other hand, I doubt I could ever become a realistic story writer. I can't help it, but I find it repugnant when an author leads his readers through the life of a fictional character and engineers the plot and the theme in order to make his point. What I'm doing is different. My stories are more light fantasies or serious semi-essays, and into them I incorporate some fiction writing techniques.

I want to write the poetry, even in prose, of moment to moment existence, hold on to it, and evoke it before it dissipates. Therefore, I tell the reader about the car we drove in from our apartment to the dentist and the intimations of spring, noticeable even at the gas station. I don't want to let those realities go by in favor of an imagined, fictional setting. When I sit down to write, I don't want to forget the immediate moment—the table where I'm sitting, the pen I'm holding, what friends are with me, what I'm doing in my life. Fiction and reality are never distant from each other when I write stories—there's an interplay between them.

I'm glad these stories are here and can be shared with readers just as much as the writing sessions and other genres in this book.

In the Flow

u/ want to go to a place where a story is flowing, stay there with it, and report back in my inimitable way. When I come back from that place, I'll feel better able to cope with the political thoughts of the day and the threats to my being. (As I write this, a fighter jet streaks across the sky and then burrows, mole-like, through the air.)

That place supreme, beyond even my stories, is the realm of transcendental Vaisnava thought flowing from the *deary as*. I touch it or join it when I am an alert, submissive student reading my spiritual master's words. It does me good. Srila Prabhupada tells of the deluded scholars who cannot understand Lord Krsna. Krsna cannot be known by speculation, but only by devotional service (*bhaktya mam abhijanati . . . yasya deve para bhaktir*). I want to stay in that flow. Even if I don't feel bliss, the transcendental sound vibration acts to purify me. So I stay with the page, reading a book like *Renunciation Through Wisdom* for forty-five minutes. When occasionally I close my eyes to review what I am reading, I feel little shocks of brilliance, the spiritual atoms colliding.

It would be nice if this feeble, flow-desiring story-teller could go to the realm of transcendental knowledge and speak stories in disciplic succession. That is my desire, although I don't know quite how to do it. I enter the water of my own human consciousness and assume that the divine is there because God is everywhere and I am His part and parcel. With that assumption, I start to dog-paddle, thinking, "This will bring me into Krsna consciousness." And I'm right. Besides, I can't do spectacular dives into the swift-flowing Ganges. I'm too lean and old and fearful for that. (Nor can I read Sanskrit or be

content to write out *slokas* and leave it at that. I'm left to swim by the shore, feeling the flow.)

A rubber band sits on the arm of this chair. It greets me as a complete circle, a muscular arm ready to band together a bunch of letters addressed to me, either answered or unanswered—to tie up some business I can file away.

Sunlight, the hottest of the year, glances and angles over my shoulder and into this corner of the room. Some kind of farm machinery is making noise outside (I can see later what it is). Birds chirp only if I calm down enough to notice them. I am not the center of existence.

This story writer passes up a number of leads. He could tell the latest news: some Italian devotees will be arriving in Rome tomorrow, home from their Indian pilgrimage. They will have medicines for me and probably some agitating news about the annual conferences, news about things that affect me. No need to go into it here because this is where I seek the flow. My Australian crawl is to bring me away from those relativities.

But if I am not willing and able to face what's actually floating in the river, as well as meeting the big-bodied fellows who are swimming nearby, then my few timid strokes near the bank will not bring fearless inspiration.

Oh, you may say that, but in my heart is a partial view of the universe and a way to Krsnaloka. It's in your heart too, dear reader. We can dog-paddle together and discuss it. Who will prevent us? Or we can sit on the muddy bank—it's warm enough today—and rub wet mud on our limbs and heads. Listen: Lord Krsna is in His holy names. The deluded Mayavadi scholars think there is a formless existence beyond Lord Krsna. No, *nama cintamaniḥ kṛṣṇas/ caitanya-rasa-vigrahaḥ*. Krsna is in His name. That is the greatest discovery for a practitioner in this age. You can get that understanding by paddling even a

few feet into the flow of this holy river. Chant as you put mud on your limbs: Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

What are these stories? I can't exactly explain. I'm taking a rest.

Now the sunlight has moved to a small section to the right of this chair. It is brightening the wall. My left side grows chilled. I feel gratitude for this trip down the river, and aware that I have taken up as much of your time as I dare on a swim and a rest and an analysis of the flow.

The Dream of Losing Your Teeth

It's a good day to have my teeth pulled out," thought Sid Frances, as he rode in the back seat of the car on the way to the dentist. He was an American in Italy. He was a devotee of Krsna, or as he said, an aspiring devotee. It was a good day. The sky was bright, though the traffic was congested. Sid tried to always see some good in everything. Sid remembered reading in Srila Prabhupada's books that a great soul magnifies the good he sees in others, whereas puffed-up Daksa criticized the greatest Vaisnava, Lord Siva.

Sid's car companions were quiet. It was spring. They drove as fast as traffic allowed. Sid was not afraid of dental pain or of having no teeth, and that surprised him. By coincidence that morning, he had read about the demigod, Pusa, who had lost all his teeth at the hands of Lord Siva's followers. When Daksa cursed Siva, Pusa had smiled. The appropriate punishment was to have his teeth removed. Later, Lord Brahma approached Lord Siva and asked him to forgive the offenders, but Lord Siva said, "The demigod Pusa will be able to chew only through the teeth of his disciples, and if alone, he will have to satisfy himself by eating dough made from chickpea flour. But the demigods who have agreed to give me my share of the sacrifice will recover from all their injuries." (*Bhdg.* 4-7.4)

Sid thought this was interesting. Although Lord Siva is by nature forgiving, he did not mitigate Pusa's punishment. Srila Prabhupada writes, "He could not use his teeth for eating since he had laughed at Lord Siva, deriding him by showing his teeth."

"Of course, if I mention this to my friends," thought Sid, "they would say that it doesn't apply in my case. They would say that many *sadhus* in Vrndavana have no teeth, that tooth

lessness comes with old age. In India, poor people and mendicants don't have the money to go to the dentist, although their hearts are clean." Sid was going to the dentist. He was not going to have his teeth knocked out of his head like Pusa's teeth were, but planned to get local anesthesia and have them taken out a few at a time. Then he planned to get good, false replacements. He knew there would be an interim where he would have to drink his food, and he thought of adding chickpea flour to the shopping list, on the *Bhagavatam's* authority.

The car stopped at the entrance to the *autostrada*. The driver reached out and took a ticket from the machine. A woman's recorded voice said something Sid couldn't understand. He remained silent in his thoughts. He was wondering if he had committed an offense. Maybe his inattentive chanting was the cause. Did he say something blasphemous?

I am an author who is about to have his teeth removed today. It's a notable milestone in my life, but I don't think, like the fictional Sid Frances, that I'm an offender. Oh, it may run through my mind, but I'm more amused by it than anything else. To me, the loss of teeth is an occasion for realizing that I am not my body. It's a good joke — something to talk about (although I'm not even sure I'll be able to speak once they're out). I'll use it as one of those moments when I can practice *mauna* without the devotees telling me I'm in *maya*.

I can get back to my story about Sid and his teeth, but what's the use if his worry is fictional? There is enough real worry in the world, enough unnecessary worry — worry by people who cannot think of Krsna as their protector. A fictional worrier could serve a purpose, I suppose. He could teach a moral.

He could realize that he has it easy in life and that even if he can't think of an offense for which he has lost his teeth, his very position in material life is one of an offender to the Supreme. Let him not seek to exonerate himself. He could realize that he is meant to suffer as long as he has a material body. This would have to come through the story naturally, not by my spelling it out.

Let's get back to Sid.

They drove along prayerfully. The dentist didn't show up for Sid's 7:15 A.M. appointment. Sid and his men waited in the car. They looked like gangsters. The *gelataria* owner came to clean his store. Sid stayed in the car and watched. Then he fell asleep and dreamt of a little pet dog, his own, at least in the dream. The poor dog was growing old. Sid gave him some food, and the dog managed to behave with a little interest in life. Strange dream, the vulnerable, little pet dog . . . and then it disappeared.

There are two people who have got to get together. There is Sid who's about to be toothless (if the dentist shows up), and there's me, the author, who is also about to have his teeth removed. Sid and I have that in common. We also both thought of the demigod, Pusa. What a coincidence.

I could talk with Sid by *deus ex machina*, but I'd prefer not to. I don't like his looks. He looks like Sid Caesar or a character in a grade B Hollywood movie. He wears a fedora and an un-pressed suit. He is realistic fiction and that's too formidable for me. What Sid and I have in common is that we both desire to be serious, he in his way and me in mine. But does serious mean realistic fiction? Can't you be serious in another way?

The author doesn't mind going to the dentist. Maybe Sid can go in first. Maybe I'll need him there. When it's my turn and I lean back and close my eyes and try to relax my feet and

legs as they tense up, I could see Sid in my mind's eye. Why not be straightforward? Without any rigmarole, just tell Madhu, "When my teeth come out, could you make bread with chickpea dough? A demigod who lost his teeth ate that way." (I wouldn't want to eat something someone else had chewed.) I don't need to impose that on Sid, but Sid is already loose and I wish him well. Hey Sid, chant Hare Krsna, there's nothing to worry about. People lose their teeth every day. The real thing is to chant Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

<\$aJLsR*>

Story at the Big Table

story should be serious and like my Sheaffer pen: “No Nonsense.” It should not be a worried, chewed-at cuticle. It should definitely be from the heart and not some chic, artsy teaser. Mean it and say it plain. As for excesses, what can I say? They do occur. Even a quiet raconteur chortles sometimes and some storytellers spit out chewing tobacco. Myself, I am quite a laughable object nowadays with my teeth out and no replacements. I seem to be a new, old fellow whose nose hooks down more and who smiles like an old lady in Vrndavana who is not about to get dentures and fake the world. So I may laugh.

But doesn’t it matter, if you have a good yarn to tell, like Marlow, the storyteller in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*? Remember? The characters who gathered to hear the story were carefully chosen, adventurers or maybe a businessman, a kind of old boy’s club with no ladies. They sat around a table with a bottle of liquor and some cigarettes, a candle burning down while Marlow led them, each paragraph beginning with quote marks, into the heart of darkness.

Literature.

I’m writing this in the big room at the dining room table. The table has three sections, the kind you can spread out if you have a big family or guests. On the table is tiffinware, the stainless steel Indian plates and little cups, a water bottle, farina in a bag, cardamom powder. The stainless steel dish rattles when I move my hand to write.

The room is quiet like a library. M. is reading Krsna book. He told me he is reading of Krsna after He leaves Vrndavana. He very much likes Krsna’s dealings with Rukmini. He piqued my interest. It’s a treat awaiting me, but for now, I’ll stick with Lord Siva and Daksa and Lord Visnu and then Dhruva and

Prthu Maharajas in the Fourth Canto. I hope when I get to *Krsna* book again, I'll be chastened and ready for it.

I wrote about that story in *Chota's Way* and quoted excerpts, the speech where Rukmini reverses Krsna's self-criticism. "You say that only beggars are Your devotees, but who are those beggars? They are the topmost transcendentalists like Narada, who have given up all material activities and who wander on the earth to teach Krsna consciousness."

Today is Ekadasl. I drank only one and a half glasses of pineapple juice for breakfast, and for lunch, nothing except a spicy tomato soup. I am trying to partially fast and allow air to pass in my stomach. I took two and half small, metal bowls of the soup and now I have indigestion. My stomach is churning as if I had over-indulged in a big meal. I don't get this when I eat heartily—two bowls of *dal*, six *capatis*, rice, *sabji*, sweets, but today I get it. It's ironic, but I don't appreciate the humor of the situation.

The fridge runs and then cuts off. In my mind I hear Nanda: "The Italians want to get more money but work less." Madhu replied, "The English and Americans want more money, but they're willing to work for it. The Irish want less work and if that means less money, they're willing to accept it."

<17 am looking for a story. Maybe my story is not in this room. I have my back turned to the room. The story could be in my chest, in my boyhood, in my wrist.

This story could be the only story I know worth telling— that I am saved now from madness and whatever may happen from *adibhautika* enemies. I can turn to the holy name. I am trying to say that.

I'm like a boy after school hours in a library forgetting himself, not doing his homework because he already did that. I am my Uncle Jim, gritting his teeth and plotting to break a girl's heart, but I know nothing about it because I'm too young. All I know is that Uncle Jim and I share the same room and when he comes home late at night, he wakes me up while dropping coins into his glass savings jar. I complain to my father about it and he talks to his younger brother, Jim. Eventually Jim moves out.

All these things in the past. Do Indian *sadhus* know with what we have to contend? Srila Prabhupada knew. I am a police sergeant (in the library) studying for an exam. He has to know law and guns and handcuffs. I'm a professor escaping the grind whose intelligence is stolen by *maya* and Darwin. I'm a mayor. A footloose—reaching out as far as I dare. The apostate cultist who skipped college goes back to read Whitman, is thrilled by his cosmic I-ness, and believes it. Sucker. But here I am employing that same lying technique—I am a professor, a housewife—whereas I am not actually those *brahmas*. God is all in all and knows all lives. I or Whitman know barely one *jiva* and the rest is fiction, puerile fiction.

So I sit at this desk which is filled with jars and herbal tea bags with labels in Italian and a blender and a plate for Srila Prabhupada, a bottle of mustard oil, and my own books, and the story runs on like the fridge motor. All this time, Madhu, I presume, is reading *Krsna* book. I won't berate myself. I read for two and a half hours this morning in Prabhupada's books and I will be reading more later. This is my story time.

I am nearing the finale of this piece about the big room and the shadow of death that moves toward my left shoulder. Good intentions, grateful God consciousness and the innocent young girl who may read this and whose mother says, "This sort of literature with references to past use of LSD is not suitable for

children raised in Krsna conscious families. We never let our children see their parents as ex-hippies. We have been living in India and appreciate that this culture is vastly superior to the West, which disgusts me. Why do you linger in those self- images?"

Mother, I say, you have hit an important point to end this story and it permeates all that I write. That is, I am from the West, did get shattered into kaleidoscopic prisms back then, and can't and won't think straight like an Indian. I shoot from the hip like Tom Mix, whose mystery ring I sent away for (I was eating hot Ralston in those days and never satisfied). I am proof—as I told a Hindu Alliance Meeting in North Carolina—that a Western jiver can become a devotee of Indian spiritual truth. Prabhupada accepts me. "Why don't you guys accept Lord Krsna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead and preach *Bhagavad-gita* as it is without mal-interpretation?" I told them that.

Thus ends this story about the sitting to write at the big table in the room near Brescia in April 1994.

Of Stories, I am Flower-bearing Spring

(Spring is singing in the Esso stations and around the grapevines tortured where they grow, twisted around the trellises. Spring is Krsna's favorite season: " ... of seasons I am flower-bearing spring." Prabhupada writes, "Of course spring is a season universally liked because it is neither too hot nor too cold and the flowers and trees blossom and flourish. In spring there are also many ceremonies commemorating Krsna's pastimes; therefore this is considered to be the most joyful of all seasons, and it is the representative of the Supreme Lord, Krsna." (Bg. 10.35, purport)

There are ceremonies in the spring. Gaura-Purnima comes during the thaw, and the crocuses and snowdrops appear. Lord Ramacandra appears in the spring. Do you remember the Rama-navami in 1967 when we chanted at some Peace Be-In in the park behind the 42nd Street library with devotees from several cities, singing with drum and *karatalas* all day, then down to 26 Second Avenue for potatoes, breaking the fast, and talking about Swamiji, who was on the West Coast? It was neither too hot nor too cold, and we were filled with plans for spreading Krsna consciousness and making spiritual advancement.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura appeared in spring. Prabhupada wrote,

"Adore adore ye all,
The happy day,
Blessed than heaven,
Sweeter than May,
When he appeared at Puri
The holy place,
My lord and master,
His Divine Grace."

And spring brings out the *harinama* parties again out of the frozen cities.

This story I am telling wanted it to be spring, but didn't want to squeeze it in. I can't squeeze it in, and I can't squeeze out a story, either. That brings up other stories. I remember one spring how three new *bhaktas* left the Boston temple together to seek out women or love or just to hitchhike. They'd been devotees all through the winter months, controlling their senses and minds indoors, but now it was full-blown spring and they were called to go out and find what they could, not to be contained or tamed in a wooden temple chanting on beads and reading spiritual books.

^ou think you can get away with murder. "You'll be chastised, young man," my friend Murray said to me on the telephone after reading the manuscript of my latest autobiographical novella, *Sagittarius*. One of the characters in the book was Murray, and I described him as an unemployed poet living off his wife's earnings as a schoolteacher. You'll be chastised, young man, for turning life into literature and thinking you can get away with it unpunished. Your raw baked potato stories will fail. They'll throw the potatoes back at you. They'll say this stuff is not from the heart. You don't know how to write deeply enough. When you write, "I think," you should do it in your closet.

That's what's good about the writing sessions. There's less pretense. I don't feel sorry for these stories that aren't audacious enough. They're not even up to the skits Uncle Jim used to direct and we cousins played in. He burnt a cork and painted our faces black. Someone wore only a towel. Someone else wore

an adult's hat. We had funny lines to say or sing. Then Dutch Hess or Uncle Mickey combed their hair in the front like Hitler's and stood on a chair to imitate *der Fuhrer* making a speech. Uncle Mickey imitated hula dancers or strip teasers. "Mickey! Mickey!" They knew he was wild and asked him, as the day grew old and the room smoke-filled, after the meal and the after-meal tangerines had all been peeled and discarded, after the walnuts were nothing but shells—"Mickey, do something funny! Stand on the table and dance! Do an imitation, a mockery, of someone who usually mocks you! Get it out of your system!"

Those Guarino gatherings and children's skits and Uncle Mickey routines were wilder than anything I can come up with today. Such a thin trickle now, and ashamed and hiding, so literary and starved.

But this is my story, so don't knock it. I have no teeth, I'm wearing an old linty, knit cap, I'm a fifty-four-year-old celibate, alone in this house. It's spring and I want to be as alone as any monk praying in solitude.

This story wants to capture spring, but it can't. I'm in Italy where spring means motorbikes and girls and ice cream and late nights. Better to let it go and seek the eternal primavera in the pages of the *sastra*.

I want quiet spring from an open window. St. John of the Cross wrote a poem where he described how on the dark night, the soul goes out to meet the beloved. There is no moon. That allegory is realized in the heart of each prayer-maker who rises before dawn and opens the window to get fresh air, thanking God it's quiet and he can begin his *japa* quietly and in peace.

Spring breathes attachment, sex desire, longing in the mode of passion—so for us, April means travel. We speed by the flowers on the highway. You can't be attached to the world if

you want to get out of it. The spring *rasa* dance – Balarama’s spring and Krsna’s spring. The *gopis* respond to the flute song, flowers gushing everywhere. Here, we see the Italian version of the lilac. The American lilac is more delicate—a lighter blue bloom. I saw it last sitting on a doorstep and chanting Hare Krsna.

“Of seasons, I am spring.” Krsna, I can find You here. You are all-pervading. I can find You in the flowers. Dlna-dayardra brought three potted plants and I put them on my altar.

Spring to me means I can’t live in the van and yet it’s too cold for the campgrounds to be filled (except on weekends). I once spent four beautiful spring days in a very green campground that we had all to ourselves. It was cold in the morning, almost icy, yet in the day’s sunshine I wrote *Am I a Demon or a Vaisnava?*. That is the unequaled opportunity of spring. It goes by so quickly. I always seem to miss it and then it is suddenly summer.

I’m making confessions and you can blame me, I know. You’ll be chastised, young man. Guilty of wanting to be alone. Of not being able to write with heart and yet claiming to do that.

The story of spring is heard from the chirping of birds. It’s timeless and eternal and everything is right in Krsna. The woman in the small car stops at 7 A.M. and beeps her horn. Her girl friend runs out of the big building, running, getting into the car for a ride to work. All this happens in winter too, but with heavier coats on. For three years in a row, I have been here in spring for dental treatment. Tomorrow, if our van papers come through and the denture fits, we’ll escape over the border with no questions asked into the wider Europe of the circular

stars on a blue flag. Beautiful south France and then jinx- ridden Spain. Machado's Spain. Better end this while I can. It's already overdone. I'll be chastised. Be sober now and chant. I've done it.

Writing Alone in a Big World

The apartment is empty. They're out shopping. They said they're going further today and may not be back until 7 P.M. In some ways, my life is very protected. I prefer it this way. It leaves-me free to go within. But when left alone in the house (with the fridge engine whirring), what do I turn to? Tell a story to pass the time.

The doctor told Bridge that he was going to die unless he had his arms and legs removed and replaced with new ones. He needed a new head too. Why not? It happened to Daksa and *he* spoke with *improved* consciousness. As a handsome demigod, he was envious. He was humble when he had the head of a goat. And with all respects to astrologers, Brghu Muni improved once he was given the goat's beard to wear on his chin as punishment for taking part in insulting Lord Siva. So the body isn't everything. We always look at people's bodies and make judgments. If their teeth don't look white or if they have a burn or a scar or a limp, we get judgmental. We may be ashamed to be with them in public: "Someone will think that the Hare Krsna movement recruits only disabled people who can't make it in the real world."

Handicaps can happen to anyone. A star skier or a baseball player may suddenly have to spend the rest of his or her life in a wheelchair. Don't put someone down because of their body and its defects. Even if it's something they could apparently control, like being more careful when they shave or not eating so much, for some reason that's the way they are. Try to see the soul.

The doctor told Bridge that he would have to replace almost his whole body, but that he was fortunate to live in the 21st century where all this technology is available. The doctor shook

his hand and told Bridge that he'd have to go to a used parts place and get some of the replacements himself. Then over a period of a few months, they'd squeeze him into their schedule and start replacing the parts.

"Who will pay for it?" asked Bridge.

"You will, dear, you or your government."

Leave that. Just write here. It's these stories. Let me tell you some things that are happening here. Tomorrow (here's a real tale) I'll ride in the back seat of this small car. It's a Citroen, but a cheap-o. The two men will ride in the front seat. Dina has some cheap insurance where he's the only one who can drive, so we'll all go together. Madhu would drive faster, but we settle for Dina's pace. We'll leave at 6:30 A.M. when it's starting to get light. The headlights of cars and the streetlights are like illuminating jewels. It's a beautiful time of day. Even if you pull off the *autostrada* to get gas, you think, "I'm here before the rush." It's not fully dawn. The attendants rush out in their overalls and give you gas quickly and you're on your way. I don't want to make a romance out of it by telling it, but there's a thrill when these small things happen—a thrill and also the realization that at any moment we could get a flat and crash and die and people could say, "If he were such a pure devotee, how come he died like that?" You're supposed to die in a cot in Vrndavana saying holy things. That gives you more credibility.

We will drive to John Franco's. Our appointment is at 7:15 A.M. That's a sweet time of day. We are always there before he is, parked in front of the *gelateria*. Then a small car pulls up. John's wife is always driving. He gets out and she

drives off. We go up the stairs with him and he unlocks the door to the dentist's office where he works. Within a few moments I'm in the chair. You get the feeling that you've got a great jump on things so early in the morning and you're going to get this over with promptly and maybe John is also in good form. He's young anyway, with a steady hand. He plays a Krsna Vision tape. You try to relax, although that dental chair never fully supports your neck. What the heck, it's only for a few minutes. Now relax . . .

I'll save the rest of that story for tomorrow, although I can tell you that he will be coming at me with a very long needle.

y did you start that Bridge story and then stop? If you can't go further with something like that, then you'll always be confined to your actual life, your visits to the dentist's office, and so on. Maybe that's enough?

The thing about Bridge or Bhakta Bob or Maria and the visiting *sannyasi* or whoever comes to me, whoever I invent—it has to be deeply felt. My own voice. You know, the kind of thing writing teachers say. Henry Miller: we could be masterful writers if we didn't stifle the tender shoots, "because we lack the faith to believe in our own powers, our own criterion of truth and beauty. Every man, when he gets quiet, when he becomes desperately honest with himself, is capable of writing profound truths."

What do I want? Some little entertaining tales that I can get off without too much labor while my friends are out shopping or even while they are in the same room with me and cleaning and reading while I write? A collection of short, short

stories that I already finished, that's what I want. And new ones every day.

Don't panic, William Stafford said. Don't keep ripping up your efforts and throwing them away just because they didn't come out like John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Speak what you can, but truthfully.

LJ loved those flat crackers that Madhu made for lunch. He served them with fig jam. The figs were gathered by Sridama and his wife near their home in Florence. I ate five crackers with the jam. We offered all our food to Srila Prabhupada. We did the offering in a rush. I'm going to bed down tonight at 8 P.M. and be up at 12, at the desk by 12:10 at the latest for that free-for-all I call the writing session. The sessions are different from these stories; there are no holds barred. The story is *trying to tell something* and that's what can make it different, more lasting or less close to my truth.

^Dridge

wept. He didn't want to die. He didn't want the doctor to condemn him. He thought, "How can I find human parts like in an auto graveyard? Or is it actually auto parts I need? A bike seat to replace my rear end, a windshield for a face? I've heard of people who refuse to die when doctors told them, 'You have only three months.' I don't have to die either. Of course everyone does have to die, but I don't have to die right now."

The thing is, Bridge (who was an initiated devotee named Braja dasa, but the doctors kept calling him Bridge) knew that he could not become inspired like Maharaja Pariksit to stay awake and to fast and to attain the height of Krsna consciousness in seven days. Sure, Sukadeva Gosvami is available today and Srila Prabhupada too—and we are similar to Maharaja Pariksit in terms of our limited time. But Braja just felt that he didn't have it in him.

Gite Stories

Introduction

LJ wrote these stories while we were traveling in South France. I was still, at this time, doing daily writing sessions and also writing stories such as “Stories In April.” That meant sitting down and improvising for an hour a short-short story and letting it stand as whatever it came out to be, fiction or nonfiction.

We were on our way to preach in Avignon and we decided to take a few days rest before we arrived. The campgrounds were filled with holiday people, so we decided to look for a cottage, a *gite*.

At first we moved into an old house, but because it meant sharing the kitchen, we moved out again almost immediately. With some luck, Madhu was able to find a cottage we could borrow for a few days. This was in Provence and it was at the height of summer. We were told by a local that in Provence in summer, people stayed indoors during the day with all the shutters closed, and then at night, they opened them to the cool breezes. We did that too.

Our stop there was so brief that I felt just as I was getting warmed up in the writing, it was time to move on. I think these pieces read interestingly enough on their own, but I can’t help but feel they were on their way to becoming something else. They are mostly composed of reflections I made while sitting outdoors in the heat for an hour at a time, recording different impressions and Krsna conscious thoughts that passed through my mind. The “story” or fictional content is even thinner in these stories than in “Stories In April.”

After a few stories, I shifted from sitting on the flagstones to sitting at the round table. The round table provided a hint of Joseph Conrad in my mind, where he and his friends sit around

a table and one of them tells stories. I imagined the people I would be sitting with and began to improvise the stories. I wasn't looking for a structure to help me create plot and outline, but for the varied voices of my "friends." That's what got cut short by our leaving there. I know if I had stayed in that gite and kept working on those stories, eventually, each friend in my imagination would have told a story.

When we did leave that place, I made a plan to continue those stories on the road, but by the time I got another chance to write, the magic was gone. Or rather, I should say the stories weren't interested in me anymore. The secret of that inspiration was not revealed to me again. In that sense, what is presented here as "*Gite Stories*" is actually a prologue to a longer work that never got written.

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Witness Life

TH ere is a hot breeze. It reminds me of India — that famous wall of heat the Westerner meets as soon as he steps off the airplane in New Delhi. It's all bodily consciousness, of course, this meditation on the heat. I'm sitting here in light pink socks up to the knees and sitting with my back to the wall on a stone porch.

Frankly, I'm sitting on a pillow on the flagstone. The pillow has a quaint design on it. Shall I describe it to you? It shows a child clutching a book to his chest. Or maybe it's a clown wearing a tri-cornered hat, playing an accordion. The green leaves on the tall trees have a silvery underside to them in the midday July heat.

I remember being alone like this by the Tuscarora Creek and hearing masses of trees in the wind. I don't remember such heat, though, or such an unrelieved blue sky. I never before owned a white Renault van. I don't own one now, not officially, but I'm the reason it's traveling.

A salamander flicks its tongue. He's dry on the hot stone wall. The mosquitoes haven't found me here. Do they sleep at midday?

Now, we are expecting that I should be Krsna conscious. What does that mean in terms of this writing? It means when you read it back, we won't be worried that you are misleading us. No one should become a spiritual master or a father or mother or king or story writer unless he can free his people from birth and death. That is the responsibility. If you take people's eyes and ears — attention — for a while, you have to lead

them, as Lord Rsabhadeva led his sons, to the ultimate conclusion. That is, you have to advise them to engage themselves a hundred percent in devotional service to Lord Krsna under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master.

A story puts the message in an easier-to-take context. That has its own effectiveness. This writer says, "I won't mislead you. When I speak of summer heat or whatever, you can know that I won't mislead you. I have not left out Krsna consciousness and I will never leave it out. It is always central and nothing can change that. The heat may remind us to mention India, give us memories of Gita-nagari, memories of years gone by when we are all bound by the obligation to work not only for this lifetime but the next. We both understand all these."

I read a statement where Srila Prabhupada said it was advisable to read *Srimad'Bhagavatam* twenty-four hours a day if possible. *This* is what I want, I told myself, and underlined the passage in pencil. Lord Caitanya said *kirtaniyah sada harih*, and that could be taken as always reading Krsna's glories and teachings, or chanting Hare Krsna mantra, or moving through a variety of Krsna conscious activities, never ceasing to remember Lord Krsna, to serve Krsna in the context of Srila Prabhupada's order. If the world could do this.

today, I sat on the edge of the bathtub and Madhu shaved my head. I mentioned to him that I saw an ad for a book by a Godbrother. I began to tell of my close friendship with him years ago. I was a *sannyasi* when he joined the movement. He traveled with me. I sent a letter to Srila Prabhupada recommending him for initiation, and Srila Prabhupada wrote back with his name. I told him how our relationship changed. My

Godbrother looked up to me as a spiritual mentor, but when I observed him performing austere penances, I said it was too much. My Godbrother wrote in his diary that I ought to look to improve my own renunciation rather than criticize his as too extreme. Our relationship broke at that point.

After telling this story to Madhu, I felt apprehension. It had come out of me so honestly, like a confession, especially the part where I related how I had been a spiritual mentor for this Godbrother and that I was sorry it had changed. Why am I afraid to have spoken honestly? Because maybe one day Madhu will also feel that change toward me. But he is my disciple, whereas this other devotee was my Godbrother. Still, if you grow up, you grow up; if you change, you change.

It reminded me of how we all share the urge to be looked up to, even by only a few persons. It's probably a natural urge, especially as you grow older. I can think of other Godbrothers who also have this urge. It's like a spiritual fatherhood without having to beget children through a wife. Still, it's possible that others will grow up and feel differently about you.

In his advanced age, Srila Prabhupada had the opposite experience: he gave up his ungrateful wife and children, and Lord Krsna gave him hundreds and then thousands of children. Srila Prabhupada said this was happiness in Krsna consciousness. It was with great responsibility that Srila Prabhupada took charge of his disciples. I can't match that, but I think he wants me to help others in Krsna consciousness. I should do it and rest assured that Lord Krsna will take care of me just as He takes care of everyone. *Eko bahunam yo vididhati kaman.*

As I said, it's hot out here on the patio. I hear locusts. A fly has discovered my white-skinned knee. The breeze is too warm. People in this area mostly stay behind closed doors at this time of day and I think I'll do that too. I only came out to talk with

you. I'd like to leave many little volumes for people to pick up and read in Krsna consciousness. The readers don't have to be my disciples. I don't have to be guru. I can witness life, that's all.

2

Scabs, Don't Scratch Them

LJ thought of writing a story about scabs when I felt the scabs on my legs. I got them from scratching a mosquito bite. That's a story in itself, how we were raided one night by midges that came right through the screening in the van's skylight and bit us to pieces. (Twice in that same night, we were visited by police.) Anyway, whatever I have to say, I'd better hurry because it's oppressively hot out here.

Now I can tell the difference between two sounds – crickets are more rhythmic than locusts. They're more steady, constant, and tireless. Locusts are rattly. Their sound is looser and less mechanical. I don't really know what the insects are doing to produce that sound, where they rub themselves and whether it's for mating or what, but when we humans hear it, it means "summer." Heat waves. I'm a bit crazy to be out here in the sun. I feel my face starting to flush, and the breeze reminds me of an oven. But it's stark and it reminds me to say what I have to say quickly and get back inside under the fan.



THe world is a crazy place. Boys fight in school yards, men on battlefields. Soldiers hurl shells into crowded marketplaces. Governments are torn asunder. The big powerful ones, like the U.S.A., think that without them, the world would go to hell. But it all could be simpler, like life in a rural French village.

Jada Bharata says it's *all* false; the world is just a conglomeration of earth and water stuck together with straw and

sticks. Call it a body, a kneecap, a pretty head – it's just a combination of the five elements. We're all like little mud pies. Congregate a group of mud pies and you've got a city. More mud pies make a country. The only truth in it is the spirit soul, but people forget that fact.

Some *bhaktas* have pointed out that Jada Bharata teaches the extreme, as he was meant to do. Rupa Gosvami, on the other hand, approaches matter with a different emphasis: *yukta-vairagya*. Matter can be used in the Lord's service and then it becomes spiritualized. You can write a story and it can be printed. You can dance on legs and sing. You can be embodied and not in *maya* if you do it all for Krsna.

Srila Prabhupada was hopeful. He told his disciples to stop quarreling and deliver Krsna consciousness to the suffering people of the world.

Tdii's writing feels a little desperate. We may have to take extreme measures. We speak nervously on the telephone to each other, not sure if we can pay for it or if our friend loves us and understands. Besides, *<we* may be bluffing. So there is no recourse but to at least speak Krsna conscious conclusions. Then it is always profitable.

Remember seeing very old men in gaudy sports clothes? They looked even more hideous in their Bermuda shorts if they were accompanied by their equally old wives bleached blond, arm to arm, drinking liquor from glasses filled with ice cubes. But why pick on them? I might as well tease the Hare Krsna *san-nyasi* who stayed indoors and grew so old he started looking like Hiranyakasipu and he didn't even attain love of God, nor did he scare any demigods into coming and granting him boons.

They all just laughed when his name was mentioned: “Oh him, he’s a puffball.” They knew he ate big bowls of tapioca on Ekadasi, so they didn’t take him seriously.

elks&s

(Scabs are also what they call people who break strike lines. I was called a scab when I continued to work at the welfare office in Manhattan when the case workers called a strike. It was part of my service to Srila Prabhupada. I wore Lord Jagannatha around my neck, fresh *tilaka* on my forehead, a *sikha*, and a suit and tie, and plunged right through the strike lines. No one hurt me, but they shouted and threatened me with a clothes hanger. I heard that one morning Srila Prabhupada walked down that street and when the strikers saw him, they chanted, “Money, money, money, money” to the tune of “Hare Krsna.” They knew he wanted me to go to work. Foolish strikers. I needed to bring home the money to Swamiji’s temple. If you call that being a scab, then that’s your choice, but it has no meaning.

9Vow the crickets, cicadas, chickadees, and locusts are all saying “Beep summer,” and the small piece of shade on this porch is wavering like a shadow of a breeze. A butterfly of black. White puffball in middle distance. High above, an airplane sound. On my body, little moles and birthmarks and hair.

Dear friend, this body is false enough, like the sticks Jada Bharata describes, but it also can be used in the transcendental Lord’s service and that’s the best use of a bad bargain. Eye

glasses, my eyes, a pen and this ink—these are by no means to be scoffed at. The summer sounds too have some reason to be or Kṛṣṇa would not have put them there. A wise devotee sees Lord Kṛṣṇa everywhere and sees everything in Him.

Uncomfortable heat tells us we can't live free and happy in this world. Happiness in summer means to beat the heat by some artificial means. The body is naturally in hell (at this time). What the flies and mosquitoes feel I can't even imagine. Better I don't try. Hell is all around. We shouldn't be sentimentalists and believe in the Disney depiction of the natural world. Use everything to remind you to get out of the cycle of birth and death.

It's time to go in and read. This is a note left outdoors.

I'll close with this: in Prague, there is a ninety-year-old Orthodox Christian priest. He lives as an ascetic recluse in the city. I heard this from my Godbrother, Jaya Gurudeva, who has befriended this man. The old monk loves Srīla Prabhupada and reads his books. Jaya Gurudeva says the priest can't really understand the philosophy so well, but he loves Prabhupada. The priest told him, "Srīla Prabhupada threw down a gauntlet before the people of the West, but very few have dared to pick it up." He also looked over at Jaya Gurudeva once and said, "You should do more! Be like Prabhupada!" Jaya Gurudeva visits the old man twice a week and gives him a massage. Sounds nice.

I hope you are passing the summer tolerably, chanting and serving somehow. May your sorrows lighten by virtue of transcendental engagement, and may you remember *pundarikakṣam*, Govinda, the lotus-eyed one.

3

Didn't Want to Draw Blood

LJ was hesitant to come out here and write another story. I don't want to do one that walks on stilts. Let's be earnest. If a bug crawls on my bare leg, I'm not going to tolerate it. I'll flick it off. Same goes for horseflies. But I will be directly Krsna conscious as soon as possible.

I could spend my whole afternoon finishing the last pages of Hari Sauri's *Transcendental Diary*. This is my second reading of it. You stay with Srila Prabhupada in 1976 and vicariously endure the pressure in his shelter, as if you are part of his personal party. Harikesa was Prabhupada's typist and cook. When he took *sannyasa* and left to go preaching, he felt misgivings. "Everyone knows once you leave Srila Prabhupada's personal party, you never come back!" But with the *Diary*, we can come back. We can put the *Diary* aside while we do other things and then come back to it again. And Hari Sauri does all the work – he stays up late massaging Srila Prabhupada and confronts all the possible difficulties, and he remembers it all in his diary. I'm almost finished, though, and I can't keep rereading it. I have to come out here and write a story.

I want to do it in a straightforward way. Yet it's not a free- for-all writing session. It's a story about the locust high up in the tree way in the woods. I didn't know that white birches could be so tall.

If we're not on Srila Prabhupada's personal party, even vicariously, then how will we speak Krsna consciously? The first symptom of a man's quality, Srila Prabhupada writes in his *Bhagavad-gita*. purport to 2.54, is how he speaks. A well-

dressed fool remains hidden until he begins to speak. I lectured on those verses at the ISKCON farm in Poland. The symptoms of one fixed in Krsna conscious *samadhi* (*sthita'dhi'tnuni*) are that he is not depressed by unhappiness or elated by happiness. Srila Prabhupada gave the example that if I receive an M.A. degree, I may be applauded at the convocation ceremony, but what is this honor? The degree is awarded to the body, which will cease to exist. If I get some palatable food I think, "How happy I am!" But it's the tongue which is enjoying; I am not my tongue. A few days after lecturing on those verses, I went to the temple in Prague and there they were up to the fourteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad'gita*. There's a verse similar to 2.54 where Arjuna again asks for the symptoms of the person who has transcended the modes of nature. We want practical proofs. A devotee's behavior sets the standard for *dharma*.

Practice tolerance. Stick to your principles. Don't run and retreat just because some small red ants are roaming around on the flagstones. You represent to them a huge moving tower, an unfathomable giant. I am so big the ants don't even know it. They are so limited. And there are giants and towers that hover over me and take no account of me. Or they see me and I am fully under their control, but I can't even know it. Demigods are like that.

Lord Krsna is the greatest giant, but He's also smaller than the smallest. He's in the heart of each ant and even in the stone in a very limited form of consciousness. God is all- pervading. He is also untouched by matter and apart even from the work of His immediate Visnu expansions. He is not menacing to me unless I'm foolish enough to try to menace Him or His creation or His devotees.

We are moving along. We have to leave in two days. I've been fifty-four and a half years in this body and have to leave

in—? This story has stretched out to two pages, and when I want, I can fold it up. I can just say the bugs became intolerable and I began scratching but didn't want to draw blood, so I decided to stop and go inside. Make some excuse or explanation.

Here are some other excuses: the shade retreated on the patio and it was all exposed to sunlight (not true). A man ran by, or better yet, a horse and I felt . . . (not true, not true). I wound up writing this story on stilts after all (that's for the reader to judge).

Now the purport. I tend to forget purports as soon as I read them. When I lecture, I place those sticky Post-its on a page with notes to remind me what to say. That way I give an organized lecture, to the point. Srila Prabhupada didn't have to do that, yet he always went to the heart of the subject matter. He spoke in a scholarly way, analyzing Sanskrit words in the *sloka* and quoting relevant *slokas* from other scriptures. He was never pedantic nor confined. Said what occurred to him and what Lord Krsna wanted him to say. He spoke from the strong, unassailable position of a pure surrendered soul. He was most qualified to speak of *Bhagavad-gita*. and *Srimad'Bhagavatam*.

We take turns sitting on the temple *vyasasana*. Now I am not on one. Pm on a pillow on flagstones, lying back against the stone wall. Pm not facing an audience who will detect a mistake as soon as I make one and show it in their faces. Pm outdoors under a clear sky, and the only sounds are nature's wind on summer leaves, locusts, bird songs. I came here to write a story with Krsna conscious meaning. This is it. You can be with Srila Prabhupada in Hari Sauri's *Diary* and ride the airplane with him, be alone in his room with his servant and not even be noticed. You can observe the crossfire of his chastisement without being caught in it—but be careful. Your conscience will speak to you. You have to ask yourself what you

are doing to serve him. You can't just hide anonymously in a crowd of five hundred during his Mayapur lecture.

As I write, a red spider dangles in midair beside me. He is riding his amazing invisible cable that extends toward my leg—and suddenly he lands on my leg—and I dismiss him abruptly. I know I've got work to do, and so do you, dear reader. First, you have to fix up a *prabhu'datta'desa* or a vocation in ISKCON. You need to follow strict *sadhana*. Keep reviewing how you are doing. You can't be too hard on yourself these days, but neither too easygoing. My story would like to help you. Sit awhile in the shade while the locusts chime and scrape un-earthly yet earthly sounds. It's a brief respite. I offer it to you. What do you think? I mean about yourself—what are you doing in Krsna consciousness? As for me, I'm going to go inside now where it's cool. I'll read some more *Srimad'Bhagavatam* or *Diary* and think over what we have said.

4

At the Round Table

the round table. It's green metal. These tables are always small so you can crowd four chairs around them. A cafe owner could put a dozen of them out on the sidewalk—each one with its own umbrella—and be in business. I have only one table and I'm sitting here with my friends. The sun is still too hot and direct at 4 P.M., but there's shade provided by a viney tree that is leafing over us on a metal trellis. Some kids are playing in a creek down in the woods and occasionally I hear them, but otherwise, we're at the end of a long road in France.

When I sit with others, I think of what to say. I don't think about what I'll write later. I know I can only socialize for an hour and a half and then I will have to retire. I try to make the best of it, to be friendly, and to have Krsna conscious topics to discuss. The last time I did this—shared lunch—was in Germany, when I sat with two Godbrothers. I wrote topics down ahead of time. One topic was about spiritual masters and disciples. Another was to ask my Godbrother about a rural community he is part of. I also had some questions about Deity worship. It went well. Of course, it helped that they were gentle and friendly.

Sometimes I'm more uptight, but I still try to function. Others may not realize how limited I am. After an hour and a half of any intense occupation, I start to get a headache if I don't take a break. I came to the meeting ready to be in top form, just like I approach a timed writing session: "Let's go, let's make it Krsna conscious, not *gramya'kathd*."

Sometimes the image of a taxi meter comes to mind. As soon as I get into the cab, the driver pushes down the metal flag and the meter starts ticking. The cost increases with every minute. I'm paying even when he's stopped at a red light or stuck in traffic. There is no such thing as free time. Therefore, I silently request my friends, "Please use me well so that you are satisfied with my participation. I won't be here long."

I also think of the image of melting ice cream. As soon as the ice cream comes out of the freezer and is put into serving bowls, it starts to melt. I felt like that recently in Prague. I was going to give the Sunday Feast lecture, so I bathed and rested and then came out of the van (meter starts ticking). I decided to sit with the guests for the half-hour *bhajana* preceding my lecture, but once I was in the temple in a crowded and warm situation, I realized, "This time isn't free. It's part of my total." I began to melt. I was half melted when I began my lecture.

Sound strange? That's me. You've got your own problems, right? Here we are, and the summer wind is strong and gusting on this patio. It blows loose papers off the table, but I like it since the air is otherwise so warm. Sunlight comes through the trellis shade in patches and circles of light.

When you meet with others, you can't control the topics. You can't have it all your way. Knowing that in advance I would be coming out here today, I was determined to steer to Krsna. Here goes:

"Fellows, did you ever try chanting early in the morning and bringing your mind back to the holy names no matter how it wandered?" I feel a bit awkward, as if I'm interviewing folks rather than actually being with them as friends. But how else to be sure that I stick to real subjects?

Brando dasa says yes, he chants and sometimes goes on an increased quota pilgrimage to Vrndavana. Ah, that's interesting. "Are you going this year?"

He says he has to wait until he gets a signal from Krsna. If you're not enthusiastic, it won't work.

I'm actually desperate to get help with my chanting. Or I wish I were desperate. But I can't come out with the desperation. This is polite conversation. Still, I feel like saying, "If anyone can help me, please do. I'd like nothing better than to pick up something truly valuable, to experience a turning point in my life, from today's tete-a-tete."

The wind gushes and the leaves swish. A chill prickles the skin on my forearms. How beautiful the weeds look leaning this way and that. I glance at them over my left shoulder and then back to my companions. Life is . . .

"What is your itinerary?" one asks me clearly. I reply with a generalization. Can't say my itinerary is to write without caring what it is used for, to attain an inner state. I can't ask my friends what I am constantly asking of myself, "*Am I doing the right thing?*" Instead, I list the countries and temples I plan to visit in the coming weeks. That's all he wanted to hear anyway.

He says he has a disciple on whom he counted and who was special and good, but now that disciple is disappointing him. I made no follow-up inquiry. Only later did I think of it. Did he want to say more? Did it hurt? Did he want us to help him? In *Walden*, Thoreau writes that it would be a miracle if we could see through another person's eyes even for a moment.

We are selfish and limited, but we try to be helpful. We try to keep up good conversations and say things that are meaningful to each other. My view of ISKCON is that each devotee is free to make his contribution, no matter how humble. Each

person's service is a tiny piece in the mosaic. We have to respect each other. I say that. They listen.

Another one speaks of ecology. I listen. One speaks of a seminar and a Godbrother. We listen. The wind moves and we listen whether we know it or not. We listen to innuendoes too. The rush of the wind is like a train. Sometimes it comes from one direction and sometimes from another.

In Conrad's books, a character speaks a whole novel while his friends chime in from time to time with support and to keep him going. I know no talks like that. I favor the short ones. I don't want to tax my friends and I don't have such a long wind or yams to tell.

I watch the clock. I'm happy when time passes and I have been part of some passable conversation and can soon take a break.

"I plan to have some meetings with my disciples, one for a period of five days in Ireland, and then later in India I'll give some classes."

"I heard you say," I say, "that sometimes you read from your *sloka* box. What's that? A collection of *slokas* you keep in a box? Could I borrow it for half an hour?"

He says he doesn't have it with him.

I'm grateful they have brought me out of myself. I can go back to being alone, but I have been enriched. I can think fondly that I have some friends and that I met with them. I'm not such an impossible loner. In another country, with other devotees, I can refer to this meeting.

"I am reading *Srimad-Bhagavatam* this year."

I don't agree with everything they say. That's all right too. All of this is very obvious, I suppose. Maybe this story is the same sort of thing, me sitting on the edge of my chair and trying to be earnestly sociable and not quite making it. I don't

want to be blunt or hurt anyone, and I am easily hurt. When we meet, I can't come out with deep secrets, and besides, I don't have so many deep things to share. I like a light exchange. I like to sit with "you all" and glance at the weeds and trees and watch time go by. I like to read ancient Chinese poems and modern American idiom, poems that express human themes similar to these—friends meeting, friendliness, what doesn't get said because we are each alone. No big neurosis here.

I will read *Srimad' Bhagavatam*. and chant and look forward to writing it down. And I look forward to touching you in spirit. Not to be utterly alone. Can someone tell us about Krsna? I mean not just in the *Srimad' Bhagavatam* lecture, although that's important too.

I'm running off here. Seems there's more to say, but maybe not now. We can continue it another time. I'd like to talk, for example, about moods. Sometimes in the morning, I feel my life is wrongly directed and needs a serious overhaul; I've lost confidence in what I've staked my life on, my way of writing and living alone. Then in the late morning, maybe in my noon shower, the confidence returns. What to do with these moods? Oh, well. Melting. See you later.

5

A Prayer Not to Forget

“We’re about to start traveling again. This table is covered with microscopic red bugs. They locomote frantically toward the edge. For the third day in a row, heavy winds are up and yet it is sunny – no clouds. We scraped our chairs and tucked ourselves in around the table.

“Don’t look so glum,” he said. “It’s not like we’re going to the dentist.”

“Or the plumber.”

We lightened up a bit. We follow the four rules and chant sixteen rounds, we friends.

One of us was most sober. He had been through a GBC meeting this year. As we leaned forward, I noticed a red microscopic bug on his hand. I blew it off with a puff of my breath. “We’ll be lucky if we get off without killing any of these,” I said, and blew an ant off my sweatshirt shoulder.

“They’ll be lucky,” he said, and then he commenced.

“You know ‘The Road Less Taken?’” He paused and I was hoping he would come through. “Well, Krsna consciousness came down that road. It was carried on Hare Krsna mantras carried by *sankirtana brahmacaris*. Seems they are often the ones to bring it into new lands.”

I didn’t want to interrupt, although I thought of many *grhasthas* who have pioneered Krsna consciousness.

“They carried it in the form of Prabhupada’s books,” he said, “during the summer book distribution marathon of ’93. When they went back a year later, they found a family chanting Hare Krsna regularly.”

Is that the story? Not really, although it is definitely important.
Do I feel guilty? What more did my friend say?

round table. It's hard to get into the spirit because as soon as our tete-a-tete is over, I ought to start packing my belongings into the van. The train sound of the wind in summer trees is as strong as ever, but not that wistful submission to voices that tell the stories. We don't have time. We are in a rush. We're on a different schedule. I don't say stories are for idle people, not at all, but you do have to have a little time on your hands.

This morning I was reading about the priests of King Nabhi and how they regretted their prayers to the Lord. He appeared in their *yajna* arena in response to such paltry prayers. They were sorry they disturbed Him from His eternal, internal pastimes. Of course, I also don't want to waste Krsna's time with my so-called re-telling of His pastimes, asking Him to meet us at the round table, but something is better than nothing. Even a little devotional service does immense good.

The priests prayed, "Please, Lord, we are prone to forget Your names and pastimes. This may especially happen when we yawn or stumble or get diseased. We pray, therefore, that You will stay in our minds, and especially at death we will be able to chant Your holy names."

This is the prayer I wish to offer and share with my friends at the round table. It's the best I can offer.

Now I too am the priest. As you go on your journey and return to your work, keep this prayer with you and utter it. Dear Lord, don't let us forget You. Let us *hear* Your names and

recall some teaching or verse from *Srimad'Bhagavatam*. If we can do this with devotees or by reaching out and preaching to the innocent nondevotees, that is best. Let the prayer form when you are alone. Hare Krsna. Don't forget.

Introducing Bhakta Bob

Introduction

In the epilogue to this story, I wrote, “This has been an apprentice story, and an experiment in which I have explored what fiction is and how much I actually want to work in this genre.”

I wrote “Introducing Bhakta Bob” in installments in the back of our van when we were parked for a week near the ISKCON preaching center in Leche, Italy. I worked on it for an hour a day, between 3 and 4 P.M. I get into these moods where I discipline myself and establish a small routine to aid my writing. When I was writing this story, I would open the back door of the van first and then start in. Once I got going, I followed a flow that wasn’t always deliberately coming from me. I followed the story’s scent like a hound dog follows a trail, while at the same time directing things in Krsna consciousness so that at the least, each chapter has the full *mahd'mantra* in it. There were few other rules.

Authors can develop relationships with their characters when they write fiction. Characters can develop independent lives and even guide a story successfully to its conclusion. In that case, authors become interviewers or reporters, following their characters around and recording what they say.

It’s hard to describe how this feels—you would really have to experience it yourself. The author-character relationship is usually not visible to a reader. When we read Dostoevsky, we meet Raskomikov and he is alive for us, but we don’t see his relationship with his creator. Only the author knows the subjective details of a character’s birth and development.

It is also true, however, that a character does not take on an independent existence without any prodding from the author.

An author has to define and mold a character in the beginning. The character has to grow from a creative idea.

(This is the topic that fascinated me when I began writing at seventeen. Where does creativity come from? How does someone create a character? Of course, devotees know that creativity comes from Krsna, but how does it come from Krsna down through a person's imagination? It's inconceivable.)

After an author gives birth to his or her character, the character has room to develop on its own. The author simply waits to hear what the character has to say, what his or her voice sounds like, how he or she walks, and so on. I remember this phenomenon touching me when I wrote Sri *Caitanya'daya*. I kept a notebook beside me while writing that book describing what each character thought and developing his or her voice. I found the characters giving opinions on how the story should progress. When I was stuck how to bring Harideva back from his wanderings and how to resolve his guilt, Chaya-devI took over in her strong, womanish way, "I know how to end this story. I know how to get my husband back. Here's what you should do." I felt myself sitting separate from Chaya-devI, listening to her advice on how to end the story.

This experience is very different from the feeling I get when I improvise in my writing. Improvisation means catching the latest breeze moment to moment and allowing that to flow into the writing. In fiction, an author creates a reality, establishes it as the reality for his or her characters, and then allows the characters to become credible by stepping out of the line of action.

Someone may question how Krsna conscious all these experiences are, and therefore how important. Perhaps they are not in themselves Krsna conscious, but the tools of creativity work both for the nondevotee and the devotee. At the liberated stage,

Krsna dictates to the devotees; at a lower stage, the devotees sincerely try to render service and address themselves to Krs- na. It may come out more as John Berryman describes in his “Eleven Addresses to the Lord”:

Oil all my turbulence as at Thy dictation
I sweat out my wayward works.

It is more a combination of feeling that Krsna is speaking to us as Supersoul, but we’re also sweating it out to make it good, skillful, and offerable. Our attempts go “wayward” sometimes —they don’t always look like what we would expect standard Vaisnava literature to look like—but they are being written to glorify Krsna and His devotees.

Similarly, the illustrations just came to me. I don’t claim they are great works of art, but they are part of the playfulness of this story. They are another expression of my creative drive. I had more fun doing “Introducing Bhakta Bob” than with any other piece in this book.

Fun. That’s a scary word to some devotees. I guess the more dignified word would be “ecstasy,” but I’m not claiming that I reached a state of transcendental emotion while writing this story. By fun I mean an uplifting, spontaneous feeling of getting beyond duty. Of course, in Krsna consciousness, we’re not supposed to do anything for sense gratification, but when we engage our senses in Krsna’s service, that is our greatest satisfaction.

Fun means joyousness, playfulness, and we think of the childlike state. In writing, we can express that *joie die vivre* and preach at the same time. We can express happiness and at the same time surrender to Krsna.

There's some humor in this "Bhakta Bob" story. I combined words and bounced ideas around and tried to help us all relax. It's good to get relief from our anxieties and the heaviness of life as it sometimes is.

1

L^J'm in the van. The backyard is cold this morning. I would like to give you a story. I'll start with a fictive man. Should he be small so I won't have to make him complex like Conrad's Lord Jim, Shakespeare's Hamlet, Twain's Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn? I just want a one-story man. All right, Hans Christian Andersen be with me. Here goes.

There was once a little man who walked cross-country one morning. He was carrying beans to sell in town. He kept losing heart, but reviving enough to continue. Did he have parents? Well, of course. Everyone does. But he wasn't thinking of them. He was grown up. Hurry, little man, you don't have a long life span and you have to do something in this story. Or do I have to breathe life into you?

He's running now, but he's still as transparent as the wind. He's much bigger than a rabbit, so the rabbits run away from him. Oh, I hope he meets a devotee and gets a copy of BTG. Yes, he does! There, that wasn't so hard. He ran right into a devotee with a bulging book bag who was walking on the same country lane. The devotee urged him, "Please take one, sir. We're giving them out to all the good-looking guys today." My man gave a donation in mixed currency – Dutch and Italian and Irish and two American eagle quarters.

Hurry, little man. Go into town. He runs in his wooden clogs past rows of yellow tulips and by windmills that look like dragons. His shadow falls on the canal. He keeps running. He's chanting Hare Krsna.

Where was he going in the first place? Well, I'm not sure. You ask difficult questions. Maybe he has a job on Grafton Street, a part-time job at the bookstore. Of course, I already said that he is going to town to sell his beans. But now he is

working part-time at a bookstore on Grafton Street. He has to go in early to rearrange the books disarrayed by last night's browsers. Yes, he's in Dublin, walking on cobblestones. He's chanting Hare Krsna and praying to be delivered.

(Is he still wearing those wooden clogs over the cobblestones? Seems cumbersome. All right, he can change his shoes.)

I'm sorry he's still faceless. Actually, he looks like this:

This is my fictional man. He can walk and talk, but it's too early for that. Let's leave him now. He has a BTG and the Hare Krsna mantra and I don't have much more time to spend on him right now. Would you like to send him away to day camp? Give him a little of your love? Yes, I mean you, dear reader. Do you like my gingerbread man? He could dance for you if you like. He can tell his own stories or live his own life. It's up to you. He's in God's creation, in the marginal energy. He's a figment of a man's imagining. Let him chant Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

Anyway, I have to get on with my day, so I'm going to leave him simmering on the back burner for now. His name is Bhakta Bob.

^Bhakta Bob—why do I think of Fergus, who doesn't work at a bookstore and who wears Wellington boots instead of wooden clogs, when I think of my fictional man? Do I want Fergus to come into this story? That's how it is when you write fiction: one choice doesn't close out the others.

Bob ought to be a devotee, or else what's the sense of storytelling? Therefore, I let him receive his first *Back to Godhead* right at the beginning of his life. Now he will stop to look at his magazine during his coffee break. He'll turn to the mantra page and recite the holy name. He'll realize that it's a good thing to do while he's working. Remember now, I said he was simple, so simple and flexible that he's light on my mind, my Bob.

You could sing a song about him:

My Bob, I really want to know you, my
 Bob, are you gonna be real?
 My Bob . . .
 will you please be a devotee get back
 home before my story is done.

He is chanting the Hare Krsna mantra when a co-worker comes up and quotes a Smithwicks billboard slogan: "Will you go for a pint, Bob?" He talks like Fergus, "No thanks," and he thinks of saying, "I'll just chant Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare during my break." Maybe he even says it.

Meanwhile, it's raining outside. The weather is changeable in Ireland. The sky is always filling up with dark clouds and

then pouring rain. Occasionally, the sun comes out. (It's not like in Italy, where the author is sitting and writing this story.)

Bob is not the only one in this story, but it's no small thing for someone else to enter because once they do, I'm not inclined to throw them out. I don't have the workman-like mentality to write pages of notes and then invent characters while tossing out the ones that don't fit. One writer says that before he writes a story, his characters have to fill out job applications and he has to know everything about them. Presumably, some of them don't get hired.

This story has a different premise. We can't omit girls, but I'm a *sannyasi*, so it's not going to be a "girl meets boy" story. That would violate the code I follow. If you hear mundane stories about men and women, it agitates your mind. The result is that you remain attached to these topics—either hearing of other's affairs or wanting to pursue your own in real life. (I use the phrase "real life" tongue-in-cheek.) Then you have to be born again in a material body to act out your karma.

"Oh, ha, ha, we don't believe in karma, so it's okay to hear stories of men and women. Besides, if there's karma, that's okay with us, blah, blah." If you think like that, then this story is for you, although you may not like it.

Anyway, there's a girl working in the bookstore who was already serious about Krsna consciousness before she knew Bob. Her name is Pegeen. She received a book in front of the post office from Prabhupada dasa. (When I said "real life" comes out tongue-in-cheek, I don't mean I don't believe it's real. I mean it's not the only reality and we shouldn't forget that. We are not these bodies. We are pure spirit souls. In this lifetime, I may be born an American. In the next life, I may be born Chinese. However, the life of a devotee like Prabhupada dasa is

real because he is performing eternal devotional service. Lord Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagavad-gītā* that even a little devotional service never suffers loss or diminution and can save one at the time of death. But what the nondevotee so desperately identifies with as real life is a subject for tongue-in-cheek, or even pity. What he takes as the all in all is actually a will-o-the-wisp.)

Pegeen gave Bob a book when she saw that he already had a BTG. She invited him to the Hare Kṛṣṇa center on Dame Street. There. We are getting along. We have a thickening plot. It's a "how I came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness" story. I have to allow myself to write such a story, even though I might embarrass myself—not only in public, but in my most private self—to admit that I prefer this type of story to a high sea saga, and yet I can only write it in the lightest way.

You see, here in Italy, the flowers are blooming at midday. The electricity went out, so there'll be no sweets for lunch. The *karmis* are going back and forth on this busiest day of the week. There is a boat dock just two minutes away from here and they are all going there to sail in their pleasure boats on the Adriatic Sea.

Bob is 6'2". He decides not to drink beer or smoke cigarettes anymore. He's weighing the pros and cons of celibacy. He strokes his lips and thinks about it. He'd have to get some mercy to give *that* up.

He's no longer carrying beans to sell or wearing wooden clogs. The author is unsure. Please bless the author, or offer him whatever we can, at least wish him well. And unless the previous *acaryas* are pleased, all efforts are wasted: *srama eva hi kevalam*. My aim in writing this story is only to please and serve the present-day devotees. Then the exalted previous *mahd'bhagavatas* will be pleased with me.

The readers are clamoring: this story doesn't have to be all sense and plot, but if you're going to sail off in a multicolored helium balloon, there ought to be a reason behind it. Is there any menace in this story? A challenge to come? Maybe Bob's parents will object. He may not be so pleased with what he sees when he visits the Hare Krsna center. Someone even said Ireland would be entirely covered with a tidal wave. Nothing, then, should divert us from applying our minds to patient and particular hearing of the holy names, Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

3

Each of us has a minute amount of free will. That free will should be used to surrender to Krsna. Ah, if we only knew the Lord! He is gradually revealing Himself to us as befits our qualifications. He is expert. He withheld Himself even from the view of His beloved *gopis* of Vrndavana saying, "If I were too easily available to you, you would take Me cheaply. I have disappeared from you just to increase your yearning for Me." And to young Narada he spoke, "O Narada, [the Lord spoke], I regret that during this lifetime you will not be able to see Me any more. Those who are incomplete in service and who are not completely free from all material taints can hardly see Me. O virtuous one, you have only once seen My person, and this is just to increase your desire for Me, because the more you hanker for Me, the more you will be freed from all material desires." (*Bhag.* 1.6.21-22)

Bob in Dublin and me in Italy. I don't want to give Bob over completely to my Free Man, but to balance him with my Krsna conscious Man. Wrote myself this note and I share it with you, dear reader:

"I'm timid and conservative in moving from reality to fiction. That's okay, but keep moving as much as you dare. Let the conservative side keep up Krsna consciousness and the daring side fly!"

Also: "Don't start ripping up pages and throwing away chapters and the whole manuscript just because it's not another *Adventures in the Skin Trade* or *Amerika*."

Bob in pants and hat and graphic wit, the Free Man in me so eager to describe him he can't even get it straight, guided our Bobby down the street and into the Hare Krsna center. Scene:

Bob entering. Inside, cymbals crash.

One main criterion in writing this story is to be able to come back to it later and enjoy it. I want it to be like Krsna consciousness itself – inexhaustible and eternal. In the spiritual world, everything is like that. If you pick flowers for Lord Krsna's garland, the flowers don't die. Seeing their freshness and original flavor, the bees follow the flowers on His garland. Those bees don't sting. The Lord has a swarthy blue complexion and wears a yellow *dhoti* on His hips, and He is loved by all the pure devotees, who can't bear it if He goes out of their sight for even a moment. The idea that the Absolute Truth is impersonal is atheistic and not even sensible. The Absolute Truth is the controller. Therefore He must have a brain. And if He has a brain, then He has other bodily parts as well.

I know a sensitive proofreader of my books who doesn't like it when I print the names of devotees and their faults and even if I withhold the names, but say things like, "I received a letter from a temple president whose wife was unfaithful." My proofreader thinks this is heartless. Her point is, "Be confidential. Don't expose people even indirectly."

But Bob, you boob, if you enter rightly this interior castle of the Hare Krsna center, you'll never be the same. So warned the Sukracarya part of Bob, advising that Visnu might take away everything that he owned, even his Wellington boots.

It's true. The Hare Krsna people might say later, "Hey, Bob, give us your boots for the Lord's service."

Bob might reply, "Them's my only pair. Why don't I just use them in the Lord's service?"

Anyway, heedless to the inner warning of the protective, materialistic guru, Bob opens the door and enters.

There was a bunch of fellows sitting around doing *kirtana* nice and simple: Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare. There was a full-sized *murti* of Srila Prabhupada dressed authentically. There was *prasadam* being prepared, soon to be offered at a scheduled *arati*, according to the order of the founder-acarya for all ISKCON centers. This was morning and the *prasadam* was

breakfast. It consisted of almonds and Chyavan Prash. The Chyavan Prash could be picked up and eaten with banana slices. There was also fresh, hot milk with honey and hot oatmeal. Of course, this sounds appetizing and the danger is that we may lust after this before it is offered to Krsna. So let's not talk about the food or smell it, and certainly not taste it, before it is offered. And when you offer it, put your head on the floor and say, "Dear Srla Prabhupada, they have prepared this for the devotees. I offer this to you because if we eat it before you do, it will be lumps of sin. We know that you are close to Krsna and that you will offer this *prasadam* to Him, although we may not know how that offering is done. We simply offer it to you and we pray to be allowed to eat your remnants. Please accept our offering, and let us never forget to offer food to you before eating."

Bob can partake of this delicious *prasadam* if he sticks around. And we all know what will happen to a *jiva* who eats *prasadam*. It happened long, long ago to Narada when he was only five years old. "Once only, by their permission, I took the remnants of their food, and by so doing all my sins were at once eradicated. Thus being engaged, I became purified in heart, and at that time the very nature of the transcendentalist became attractive to me." (*Bhag.* 1.5.25)

I hope that Bob will stay and eat. He looked around in the temple room and saw books on the shelves. Beads available here too. He smelled incense. He saw himself reflected in the mirror. A confident man, perhaps in his forties, approached Bob and said, "Hare Krsna. We're just about to serve breakfast. Would you like to join us?"

"Yes," Bob answered, and then he heard himself chanting, Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rams Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

4

L/ don't want to just tell a story; I want to write, to be. Therefore, in advance, I object to my non-story elements being considered scaffolding which will later be dismantled. No, in this story, if you dismantle the non-fictive, non-plot, then you have nothing left but a skinny tale. "Let me live," cries the narrator. I am inclined to give him my promise. He (she) is like a cow saying, "I know you are nice to me while you are enjoying my milk, but later, will you kill me?" No, mother. You can pasture. I will personally keep you in a book of my own, even if no one else wants you. I promise.

'Bob- s not the only one. Dublin's one of many places. The Hare Krsna movement goes on despite doldrums and tantrums. One example of a good place, just one and one not necessarily spectacular, is Newcastle, England. Say you are a shop employee with a flare for Eastern or experimental religion. (That's your karma from past lives.) You visit the center, and in the temple room on the second floor, you meet Bhakti-rasa dasa, the temple president. He is a strongly built young man, comes from Newcastle, and he speaks your language. Looks you in the eye and smiles. He is busy, but he sits down with you and speaks some philosophy from the *Bhagavad'gita*. You sense he is upright and not a hypocrite. He's definitely strong- minded and isn't practicing Krsna consciousness because his father or government told him it's what he ought to do. He seems satisfied with what he's doing with his life. You start to hear him out. He'll be there when you come back to visit again,

or maybe next time you'll meet Devakinandana dasa, who is more inward and not as relaxed as Bhakti-rasa, but his questions and talk are seriously religious and he desires to practice the ultimate path. He wants to see love of Godhead within his lifetime. He is also a Newcastle person. There are hundreds of Hare Krsna centers all over the world. Srila Prabhupada set it up and it continues on his order.

Bhakta Bob, a sad case. He flies out the window, floats to Cork. I bring him back. He floats like a cloud over the countryside. Or is that cloud just the late afternoon depression of our author? Please don't toy around with our Bhakta Bob this way, as if he were a balloon.

He's just a figment, someone says.

don't know much about death. I hear of people who die. People I have known have died. I recently missed seeing the passing away of Vamsldhari dasa. He was in South India at a sanatorium getting treatment for a brain tumor. He wrote me that the tumor had stopped growing. I waited in Vrndavana, but then I left. Vamsldhari arrived soon after and within a few days, left his body. Devotees said he died peacefully, while he – or at least others – slept. His body was burned at the Yamuna.

The passing away I saw firsthand was Srlla Prabhupada's. Now I'm fifty-four, and in the house where I am staying, Dina- dayardra dasa is sixty-four and Madhu is forty-two. Eventually I'll have to witness some other deaths. It makes you sad to see a loved one go. It wakes you up to the verities of life and death. Not infrequently, a devotee writes me that he witnessed the death of a parent. They tell of last visits to the hospital, the deathbed. Sacinandana dasa said he put a garland from the temple under the bed of his dying father because if the relatives saw it, they would throw it out. At the funeral, Sac! said he surprised himself and others by his natural cheerfulness. He didn't forget transcendental knowledge; it lived in him, all the *Bhagavad'gita* lessons and chanting. Some relatives commended him for his attitude and it helped them in their breakdown grief.

°Why are you reluctant to tell us what happens to Bob next? I'm not reluctaht. It all seems too inevitable, what will happen to him. I hope he can remain *brahmacari*. He will become a devotee, that's for sure. He wouldn't have come into the story and I wouldn't be writing it otherwise. But what kind of a

devotee, what service and goals and conflicts, I'm not sure. This isn't a tri-kdia-jna story. The author only finds out along with our reader, just as it happens. Today we'll establish that he does have a soul, that he is a person and not a helium balloon floating down to Cork and in danger of sailing off over the Atlantic Ocean. For the soul there is neither birth nor death. He is never born and never dies. He is eternal and unchanging. He is not slain when the body dies.

There's no hurry to tell his story. Of course, a person wants to prosecute Krsna consciousness in earnest and not waste time, but a newcomer has to go through all the stages (*adau sraddha tatah sadhu-sango*). He has to make a realistic appraisal of ISKCON and get over the fact that the devotees are imperfect. He has to overcome his own *anarthas*, get trained, and learn the philosophy before he can receive first initiation. One doesn't want to delay saying, "Oh well, everything is eternal." I realize that, but still you can't hype through it in one chapter. It's like the woman who wants a child as soon as she's married. She will have her child, but she must be patient. By serving her husband, she will conceive, become pregnant, and then she has to wait nine months. Therefore, this is a chapter for patience.

Bob enjoyed the breakfast on his first visit to the Hare Krsna center and he liked the fact that the food was sanctified. This was explained to him by Bhanu Prabhu, the older man who spoke to him. Bhanu lived at the Dublin center. He was Scottish, but that didn't matter. The devotees, Bob learned, were transcendental to national designations. "And that's a good thing in this land of troubles," said Bhanu.

"Umhmm," said Bob, as he gladly accepted a second bowl of cereal. On a board leaning against the wall was a neatly lettered sign with the Hare Krsna mantra written on it. That

was for newcomers who did not know the word order, to help them sing along during *kir tanas*. Now Bobby had grown familiar with it and he definitely had the word order straight. He uttered it to himself: Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

5

"<MV_e do not mind for any good style, our style is Hare Krishna, but, still, we should not present a shabby thing. Although Krishna literatures are so nice that, even if they are presented in broken and irregular ways, such literatures are welcomed, read and respected by bona fide devotees." (Srila Prabhupada letter to Satsvarupa dasa, January 9, 1970)

Robert Case is Bob's full name. I thought of Srila Prabhupada meeting Robert Nelson when Prabhupada arrived in Manhattan in 1965. He called him "Mr. Robert." Is my Bob a bumpkin like that? Mr. Robert, Mr. Bob, who befriended the Swami. Then there is Bob Cohen, the Peace Corps worker who met Srila Prabhupada in Mayapur. He asked perfect questions and received perfect answers.

I also remember a boy from high school named Robert Lawrence. He gave a little speech in one of our classes when we had to go in front of the class and explain something. He explained the trajectory of a bullet and showed it by drawing it on the chalkboard. In gym class, we noticed that his chest was soft and a little bit like a woman's. Then he suddenly got sick and died while he was still in his teens. He wasn't a big athlete or a scholar or even popular.

There was also a person named Bob Lefkowitz to whom Srila Prabhupada gave the name Ravindra-svarupa. He left Krsna consciousness after a year of practice. When I asked him to give an interview for Srila Prabhupada's biography, he asked for a thousand dollars.

Our Bob joined. He decided to go with a group of devotees who were touring European cities with a Hare Krsna rock band. Bhanu thought it would be a good way to break Bob into the

ecstasy of preaching, festivals, and association with different types of devotees. Yeah, Bobby went.

Bob, you've come a long way from when you were a stick figure with almost no consciousness and wooden shoes and a scarecrow approach to reality. Remember?

The seriousness of the subject makes me ask, "Where are you taking this boy?"

It is serious. We are not kidnapping him. He joined of his own free will. We have assigned him to a touring festival group. He will come back to Ireland in a few months. This tour is for his own good and the good of humanity. This world is running under the illusion that the temporary is permanent. Everything goes wrong because there is no understanding of God.

Bhanu had to explain it like this to Bob's parents, who came to the temple. They wanted to know where their son was. His

father tended sheep and sold paint. They didn't care about Krsna consciousness, but their dear son was of interest to them. So Bhanu explained, "Your son Bob is working for Krsna, who is the all-attractive Supreme." They liked the idea that he would refrain from drugs, and that he would be back in a few months.

It's I who don't give a damn for Bob's parents. I'm just writing it in because I can't think of something else. I also know I'll have to account for them sooner or later. A person has to have parents and legs and feet and a head and tongue and hands, or at least some of that, but we are primarily interested in the soul.

Robert Bly (another Bob) writes, "There is no solution." We claim there is. It's surrender to Krsna. But how to get more people to surrender? That has no easy solution. If Krsna consciousness is practical, why don't more people apply it? Why do they say it's impractical? And personally speaking, why can't I chant Hare Krsna with attention? There is no solution. Can't get an answer, at least not right now.

I can impress some people, but not all people. I can be clever. Right now I'm thinking of someone who wants to be ISKCON's full-time representative at Prabhupada's Radha-Damodara rooms, but others want to do that service too. No solution. As Srila Prabhupada said once of the GBC, "Resolutions, but no solutions."

We have all the answers. The moon is a sliver and astronomy tells us why. Vedic knowledge and earth sciences tell us about the earthquakes and why they occur. How to prevent one from happening in your neighborhood? Where can you move

where it will be safe? No solution. Therefore, let's take to Krsna consciousness and receive enlightenment. That's the only solution. I don't say I'm better than you, Bob Bly, but God is the solution, the answer—and His science of material and spiritual knowledge explains everything.

Is this a bobcat, a bobsled, a bobbed hair cut, bobby socks, Bobby Kennedy? Wow, that's one of the heaviest Bobs of all, Robert Kennedy. By comparison, my Bob is just a scrap.

My Bob came over the hill full of ignorance, but happy in the sunshine. That is also a form of participation in Krsna consciousness. Then we shot him full of holes. I mean, we picked him up and created life in him. We made him a figure in a story. Put a soul in his stuffed straw chest and *voilà!* He walked into Dublin where he got a BTG placed in his scarecrow hand. Now he's a menial worker in the Nitai Blues Band, Festival Road and Magic Show touring twelve cities. Bob, do well.

I am just afraid he will neglect his *sadhana*, but they tell me that each *brahmacari* is given time to finish his *japa* (two hours) and a half hour for private reading in Srila Prabhu-pada's books. I agree that it might be nice for him, although I don't much like Krsna conscious rock 'n' roll or staying up late at night. Nevertheless, I invented or tolerated the suggestion which came through the mouth of Bhanu dasa.

I don't seem to see this Bhanu at all. Can't pick him up on my screen. Is he one of those chunky, dull, dogmatic fellows who doesn't know himself and doesn't smile?

6

Di ow Bob did fare on the tour I shall tell. He was assigned to take care of the horses who pulled the carts and to clean the toilets when there were any. He also helped cook and serve out *prasadam*. He was very new. I am writing this, of course, from the subjective viewpoint as his “father” or creator. I have become the Lord Brahma of a paper man?

Anyway, he did all right, my Bob Case Parnell, Robert the Second, but there was one *brahmacari* temple commander who rode him hard. The man called Bob “Mick,” although everyone else called him Bhakta Bob. One night, the temple commander, whose name was Yama dasa, hurt Bob with words and even a push. It was over something he thought Bob had neglected in his care of the horses. Now, I wasn’t there personally because I’m not the Omnipotent Narrator—I heard it in my imagination—and I’m sure there are two sides to the story. But there were harsh words from Yama: “You’re just an unsundered neophyte. If you want to stay on this party, you’d better shape up and that means doing things to my satisfaction.”

And Bob’s retort: “I didn’t come to Krsna consciousness to surrender to *you!*”

Not much more than that. By the time Bob hit the sack, I mean when he went to sleep, he was agitated. He began to think, “I don’t want to stay out on this party and take crap from Yama. Besides, it’s cold. I have never been away from Ireland and I want to go home.”

What he did, in the morning, when the sun was just rising, after feeding the horses, is give the slip to the touring party by walking down the road. Nobody asked him where he was going. Then there he was, on his own in Bohemia, between Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. He decided to hitchhike home,

but he didn't give it much thought at first. Remember, he's a simple lad, a kind of straw-head man, yet a devotee, and we shall have to see just how much of a devotee or person he is.

This is moving fast enough that I had better slow it down. Somewhere, Patrick Ball is playing his wire-strung Celtic harp. Somewhere, angels fly and sing. But there was no joy in the heart of Fergus Bob, who walked the lane in ancient Bohemia and was beginning to cry.

He's a lost boy and shouldn't have allowed a minor quarrel to upset him. I do wish someone had been watching over him and taking care of him. As Srila Prabhupada said, "After spending gallons of blood we gain a convert, so they have to be very carefully protected in the growth of their devotional creeper."

Bob sat on a rock and thought. "I suppose I should just return to the party," he thought. "I'm in the middle of nowhere. I can't think straight. I seem to be bereft of any support. My mother and father are outgrown by me and cannot help me now. Nor brothers and sisters who are not interested in spiritual life. The younger brother might be, but I would have to help him, not he me. Though I wouldn't mind seeing him now. I seem to have lost one world and not entered another." Bob got up and walked quickly back to rejoin the caravan, which consisted of two RV vehicles and one cart with horses, but when he got to last night's campsite, they had already left.

c

"Jar away in Australia . . ." (an old song sung by Irish immigrants). It's no joke. After all, I'm writing it from a distance. Think o' Bobby over there in Europe and how you got to bring him home. It's Ireland he wants right now, but I dunno if I can get him back. Can't send him the money for a ferry ticket.

Can't you just wish him back? Aren't you the magical author?

Well, sure I could. It would just be like signing a check. But you can't just sign a check without money in the bank, so I guess Bob will have to go through some trials and that will be best for all of us.

^V^hat are you thinking? I'm thinking about what I would like to read when I read this later? Are all your stars out?

I don't like to torture a sad guy lost in a foreign country. These writers do that with their protagonists. They play at God, but without the wisdom and power and compassion of God. I'm laying back on my bunk in the van and leaving the poor guy suspended. Do I have the courage to go through rrvy trials? I'd be frightened to death if that happened to me, what I just did to him. Couldn't he come back right away and find the party? Could you make him catch up to them?

Now hold on. It's just a story and we ought to go through it. A story has to have a conflict. The hero has to meet suffering (as far as I understand it). Then he goes through a change as a result. He can't just forever eat bowls of oatmeal in Hare Krsna centers in Dublin.

Why not?

Why not?! Because! People got to flow and change. A neophyte or a new person has to go through experiences. Look, I've got it all figured out. He'll have some adventures while hitchhiking. Somebody will pick him up, two Germans, say, and they'll tell Bob that they don't normally pick up hitchhikers. There'll be dialogue and Bob will be able to preach. Then we'll resolve his problems. Trust me.

All right, but it's going to be a long afternoon for Bob in Bohemia. He didn't even think to take any *prasadam* with him. Anyway, someone offers him their barn to sleep in. It's not bad in there. In the evening, a young man and his girlfriend stop by. They have heard of the Hare Krsna movement from a record. They ask Bob questions. He preaches according to his simple understanding. When they ask him what he's doing alone, he says frankly, "I joined the movement only a week ago in Ireland and came here with a traveling party. But I think I'll go back to Ireland and practice Krsna consciousness there."

The couple go and get some vegetarian food — bread and olives and a bottle of orange juice — for Bob and give it to him in his haystack. He's sure grateful because he's *hungry*. He eats while he talks. Then they leave him in the dark while the stars come out. It's not so bad. He decides he will continue to be a devotee when he gets back to Ireland, but maybe he has to be more realistic about how he's going to live. He falls asleep in the palm of the Lord's hand, chanting to himself to keep away evil spirits: Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

7

“Why do you serve Krsna anyway? What’s the reward?”

“We don’t serve for any reward, but because God is our worshipable Deity and it’s our duty to serve Him.” Bob repeated what he read in Prabhupada’s purport. He was questioned by a gray-bearded man. The man and his wife had picked Bob up hitchhiking. Bob was in a *dhoti* and had a shaved head. If he had planned his departure from the touring group, as well as his travel back to Ireland, he would have worn his pants, but now he was stuck in this embarrassing way as a “naked” devotee to whomever he met. This was his trial.

(There you go again, giving him a hard time. Well, I’m here, too, to get Bobby some treats and ease his way. Our neophyte hero’s footsteps should be made less thorny and bloody. You authors with your violence . . . and dragging him down.)

Another time he was asked, “How come you’re wearing a skirt?” He hitched rides mostly at petrol stations or rest stops. He went around to the cars and asked. Once, a group of motorcyclists made fun of him. He wasn’t such a fixed up devotee, but he had no choice but to face them and talk about Krsna. People almost always listened to him respectfully. Poor Bob. His complexion was so fair that he looked like he had high blood pressure. His cheeks were so rosy. That was a sign of his youth. When pressed, he stood up for his belief.

Reminds me a little of Peter O’Grady, now Parasurama dasa, famous in ISKCON Europe for oxen-pulled Padayatras and puppet shows and sleeping with a sword on the England roadside. Reminds me too of Subala dasa, who hitched from Poland to Italy to see his spiritual master. To return to Poland, he went to Rome and found some Polish pilgrims. He knew they would drive him home. He wore khaki shorts,

sneakers, a T-shirt, and a beaked cap when traveling. Doing it in a *dhoti* would have been something else. Subala didn't hitchhike at night. Neither did Bob.

He didn't know roads and barely knew countries. No one was from Ireland or going to Ireland. He began telling people he wanted to go to England.

He chanted his rounds; he washed his face in a creek. It was cold. He got some food and sometimes none. He was a sorry figure, but inside knew he was resolving to be a devotee. The material world was more fearful and disgusting than attractive.

U balsam wood, oh, knock on wood, bob up, Cork soul, and ride the flood. Bob had committed no dastardly crimes; just over a little quarrel, he got separated from his brood.

Nobody told him to get a haircut.

"Is this Buddhism?"

"What do you people think about the nukes?"

He had heard about the Neo-Nazis and wanted to avoid Germany. Saw some swastikas on the road, "Jews kaput."

A round moon one night and a bit lopsided the next. Grateful for his beads and sorry he had no time to pack a book or extra clothes or even a toothbrush. Just a green-with-gold- harp-passport and a few pounds and pence quickly spent.

^eah, well you sound like you're spent, Author. Nah, I'm just getting going, but I told you to be patient. We got to study him, see? Figure what's best.

But what's your criteria? The thing is bothersome. Sometimes when you think of it, you are elated. Glad you have a longer term writing engagement. But sometimes you want to ditch him quick. Get him married to Pegeen and say good-bye. Do a "he changed his mind. The rigors changed his heart (both toughened and softened it) and by luck, he found the tour devotees again and surrendered and was ever after happy."

Fergus would be likely to get back to Ireland and assess the situation and not expect to live with devotees, yet pursue Krsna consciousness as a private life choice and visit a temple maybe once a week, but think of ways to deepen that commitment. Subala dasa would live in a temple and do as his authorities bid him. I too took that way. But this is the 1990s and Bob is only a paper hero, like Pinocchio or . . . not Dumbo. Like Hans Christian Andersen's match girl? Please consider your words before you write them down. It's a permanent karma whether you like it or not, and young readers may not be misled by you, a scarred veteran.

The electric heater just kicked off here in the van. We fasted yesterday for Ekadasi except for a glass of juice and a vegetable broth at noon. There's a military school nearby, and when they shoot their big guns to practice, it rattles our house so much I think the windows might break. Every gun beat is followed by a shock wave in the house. Went to bed at my usual time and the guns stopped at once, as if in consideration that I was resting.

Someone else asked Bob, "Isn't there ultimately one soul and we are all it?"

"No, there is the individual soul and God, Krsna, who is the supreme soul. Otherwise, how could we love and how could He control?"

Bob wasn't always perfect. He couldn't answer questions about Christ or nothingness, although he had the right idea.

Did any bikers rough him up? Anyone hurt him? Any girl entice him? That happened only in his dreams. He felt cold and hunger and slept on rough ground until gradually he made his way west and north and found the Hare Krsna Zentrum in Antwerp, Belgium. A lady devotee there saw his plight and asked her husband, the temple president, to take him in, even though he was dirty and torn. They gave him *karmi* clothes for traveling and he was grateful for that. He was able to wash his *dhoti*. They fed him plenty of *prasadam*. He sat at the table with them and told them of his travels.

They asked him why he had left the touring party. It was a famous ISKCON party and one that many devotees would like to join. "Oh," he said, he had behaved foolishly when there was an argument, so he left.

"Did you learn a lesson?"

"Yes," said Bob, and he gave the official answer he thought a devotee was supposed to make: "My karma . . . purification . . . *maya* was testing me." He believed in those things theoretically, but he really didn't know what to make of himself or the world or of God. He believed in God's good intentions for the *jivas* and the particular science of *bhakti* that Prabhupada taught. "One thing I learned," he said, "is that it's important to know the philosophy, but it is all in Prabhupada's books. I had no books with me. Now I really want to take like a serious

course or take time to study *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* and maybe start *Srimad'Bhagavatam*."

"If you like," said Jatu dasa (that was the temple president's name), "you can stay in Antwerp with us. Do a little service and I don't mind if you spend hours a day studying. I read for an hour a day and I wish I could do more."

Bob accepted their offer. He really didn't know what he would do in Ireland except show up shamed and defeated.

That evening he sat with his new friends in the temple room, which had varnished wood floors, and chanted in the *kirtana*. Bob cried tears of joy that he was home again in Pra- bhupada's house. Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

8

<3 obby Brookmire, Bob and Ray, Bobby Bums and my Bob — what do they have in common? All *jivas*, whether trombonist, comic, Scottish poet, or the boy star of this story who was bom into the world and escorted (windblown) to this place where he is now.

Whew. It's true. I rushed him here. Maybe he should have stayed out suffering more in the cold. I could have handed him over to the Neo-Nazis for a while and tested his mettle. He barely went through any ordeals. Ordeals make a character show that he's Krsna conscious of his own free will. It would have made great film footage. Or he could have rejoined the touring party and resolved his conflict with Yama. Instead, I was as soft-hearted as the blond lady in Antwerp. I couldn't bear to leave him out in the cold.

As a result of such a quick escape from the rigors of the road and such a warm reception in Antwerp, Prabhu, you have bypassed what was to be the major conflict and plot in this story.

Well, we could still have some internal conflict. Or at least some suspense.

The thing is, what do you want to do?

Take a break and wait for the muse.

^Dina's sweater is blowing in the wind on the backyard clothesline, held by two wooden clothespins. It's a light gray crew neck. Dina is sixty-four years old, his face skinny and

craggy like I will be, like I already am. But he has an interesting bumpy Roman nose that looks like a downhill road you could ride on your bicycle. Very nice, like a school don or a poet or a pensioner living with the Hare Krsna devotees. I don't speak Italian, but M[^]dhu talks to him. Madhu says Dina is tolerant. When Madhu doesn't know a word in Italian, Dina is patient. When they cook together and Madhu gets short with him to make him hurry so it's done on time, Dina is unruffled and kind and tries to hurry up.

He has written me a letter with two questions from his reading of *Entering the Life of Prayer*. The questions are sitting, translated, on my desk for when I go back inside. Today I asked him, while he was hanging Prabhupada's clothes on the line to dry, to please write a description of the days he spent with Vamsidhari up until Varhshi passed away from the world. Dina said he is not a writer, but since I requested it, he will try.

I was reading Srila Prabhupada's lecture on *sa vai pumsam paro dharmo*. He lectured on that verse many times. One time in Vrndavana, he was uncompromising on the point that a pure devotee doesn't serve for his own satisfaction, but to please Lord Krsna. He warned us not to misunderstand the phrase, "*yayatma suprasidati*—such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self." Pra- bupada said this doesn't mean that we should serve Krsna with the condition that we will be satisfied as a result. No, even if we are not satisfied, a devotee serves as duty, as his constitutional nature. Prabhupada quoted Lord Caitanya's verse, *aslisya va pada-ratam pinastu mam . . .* "Even if You don't come to Me, I'll go on serving You forever." That was an eye- opener. I myself seek satisfaction, and in other lectures, Srila Prabhupada says it's natural that we do, so we should seek that satisfaction in the Lord's service. In this Vrndavana lecture,

however, he let us have it straight and uncompromising – if you are seeking your own satisfaction from this service, then you won't be able to join with Lord Krsna in the spiritual world. Not yet.

When I read it, I flashed on this Bhakta Bob story. Is it my fun? Is it done out of service to please the Lord and with no other motive? Seems lacking on those points.

ere is this story going? Maybe Bob can meet a samvysai who happens to be visiting Antwerp. The *sannyasi* is writing a book called *The Daily News*. It's an expose on the futility of news reporting and materialistic problem-solving. The subtitle is *All Things Fail Without Krsna*. The *sannyasi* meets Bob and engages him in service. He asks Bob to put together a file of newspaper clippings under different categories. Bob has to read through the articles and decide whether they belong under "War" or "Maya in the News," like that – twenty-eight categories. Bob starts to do it with enthusiasm, but soon feels agitated by reading of all the suffering and cheating and *pra-jalpa* (unnecessary talking about Michael Jackson and the skating star, Kerrigan, and Clinton and condoms and you name it). He sheepishly asks the *sannyasi* to relieve him of this duty. The *sannyasi* apologizes for giving it to him in the first place. Bob is not so impressed with him, or at least not impressed with his newspaper clippings.

That's just an anecdote. The main thing is that Bob tries to read Prabhupada's books as he said he would. He gets into *Bhagavac'gita As It Is*. It's slow-going, but that's okay too. He takes a little every day and keeps going with attention. There's

not much to tell you about that. If you want to know what he read, you can (and should) reread the *Bhagavad'gita* yourself. Bob also put on some weight, but he didn't oversleep.

^There's an author's conference going on with a sign on the door, "Do not Disturb." Guess what they're talking about? No, not whether to keep this story's scaffolding when it's all finished. We already promised we'd keep it. They're talking about whether to end this story pronto.

You know what I think? I think they're just trying to get out of work.

"We are getting too performance-oriented."

"It's got to be a story."

I hope Bob doesn't overhear this and develop an inferiority complex about his humble and shadowy origins in the dawn of the first chapter. He could just disappear, you know, and then the author's conference and whatever they decide would have no meaning.

Look, if I'm the main reader (and that's what I'm supposed to be), then why get hung up? I don't care if Bob lives happily ever after in ISKCON Antwerp. Really, why worry that he has to do something or become something? You guys are overworking your brains. You've read too many books by Norman Mailer and Thomas Hardy on how to be a writer. Did you read anything by P. G. Wodehouse? He wrote a hundred novels.

Forget it. Tell me your own sorrows and hopes. Don't bother about bobbery. Do you know what that word means? It's Anglo- Indian, meaning the way Hindus talk after the British rule. It means a commotion. Give us Bob, when you like, but not bob

bery. And this much discipline, to end each chapter with Hare Krsna
Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama
Rama Hare Hare.

(Dear reader, please stop and read the maha-mantra.)

9

bobber is a person or thing that bobs. It's also a buoyant device, as a cork, attached to a fishing line to hold the baited hook at a desired depth. The word bobbery actually comes from the Hindi *bap-re*, "O father!" An exclamation of sorrow or surprise.

O *bap're*, this is not a wisdom book because our Bob is just a buoyant boy from County Cork who bobbed up to Dublin. We met him on the way, walking down a lane surrounded by yellow gorse bushes and we proposed to him (or virtually abducted him), "Please be in our story." If you write about a bumpkin, how can you give depth and wisdom?

Of course, anyone's coming to Krsna consciousness is a cause for rejoicing. The Vaisnavas and Krsna Himself are pleased. It was certainly pleasing that Bob Case started studying Prabhupada's *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. He read by himself in a cupboard they let him use as his room. He also joined Jatu Prabhu once a day and Jatu would read aloud to him from *Srimad'Bhagavatam*. Jatu read from the Third Canto on the qualities of the Vaisnava, as taught by Kapiladeva.

"Listen to this," said Jatu. "These are the qualities of a devotee." Jatu read aloud while Bob listened peacefully.

"The pure devotee should execute devotional service by giving the greatest respect to the spiritual master and the *acaryas*. He should be compassionate to the poor and make friendship with persons who are his equals . . . ' Isn't that wonderful? In the purport Prabhupada says that this compassion to the poor doesn't mean those who are poverty-stricken materially. It refers to all people, who are considered poor because they are not Krsna conscious. He enlightens them and brings them up to Krsna consciousness. As for making friends, Prabhupada

says there is no point making friends with ordinary persons. Listen to this:

“There are innumerable books, such as the *Puranas*, *Maha- bharata*, *Bhagavatam*, *Bhagavad'gita* and *Ljpanisads*, which contain countless subjects for discussion among two devotees or more. Friendship should be cemented between persons with mutual interests and understanding. Such persons are said to be *svci'jati*, ‘of the same caste.’ The devotee should avoid a person whose character is not fixed in the standard understanding; even though he may be a Vaisnava, or a devotee of Krsna . . . ” Bob thought the *Bhagavatam* was wonderful, especially when he heard a devotee enthusiastically reading it. He hoped that one day he could attain the qualities of a Vaisnava, or at least go on hearing about them. When Jatu paused too long, Bob asked him, “Could you read some more?”

Jatu read aloud, “A devotee should always try to hear about spiritual matters and should always utilize his time in chanting the holy name of the Lord. His behavior should always be straightforward and simple, and although he is not envious but friendly to everyone, he should avoid the company of persons who are not spiritually advanced.’

“When one is fully qualified with all these transcendental attributes and his consciousness is thus completely purified, he is immediately attracted simply by hearing My name or hearing of My transcendental qualities.” Jatu put down the book and looked at Bob. “Prabhupada also says that even though a devotee may attain these attributes, he should never be proud of them. The symptoms of a devotee are meekness and humility. As Lord Caitanya taught us, we should be humbler than the grass on the street and more tolerant than the tree.” Jatu read and spoke and Bob relished.

C/th, wisdom behold, what do you see from the third-floor window of this temple building? Signs in Dutch—I can't make them out. In the dictionary, bob is soon followed by bodhisattva, an enlightened person who refuses *nirvana* in order to assist suffering mankind. Sooner or later in this novelette, we will have to take some action regarding Bob and preaching. Are you going to give him books and a book bag? You've got him reading and hearing *Srimad' Bhagavatam* in the company of a respectable devotee. Now he ought to get out and preach. What do you think?

Of course, that was our intention. If he stayed in the Dublin temple, he'd have joined Prabhupada dasa in front of the post office. P. dasa would have taught him his friendly gestures and how to offer books to passersby while tolerating the taunts. Bob would have seen how some persons like to stop and talk philosophy with P. dasa and how he sells a fair amount of books. Bob would be enlivened to learn of Prabhupada dasa's attitude toward life on the street with Prabhupada's books. I'm sure he'll go back there and do that in the end.

Also, the tour through Europe would have introduced us all to nightly festivals with mass *kirtanas* and *prasadam* and book distribution.

Yeah, but that stuff didn't happen yet.

It will. Take it that it is happening. You know, preaching is always going on in one way or another, not only when you are on the street or when the rock band is playing Hare Krsna to a hall full of people. We preach in many ways.

That's all right, but I just want to see that Bob gets some direct experience of the mainstream outreach. He shouldn't only be reading in a cupboard in downtown Antwerp.

Yes, I share your concern. To be sure, these pages will tell of him preaching. Just let it come. (Doesn't this carper remember

that Bob was preaching to whomever he met when he was hitchhiking in Bohemia?)

Jr's not always wisdom and play. Some of it's hard work and page-filling. Word count. Just doing it. You lay back on your cot and wait for the muse to whisper, but then you think, "Watch out! Sleep isn't far away." Now stand up and write from that position. You will be asked at death whether you were writing with all your stars out, writing from the heart.

A smug editor lets me "indulge." In North America, the bob- white calls its quail song and the bobolink lands and then flies through fields and meadows. On the back road at Gita-nagari, farm machinery rusts and mice run through the abandoned ox power unit, while a golden cat stalks them. Spring is not far away. There's an abandoned car in those woods. Its owner is in South India and I think of him. We both look sadly, our wrinkled faces show thoughtfulness and disappointment, aging too, but we are ready in a moment to smile. After all, we have Krsna consciousness to live for. Could I tell my friend of Bob? He'd like the word play. I rest my Robert Case.

Meanwhile, in the heavens, rubric clouds vanished and left a blue sky over the Adriatic.

Yes, my Bob prospered by his stay in Antwerp. And then one day . . .

10

Die was reading in *Bhagavad'gita* and came to the second chapter, Text 7, "Now I am confused about my duty ... I am asking You to tell me for certain what is best for me. Now I am Your disciple, and a soul surrendered unto You. Please instruct me." Bob realized he needed a guru.

"Prabhupada is your guru," said Jatu, when Bob asked.

The visiting *sannyasi* said, "Prabhupada is everyone's guru, but still you have to approach one of his disciples and be initiated into the *sampradaya*."

Bob thought that he didn't know anyone he could consider his guru. Maybe he should go look for one.

"If your everyday life seems poor to you, do not accuse it; accuse yourself, tell yourself you are not poet enough to summon up its riches; since for the creator there is no poverty and no poor or unimportant place." (Rainer Maria Rilke)

For the creator? Who is that, Lord Brahma? Are we creators now? Maniacs of self-assumed power? Oh, the world of imagination. Srila Prabhupada: "Imagination is only imagination and leads to further imagination."

Stark confrontation. I feel like a tired bird, but at the same time I want to keep flying.

Someone writes a story about vampires in Maine and sells a million books. I'm not griping. I like to cut out all these influences, but it's not possible. Today four weeks of mail arrived. If you don't behave, if you are not a devotee, then how can you advise others? If you can speak or write expertly, but you are

not a devotee, what good can you do for others? Am I not of the saffron tribe? Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

11

°AVh o are you, Bhakta Bob?

"I am your own self. I come from the fields, a friendly scarecrow, a Frankenstein. I can speak this way or whatever way you wish. (I'm a puppet of your imagination.) But I do have a core of independent identity that has sprung up from you."

What do you want to do in your Krsna conscious life?

"I don't know. I need guidance. Maybe I shouldn't get married. Maybe I should. Maybe to Pegeen, maybe to the bronze woman, Molly Malone, who wheels her wheelbarrow/ down streets broad and narrow/ crying 'Cockles and mussels, alive, alive-o!'"

Do you uh . . . are you alive? Are you like the young Polish man I know? What was it like when we left you alone in Bohemia?

"You know, ask yourself."

Bob, I can't get rid of you. I mean, why do you even exist at all? Why don't I just forget you?

"It's too late to crumple me into a ball or shred me. The soul cannot be cut or dried."

Do you have a soul?

"Do you?"

I asked you first.

"I don't know. But you wish me to be a story figure, a person like Alice in Wonderland or Chota or Nimai, right? You want me to live in the hearts of readers in the great tradition of literary fiction. That can happen if you skillfully patch me together. Some Fergus, some Subala, some Parasurama, some Satsvarupa . . . But I don't think you have the gumption or discipline, and neither do you believe it's worth taking the time to 'create' me."

Because in the end, you don't really exist.

"That's your fault. Would you say that Romeo and Juliet don't exist? Are they not eternal young lovers? Do you think Chota doesn't exist? They exist in a world of imagination and those who partake in it believe it and add it to their lives. We don't even see the souls of those flesh and blood people whom we see and touch and smell every day. We only see their bodies. It's possible you could see as much soul in a literary character as you do in a flesh and blood boss or wife or son. But you haven't brought me out enough. I remain a kind of joke, a paper weight, a motto, a cut-out doll. I'm your 'Bhakta Bob' whom you play with and toss this way and that saying, 'What shall I do with him next?' If you give me more life and freedom, I could act in real ways and accomplish your purpose."

Sorry about that.

LJ got a letter in the big FedEx box of letters from a real live Bhakta Bob. I quickly scanned through the dozens of letters, looking at the upper left hand part of the envelope for the name of the sender, and it flashed by: "Bhakta Rob." What? There is one?

Bhakta Rob is real. He began his letter, "I am currently writing to you from N.Y. I was very inspired . . . " He has service in the Brooklyn temple where he lives. He's thinking of getting married. He's a member of a Krsna conscious rock band and they're going on an international tour soon. He has been thinking a lot about *japa* and prayer. "My question is, is it best for me to avoid self-prayer and try to adopt and recite the mood of prayers I read by the *acaryas*, or "

Shall I steal from Bhakta Rob and give to Bhakta Bob?

"You don't have to. I have my own life. Just see me for what I am."

(He's growing like a worm, like the flowers in the yard. He and I are friends, partners. Dinanatha dasa is also a little bit of Bhakta Bob. He's Italian, but he wears a sweatshirt that says, "Team Partners.")

In the mail, someone sent me a copy of Kafka's *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*. She wrote: "Kafka is both captivating and disturbing. A bright light in too narrow and plain a room." She was interested in the patchwork of poetry and prose, single sentences and rambling notes, journal entries and narrative, and "I thought the variety of expression might encourage you to continue with your free-form style."

He's another crazy man, not like me. I'm a perfectly sane devotee, a transcendentalist (not a speculator like Thoreau). I'm making fun here, but it's true, I should take responsibility for the gift of Krsna consciousness and write nicely.

Kafka begins his Octavo notebook like this:

Everyone carries a room about inside him. This fact can even be proved by means of the sense of hearing. If someone walks fast and one pricks up one's ears and listens, say in the night, when everything round about is quiet, one hears, for instance, the rattling of a mirror not quite firmly fastened to the wall.

Isn't that strange, to say you have a room inside you which if you listen, you will *hear* as "the rattling of a mirror not quite firmly fastened to the wall"? He's unhinged, not quite right, not quite fastened to the wall.

Another letter was from a *sannyasi* Godbrother. He said he preferred "neutral, professional" writing to personal writing, at least as executed by the nondevotee poets, whom he finds

wearisome. He said in Natalie Goldberg, what you get after all the discipline and intensity is just “a mixed up Jewish girl like my sister and her friends.” I wrote back and said we can use what the nondevotee writers are doing and employ it in Krsna consciousness if it’s helpful.

Come back to Bob. He rotted. His flesh grew old in a week, in a day even, or was he immune from that and that is why we are interested in him—he is neither soul nor body, but a paper kite?

Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare
Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

12

~~But~~ Bob narrate.

"I am at a crossroads. The night is dark. No moon in sight. Guards on the border. How can I cross? I withdraw into myself. I chant the Hare Krsna mantra. I'm just a new *bhakta*. I am at a crossroads. I have to get more serious. It will eventually come. I'll find out what to do in Krsna consciousness.

"We have fun in Antwerp. I read in my cupboard, then sit with Jatu, who reads *Srimad'Bhagavatam* to me. We hear the philosophy straight from Srila Prabhupada. Once a devotee came traveling through and told rumors. He said this movement is imperfect and doesn't offer a loving home. I spoke with Jatu about that and he said it was true, but it's a lot better than anything we'll find in the material world. Perfection means surrendering to guru and Krsna and then going back to Godhead. That's what all devotees want to do. Jatu also said I'll have to get used to the many imperfections devotees have and live with those imperfections in this movement and in myself. But I mustn't become disillusioned by them. I should just persist in going after the goal.

"The question is, should I go back to Ireland? Or what should my service be? I am at a crossroad and that is the story. How to resolve it? They say I'll have to resolve it in seven days and then start off clearly in one direction.

"The night was dark. The border guards were practicing with their rifles—shooting at targets. I approached the toll booth and showed my passport. 'Where's Ireland?' asked one.

"That irked me.

"The night was dark . . . "

Sin right, Bob. Thanks. If you can take up more of the responsibility, I'd appreciate it. You seem to be a good narrator; you have a lot of potential. If you could carry the burden of the story, that would be better. After all, who knows you better than you, right? Just straighten out some of the words. For example, it's "crossroads," not "crossbow." And the repetition about the night. Well, that's okay, I guess. But the real thing is to give this story direction, plot, suspense, and lacking that, to at least care very much about it, to write from the heart.

Bob: "Otherwise, it's chewing the chewed, right?"

Yeah, you could say that.

^Dinanatha was supposed to cook today so Madhu could have time to fix the van. Just as Madhu was about to begin work, Dinanatha remarked that he had a wart on his finger. Madhu said it was contagious and that it may be conveyed to me (the author) through the cooking, so he sent Dinanatha out to buy a pair of rubber gloves. There was no store nearby, so Dinanatha didn't get back until 1 P.M., which was, of course, after the lunch was already cooked. It was an excellent lunch, but Madhu didn't get any work done on the van. However, he did start on it this afternoon.

I'm in the van now, writing this kindergarten story. I like the idea of kindergarten stories because it indicates the level of skill in storytelling (compared to Chekhov) and also because in kindergarten, you are allowed to play with finger paints, blocks, and other toys without having to compete or come up to any educational standards. It's a period of introduction to school, but allows for the fact that you're only five or six years old and still prone to wanting to play in the garden.

That may not be the best idea, but I kind of like it. In my old age, I can reread these stories and show them to like-minded friends if I find any. I can't take the pressure or confinement of a writing assignment or a writing mentor or a class, so I'll write to please myself as a way to get free and surrender my private best to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Then there'll be no argument, no competition, just love and relaxation and yes, fighting against the inevitable, troublesome elements. I have no ax to grind, no people to grind.

(Today I started keeping an account of how much I am reading in Srīla Prabhupada's books. I plan to total the time and comment on the level of reading performance. Start the account, and the practice will follow. So you see, I'm a good sort of *parampara* fellow, just in case you get the wrong idea from this book on Bob.)

, can you take over?

"The day was bright. I was sense-controlled. I stepped onto the street and looked both ways. The *harinama* party was going out for the first time in a week and I was with them. We had a Balaram *mrdanga* and I was playing the *karatalas*. Our group consisted of four men and two *matajis*. We walked in single file. It was great to chant and hear our voices ring out and bounce off the city buildings. Miseries, begone! *Karmis*, hear the news! All glories to the shout of *hariboll*

"They were hurrying home from work and we sang as they rushed past us trying to ignore what we were doing. I was doing pretty good, but then started looking into store windows. Even then, I had the singing to return to and the demand of doing *harinama*.

“I say all glories to Lord Caitanya’s *sankirtana*. The day was bright. I think I’m not even at a crossroads. Or maybe I am, but I am not this body. I have to cross over birth and death.

“I am at a crossroads. The day is bright. I’m writing this on the fourth floor of the building after *harinama* and taking *prasadam*. I’ll read a little bit and then take- rest. I’m sorry, Mister, if this ain’t a book, and I’m sorry about your book and your expectations. I wish I were real. Maybe you should start all over with a real character, or forget fiction and just write as you desire in a Krsna conscious way as you do in your writing sessions. I won’t mind and who can stop us or blame us? I can become a regular member of this temple or go back to Ireland. I promise I’ll be a devotee. I don’t have to be a literary character in a novel. Let’s face it, I’m no Oliver Twist, and you’re no Charles Dickens. Just say the word and we can wrap it up as you like. At any rate, Hare Krsna to everyone and to all a good night. God bless us, every one!”

13

'Dear reader, this is Bhakta Bob. After I wrote that last entry, I stayed up late talking with the author. We decided to have a parting of the ways. He's going on to write other stories, probably not as fictional as this one, and I will conclude "Introducing Bhakta Bob" by telling you the story as I see it.

When I think of what we've written so far, a lot of energy has gone into trying to understand me, Bob. It's not that I've done so much soul-searching, but the author is always asking on my behalf, "Who am I? Who created me?" As far as I know, fictional characters hardly ever talk that way. They just exist and do their thing like everyone else. Of course, some flesh and blood people do ask, "Who am I?" and it's not a futile question. I heard in the *Caitanya'Caritamṛta* that when Sanatana Gosvami approached Lord Caitanya, Sanatana asked, "Who am I and why do the material miseries always give me trouble? How can I get free of suffering?" Lord Caitanya told him that he was the eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa. This is the actual identity of every "character" or *jīva*, living being.

If a fictional character asks the same question, then what's the answer? Is it, "You were created by the author of this book"? That's factually true, but then we have to go and ask the author for the origin of the character in the book. One author may tell you that he got him from a dream and someone else may assert that he created him from a composite of people he knows in real life.

I heard another story in the *Srīmad'Bhāgavatam* that reminds me of this. One time Narada Muni approached his father, Lord Brahma, and said, "Are you actually the ultimate creator? You seem to have everything in your control, just like someone keeps a walnut within his fist, but sometimes I see

you meditate. Is there a being higher than you?" Lord Brahma said honestly that he was a humble servant of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. If you ask an author, however, or if one of his characters could ask him, "Who created me? Are you the ultimate creator?" I think most authors would reply, "Yes, I am your creator. There is no creator other than me." If it's true that everything comes from God, though, then it should also be true of fictional characters.

In one sense, a literary character is a product of madness set loose by an egoistic author. Or what is he? I don't know. But he's definitely not supposed to be extremely self-conscious or too concerned about his origin. He is supposed to be, as far as possible, like a flesh and blood, heart-beating human (or animal) who eats and sleeps and mates and defends, sometimes thinks about God or doesn't, and most important of all—has some conflict or obsession.

Putting these speculations aside, let me tell my story. You know some of it already. Before you met me in Chapter One, I was born in County Clare, Ireland, and was raised by my father, who was a shepherd, and my mother, who took care of the five kids, in a cottage. I was raised as a Catholic, went to the local schools and church, and played with kids in a simple way. We were somewhat removed from the heavy Kali-yuga influence of Dublin. Therefore, I didn't take drugs or have much illicit sex. I can't remember much of my days at home right now, and when I think back to them, although I have some nice memories, I realize I was as covered over as a tree.

Things really started happening the day I met the devotees and got the magazine. According to what the devotees say, someone who comes to Krsna consciousness in this lifetime must have practiced it before. On the other hand, that's not so important, provided we get the mercy now from a pure devotee.

It's another one of those things, like your origin, that you can't really figure out. There is no definite conclusion. I take it that I am definitely the recipient of mercy coming from Lord Caitanya and Srila Prabhupada, which has reached out to the little suffering island known as Eire.

As for this story, I think my life since I became a devotee has pretty much been described, although sketchily. Actually, my whole devotional life is rather sketchy. I have an initial impetus to be a devotee, so it's auspicious, but I still have to make that desire solid. I don't think I've even begun. How easily I got knocked off the track and left that traveling party over a little quarrel and false ego. The real question is, where do I go from here?

I think I'll stay here for a while. It doesn't seem important for me to go back to Ireland. Better I get fixed up as a devotee. I need a spiritual master. I will try to find one who represents Srila Prabhupada. I accept that the *parampara* is continuing eternally and that I have to link up to it, but it can't be done as a matter of convention. I want to learn as much as I can of the philosophy and practices and associate with good devotees. Then one day, I can only hope to meet my spiritual master. In fact, I'm sure I will. In the meantime, I wish to prepare myself for that moment by learning to balance *sadhana* with preaching. There's plenty of preaching to do here in Antwerp. This center is small and it has a nice family feeling to it. The people in the town are pretty materialistic, just like everywhere in Europe, but there are interested people too. People visit the temple regularly, and the *harinama*, book distribution, and *pra-sadam* distribution are unlimited. Everything depends on our willingness to go out and meet people.

I would like to please Prabhupada by becoming a humble preacher and chanter of the holy name, and a reader of his

books. I'm sure that by his pleasure, all the mercy I require will flow to me. I'll get further guidance too, in the form of guru, Vaisnava, and scripture.

I would like to stay with you, dear reader, and live through different adventures in Krsna consciousness through this story, but sooner or later we'd have to part, even if this book ran into six hundred pages.

If a character is successful, the reader will remember him. In my case, perhaps my poor example will be of some use to you in your own efforts to become a devotee of Krsna. I wish you well. Who knows, perhaps we will meet again. Such things are not under the control of any mortal author, but under the control of the supreme author, who creates all meetings and partings and who lives as Supersoul in the hearts of everyone and everything. All glories to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and all glories to you, dear reader. Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

Epilogue

Let me tie up some loose ends here – make final apologies, obeisances, good wishes, and hopes for the future.

This has been an apprentice story, an experiment in which I have explored what fiction is and how much I actually want to work in this genre. I learned some things and had some fun. Rather than just shut off one part of my brain by “suspending disbelief” and writing a make-believe story, I tried to stay awake, even on the page, to non-fiction reality. I wanted to stay open and admit my reluctance to play the deceptive game, the lie that is fiction, in the name of a higher truth. At the same time, I kept yielding to the lure of fiction, to wanting that power of imagination whereby I could write to you, dear reader, and carry us both along in a Krsna conscious narration.

But the most important thing for me is the substance and relevance of whatever I write to Krsna consciousness. That is the real “problem” of this story. As I understand it, this substance will be given to the writer as a natural consequence of his full practice of Krsna consciousness. To be a devotee-writer, it’s not enough to have a facile way with words or be able to create vivid scenes and characters. One has to actually be a practitioner, following the rules and regulations of devotional service and chanting Hare Krsna. Then out of realization from the life of devotional service, including one’s failings, one can write something to share with others. As Srila Prabhupada said, we should read the *Bhagavatam*, assimilate it, speak it in our own words, “and make a literary career.” The purpose of our writing, even if we don’t know it, is self-purification. If we can tell that true story, it will also function as a kind of preaching or glorification of Krsna and devotional service as the only solution to the world’s miseries.

Again, I request the reader to please accept my humble obeisances,
and may you always remember Krsna.

Letters From a *Sannyas*

Introduction

The letters in this section are sequels to the letters I published as *Dear Sky, Letters From a Sannyasi*. In the preface to that book, I described how I write anywhere between a hundred and two hundred letters a month. Then don't I want relief from letter writing? I find writing "letters from a san-nyasi" a relief. They are not really like letters because I don't expect replies, and they are written deliberately to persons or personified objects to whom I can freely speak my heart.

I once read a short story about a man who was grieving for his dead son. He wanted to talk to somebody about his feelings. No one would listen. He was a cab driver, and even the people he chauffeured didn't want to hear his heartfelt expression. By the end of the night, he spoke out his grief to his horse.

Of course, people do respond to letters I write them, but there are times when people don't want anyone to respond. They simply want to speak their heart in safety and with silent sympathy. Talking to a flower is like that. The flower is a receptacle for the words, but it doesn't respond, react, feel hurt, shocked, or look for guidance from what I say. It's simply an ear.

These letters are written in a little different mood than for communication. As soon as communication gets in the way, things get qualified and modified and adjusted, and the raw expression loses its validity. In humility, we may hear ourselves saying, "Well, I'm not really like that," and we qualify our own feelings or adjust them based on another's reactions. I don't want to sound cynical—communication is good—but when it's rapid or shallow, it doesn't always satisfy the heart. We don't always have to be communicating to convince one

another of our point of view. Sometimes we just want to speak our minds.

Emily Dickinson wrote a line describing her body of poetry: "This is my letter to the world who never wrote to me." She was cut off from the world, and it's true, the world never did write her. She was never published and people didn't come after her or pay her any attention. She also never married. It may have been a cry of loneliness in her case.

I have sometimes thought of that line in connection with my "letters from a sannyasi," but in a different way. I mean something different when I repeat that line. Because the world, at least enough of the world, or more of the world than I can handle, does write me, I can't claim that the world never wrote to me. I'm not neglected in that way. But the flower world never wrote me, the river world never wrote me, the tree world, the bug world, the world of deceased people and foxes and sheep. I no longer expect Srila Prabhupada to write me, and I have never received a letter from Krsna. I am writing with that awareness.

Therefore, I say, this is my letter to the world that never wrote me. It's a special, secret world, and I like to think of that other world as much as I like to think of the one that does correspond.

Dear Srlla Prabhupada,

lease accept my humble obeisances at your lotus feet.

I want to thank you for being who you are. This morning I gathered with two of your *brahmacari* followers and read from your translation and purports of the *Caitanya'Caritamrta*. There's one verse where Lord Caitanya is addressed as Prabhu- pada, and in your purport, you say that Visnu-tattva, including Lord Nityananda, are called Prabhupada. You defined "Prabhupada" as one at whose feet many masters take shelter. Of course, the exalted *acaryas* Rupa Gosvami, Haridasa Thakura, and Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura are called Prabhupada by their followers, so it was nice to hear one of the *brahmacaris* say how appropriately this definition fits you.

If some of your Godbrothers, feeling equal to you or even senior, didn't feel right in calling you Prabhupada, I don't see how anyone could say we weren't justified in addressing you with that title. Thousands of souls have taken shelter at your lotus feet.

Therefore, I want to thank you, Srlla Prabhupada, for presenting everything so expertly. Thank you for being patient with me and your other disciples. It's taking some of us years — a lifetime — to realize some of your basic teachings and to appreciate you as our best friend. Who else would have worked so selflessly to reinstate us in our spiritual position if they didn't love us?

Srlla Prabhupada, I have embarked once more on writing these letters. I try to do one each morning. This morning as I thought who to write to, I thought of you. I just wanted to thank you for being who you are. And please accept my humble obeisances. I am ready to accept whatever direction you give me.

Dear Dumb Sheep,

You are assembled at the top of this hill where I have come walking. I chose to walk in the hills today. Here you are, a dozen woolly, timid sheep.

It's still so gray — there's a line of dark rosiness in the clouds — and we can't see each other face to face. But as soon as you noticed me coming up your hill, a tall human with a stick, I could tell you were nervous. You grouped and regrouped around your leader, waiting for him to bolt so you could all bolt with him. I don't want to disturb you unnecessarily, so I have stopped a little distance from you.

Did you know that as I was walking up this hill, I was thinking of *Srimad' Bhagavatam*? I even thought of addressing this letter to the *Bhagavatam* itself, but I didn't feel qualified. I don't really have anything to say that would be worthy of Srila Vyasadeva's hearing. What could I say, except a childish thing like, "I like *Srimad' Bhagavatam*"? I know, dear sheep, that the *Bhagavatam* is beyond your comprehension. Even what I understand of the *Bhagavatam* is beyond your comprehension.

Did you know, however, that the *Bhagavatam* is full of good news for you? It says in there that you are spirit souls and are as good as I am. Somehow or other, you are now in a deplorable condition and about to be slaughtered. You stand side by side, ignorant of what will happen to you even tomorrow. But you are eternal souls, and eventually, over perhaps millions of lives, you will come to realize that.

The *Bhagavatam* tells the story of Gajendra, an elephant, and how he prayed to the Supreme Lord. Gajendra had been cursed. In his previous life, he was Indradyumna Maharaja. He remembered both his previous birth and the mantra that he had chanted to the Lord. Of course, he was an enlightened sage

dwelling in an animal's body. Even if you're not enlightened now, after your ordeal in this woolly species, and perhaps many other species, you will get a chance to become enlightened. Krsna will bless you at some point.

Where are you going? I haven't said anything to make you fear me. Rather, I am your friend. You look like bored materialists who want to get on with something more exciting. Was I too pedantic in my presentation? All right, if that's how you feel, I'll take advantage of your leaving and "take possession" of the top of this hill.

You can still hear me, dumb sheep. Should I continue my sermon? I was saying how nice *Srimad'Bhagavatam* is. I especially like the sections where the devotees speak their prayers to the Lord – Dhruva Maharaja, Gajendra, Prahlada. I like to give classes on those sections by taking what Prabhupada has written in his purports, condensing it, and then savoring it with the devotees. I like becoming more and more aware of the *Bhagavatam's* importance and how it's all connected to original Krsna, whose personal pastimes are described fully in the Tenth Canto.

Dear sheep, the first morning light is just starting to appear. Nature's stage director is gradually turning up the lights. Now all of you are up on your spindly feet, looking around, feeling the breeze, and preparing to start your day's chewing. All I can say to you is Hare Krsna. If I lived here all the time, I might make a regular practice of coming near you and speaking to your dumb ears. Perhaps I'd get more reciprocation from you, or understanding why I am standing here talking to you who can't respond, who are afraid of me, and who are so much in need of the *Bhagavatam's* teachings. You impel me to remember that the spirit soul is present in every body and that a sage has equal vision. Krsna is in your heart.

Dear Friends,

I'm writing this letter to you while leaning back on a rock in this cold, wet bogland in Ireland. It's hard to believe it's summer. My rubber rain gear keeps me dry. I'm up on a hill. There's nobody except sheep around for miles. It's 6:30 in the morning. The sky is no longer gray. The blue sky and white clouds are bringing up the morning.

I have already chanted my sixteen rounds. Now I'm sitting here for a last few minutes contemplating whether I want to communicate with you right now or not. I do want to communicate, but I am also aware that by communicating with you, I will create a conflict or tension between that and just being alone to enter deeper into a wordless communion with nature and Krsna. There is a time for both kinds of communications; we have to have minute to minute awareness: what will help our Krsna consciousness most right now.

For me, it's a fact that even if I could go alone, sooner or later I would want to retrieve something of my experience and share it with my friends. That's what Prabhupada wants of^v me. If I had no desire to share my experiences, then I would be in *bhajanandi* life. Therefore, even when a Prabhupada follower goes alone, he plans for how his aloneness can benefit others. Then that aloneness becomes preaching. It sounds contradictory, but it's not. I can preach about the benefits of solitude.

As I write, three sheep are walking down the hill into a valley far below me. They are soundless, and their innocent white bodies moving down the path into the pasture are somehow a beautiful sight. God's creation resembles His original abode. Every beautiful thing we see around us can remind us of Goloka. The rosy clouds speak of Goloka. The birds here make

us think of birds there. The only thing missing here is Krsna and the transformation that every living being experiences in Krsna's direct presence. If it were Krsna walking down that path playing His flute, barefoot, with boys running in front and behind and calves gamboling around Him, I wouldn't just be sitting here leaning against a stone. I would want to join and serve Him, not sit here and watch, like a lone philosopher.

The rosy skies here, the smoke-like clouds moving in the sky, even the gnats that pester me—everything is speaking and preaching about the necessity for Krsna consciousness.

I've used up my time and yours too. My morning duties are under way. I'll leave this field, but I'll be coming back here this afternoon. I'll sit and read a few verses of *Bhagavad'gita*. I'm hoping that gradually, and even imperceptibly, as I hear Krsna speak, I'll be infused by His words. Then when I meet you in Mayapur or Gita-nagari or wherever, I'll have a pleasant surprise for you. I'll actually be more in touch with Krsna. I'll be representing Him and more able to assure you of His presence in all of our lives.

Dear ISKCON,

^Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

I don't want to take on a huge topic in this letter, but let me make a few partial statements. Maybe later I can add to them.

You, dear institution, are such a complex entity that there is little I can say that everyone will accept as fact. I know your history, especially of the early days, and that's always fun to describe. Prabhupada compared your birth to the appearance of Lord Varaha from Lord Brahma's nostril. He was small and then grew quickly. You first appeared in Srila Prabhupada's mind and then grew quickly in America, attracting dozens, then hundreds, then thousands of young men and women. Prabhupada was the magnet that drew us—Prabhupada with his Hare Krsna mantra, *krsna-prasadam*, and knowledge of Krsna. It's safe to say, therefore, that you are a spiritual entity. Lord Krsna has appeared in you just as much as He has appeared in His other forms in Kali-yuga.

The complexity comes when we start describing the wrongs that have occurred in ISKCON in the name of ISKCON. Are you, ISKCON, Vaikuntha or even a sample of Vaikuntha? Some say that the original ISKCON, Prabhupada's movement, no longer exists. They think we are left with only a corrupt outer shell. Others say that whoever criticizes ISKCON is a demon. In other words, some equate you with the Krsna consciousness movement, the flow of Lord Caitanya's *sankirtana*, and that you will always remain victorious despite all appearances to the contrary. Others don't agree. They say that you are not the representative of pure Krsna consciousness, but an institutionalized, GBC-governed entity that moves along from

year to year veering sometimes to the left and sometimes to the right, but not often resolving its problems.

I said at the beginning of this letter that I wasn't going to bite off more than I could chew and try to cut through the various opinions. What's prompting me to write this letter today is that I just received a letter in which someone attempted to describe my own relationship with ISKCON. This person said that I seem to have major disagreements with ISKCON and that except for my seniority, I would probably be in trouble with the authorities of this movement. The letter implied that if I actually followed my own inclinations, I might leave ISKCON entirely. The person who wrote this letter is himself disgusted with ISKCON and has left in search of better association.

That letter makes me want to address my own connection to you, ISKCON, Prabhupada's movement. First, I do believe that you are still Prabhupada's movement. I don't think I am just playing it safe in my lack of criticism of this movement. The person who wrote me criticized me for being apathetic toward the wrongs in ISKCON and suggested that if I were a real witness of truth, I would speak out against those wrongs.

I have a response to that: let me correct my own wrongs. That includes not getting entangled in what I may see as wrong behavior in ISKCON. It's a quiet method of reform; it's nonpolitical, and it's what I can do best. You are still Prabhupada's movement. I don't think the saying "ISKCON, with all thy faults, I love thee" is outmoded. If I can say it deeply despite the wrongs and by being persistently loyal, then it's the best position I can take.

What are those wrongs? You know the charges. We went wrong in drastic ways after Srila Prabhupada's disappearance. The top leadership gets the blame for that. Some say there has

been no reform of the basic wrong attitudes which drive devotees away—manipulative power-hungry leaders, branding as heretics devotees who have differing opinions, offending Gau- diya Vaisnavas from other camps, and so on.

ISKCON, with all thy faults I love thee. I have seen and felt how beautiful it is to be in a temple, gathering together with your members to see the Deities at *mangala'drati*, or at an afternoon *arati* with only a few devotees present and late sunlight streaming through the window. I've seen the preaching drive in your members as they risk their lives to distribute Prabhupada's books and maintain you in unsettled places in this material world. Sentimental? You could say so, but such a skeptic would think that devotion to Krsna was sentimental.

Remember that sensational "true crime" book, *Monkey on a Stick*? The thing that horrified an ISKCON member on looking through that book was how they had distorted the quality of ISKCON life. The authors had distorted facts and were even often mistaken. They did have the police records—who killed whom, who misappropriated funds, who misled devotees, who fell down—but even in those cases, their description of what it was like for the average temple devotee was bogus and based on no experience. The author couldn't see into the devotees' hearts and he couldn't understand Krsna's statement that even if a devotee commits abominable behavior, he is still rightly situated. They don't know how precious and rare it is for someone in this world to render sincere service to Srila Prabhupada and Krsna in this movement.

It's true that one can render sincere service to Krsna—and it is probably possible to render service to Prabhupada outside of ISKCON. But if it can be done outside of ISKCON, why can't it be done inside ISKCON? If there are sincere persons both within and without ISKCON, then I choose to be within.

That's where Prabhupada wants me to be as far as I know. If ISKCON were devoid of sincere devotees and had actually become corrupt, then who could follow it and say that it was what Prabhupada wanted? But I would be very, very afraid of deciding that ISKCON was so corrupt that Prabhupada would no longer want me to serve here. When I meet up with Prabhupada again, how can I say, "But Prabhupada, I thought ISKCON was completely bogus and that we should leave"? His voice echoes in my mind: "Who said? Who is that rascal?"

I admit that I fail to face up to all of ISKCON's faults. I feel too protective and loyal. I don't want to make waves. Besides, it's not my nature to find faults and then proclaim them. People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. I am guilty of not being an all-out reformer, and thus I'm implicated in ISKCON's wrongs by default.

I also admit to failing in the second half of the expression, "ISKCON, with all thy faults – *I love thee*" If I loved you, ISKCON, I would be more active and would try to make myself a more worthy member. If I loved you more, I would *see* the spiritual world in the movement as it exists in this confederation of temples, the ISKCON that publishes *Back to God-head* magazine, the ISKCON that goes on Navadvlpa and Vrndavana *parikramas*, and yes, the ISKCON that blows its own horn, sometimes in a superficial way, in the *ISKCON World Review*. The ISKCON of the businessman devotee cashing in on the market of devotional items, the ISKCON that also sells pure *bhakti*. Many, many ISKCON devotees love Srila Prabhupada and serve him with their body, mind, and words. I don't think that this can be matched anywhere else in the world. That is what attracts me and binds me to ISKCON.

One devotee was telling me how her co-workers discovered that she was a Hare Krsna. She told them that she sometimes

meditates by chanting mantras. One of her colleagues queried her further, “*What* mantras do you chant?”

She took a chance, smiled, and said, “Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.”

Her associate exclaimed, “You mean you are with those people who drive around singing from a truck?” (He was referring to the flatbed truck the New York devotees use to perform hari- nama.)

The devotee blurted out, “Yes, the very ones!”

George Harrison said something similar when he aligned himself with the devotees. He said that when it is time to be counted, he would prefer to stand with the devotees rather than the nondevotees.

I think like that too, that I want to be counted among the very ones, the Prabhupada fanatics, the devotees with all their faults—of ISKCON. ISKCON, with all my faults, please accept me.

Dear Pain,

letter should be addressed to a person, so how can I write to my pain? I imagine Pain personified, like Peter Pain who used to appear in Ben Gay ads. Remember him? He was a potato-headed green man with beard stubble and an ugly face. I think he carried a hammer. He was short and nasty and he used to pound on the biceps or lower backs of nice folks, like the lovely girl who wanted to go on a date with the handsome man or the dad who wanted to go bowling. With a single application of Ben Gay, Peter Pain was thrown out on the seat of his pants and you'd see him running away, cursing and banished.

No, I'm not writing to that character.

I'm writing to what we might call a sub-person within myself. If I personify my pain, perhaps it will explain to me why it is with me. It may be with me for a reason.

So, my dear pain, I'm writing to you because you were with me for most of yesterday, then all night. You always attack in the same place, right behind the right eye. The doctors call you "cluster headaches" or "vaso-motor instability." I simply call you pain. When you come like that, I tell Madhu, "I'm feeling a sharp pain," and after trying different therapies to subdue you, I end up going to bed for the day. This time, you didn't go away overnight. Therefore, I couldn't get up until 7 this morning. And still you are lingering.

The last time I tried to talk to you, you presented yourself as a tough guy, but a righteous one, not my enemy. You said you have to come when I push my body too far or overwork. It is your duty to warn me. At that time, you want me to stop all my other duties and plans and simply repair my body. What I would like to negotiate with you is whether you couldn't give

me a gentler signal. Maybe you think a gentleman's signal is not enough for me and that I'll ignore it. That's probably true.

Part of me wants to control you, to minimize you, maybe to visualize you into a small ball and then throw you away at the first signs of your appearance. But another part of me knows that I have to reconcile myself to what you are doing. You're a sign of the true deterioration of this body, and whether you appear behind my eye or somewhere else, I can't pretend to make you disappear forever.

This is a truism which is easily and sometimes jokingly spoken among the devotees who experience pain. After all, this material body is a source of pain. We've got to get out of this material body and get a spiritual one. True enough.

Still, I want to take a deeper look. You force me to look deeper. You thwart my enthusiasm for immediate plans. For example, a mail packet arrived yesterday and I had manuscripts to edit and stacks of letters to answer. I was all ready to go at it, but then you came and the work had to be left undone. That's what will happen at the time of death too. All current projects and duties will simply be left unattended. We have to leave the field of interaction and endeavor sooner or later. You are always reminding me of that.

All this is obvious. Maybe I don't have anything new to say. Simply that your appearance in my life and your disruption of my routine makes me want to address this letter to you. You are close to home.

This morning when I got up late, I noticed that Balarama dasa was also up late. He said he has pinched nerves. Madhu also has his pain. We all do. My pain should remind me of that. Be kind to the pains of others and don't cause them more than they already have.

Pain is the ultimate unwanted guest, but Vedic etiquette demands that we should make even an unwanted guest feel welcome. I don't kill my pain. I wait patiently until you decide to leave. But while you are here, I want to take advantage of your presence to deepen my dependence on Krsna. For example, when you come, I claim I can't chant attentively and can't read. Still, I can simplify my attitude and become more subdued and dependent. Instead of waiting you out before I can chant properly again, I should learn to be Krsna conscious throughout your stay.

Dear pain, do you think we can learn to chant together? Just one pure mantra can purify the whole ordeal.

My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa,

lease accept my humble obeisances at Your lotus feet and the lotus feet of all Your pure devotees.

I wish to praise You as Rasaraja, the king of all *rasas*, the enjoyer of all mellows. I wish to make a tiny offering of my understanding of You as I understand it from His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

There are many ways to understand You, all from different points of view. My understanding is that Prabhupada loves You, the original cowherd boy, Govinda, Syamasundara, and he wants the whole world to love You too. Prabhupada teaches Kṛṣṇa consciousness in a scientific, step-by-step manner, and everything that he says is authorized by the Gaudiya Vaisnava *sampradaya*.

Srila Prabhupada is Your pure devotee. Sometimes the pure devotee emphasizes a particular *rasa* in which You are loved by particular devotees. He may emphasize *sakhya-rasa* or *vatsalya' rasa* or *madhurya' rasa*. All Gaudiya Vaisnavas agree that *madhurya' rasa* is topmost and that the *gopis* are the topmost expression of that *rasa*.

But Srila Prabhupada liked to emphasize that You, the same Gopijana-vallabha, the Personality of Godhead, are the same Kṛṣṇa who appears in all Your expansions. When You lift Govardhana Hill, you are Kṛṣṇa. You are Bhagavan when You are being loved by the *gopis* and by Your mother and father and friends. How else could You lift such a big hill with the pinky of Your left hand?

Prabhupada said, "When He is in the lap of His mother, He is God. When He kills the Putana witch, He is God." God is always God. Prabhupada also taught that any *jiva* who claimed

to be God by word jugglery or mystic display was actually dog. You are the only Supreme Personality of Godhead.

When we read of the different Visnus who appear to devotees throughout the *Srimad' Bhagavatam*, this is also You in Your expanded form. You, dear Lord, sometimes appear for Your pastimes as the *purusa* incarnations, the three cosmic Visnus. You also appear as *lila-avatars* such as Vamanadeva and Nrsimhadeva. Sometimes You appear as an ideal king, Lord Ramacandra. When You appear in Your original form as Krsna with Your brother, Balarama, and the *gopas* and *gopis* of Vrndavana, that is Your most relishable form. But it is not only Your sweetest form, but the form of infinite power, the *adi'purusa* from whom everything comes. Your original form is *janmady asya yatah*, the source of everything.

I have been hearing this fact for over twenty-five years, but I think I am just beginning to appreciate how affectionate Prabhupada is toward You, dear Lord. He is insistent that everyone understand You properly. He doesn't leave room for us to be vague in our understanding, but gives us strong purports and descriptions in the *Srimad' Bhagavatam* and the *Bhagavad-gita*. I am becoming particularly attracted to Prabhupada's way of presenting You as the beloved of *all* pure devotees. Prabhupada acknowledges *madhurya' rasa* as the highest understanding, but he gives equal credit to all pure devotees without slighting anyone. He says we should not reject even a drop of *Srimad- Bhagavatam*. Neither should we jump to the *rasa* dance chapters and leave the other parts aside as if they are unimportant. We need to be nourished by all ten cantos. And it is good for us to appreciate all of Your devotees. That leads us ultimately to appreciating You, dear Lord, as the taster of all different relationships with Your devotees.

Therefore, Srlla Prabhupada emphasizes the teachings of Prahlada Maharaja, the prayers of Dhruva Maharaja, Arriba- risa Maharaja, Bali Maharaja, Arjuna, Narada and Vyasa and their sacred conversations, as well as the conversations of Maitreya and Vidura or the Kumaras and Maharaja Prthu. The *Srimad' Bhagavatam* is the spotless *Pur ana*.

Srlla Prabhupada also taught the *Bhagavad' gita* because You speak personally to us there. That same Krsna on the Battlefield of Kuruksetra is ultimately nondifferent from Your form in Vrndavana. Of course, Prabhupada taught the Gaudiya Vaisnava conclusion that the original Krsna never leaves Vrndavana and that His pastimes in Mathura and Dvaraka are performed by His Vasudeva expansion, but still, he leaves us with the feeling that we should be just as interested in Your form as Vasudeva Krsna as in Your form in Vrndavana.

Prabhupada does not make such a distinction, but goes on beating the *brhat' mrdanga* of Your glories. Therefore, he has presented *all of* Your activities in this wondrous book we know in ISKCON as the Krsna book. By reading about their relationships with You, all of Your devotees become beloved to us and our devotional creepers are nourished in a balanced way.

My dear Lord, I would also like to acknowledge Your willingness to protect Your devotees, even the little ones. This is also part of Your pastimes. Although we relish the pastimes described in *Krsna* book, and although our own conditioned lives are not mentioned there, You enter the heart of each *jiva* and are especially inclined to the devotees. Surely You recognize Srlla Prabhupada's followers. Our Prabhupada told us that if we served him sincerely, then surely You would give us the intelligence to carry out his more specific instructions—we would be inspired by You how to paint Your form or how to make money to support Your temples or how to preach or

manage temples, how to understand Your teachings in the *Bhagavad'gita*. You are always ready to help us.

That Lord in the heart who Prabhupada tells us of is certainly You in Your original Vrndavana form. He told us about Paramatma and described Him to us, but how it is that when I pray to You in my heart, I think of Your original form as a cowherd boy in Vrndavana? It must be coming from Prabhupada.

In all of Your different Visnu forms, You are original Krsna who dwells especially in Vrndavana. Similarly, when I chant Your holy names, I am chanting to the original Krsna. You are the witness, the judge, the speaker of *sastra*. You are the cowherd boy. Therefore, whether You are specifically enjoying Your Vrndavana pastimes or performing some other pastimes in some other expansion, Srila Prabhupada always brings us back to understanding You as Syamasundara. *Govindam adi-purusam tarn aham bhajami*. You are seen as Syamasundara in the hearts of the pure devotees whose eyes are tinged with the salve of love. *Premanjana-cchurita'bhakti'Vilocanena, santah sadaiva hrdayesu vilokayanti/ yam syamasundaram acintya^guna-svarupam, govindam adi-purusam tam aham bhajami*.

My dear Lord, have I understood Srila Prabhupada's teachings properly? I don't think I'm wrong, although I may still be speaking a little theoretically and without much realization. I'll dare to say that my understanding is more than theoretical. Prabhupada gives us *vijnana*, realized knowledge; as long as we act in faith on his instructions, the knowledge he is giving us is realized.

I feel enthusiastic to speak of You and to read Prabhupada's purports describing how the whole world needs knowledge of You. It's almost impossible to think that the people of the world could accept Your original form. They barely accept any theistic principles these days. But Prabhupada fought hard

against the atheistic scientists and other *asuras*. He wanted his books distributed throughout the world. Therefore, because of his desire, it is not impossible that people will come to understand You in Your original form. It happened to us, by Prabhupada's grace, so why not to others?

The Vedic aphorism, *tat tvam asi*, "you are that too," is often used by impersonalists to claim that each *jiva* is exactly one with the Absolute Truth. Prabhupada explains that the real application of *tat tvam asi* is to address You, dear Lord. Therefore we pray, "You are that too. You, Krsna, are the boar incarnation, You are the ideal king, Rama. You are the *jiva* because the *jiva* is an eternal part and parcel of You." You are Lord Caitanya and You expand into all the *saktis* possessed by devotees and demons alike. The material energy is not outside Your domain, but is one of Your energies. We have only to understand all this scientifically and with clear intelligence and devotion. Then we will know how to approach You favorably.

*anyabhilasitd'sunyam
jnarui'karmddy'andvrtam
anukiilyena krsnanu- silanam
bhaktir uttama*

Thank you, dear Lord, for giving me the enthusiasm to write and preach. I pray for the strength given by Lord Balarama and my spiritual master to cut down my doubts and *anarthas*, which appear as obnoxious weeds. I pray to see You in the morning clouds that move over the hill in the beautiful blue sky, and I pray especially to see You in Vrndavana. Thank You for the devotional energy that flows through me. All glories to You. All glories to Your *Krsna* book. All glories to Srla Pra-

bhupada's presentation of You, the life and soul of Srimati Radharani. All glories to Your golden form as Lord Caitanya. I offer my obeisances to His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the servant of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, who is kindly teaching the message of Lord Caitanya and delivering these Western countries which are filled with voidism and impersonalism.

To he who called my name,

^r
(Srlla Prabhupada, I heard you call my name this morning. I was listening to a tape of a morning walk in the summer of 1974, in Germany. You were speaking about transmigration. You asked me to define it. I recited *dehino 'smin yatha dehe*, but you interrupted: "That is *sloka*, but how does it happen?" I tried to explain it in my own words, but again you interrupted: "That is all right, but how does it happen?" Another devotee ventured an explanation. Still you waited. Then I said, "The subtle body carries the soul."

"Ah, that is it."

Later on the walk, you exposed the weakness of the opponents' arguments. They say that they cannot perceive the soul's transmigration, but there are so many things that we cannot perceive and yet we know they exist. For example, you said, "I cannot see your mind or what you are thinking, and you cannot see my mind. But does that mean our minds do not exist? They are so dull they cannot understand. What is the possible objection to this argument?"

And then you said my name. You were asking for an objection from a nondevotee and you said, "Satsvarupa?"

When I heard it this morning, it touched me. Later, I explained it to a Godbrother and said, "It's like your lover calling your name." So much is aroused when a dear one says your name. It's as if you come into being.

Srlla Prabhupada, you gave me that name. You created it. Someone once told me that my name is not saturated with *madhurya*. It's a name of God in grandeur, "Krsna, the form of truth." All I know is that it sounds sweet when you say it, when you call me.

When you say my name, it means that you are calling for me. You want me to do something. During that morning walk, you wanted me to advance an argument so you could smash it. That is how you trained us.

I replied, "I was thinking of a different argument . . . "

"What is that?"

I advanced the argument that a person might say he doesn't care much for transmigration because if you forget everything anyway at death, what's the difference? So what if you become a dog if you don't remember being anything else?

"Then let me kill you right away and you will have to become a dog. Is that all right?"

"No, it's not all right."

"Why not? If you forget, there is no problem."

You called me to action on that morning. I wasn't always aware why you called me.

You called me to be your servant and secretary. You called my name. Now I can only hope that I will again hear you call my name.

Some people call my name in jest or they say it with a condescending or critical tone. I don't expect people to *worship* me, but still my name gets passed around like common property. A name on a piece of paper in a hat. A name on a list. One of a number of wrong-doers. One of the "senior devotees." But it's never the same as when you say it. Even when you say, "Satsvarupa is expert," and speak sarcastically about my financial mismanagement, I realize that you have the right to use my name however you desire. I fully trust you. You have named me and that was not an arbitrary act. You breathed life into my spiritual self.

Satsvarupa dasa. That is the name you will remember me by. You won't say, "Satsvarupa? I don't remember. When did he join?"

Or maybe you will. But I can refresh your memory. I shouldn't think I'm the only Satsvarupa, just as Brahma thought he was the only Brahma. When Lord Brahma of our universe needed to be further identified, he said, "Tell Krsna that it's the four-headed Brahma, the father of the Kumaras." Similarly I might say, "Tell him it's Satsvarupa dasa who came to him at 26 Second Avenue in 1966. Tell him I used to type for him and give him the money from my office job. I used to bring him a mango. I went to Boston to open the temple there. Later he awarded me sannyasa."

Prabhupada, sometimes you would call for me and give me the instruction to cook *halava* because the morning was cold. You did that once when you were walking in the Hong Kong hills. You called me and told me to write a book about how all things fail without Krsna. You told me to take dictation of a letter that your disciples should read the *Krsna* book section on King Nrga. You called me and asked me to close the curtains in the evening, to find out how I was doing on the library party, and to go and find someone else for you. You called my name many times over the years, but toward the end in Vrndavana, there was not much external communication between us. You went inside yourself at that time and then you left us here. Maybe you are preaching somewhere with the same gravity and drive as you displayed when you were in this world. Or you are relishing your *lila* with Lord Caitanya and Radha and Krsna. Maybe you will call me to you again.

These thoughts and feelings were triggered when I heard you call me this morning on that tape. You said it lovingly, expecting me to respond. I was awkward and afraid, but always

ready to try and respond. I am still afraid—afraid of offenses and afraid of failing, afraid I may not like what you tell me when you call, afraid I may start to cry. I want so much to be a good disciple, but it's so hard to be fully and simply surrendered. You know that about me already—not only about me, but about so many of your followers. Still, you keep us with you and call us forward sometimes one by one and sometimes in groups. You ask us to cooperate and push on Krsna consciousness. You call us into action. You call us by our names. It is love, the love of a guru, a spiritual father, for his offspring.

Since hearing your call this morning, I am listening more, even as I hear the pleasing sounds of the creek crossing over the old rocks and the sparrows at dawn, for the sound of you calling my name. When you called me this morning, you put a question mark at the end, although it was a command. Would I actually turn to you? You were confident that I would. It was your way of calling, "Satsvarupa?"

Yes, Prabhupada, here I am. I will do the needful.

Dear Gray Dawn,

You are misty this morning. When the sun comes out, the mists will lift and you will disappear into the sunshine. Therefore, we are together only briefly.

I enjoy walking down lanes surrounded by your mists, but the sun evaporating the mist and dispelling the dawn reminds me of how the sun of Krsna consciousness also exposes my life. The newspapers finally caught up with us the other day. I read about some cult that killed its members. I'm afraid that will bring us bad publicity. As devotees, we have to face so many things. I don't want to face them right now. I just want to walk through you, gray dawn, and think my private thoughts while you are still covering the earth.

It's not very cold today, so you are muted. You hold the world in semi-darkness, only gradually releasing it to its natural colors. You are not ignorance, but atmosphere. You lend mystery and gentleness to my surroundings. You make it easy for me to come out and pray to Krsna and to chant His holy names. Of course, you also cover death. Sometimes I hear an animal scream or a bird swoop down for its prey. But I prefer to think of you supporting my privacy in prayer and chanting and my desire to be alone with Krsna. You encourage me to simply walk in Krsna's shelter because you haven't yet exposed me to the light of day and the business of other people. I am simply a *jiva* alone with the Supreme Lord at this time in the morning.

Therefore, you are precious to me. I don't know how much more of your association I will have in this life, and I suppose once I leave you, I won't even want to be with you again except in the spiritual world. I have heard that the dawn in Goloka Vrndavana is sweet.

My dear Sannyasa-Guru,

lease accept my humble obeisances at your lotus feet.

Of course, Srila Prabhupada, you are my *sannyasa-guru* as well as being my *diksa* and *siksa-guru*. You are the representative of Vyasadeva for me; therefore I read your books as *sastra*. You are the founder-dearya of ISKCON. But I would like to speak to you today as my *sannyasa-guru* because I am planning the next few months' travel.

When you handed me a *danda* in the Los Angeles temple on Lord Nrsimha's appearance day in 1972, you said, "Preach, preach, preach." That was your order. Srila Prabhupada, I am trying to do that, although I am doing it in my own limited way and not according to the highest standards of boldness. Still, I do have some nice plans for the next few months.

Yesterday, because of something I read in the mail and also because of having headaches for two days in a row, I somehow lost my nerve to carry out my present plans. We are scheduled to leave from Rome in less than two weeks and go to India — first a visit to Bombay, then Calcutta, then Mayapur. In Mayapur, I'm supposed to go on *parikrama* along with Bhakti-caru Swami and some of my disciples and some of his. I think it will be good for me to live in Navadvipa-dhama, not only because it is the topmost *dhama*, but because it is your place of worship. It is an accessible *dhama*, and I think you will be pleased to see me there, just as you were pleased to see me there in 1973.

I went to India for the first time in 1973, and I went straight to Calcutta and then Mayapur. You smiled when I entered your room. Another *sannyasi* remarked that you seemed happy to see me. You welcomed me and said that we should all engage in chanting and hearing with you.

Yesterday, though, I thought I was too ill to meet up to the rigors of international travel. I would get too many headaches along the way. I thought I should instead go to Gita-nagari and fulfill an obligation I have there since it is diminishing so much.

Then during the day, I came to understand that I should go to Mayapur after all, and then later visit New York, Boston, and Gita-nagari. This reaffirmed my service of traveling with no home base, while at the same time, studying your books with concentration and lecturing wherever I go.

In 1976 I asked you if it was all right to read your books for three or more hours daily. You replied: "As a *sannyasi* and GBC, your first duty is to read my books. Otherwise, how will you preach? Whenever you get time, read my books." By this letter, Srila Prabhupada, I wish to affirm that I will continue living in this homeless way, and that I will always be reading your books.

You once told some of us in your room that although a *grhastha* can both preach and manage, a *sannyasi* should always have a "cool brain for philosophy." Although my engagements are not the boldest, still, they are bona fide *sannyasa'dharma*. Therefore, please give me the strength to keep going without attachment. I will go to Gita-nagari and try to stay there a little longer than usual, but I cannot save any particular project just by making it my permanent residence. Whatever good I can do can be done through my present travel program. This is how I am fulfilling your request to go door to door all over the world to distribute Krsna consciousness. Now I feel ecstatic when I contemplate what is coming up, despite the physical difficulties it may include.

Some Hindus say that Westerners cannot be given *sannyasa*, but you proved according to *sastra* that they can become san-

nyasis and live honorably. I pray I will never disappoint you and that I may continue to have glimpses of you smiling to see me. All glories to you, Srila Prabhupada, the leader of *sannyasis*, the calm and yet fiery preacher of *gaum-vani*. You so kindly distributed Lord Caitanya's message to the Western world, which is filled with voidism and impersonalism. Please allow me to be your eternal assistant.

Dear Bhakti'devi flow-of-genius, who allows us to engage in services one after another,

^Please forgive me for addressing you with such an awkward title, but you know who you are. I know there is a person in charge of devotional service who allows us to flow and bob blissfully up and down in the river of Krsna consciousness. This river is not like the river here where I just stood on a bridge and looked at the water sloshing over the rocks. There was no Krsna conscious intelligence to that river. I am speaking of the river that flows to the devotees, that carries the devotees away when they engage their hearts and minds in devotional activity.

Of course, all devotional service is performed under the guidance of the spiritual master. Therefore, every letter, every expression of gratitude, should be offered to him. Our spiritual master, however, informs us that the service activities he gives us are not his own manufacture, but the time-honored system of *bhakti*. Prabhupada writes in the beginning of *The Nectar of Devotion* that Krsna consciousness is under the supervision of Srlmatl Radharani and is not subject to the material energy.

Srlmati Radharani has many expansions and agents in the spiritual and material worlds. Her expansions supervise direct service to Krsna in Goloka, such as offering Him garlands, fruits, and flowers. Some of Her expansions serve as the external energy in the material world, as Durga and Kali and Sakti. The internal energy, however, allows the devotees who are in the material world, and who still have tinges of material consciousness, to nevertheless engage in pure devotional service under the guidance of Krsna's pure devotee. Srla Prabhupada assures us that this is a fact. He gives the example that if a chorus of neophytes exactly follows a tune, they are also "in

tune,” even though they couldn’t produce the tune on their own.

I am writing this letter because I am happy to be bobbing up and down in the *bhakti* river this morning. You allowed me to rise from ignorant and fearful dreams and be up by midnight. In fact, I was dreaming that I had to re-enlist in the U.S. Navy. Dreadful. That is a recurring dream for me, and I take it as a symbol for what will happen to me unless I become completely Krsna conscious—I will have to return to the material world and be forced into dreadful circumstances again. By your mercy, I awoke and went to my desk to write.

After an hour of writing, I turned to hear Prabhupada’s Bhaktivedanta purports in the *Srimad’ Bhagavatam*. I made a few notes, too, promising myself to keep up my reading practice and to keep attentive. At the end of each purport, I closed my eyes for a few moments and lovingly held on to and reviewed what Prabhupada had written.

After reading, I turned to *japa*. My services are imperfectly performed, I know, but they are still spiritual and bring me satisfaction. I don’t need anything but to go on as much as possible in one Krsna conscious service after another.

I remember when Prabhupada took us up to the Ananda Ashram for a day in upstate New York. In Prabhupada’s presence we moved through one activity after another, sometimes talking with him, sometimes having *kirtana* in the hall, then a slide show, *prasadam*, his lecture. We were new devotees and we were much like children. We always wanted something new to be happening. You, Bhakti-devI, were the perfect parent—expert at keeping our senses engaged and focused on Krsna consciousness.

Bhakti-devi, I don’t have a picture of exactly who you are in my mind, but I know you are one of the Lord’s agents. It is you

who allow us to flow forward in Krsna consciousness. It is not a specific service that makes us blissful, but the ability to merge in the whole of *bhakti*—the same *bhakti* that is being practiced by all the great and small devotees in *krsna-lila*. This is where I want to be.

In a First Canto purport, Srila Prabhupada mentions this *bhakti* flow. He says it is so powerful and inviting that anyone standing near it will be carried along, just as anyone standing on the bank of a powerful river can be swept away. That is the nature of the devotional service performed by Narada when he picked up the spirit of service flowing from the mouths and words of the *bhaktivedantas*.

As I write this letter, I see a diffused rosy glow spreading in the sky. It is the first sunlight we have seen in days. I also see the long line of a jet trail across the sky, something like a fuzzy chalk line on a chalkboard. The outline of the hill against this light blue sky is so sharp and the air so cold this morning that my fingertips are tingling with pain. I don't mind so much. That too seems to be part of the *bhakti* flow I am speaking of. That flow can broaden as my heart and consciousness broadens, until we see that you are encompassing the whole world in service to Krsna. The *maha-bhagavata* already sees that phenomenon—everyone in the universe is serving Krsna. Devotional service is continuing like a great tide; everything else is illusion.

I don't pretend to see like this all the time, that everyone and everything in creation is serving your Krsna, but once in a while I catch a glimpse of it. Even that watchdog that barks at me as I walk by the house is serving Krsna through His energy. Even the brown leaves that have fallen on the earth. Even my beads and my beadbag. Is this too much for us to dwell on, how "everything" is singing in the *kirtana* of devotion to Krsna? I

beg that you will at least let me be in the devotees' *kirtana*. Please forgive me for my offenses and punish me as you think best for me, but never strike my name from the list of those who wish to remain intoxicated by the flow of devotional service.

A tiny and menial servant,

Dear Friends,

I have been putting off writing a letter to you, my friends, because I know once I start, I will just keep writing to you and to no one else. I would like to write to the ducks and to the Fleuve Argens. I also thought of writing to the Creator of such beauty that leaves me speechless every morning. How to express all this? I imagine it pictured in paintings and photos, but how can any medium capture the beauty of the water flowing and mist blowing in over the water and the wildness of it all?

As I stood on the bridge, I thought I could write a letter to my sister. I don't know why she popped into my mind. Maybe she's typical of someone who's hard to preach to. Yes, watching the beautiful dawn made me want to preach to someone so that they too could honor the creator of this beauty.

There are tons of arguments for the existence of God and things like that. Prabhupada has offered many of them. I feel safest when I stand on his conviction and repeat what he says. I suppose there's some fault in that stance because I should be so personally fixed in theistic arguments and debates, sastric analogies as well as analogies drawn from my own experience, but it doesn't matter to me. I stand with Prabhupada on his conviction.

This morning's dawn reminds me that he said there must be a person behind the workings of nature because our own experience in this world shows us that there is a person behind everything. Nothing happens automatically; everything is sparked by some intelligence. Anyway, I thought of my sister for a while while watching the dark water erupting in white splashes over the rocks.

Whichever side of the bridge I look on, it's beautiful. On one side, the water flows in wide sheets as it approaches a waterfall. There isn't much white water, but the ripples indicate movement in the water's depths. That's where I saw the ducks. On the other side of the bridge, the water churns and breaks. When I look up, I see the changing sky. Krsna's artistry evolves minute by minute at dawn—everything is alive.

I bow down to Krsna the creator and to the creator He has created in me who likes to play with words and art. His work is the source of all subsequent creative work in me. His is the original masterpiece. In this way, I see a spark of Krsna's splendor. "A true *yogi* observes Me in all beings and sees everything in Me. Indeed, a self-realized soul sees Me everywhere." (Bg. 6.29)

Dear friends, this is a "wish you were here" letter. Of course, I don't really wish you were here because I like to be alone when I walk, but I do wish to share this walk with you. I wish to share Krsna conscious moments and realizations and if I dare to say so, I wish to nourish you. Our spiritual master wants us to do that for each other. Krsna says, *maC'dtta mad-gata'prana, bodhayantah parasparam*: My pure devotees take pleasure in talking about Me and in discussing My pastimes and activities among themselves.

Sometimes I complain that I can't see four distinct seasons outside Northeast America where I grew up. I especially feel the lack in autumn. Gradually, though, I am starting to see what passes for autumn in other parts of the world. In Europe, as the months slide into October, you see a subtle browning and curling up of leaves on the bushes. You have to be attentive though. It would take years to learn it all, and I don't have an inclination for such study. But I mention it here anyway because today I feel the presence of autumn. The air is cool in

the morning, and my fingers tingle in the cold. The autumn here reminds me of the autumn there—the long, warm afternoons with the long sun rays slanting in through the windows in New York and Pennsylvania—a mellow Indian summer.

That brings me back to the Creator. It is His material energy. Krsna says, “Come,” almost with a touch of annoyance, “what need is there, Arjuna, to list all the details? With a single spark of My splendor, I pervade and sustain the universe.” What Krsna is implying there is that we should be more interested in the Supreme Person Himself than in this world with its leaves and streams, birds and skies. Those things are all enchanting, but the real beauty is in the Lord’s form itself.

So, dear friends, it’s autumn. If you like, we can exchange letters as I travel to Rome to Mayapur-dhama. Let’s talk about Krsna and the big and little things that happen to us both in our study of scripture and what we perceive with our senses.

All glories to the Creator and to His original abode where He creates endlessly new pastimes for the pleasure of His devotees. All glories to His devotees in this world.

P.S. I enclosed a leaf from here made by the Creator. Will you send me one from Vrndavana?

Dear Ducks and all,

^VWhere are you today? I snuck up on you stealthily, but I don't see you down on the glossy, black waters of the Argens. I do see two birds down there on a rock, and although it's still dim, I'm almost sure they're not ducks. They look more like sandpipers. They're both sitting motionless—I almost mistook them for rocks—but I know they're birds. If they see me, they'll fly away, and then you, dear ducks, will be too afraid to come out. I can still picture how yesterday you noticed me and flew squawking, horizontal and low over the water.

No, it doesn't look like I'm going to see you today. I knew if I did come to speak to you, it would really be me speaking to my mind. In that sense, the two sandpipers can act as your stand-ins, or the river itself, or the bridge. I'm just looking for a witness. Then what do I have to say?

I'm thankful. I know I'm not a single creature living alone" in the universe. Neither is this universe of my own creation. This is a world of sorrow. Even if that sorrow doesn't grip me right away, it's always out there and always approaching. Everyone gets their turn to feel sorrow. The living entities are either enjoying their good karma or experiencing the results of their bad karma. Unlimited desires means unlimited miseries. I'm not tasting these miseries right now, but I'm aware that I don't live in an enchanted bubble.

Now I've come to the other side of the bridge, which is even more beautiful with its dark waters splashing into white foam as the water courses down toward the waterfall. More signs of autumn: the birch trees on the bank are dropping their leaves. O prehistoric earth, you are beautiful and indifferent. Your nature is both as silent as rocks and as loud as squawking birds.

Why am I looking for you, ducks? Because at any minute I can be interrupted by someone approaching. Is that why I identify with you? I too am always ready to fly off at the first approach of an intruder.

Having said that, I'll move to the other side of the bridge again. I don't care anymore whether or not I scare you. Anyway, all I see are clouds of midges and gnats and two very big birds lifting up from the land (disturbed by me?), not ducks, but slow-moving, blue herons. They fly off silently, no squawks. And there *you* are, dear ducks, lifting off from the water suddenly, flapping low toward the tree line.

Dear Lord Krsna, at the time of my death, please allow me to turn to You. Please accept my appreciation of Your beauty here and my understanding that this is but a reflection of the beauty in the spiritual world. Your nature and moods and divine person and entourage and land of Vrndavana—that's what I want to remember at the time of death. The beauty in this world is only here to remind me of the beauty in Your world. Sometimes it's better, though, not to discuss it too explicitly.

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To the Fox!

You drew spontaneously from my mouth the word, "Wow!" You are as big as a small German Shepherd. You raced across the road, you gray fox with your tail in the air. Out of this green and rusty autumn foliage, you ran into the woods without even a glance in my direction! Where have you been prowling? How can I connect you to Krsna consciousness? You stole my breath. My limbs froze and for a moment I couldn't go forward. The power of Krsna's energy. As Bhaktivinoda Thakura says, "O Kesava, how curious and varied is this world of Your creation!" How wild!

Dear Srila Prabhupada,

u] just wanted to let you know that I continue to listen to your taped lectures and I find them strengthening. This morning, for example, I heard you giving a lecture in Mayapur, 1976. You were pointing out how insignificant we are. It was the verse where Prahlada Maharaja says that even if one has all twelve brahminical qualities, that doesn't mean he can please Krsna. Krsna is only pleased with devotion. You analyzed that verse scientifically. If I hear it attentively, I will be forced to agree with your cofclusions and the conclusions of the *Bhagavatam*.

You expertly deflated the pride of anyone who saw themselves as the doer. You even gave the example of the devotees, and you included yourself, building the Mayapur temple. You said it's an insignificant building compared to all the palaces Krsna has in the spiritual world. Furthermore, we think proudly that these temples are built by our hard endeavor when they are actually built by Krsna supplying the stones and the cement and the intelligence. I appreciated hearing you say that. I also have to be reminded that I'm not really any kind of creator or writer, thinker, or prayer-maker. We all want to be free of this illusion.

Prahlada Maharaja gave the example that if you look into a mirror and decorate your own face, then the face in the mirror is automatically decorated. That means that if we please Krsna, we will also become pleased. The next point to consider is this: why does Krsna accept His devotees' offerings and endeavors if He already has everything?

First of all, we must acknowledge that Krsna doesn't require anything—no temples, no books, no beautiful, additional *gopis*, etc. He has everything infinitely. Because of His mercy, how-

evcer, Krsna wants to give us the chance to serve Him. Therefore, He accepts unending, sincere offerings. He comes into this world to exchange with the conditioned souls. Even the exchanges He has with demons such as Hiranyakasipu and Ravana are meant to benefit them.

Srila Prabhupada, you said that an actual Vaisnava is meek and humble. He doesn't feign humility to gain some prestige, but feels actually insignificant. Prahlada Maharaja felt this way, but he was also aware of Krsna's mercy and Krsna's desire to exchange with him in *bhakti*. Therefore, Prahlada went forward and offered prayers to Nrsimhadeva, although he felt himself disqualified by birth and not a great scholar, especially in comparison to the demigods.

Here I am, Srila Prabhupada, reciting these points back to you and understanding that this is real education. This is my offering to you. You said that at the dinner table, the child may offer a little piece of food to his father out of affection, but we know that the food already belongs to the father. The father loves this voluntary offering of food and affection.

You are pleased when we preach, not just to ourselves, but to others. You want us to spread the Krsna consciousness movement because no one can be happy without it. Here, too, I feel insignificant. I cannot find within myself the compassion you expressed for others. Mostly I want to avoid them. Still, I myself was tow and wretched, a materialist, until you came and gave me life. Even if I don't have compassion for others, now I want to please you. Please help me to serve you as you desire.

You are with me wherever I am through your books and by my living under the rules and regulations you gave me. I am looking forward to finding you particularly present in Maya- pur-dhama. In Mayapur, I will be able to remember some of the times I was able to associate with you there.

This year, I will be carrying with me the diary you wrote in 1966. Srila Prabhupada, it is touching how you were so much alone and in such a mood of self-sacrifice in your desire to give Krsna consciousness to others. In the first entry, you state that you had just played a tape recording of *kirtana* and that the Americans, although they didn't know Sanskrit or anything about the *Vedas*, took to it favorably. I thought of you like a scientist making a breakthrough, and yet you took no credit for yourself. You gave all the credit to Lord Gaitanya. I speak of wanting and needing to be alone for my *bhajana*, but you, Srila Prabhupada, left the land of supreme *bhajana*, Vrndavana, and mixed with people in New York City just for the purpose of pleasing your spiritual master. I hope that a little grain of the golden dust of your example will fall on me sooner or later and that I will do better. May I learn to follow Bhaktivinoda Thakura's words: "Forgetting my own comforts, when will the day come when I will go out and preach, taking the divine command upon my head?"

All glories to you, Srila Prabhupada, and all glories to your wonderful devotees. I beg to serve with them in this movement, making my own contribution by glorifying Radha and Krsna, Lord Caitanya, Their pure devotees, and you, my spiritual master. May Krsna be pleased to work through me so that I can bring at least someone to Krsna consciousness. I have said enough. Now let actions speak better than words.

Poetry

Introduction

LJ got off to a happy start writing poetry in 1966. I was writing my own American idiom lyrics before I met Srila Prabhupada, and when I became his disciple, I continued to write poetry, this time about temple life and chanting. In fact, many of the first disciples used to write poetry—we used to publish them in *Back to Godhead*—and Srila Prabhupada read some of our poems and approved of them.

I once sat in his presence while he read aloud my poem about chanting Hare Krsna on Houston Street. I still remember how he looked at me and told me he liked it. Hayagriva dasa compared us to Buddhist monks living in a monastery and writing, not so much out of literary sentiment, but to tell the true experience of our day to day religious life. We were writing ISKCON poetry in our natural, New Yorker voices. I have always wondered why we stopped writing like that. It reminds me of a similar question the American poet William Stafford raises: “My question is, ‘When did other people give up the idea of being a poet?’ You know, when we are kids, we make up things, we write, and for me, the puzzle is not why some people are still writing. The real question is, why did the other people stop?”

I stopped for about twelve years. During that time, poetry writing was the furthest thing from my mind. I was too absorbed in other tasks, in preaching and management in Prabhupada’s ISKCON. Then the urge returned to me around 1978. I started by writing memories of 26 Second Avenue and poems of my daily life at Gita-nagari and in my travels. I collected them in a book called *Voices of Surrender*.

One of my Godbrothers told me he thought that poetry writing was a sign of decadence in society. His viewpoint

sounded Marxist to me. Is it that because the artist is not working in a factory or growing crops that he is somehow working against the interests of the state? Every healthy society needs artists and poets. Poets don't speak official truth in an official way. They speak with authenticity—sometimes in dissidence, sometimes in praise—but always honestly and in the true voice of the people. Poetry is the voice of freedom and it is necessary in every society. ISKCON is no exception.

Some devotees have been frank: "We don't like your poetry compared to the other things you write." Or, "We don't understand your poems."

To appreciate poetry, we have to understand that it's not a transference of information or doctrine. We could call the Krsna consciousness philosophy our doctrine, and poems may include some doctrine, but they have more to do with the way things are said. They are meant to bring the doctrine to life. It's all in how they're written. In Krsna consciousness, the message has to be *parampara*, but it also has to be said in a certain way to become poetry.

What poetry emphasizes—and it's not rhyme or meter—is the voice of authenticity. The poet is a real person speaking, not an official. Poetry is therefore truthful in a most private sense. We all belong to the Krsna consciousness movement, but within that movement, we are each looking for our own way to speak the truth. That's why poetry is important. It functions to develop culture and honesty.

Sometimes devotees don't appreciate poetry because all they want is doctrinal statements. They wonder how a particular poem is presenting our perfect philosophy and can be publicly acclaimed as truth. But poetry has more roles than to express doctrine. It is meant to express moods and subtleties. A poem may be sad. Perhaps it expresses a sadness greater than what

we expect a devotee to feel, but perhaps our expectations are not in touch with the reality of people's lives. A poem may also be happy and that happiness may strike us as excessive for someone who is supposed to possess a steady consciousness, but perhaps that happiness is as real as the moment the poet captured it.

This is not a modern phenomenon. The Six Gosvamis also used poetry to express Kṛṣṇa conscious moods. Bhaktivinoda Thakura's "Saranagati" begins by expressing the mood of solid despair. We may wonder, "I thought devotees were always jolly. Why is he despairing?" But if the poet is feeling despair and captures that in his poem, who can question its value? We can't take a poem and measure it against a philosophical treatise: "A devotee isn't supposed to feel like that." We are excessive from time to time, and poetry captures those feelings and gives them voice. Their allegiance is to what we actually are, not always what we think we should become.

In material society, poetry is not as popular as other forms of writing. People write poetry because they love it and because they feel it says things that other genres can't say. I also love to write poetry. I don't care if my poetry books don't sell as well as my other books. I don't even care that much if people don't understand my poetry. Poetry is too important for me to feel discouraged by those factors.

"The authoritative scriptures . . . educate us in a very straightforward way, after the fashion of a master, by giving us unequivocal commands. And the works of traditional history edify us more gently, after the fashion of a thoughtful friend, by putting before us examples of the actions of others in the past and of what fruits befell those actions. But the works of fine literature instruct us in the most irresistible way, after the fashion of someone we love, by giving us so much joy that

we are scarcely aware of an underlying purpose.” (Foreword, *Jagannatha'priya Natakam*)

One American poet said about his own poetry, “Should I make sense or should I tell the truth?” Most people try to make sense out of the chaos in their lives and emotions, but the truth is that things often don’t make sense at all. Poetry is like that too. It speaks truth, but it doesn’t always present a neat package. It doesn’t even always make sense.

There are two ends to the spectrum in writing. There are the doctrinal or persuasive essays, propaganda, and there are the modes of self-expression. Can we say that a Krsna conscious poem should always bow to the structure of the doctrinal essay?

What, then, is the value of poetic writing? Propagandists incite people to action. When a person is writing for himself, however, he is not trying to motivate an audience, but to say how he feels. That self-expression, self-honesty, can move people. When people are moved, they can be persuaded. People are surrounded by enough direct propaganda, whether through advertising or politicians or clever writers. The air waves are filled with subliminal messages telling us what others want us to do. When someone simply writes for his own soul, it is a relief.

This apparently non-persuasive writing can be a good form of preaching Krsna consciousness to those who don’t want to hear it in any other way, who are tired of proselytizing. Poetry can move them and they can feel a soul-to-soul communication. Therefore, poetry can preach.

I also write poetry in order to be honest with myself and others. There is so much falsity in Kali-yuga, and it has seeped into ISKCON in various ways. Dishonesty ruins communication. People become faithless, and faithlessness only creates more pretension.

When someone pretends to be a perfect devotee, then those who follow him may pretend to think he's perfect. Is it actually true? Are we following our tradition? I want to rid myself of pretension. In poetry, I can write from who I am and what I actually think. I believe that by reading honest writing, others will be inspired to be honest too. These are some of my reasons for writing poetry.

Poetry, and not just the rhyming-chiming kind, but poetry of actual voice and feeling, does have a place in ISKCON. It contributes to the preaching. It's not a sign of decadence, but a sign of culture. As in the larger materialistic society, the place of poetry is insignificant and at the bottom of what most people consider important, so it is that way in ISKCON.

The next question that can be raised is, "What is poetry?" A few years ago, I asked an old college friend and fellow poet what he thought of my poetry. He said that if he were to critique my poetry, he would say that the poetry is not carefully rewritten and that it lacks assonance and other things that poets usually put into their poetry. He also said that although he could criticize my poetry, he wanted to encourage me that my prose is my real poetry. He said we shouldn't be prejudiced to think that poetry exists only when lines are divided, but that it means music, expressing secrets of the heart, and capturing the vividness of life.

When I think of myself as a poet, I certainly think of dividing lines. There is a rhythm to divided lines and it comes to me whenever I write poems. It reminds me of being in a band. I pick up my instrument and start to play. There is something musical about the divided lines. I can't explain exactly what it is and neither would I want to analyze it too closely. It has something to do with improvisation and tradition both at the

same time. Some people say that a line's length has to do with thought units or the length of a breath.

Beyond divided lines, poetry is anything that is "poetic." I love to run into the kitchen and play music with my friends (to write divided lines), and I particularly like to go from prose to poetry and back again. Sometimes the prose and poetry become indistinguishable. Someone once compared it to a plane racing along the ground and then taking off. When it takes off, it's poetry.

Like other genres, poetry sometimes flows and sometimes ebbs for me. Sometimes I feel like writing it and sometimes I don't. It takes effort and practice—practice without fear of failure. I like to write poetry every day, and I choose a certain time when I will write it, such as when I come back from a walk. I try different techniques to keep the inspiration high. For example, I have been writing poems on big sheets of drawing paper with colored pens and a large hand for some time now. At other times, I like to use a typewriter. Sometimes I look at published poets first to get ideas for syntax, but at other times, they disgust me and I turn to Kṛṣṇa and just write.

I tend to rewrite more in poetry than in other genres. I especially like to work with a typist who can return the drafts quickly. I am also willing to write a lot in order to get a few publishable poems. The more I warm to the writing task, the more unconscious the effort, and the more likely that the poems will be good.

I wrote a story about what it means to be a poet called "A Trip to Spain." The main character is described as a closet poet, an ISKCON devotee, a traveling *sannyasi*, whose passion is to make poetry his main service. Unfortunately, he has already heard criticisms: "How are we going to spread this movement if some sannyasis just write poetry?" He feels hurt, so

although he doesn't stop writing, he stops showing his poems to others. Of course, that story is a slightly veiled autobiographical account, but I like it because it provides a social commentary on what it is to be a poet in ISKCON.

I like to think of myself as a writer who writes in a poetic way rather than a narrative way. Rather than tell stories, I want to tell secrets and capture moments—as many of them as possible.

I hope the answer to why I write poetry is out of an innate need to express Kṛṣṇa consciousness and to sing and cry and share my feelings with people. Ramananda Raya said on hearing Rupa Gosvami's poetry: "This is not a poetic presentation; it is a continuous shower of nectar. . . . What is the use of a bowman's arrow or a poet's poetry if they penetrate the heart but do not cause the head to spin?" (Cc. *Antya* 1.193, 195)

Prayer To Srila Prabhupada

~^our spiritual master is still here and
you can speak with him and pray to him.
While standing on a bridge looking into
the water you promise. Walking, you
forget where you are and feel assured.
He will be lenient, he will lead you
further.

Walking. Memories pass like clouds
moving at dawn . . .

One time you came into his room when
he was sitting at the low desk. You
bowed full *dandavats* before him.

*Please travel with me, father and friend, as I
venture forth.*

You sat up and he smiled.
He told you to go on placing his books in
the libraries.

Prabhupada, correct me, be with me.

Untitled.

Th is life turned inside out
produces only pennies and a ripped rupee.
This life is blessed yet still
it's a teacup with
no spiritual emotions.

CHURNING THE MILK OCEAN

Vrndavana In Winter

The colder it gets . . . I'm the only
sannyasi at *mangala'drati* so I recite aloud
the *prema-dhvani* prayers: "*NityaAila*
pravista." Srila Prabhupada is in his
eternal *lila* and in the Prabhupada
Samadhi Mandir. We're gathered with
our differences.

The shops are locked.
Too cold for *chowkidars* to sleep outdoors.
Too cold for thieves?
Krsna and Balarama wrapped in maroon
silk.
I can't see much, cobwebs of thoughts.

Where I Go

^Performance. Don't think about it.

Be somewhere truly and write of that.

I am in my head and belly, in this house and
backyard, in the lives of those we call my
disciples.

I have read a sublime chapter of Krsna's pastimes. A
friend is traveling here tonight, and by the weekend two
more.

I am thirsty for water.

I write with a pink pen and then change it to a light
green.

Krsna — Krsna knows the reason why He visits some in
His personal form and refrains from seeing others.
He knows what is best and He reciprocates with our
desires.

All this I've heard from the reliable, undisturbed
authorities.

He is far away (I know) and very near as well.

You can seek Him in your heart.

God is not vague; He is not dead.

He's in the fierce arguments caused by His devotee-
preachers.

He's in the Deity form in the temple where He sleeps
until four.

He's in His names for whoever makes the effort to chant.
Even in the birds' cries, sounds of barking dogs and
tires.

CHURNING THE MILK OCEAN

Where did I start?
Where can I go?
Just stay on the beam as a *vaidhi'bhakta*.
I'm writing this for you,
for me that is,
hoping to express
what I'm really after and
what I'll attain one day:
fixed up in jolly attraction
for my Lord Govinda
and telling about Him
to whomever I meet, like
Prabhupada did at Dr. Mishra's
when he led them in hour-long *kirtanas*
even when there was no sign that
anyone would take to it full-time.
He sang slowly and gravely, in a deep-
voiced, old-voiced devotional tune of
Bengal — of Prabhupada.
And because he was pure, gradually some
came, playing *karatalas* 1-2-3 in New York.
That's where I started; that's where I go.

Desire To Practice Poems

^ou think you'll run out of things
 to say? No, but urgency. •
 If I tell everyone I'm writing poems, that
 could kill it.
 By lack of practice I could lose the easy
 touch, the nerve.
 You have to try and want to serve and
 then He may empower you.
 He'll let you go on ranting, rambling, but
 that's a different thing.
 I'm talking about poems that can be
 accepted as transcendental, as preaching
 ... as poems.

So resolve to practice. That's why it's so
 important to do it for your own pleasure.
 That's not a sin.
 You think Rupa Gosvami didn't enjoy writing
 beautiful verses about Radha and Krsna? No one
 forced him. He wanted to and he was renounced, not
 interested in becoming a famous poet.
 "Overcome with yearning, and crying in the middle of
 Vrndavana forest, I shall now reveal the deep mark
 burning tears have made in my heart."
 So "enjoyment" is not the word for Rupa Gosvami, but
 it may work for me.

CHURNING THE MILK OCEAN

And he had a wish to serve Sri Caitanya
Mahaprabhu by helping people come to Him,
through his writings.
“May whoever reads this prayer to
the Queen of Vrndavana – become the object
of Her mercy.”
That’s the idea.

It’s quiet here in Pennsylvania –
I’ll be interrupted at any moment.
Tonight they predict another snowstorm.
Sirens on the highway,
death in the city and everywhere.
It’s not touching me yet.
We’re going to read more Tenth Canto.
If you like, dear spiritual master,
I could serve by writing.
This is how I propose to do it.
But only if you say to Krsna,
let him flow – not another Rupa Gosvami
by any means,
but let him allow himself to release
all the wonderful things
he already knows and feels from
a lifetime in ISKCON,
moments with the pure devotee,
a self that is pure and dormant, eternal –

whose struggle
is something,
who'd like to leave a record
of songs
accepted
and useful,
fun and easy to read, *su'sukham*
kartam avyayam.

CHURNING THE MILK, OCEAN

I Said I Didn't Know

LJ keep looking at the thermometer as if it matters.

Prabhupada has put me here behind a low desk where I talk like a *sannyasi* giving advice: "How is your *sadhana*? Do you find time to chant? When will you wind down your karma and dedicate yourself to renunciation?"

I keep thinking there's more to say but I'm nervous about it.

"Still more?" a part of me wonders.

It's dark outside, 30 degrees.

I've discovered: the coldest time is just before dawn;

I can write with 3 pairs of gloves on; no matter how I try I'm always showing off.

Krsna is not so hard to remember as you may think. I know a 9-year-old boy who does it most of the time, who considers Bala-Krsna his friend, but he is a fussy eater and only draws pictures of Krsna when he feels like it.

As for me and Krsna,

I am only one of innumerable *jivas* to Him, yet He loves me singly.

I can love Him with one-pointed devotion, but
it's hard due to this body and this mind.
I can't seem to escape them,
even in dreams,
even in reading or writing.
But who is more powerful,
Krsna or *may at*

Someone asked a question about Krsna and I
said I didn't know. Then I tried answering in a
roundabout way.
I repeated what I'd heard.
We talked about Krsna until someone came and
said, "It's getting late."
I said, "He never leaves Vrndavana but they
know Him there in separation."
I'll have to read more.

CHURNING THE MILK OCEAN

Untitled

(English mines Player cigarettes
Cricket field in Raman Retl
Catch yourself in free fall
through roofs of memories,
watch out!
Man falling like a piece of
meteor, a fish bowl, a fish in the
Living Theater. You knew me
when?

cSs^&*>

A *Preaching Mission*

LJ'KI bound to wander
and often in the West
from Puri's shores.
Now I'm only a few days away from
pilgrimage to Vraja, but
Prabhupada said,
"Our mission is worldwide."
A preacher leaves Vrndavana, as he
did,
to spread the glories of
Vrndavanacandra.
I'm thinking of that.

I'm not in charge of preaching in the
former Soviet Union or even in
charge of the former Staten Island,
but I've got a preaching mission. If
we could feel it — wherever we are.

CHURNING THE MILK OCEAN

Waiting To Land

Clouds, clouds, clouds,
cumulus,
other kinds,
bunchy white
pillows, soft rocks,
castles passing them.
We're high up – when
will we go down and I
can say I'm on the
ground 3 hours from
Vrndavana? You take it
for granted the steel
plane will descend and
this airy domain
will be behind us
like a dream.
Clouds, clouds, sky,
descend like in an
elevator, pulls on
your innards,
your ears pop, your head
hurts, planet at
sharp angle see heaven
and earth. I don't want
either and can't have them anyway.

Wish I chanted now this is
also chanting Hare Krsna
Hare Krsna, Krsna – brown
earth. Captain says we are
number 5 to land (not yet)
and waiting for a break in
the weather before we can
land. It's raining in Delhi.
So up we go into the
clouds and I must
tolerate and everyone
else on board too.
It could be a while
waiting for a break
in the weather.

Calling Out

ump, dump your garbage.
 But Vrndavana is not a dump. But
 this page is not Vrndavana. But you
 are writing it in Vrndavana.
 No, "I" am not in Vraja.
 Aren't you?
 The soul is covered by fear and dirt,
 but it's exposed to the radioactive
 fallout of the *dhama*.
 O hard-shelled heart,
 that you stay in Vrndavana
 but cannot allow the
 sweet mercy to penetrate your
 being.
 Vrnda-devi, please relieve me, of
 this dilemma.
 Strong Krsna, please penetrate me
 with Your rays.
 Dearest Srimati Radharani, may
 Prabhupada teach me and reach me
 in Vrndavana — with a direction
 appropriate for my case.
 I am his servant.

To Make A Poem

The Chairman of the Board takes
the blanket off his lap and stands
to write a poem on behalf of
Stephen T. and all who have been
liberated into Krsna consciousness.
He has a stuffy audience and would
prefer no audience at all. He feels a
stitch of pain in the area near his
heart but disregards it.
What are his chances of singing a
Vaisnava song?

He bows down, but it is a superficial
gesture — praying to write a poem.
Settle for the facts: fat blue boots, a
pink *dhoti* on his legs and
on top of that a heavy tan coat. A
pleasant orange pen.
Not far from here, Kapiladeva's
instruction to His mother.

CHURNING THE MILK OCEAN

He will teach the old yoga, the perfect,
transcendental yoga that counts the body
and senses and teaches confidently of a
realm not seen or touched by them. He
delineates the soul and God and how to
reach Him in *bhakti*.

I go along willingly.

I don't want to rot in matter.

There are sages and books
that know things beyond my experience
and beyond the knowledge
of the world's savants.

I will have to lecture and take my turn
again.

I'll base it on the text and prepare it in
advance.

The pressure is on.

Anything will do.

I mean snow, shiny cold surface . . . the
facts:

a devotee is well off but he had better not
coast or he's culpable again;
what are we doing to serve our Guru
Maharaja?

About the transcendental science:
Kapiladeva teaches that it will free you
from the *gunas*,
it will enable you to see the form of the
Lord, with face like the rising sun,
whom devotees love to see.
It will free you from matter, but you
have to apply yourself diligently and
work hard — rewrite, revise your life,
inquire how others are doing and don't
just study your own belly or your own
bed and sleep.
You've got to put out energy, to work
at it,
even if it is only for yourself — a little
song for you and God.
In fact it has to be even nicer if it's just
for Him.
Look inside, recall
His teachings and what you feel.
Tell of Vrndavana and Lord Caitanya, the
Six Gosvamis . . .
Take us from New York to Ireland to
India.
I promise it will be a prayer
offered to his lotus feet -----
to my guru's lotus feet.

CHURNING THE MILK OCEAN

Reflections Of A T voice-born

One poet writes a lot about his mother and father and brother. I don't because it's so long ago in a pre-Krsna conscious past. You really leave it back there.

I guess I am made up of all that I was but I also know that my past is material whereas I am spiritual.

You may not agree but I made a break with my past – it's healthier to be second-born with a spiritual master, Prabhupada, assuring me that he's my eternal father and we have an eternal relationship with Krsna – Krsna may be our master or friend or son or lover.

That's yet to come.

I'm immersed in that today as long as I can hold up. This life is full of grace, satisfying as Caitanya wrought and we want others to take to it too.

This is Italy (I'm always traveling).

It's a nice sort of life, getting ready to think of Krsna at death.

I also think always of you, dear persons who are not yet devotees.

I shudder to think of you — you
threaten me and I also feel something like
compassion for you. My spiritual master orders us to
help innocent persons. He cries to free
the people from birth and death.
I care. At least I won't
disobey my teacher. So I write this for you.

Like I said I don't look
much to the pre-Krsna conscious days. I hope
I don't have to go back to another life
like that. But chances are I will,
so next time I want to be like Jada Bharata,
dead serious about no more *maya* and
praying desperately
that the holy name will come to me.
Please, Lord, let it be that I don't forget *harinama* and my
spiritual master's mission, and his kindness to me. Please
don't let me get lost again.

Moods Are *Subtle*

^Went down to the beach alone with
 Prabhupada's *Bhagavad-gita*.
 He is the via medium to Krsna.
 I spoke out loud while squatting on pebbles
 and sea stones. My ankle ached, so I couldn't
 take a nice long walk, but read that page and
 passed it on to you.
Be alone sometimes and hear Him.
 That's my message.

There's a promontory fort somewhere around here but I
 couldn't easily find it. At my feet were smooth rocks
 like eggs, some striped gray and white and others long
 like carrots. The cove of the sea. This morning the moon
 was half.

Out there the air and hill, uninhabited by us, the houses
 on the hill – everything is His energy. He is the
 Supreme Person and I got an inkling of it by reading
 the *Bhagavad-gita*.
 Srla Prabhupada said,
 "And that liberation is specific." Go to Krsna. He's in
 all things. So whether you read the scripture or look
 out, a faithful son will see Him.

I hereby promise I won't hear Bach's Mass in B minor, which someone left here in 3 cassettes. Why not? It's holy music for horns and violins and the master musician is shown on the cover with a mild smile and big wig . . . The reason is moods are subtle.

God is One and Bach is sublime, I suppose (and so is Chuck Berry in his own way and John Coltrane too), but moods are subtle. I have only a few days here and don't want to miss whatever concentration (*samadhi*) I can achieve in *Bhagavatam*, and *Bhagavad'gita* walks.

So when I see a rock on the beach I'll know for sure whether to pick it up or leave it.

And when I speak the music will be right for time and person and place. Krsna will speak and I'll speak to Him and it won't be a pretense if I share it. But it's all . . . sensitive.

Right now wind buffeting and breakfast.

*Happy To Report It**i*

Di ear from Me, Sri Krsna says.
 My poem follows Him down a lane,
 opens His book – He speaks and we
 listen: I am everything and in everything.
 Amen. The lamb has escaped under the
 wire fence but lacks boldness to run
 away. As I pass by he ducks back into the
 field, a black and white spotted lamb.
 As I was saying . . .

Sri Krsna is in everything and He is
 everything, yet He's apart from
 everything. There's no truth greater than
 Me. That's not a vague "Me," not
 interchangeable with you and I. We are
 tiny souls.
 We don't sustain the universe –
 we work it, but it comes
 from Him and goes back to Him.
 Both matter and spirit are His.

Down a lane with morning mist sprinkling, go out of
 range from the roadside houses so they don't see you.
 In the shelter of a road bend or behind a tall gorse bush,
 I take out the *Gita* and read some more.

Krsna is in all His manifestations.
 He's fully present in the spiritual world.
 As I read, a thread, an electrical connection — a synapse —
 occurs and I'm happy to report it: another way to perceive
 Him in my life.
 My discoveries are not so great, not entitled to be called
 realizations. But I kick out the nonbelieving stance or the
 too familiar stance. I walk and stand in wonder at the
Gita's choice pages.
 It appears to me. I talk what I'll do and how I'll serve Him
 if He lets me.

ii

^ou want to be a writer, poet, and all that? Okay, it means
 hours and days alone and lots of time in the books.
 Main thing is your own lungs and
 feet and Krsna. What your guru taught
 you. What you loved and continue to read
 and love, his books. Krsna will give you intelligence.
 You'll find Him on the road when you
 walk and when you stop and open the book.

CHURNING THE MILK OCEAN

Hear from Me.

Writing means imbibing, being absorbed, immersed, engaged, surrendered — a plain old Hare Krsna music and food and preaching to Sunday guests, “Why don’t you take to it?” And to the initiated devotee who has stopped chanting his rounds you say, “Why don’t you chant them?”

You should. Start it up again.”

A voice says, “You want to be a real writer?

Then go door to door and tell us what they say. Write a ‘preaching reform notebook.’ Don’t sell us problems or mental stuff from your old aging body that can’t digest.

We don’t want toothlessness, we want youth and vigor and surrender to wild *kirtanas* . . . coronet blaring, 8-hour meetings . . . ”

Okay, I know you can’t do all that.

Then just be real and true, be a man on the road, in your room, sing praises of Bhagavan Sri Krsna and His pure devotee.

dxshdls

How To Pray When It Rains

LJ was in the rain and couldn't read my book outdoors. I began
crunched under an
embankment at the beach reading and hearing
my voice utter *Bhagavatam*. Dhruva's
beginning to pray. Srila Prabhupada said Syamasundara
is in the heart of the devotee.
Then too much wet on the page,
so I closed it and walked in my rain gear.

When you can't read that holy book, can you pray? Can you
recall?

The day all gray. I saw an animal big as a cat loping fast from a
distance for the sea. Would he run into it? Sure did – what was
he?

Wild seaweed in piles. My eyes without glasses can't see that
well and it's too wet to read.

I wanted to record it for folks like a natural sermon, but the rain
prevents me.

So make the best of it, you and your *japa*, beadbag soaking
through. I can get another and water won't hurt my red beads.

Pray to God, please keep me awake to Your holy names:

Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare.

Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

CHURNING THE MILK OCEAN

Back in the room, sheltered.

Domestic sounds, crackling fire in fireplace, milk
smoking on stove. Madhu asks me how many
notepads I want to keep stored in the van (which is
not a warehouse).

They're all so beautiful, I say, I can't part with but 1 or 2. Give
me the rest to write long prose in writing sessions.

Upstairs, rain pelts the roof.

Green Celtic cross on shelf here, not mine. We've got Krsna
conscious burdens and trials. Krsna is playing in Vrndavana all
smiles and woe to those who sin against Him.

Old Christian roots to many a Hare Krsna server in the West.
And Jews and plain atheists, exotic neo-hedonists, men and
women, all come to the shelter of His Divine Grace.

Things That Went Wrong Today

THe generator went off, so no lights tonight.
I put a big log on the fire and for two hours I've been wasting
time trying to get it going. It's just a big black lump. Gas
water heater broke, so no water except ice water. I skipped
my noon bath.
My *japa* this morning was sleepy.
Wasted time. Dull and covered over.

But of course there is good news.
I'm engaged in devotional service, my spiritual master is
loving and guiding me from wherever he is and from within
my heart.
I read *Srimad' Bhagavatam* for an hour.
I wrote for an hour, twice.
I had some ideas for a book he asked me to write,
All Things Fail Without Krsna.

Neither good nor bad — the white frozen pond.
Actually it's all good if you can see it —
the broken generator means no light, the gas heater,
no hot water — do I die without that power?
Wake up, friend. Don't complain.
Look for the Lord within. Let all events transpire to bring
that about.

My Truth

c/Vty poem's not so packed perfect or meticulously honest but
scribbled quickly before lunch while the generator hums and I
have cold feet.

I've got the greatest treasure — the astrologer told the poor man
he'd find it if he dug on the eastern side.

Tenderly I hear those '66 tapes and promise to hear them until
the end of my life.

There's no need, I'm learning, to be attached or amazed when a
forty-year-old memory of high school days pops up or even a
forty-million-year-old recall of when I was a beast or a piece of
now-petrified wood.

(Like the pines I throw into the stove?)

Live for now and hear your spiritual master,
look how gracefully the folds of his
gray wool *cadar* lie across his
murti shoulders and I am
praying to him to be my spiritual master.

No need to feel guilty; things will get better.

Like Waking From A Dream

10 rounds done. Do you write to
communicate?
2 more rounds to stay awake
before a 6:15 breakfast.
I am not one of those lusty hard-
edge truth-telling poets.
I've got my own turf which I
acknowledge belongs to God.

There is God. It's not all happening by
chance. Now I'm communicating to the
guy inside my head.
But I don't have to do that.
Just talk for yourself, to free
yourself from the obstacles to
devotion.

Lord Krsna can only be known by
pure devotion God reveals
Himself.

Aunt Mary, Aunt Jo, Aunt
Madeline, Aunt Nancy.
Those are my aunts long gone from
my life. And Catholic saints I never
knew because there was no one
religious in my life.
I knew Studebakers, not saints.

CHURNING THE MILK OCEAN

I knew hot cross buns, not repentance. My mother forced us to go to church. She went, of course, but didn't and couldn't talk about it.

Nothing to say except it's the Church and you believe. Nothing about love or Jesus or God, no Bible, no nothing.

Father didn't believe but he was a Catholic. He didn't like Father Farricker or Father Flannagin or even Father Hicks. Damn them all with their special requests for a collection for the winter heating and a special collection for their black hats – put it in the weekly envelopes and seal them, put it in the basket, how much you gave will be published.

During *mangald'drati* I was thinking maybe my parents were cold and hard-hearted, I'll never know. Maybe I was an angel in their midst and they mistreated me. Somehow I survived their rough and denying treatment. I got out after the Navy, which Daddy forced me into. My sister was on their side but later switched to her own side, crying in her room and then marrying Tommy Morrissey and got out, went to Westchester.

I didn't move back home after
the Navy. They thought I would and
should. But I couldn't eat
that crap anymore. I read Paul Krassner's
"The Realist" once a month in the Navy. They'd
never catch me again. I dreamed as my
days in the Navy reduced, of the Lower East
Side and buddies there. Pitiful story to tell
now. But I want to tell it more.
Will it bore people? I didn't move back home. They
thought all
I wanted was their money and they didn't have
enough—just enough to buy a bottle of liquor for an
occasional drink, just enough to pay for their 1 house
in Avalon, New Jersey. Haven't seen them in about 25
years. Then I caught myself treating Gaura-Nitai as if
They were dolls and brought my attention back to this
temple room and chanting Hare Krsna, like waking
from a dream.

Travel Diary

Introduction

t/Wy travel diary, as the name implies, is what I write while we're in transit. Traveling is often tense and is always filled with inconvenience. Writing while traveling is a survival tactic for me. It's also interesting to see how differently I think when I am undergoing the pressures of travel as opposed to the relative peace of having stopped somewhere to preach.

I first took up travel writing while doing *Lessons from the Road* in 1986. At that time, I thought of the literary project first and then shaped my life to fit it. We bought a motor home and traveled around America, visiting ISKCON temples and preaching. The main reason for the traveling was so I could write *Lessons from the Road*.

Although I have kept diaries of my travels since then, I tended to record more my internal travels as were published in the earlier issues of "Among Friends." I didn't take up travel writing again in earnest until May 1994. I had just written "A Trip to Spain," which I mentioned elsewhere in this book, and as I came to the end of my fiction writing cycle, the travel diary provided immediate relief. I decided it would contain only real-life events and honest thoughts and no more than that.

It's hard to write in a bumping van or when I have a headache. Travel makes writing more of a chore. Sometimes things are happening so fast that I find myself writing in unusual places and positions. Other times I write in the back of the van when it stops for a few minutes.

Writing while traveling is an adventure because I never know what is about to happen. I could be sitting quietly in the back of the van and suddenly, someone is banging on the side — the police, looking for our papers. I always try to find snatches of time to write a few sentences during pit stops. Madhu-

marigala is a relentless driver. He doesn't waste time, and he drives fast. If he stops for gas, I immediately grab my pen and start writing. I know I'll have only five minutes. I don't mind, because writing like that prompts the rapid, fragmented sentences that allow me to say things I might otherwise have passed up. Sometimes I draw quick pictures, such as of the Mobil flying horse I see in front of me at a gas station, write a few jotted notes, then we're off again. It's a nice change of pace from other kinds of writing.

Ironically, travel provides plenty of opportunity to think. You can imagine what it's like to be forced to wait at airports or to have long hours driving in the van. We spend a lot of time coping with being unsettled and pushed beyond our usual hours. Those factors make you look at things more clearly. You catch, as you run past them, unusual views of yourself and where you are headed. You know when you get to where you are going, you'll be a new person.

En Route to Belgium

c/Vtadhu is trying to put extra locks on our van so that it can be parked on city streets and we can sleep in it at highway P-stops with more security. Thus he plans for the continuation of our roaming van life. I am planning on these travels to keep a notebook where I'll mix travelogue with all other thoughts, stories, and *krsna'katha*, reading notes from the *Bhagavatam*, etc.

Travel is often an odd time. I usually can't do writing sessions while driving, and to sit and write a story seems beyond me. Yet there is energy and adventure in travel. There's always the story of what happened as we drove through the countryside or bypassed the city, and sometimes we get clear realizations that come only when we travel.

Travel means emotionally and psychologically breaking away from places where we stay for a period of time. When we stop traveling even for a few days, we tend to adjust our schedules and find time for reading and prayer and writing. Travel disrupts all that. This time, we're on our way to Radha-desa, Belgium.

We expect big packs of forwarded mail and manuscripts to reach us there. Between dealing with that and the temple program, I'll have enough to do. After that, we go to Brescia, Italy, where the dentist says he needs me for ten days or so. During that time we'll visit the Medolago temple and go to Matsya-avatara Prabhu's house.

°We' re supposed to be underway in ten minutes. I had a headache all night. Didn't get up at 12 to write or at 1 to read.

Did get up at 2 to chant and finished nine rounds in front of Srila Prabhupada. Massaged and bathed him at 5 A.M. I like the way he looks—tanned and handsome, like himself. Although I'm preoccupied with my own pains, he gently reminds me to serve guru and to remember Krsna's holy names.

Took breakfast of fruits and prune juice, then went to bed for another hour. On waking, the "knot" of pain is still there behind my right eye. Gray day, be glad to be alive. I was eager to set these lines down before we left.

2:45 P.M.

The pain continues. Of course, I look forward to it going away, but what is my normal condition, this pain or relief? En route I saw a nursing home and an old hag of a lady walking with a white-haired man. A funeral home, a cemetery. The living and the dead. The living have their photos on billboard: "Elect Me." The dead we don't hear from.

The pain in my head may be my permanent condition at the end, as it is so often now. If I do get relief, I have to be vigilant to use my time to serve Krsna and not to waste it. Always chanting Hare Krsna.

12:04 A.M. *P'Stop off the auto'route*

c/Vly headache is gone. Dreams, dreams, but what's the use of them? When I wake, I often think the dreams have something to do with whether I can serve Srila Prabhupada the way

I'm doing or whether another way of life is even possible for me. But if Providence (Krsna) puts me in another life, it will become possible. Mainly, I tell myself not to worry.

e

The parking lot is finally quiet. It's cold in here and I am wearing my coat. I hope Madhu and I and the Renault hold together a little longer, to finish another season, and then make it to India.

Listen, you can fill your head with only so many things. It's like eating. If you stuff yourself too full, it starts to repeat on you. How much can you talk about Bill Clinton and what good will it do you at death? Either news of this world or news of Narada talking with King Barhisat — which do you want to hear?

Srila Prabhupada said that there's no happiness in the material world. They take the struggle to achieve happiness as happiness itself. Even rich people suffer. Narada told the king that his religious *yajnas* where he killed animals were all useless. Then he told him of his unknown friend, Avijnata, the Supersoul.

I wish to know my friends, Krsna and Srila Prabhupada. They are my well-wishers. And I wish to be friendly with the devotees. I can't solve so many people's problems; I can only try to be willing to help. A Vaisnava is compassionate. To do that, I try to keep in touch with myself and dedicate myself to Prabhupada's books. Then at least I will have something to give.

We are supposed to drive all morning and then stop for the rest of the day at some gas station or P-stop. I plan to repeatedly hear the lecture Srila Prabhupada gave on Lord Nrsimha's

Appearance Day in 1972 so I can speak on it when we get to Radha-desa.

My thoughts right now are reluctantly simple and quiet.

J2ord Krsna is the supreme teacher. In Vrndavana, the pure devotees know Him best in His confidential mood. But there's plenty for us to learn in the early cantos of the Bhaga- *vatam* too. Prabhupada's purports are always telling us to surrender to the original Krsna, *yam syamasundaram acintya-guna'Svarupam, govindam adi'purusam tarn aham bhajami*.

A few motorists outside have their fun. Take a little rest. I'll avoid even their faces and voices as much as I can. Nothing to see or learn from them. May Krsna protect us. May He save me from calamities. May I do something to help others. All glories to Him.

Reading notes

"J^ll facilities given by the Lord are unknown to the conditioned soul." (*Bhag.* 4.25.10, purport) Therefore, He's called Avijnata, "the unknown one." It's He who awards our past and present desires. In my case, that means I wanted to be a writer and a traveler, and that previously, I also wanted a big position, a chance to be close to my spiritual master, etc.

I have acted like a Puranjana, using my senses according to my whims. Living entities try to become *prabhu* and thus they travel all over the world "looking for a suitable place to live."

This travel doesn't make them happy, but only morose. Srila Prabhupada compares it to the hippies. If while traveling, a *jiva* becomes fortunate, he meets a guru and comes to Krsna consciousness. Then real life begins.

Poor Puranjana wandered all over the universe. Finally he came to India. He found what looked like a pleasurable city with nine gates. That city is an allegory for the human body. It's described in some detail. In the city, he's sitting alone and along comes – guess who? – “a beautiful woman with no engagement.” In the story, the woman represents material intelligence by which we enjoy the senses.

There are two kinds of heroes. A *gosvami* is a spiritual hero because he controls his senses. If I can control my senses and not be mad after sense gratification, I can be free of so much “responsibility” and anxiety as I leave things up to Krsna and His desires.

6:15 A.M.

Took brisk exercise and *japa* walk thirty minutes before dawn. No one was around. First patch of blue in sky. We want to take shelter in the holy name and not be concerned for, afraid of, or allured by, this world. Walking back and forth chanting. If the people in this world could add this chanting – but that's not possible.

11:10 A.M.

°We 're making good time on the French *auto-route*, trying to get to the other side of Paris before we stop for lunch. American rock 'n' roll blaring over loudspeakers at Elf gas station — Ray Charles' "Hit the Road, Jack." I *listened*, but was disappointed. America, the land of rock and Coke and Boeing 747s and what else?

I prepared for my lecture on Lord Nrsimhadeva. I'll tell the whole history briefly. I'll mainly lecture on the verse, *matir na krsne* . . . When Prahlada tells his father that he should get out of the well of household life and go to the forest, Prabhupada calls that forest "Vrndavana."

Srila Prabhupada also said that there are two kinds of civilizations, one represented by Prahlada and one by Hiranya- kasipu. We represent Prahlada's civilization.

(A thought: may Krsna protect us so that we can carry out our plans and arrive safely tomorrow at Radha-desa. We should be grateful that He is escorting us, protecting us, throughout the passages of our lives. Never be cynical about how things happen or take them for granted or complain or fail to see God acting.)

So Prahlada tells how persons of the demoniac civilization can't appreciate Krsna consciousness. There are three verses in a row to be considered: (1) *matir na krsne*; (2) *na te vidhuh svartha-gatim hi visnurh*, and (3) *naisam matis tavad*. The demoniac civilization is described, uncontrolled senses, chewing the chewed, don't know goal of life is Visnu, blind leading the blind. And devotee life, hearing from and serving pure devotees and Lord Krsna. Talk a little more on these, then continue the history, the slaying of the demon by Lord Nrsimhadeva who appeared at twilight (and we fast until then).

As for Srila Prabhupada's 1972 lecture, I'll hear it at least once more and then let it enter my own lecture naturally.

^^adha-desa: marigolds neatly landscaped, nice apartments for *grhasthas*, elegant and palatial temple room and main building, tourists arriving by busloads and taking the hour-long tour. Our van will be parked in a bit of woods, quiet and safe, starting tomorrow afternoon. Now we're still only approaching Orleans. I see the white stripe in the middle of the *auto-route* and hear the loud vibration of the engine.

1:35 P.M.

(Stopped for the day short of Paris. I placed Srila Prabhupada on the front of the desk as I prepared to massage and bathe him. Then I took a risk and unhinged the book case to replace a book. It passed through my mind that Srila Prabhupada was exposed to falling objects, but I thought I could manage it; in other words I wasn't careful. A book did fall and broke his arm in the exact place where it was broken when we left Spain.

I went to Madhu and said, "A terrible accident happened. Prabhupada's arm is broken again." M. glued it, so he's sitting as usual, but with only his *cadar* around his body while the glue hardens.

I'm sorry. I'm determined to keep worshiping him, but our travels are too rough for a delicate *murti*. It makes me think maybe I shouldn't keep this *murti* here in the van. But without

the *murti*, places in which we stop, such as the P-stops, would remain mundane environments. We wouldn't be able to offer our food as nicely, although I guess we could still worship Prabhupada in his picture. Maybe that's best, get a nice photo of Srila Prabhupada and bathe it and garland it every day. Be- cause it's not going to get any easier.

5:05 P.M.

^7 roup of Hindus meeting in this P-stop. M. says, "Hare Krsna," as he prepares our items for an overnight stay. We have a new padlock for my back door. I'm always a little nervous about thieves and possible visits by gendarmes. M. put more glue on Srila Prabhupada's glued arm. I won't make any rash decisions about stopping the worship. The best thing would be to continue, but to stop having accidents. Otherwise, it would be offensive to keep him and keep subjecting him to being broken.

Dear Lord Krsna, You are the controller of everything, so certainly You control the lives of Your devotees and see to their protection. You act in ways we cannot always understand. You are always trying to free us of our entanglement in this world and bring us back to You in the spiritual world. Unfortunately, we are sometimes reluctant to join You. That is our foolishness. When You see an aspiring *sad.ha.ka* who is still attached to material desires, You break his hopes for material success.

This leaves him no alternative but to surrender to You fully — and that is actually the servant's true desire and happiness. Happiness is not found in material things.

Dear Srila Prabhupada, I am sorry that I did not take more care and left you exposed so a book could fall and break your arm. We want to think it did not hurt you, but you are present in the *murti*. I don't know exactly what to think. But I do wish to continue serving you in this form. You travel with us every- where and in return, we have broken you twice in two months. Perhaps I should leave you somewhere so you can receive better care.

Dear Srila Prabhupada, you are everywhere. Once, your *murti* form was burned in Fiji by fanatical religionist hoodlums. That does not mean *you* were burned. You leave the *murti* before such things happen to you. As I write this, you are sitting before me peacefully as a true *sad.hu*. You know me and my assertion to serve you by writing. Tomorrow (and every day) brings another opportunity to serve you. I know you want wide preaching. I'll chant your names in transit to Belgium. There I'll serve by replying to the many letters that will arrive in the mail package. Some persons at the temple have received re-initiation or initiation from me and I will try to reciprocate with them.

My dear Lord Krsna, please have mercy on this sinner.

I read aloud to Srila Prabhupada from his 1967 letters in India and his return to America in late December. In one letter, he described how the disciple should always appear to be a fool before the guru; as soon as he thinks he's better than his guru, he is doomed.

In another letter you referred to me as "wanting to be overloaded with typing tasks." You said you too like to work to full capacity, but in old age, you didn't have the physical

energy of your young disciples. Now I'm feeling my own physical energy curtailed, but I'm also feeling a strength in serving you by writing and reading. I pray you'll give me intelligence how to do it.

Almost 8 p.m.

Thump, thump of rock bass on car radio. Shrill female laughter. Steady flow of trucks. Seems like more of a partying atmosphere out here than is usual at rest stops. Usually it's just silent truckers and quick-stop travelers. It's probably because it's a weekend and we're near Paris. May Lord Nr- simhadeva protect us. *Harinama* is our shelter. Voices, music, and car horns only prompt us to cling more to the Lord's holy name. This is a nightmarish world—no fit place for a gentleman. But for some reason, we wanted to be here.

I*!

1:23 A.M.

LJ t finally quieted down enough to rest last night, or maybe my fatigue let me blot out the noise. I dreamt I was advocating a kind of radio rap show as a kind of preaching, the devotee as *raconteur*. This happened in an *ista-gosthi* setting, and one devotee after another came forward and spoke in favor of it. It generated a lot of positive input. Ramesvara was there, and I wanted him to speak in favor of it and then to give us some BBT facility to do it, and he did.

Later, I dreamt I was interviewing Rupanuga on the same subject. He said when he does that kind of preaching, it functions to bring his transcendental thinking down into an acceptable and useful form of the mode of goodness.

I don't know quite what to make of these dreams. Do they indicate a way devotees might preach? Do they show I have concern that my Godbrothers are preachers, as I am, and that we are all seeking a way to express it? Can I give them ways to preach? At least the dream tells me I ought to continue with my own radio show and self-expression.

Now I'm awake and again aware of the highway sounds. I have some time to work on my different forms of expression — the radio shows, the stories, writing sessions, free-writes. I wish they could be better, mixing spontaneous thoughts with Krsna conscious *siddhanta*. I want the two to blend into an artistic form. What do I mean by "art"? I don't mean "art" that will make me famous. I don't mean "art for art's sake." I mean art as a way to better deliver Krsna's message, to make it attractive to others — and I mean more than that. Art brings the message to the heart.

Writing is a seeking to express Krsna consciousness in forms (call them art forms or genres) which are capable of getting past the defense set up by various rascals (both those outside and those within us). Then it means delivering Krsna's message to the head and the heart and convincing the readers to accept Lord Krsna and Srila Prabhupada and the process of surrender.

Hari Sauri recorded in his diary Prabhupada's words that it is respectful to praise the spiritual master, but a greater praise is to go out and fight the rascals on his behalf. This implies

that we might express our Guru Maharaja's words in a personal way. We imbibe and assimilate what he says, and then we repeat it according to time, place, and person.

As preachers, we may not always see a tangible result. We simply have to keep our faith in the power of the message and continue to express it. We are not preaching, and in my case, preaching through writing, simply for our own satisfaction. We are trying to contribute to a Krsna conscious revolution.

One thing I like to express in my own words is the struggle to surrender. Prabhupada wants us all to overcome our doubts and *anarthas* and that takes struggle.

Therefore, a lot of my "fighting" is inner fighting. I am encouraged when I hear Srila Prabhupada express Krsna consciousness as inner life. He gave examples in his model of the spiritual dialectic. The Krsna conscious thesis is that man can't be happy by outer engagement, but by inner meditation. For example, having sex while covered (your clothes on) isn't enjoyable. To enjoy sex, you must uncover yourself. The antithesis is that we are all struggling to be happy, but don't know how to uncover ourselves in order to find inner joy.

For example, a Bengali proverb says a man is struggling with the outer fibers of a coconut, but not tasting the juice inside. Therefore, the synthesis is to take to Krsna consciousness, which teaches us how to uncover ourselves from the bodily designation and the externals of materialistic life and find pleasure in the soul.

When I hear Prabhupada speak like this, I am enlivened. To hear that the essence of Krsna consciousness is an inner state and not an external work schedule, makes me happy. I like to work for the inner states, to purify myself through *sadhana* and prayer. I am less inclined to concentrate only on management for the sake of management or relationships between devotees if

the goal isn't an inner one. Srila Prabhupada's words stress that Krsna consciousness, the life of the soul, love of God, is an inner—or individual—thing.

Prabhupada has given us a combination: work on your inner life, and don't simply praise your Guru Maharaja, but fight the rascals on his behalf. I take these words personally and apply them to my service. This combination gives me the strength to be a Krsna conscious writer.

All glories to the Lord of the universe who protects us from fear and danger. Thank you, Srila Prabhupada, for sanctioning my writing and publishing in Krsna consciousness. I am eager to pursue the avenues I've begun—the radio shows and other verbal forms. I am trying to develop genres that help expression. Thank you for allowing me to grasp a little better what it is I'm trying to do—that I am trying to fight with cultural weapons.

7 a.m. breakfast stop, Shell Station, Belgium

❧ really “owned the road” as he drove through the outskirts of Paris at 4 A.M. this morning. We saw signs that said, “*Fluide.*” No one was on the road except at 4:30, we saw a dream-like procession of a dozen shiny, restored VWs and a few strays. M. says the only defect of the 4 A.M. driving time is that he doesn't get to chant his rounds early. 5 A.M. is generally better.

9:30 A.M.

On the road, an hour and a half to go before we reach Radha-desa. I am thinking perhaps I'll change the verse I'll lecture on tomorrow. Instead, I could speak on Prahlada's saying that he wants to rescue the *mudhas* before he goes back to Godhead himself. But probably *matir na krsne* is a better choice because it's in the middle of the action leading up to Lord Nrsimhadeva's appearance. I also plan to read from Hari Sauri's book where Prabhupada says that modern society is a "Hiranyakasipu society." He says the devotees are a "Prahlada civilization." There's another quote too that I would like to read. Srila Prabhupada is asked what will give him the most pleasure.

Our journey is coming to an end and we will be able to relax now in a friendly temple. Madhu's steady service and competence in getting us here—now we will have a change of pace as the mail arrives and we meet with devotees. I doubt I'll have time to write much while we're here, although I might be able to spare a few moments to say "hello" on the page. Maybe in those moments I can find what the Japanese poets call "*haiku* moments." But I'll probably have to take up a new chapter of the travel diary after we leave Radha-desa.

*Scrap Journal, Ireland (Wicklow, Dublin,
Inis Rath, Belfast)*

*The idea for this came while reading *Into the Deep: A Writer's Look At Creativity*, by Susan McBride Els. She said she was doing a master's thesis on novel-writing, and along with it, a journal describing the nature of the writing process. The official journal didn't work. "Because of the nature of creativity, the 'journal' immediately degenerated into ubiquitous scraps of paper stuck between the seats of my car . . . two sizes of pink and green Post-it notes turned my office walls and windows into a sloppy mosaic. There was nothing organized about this process diary." She continued to keep methodical notes on the computer. "But the really good stuff, which came while walking, driving, and cooking, was hanging around my life like suspended confetti."

Her book about the creative process and how artists follow it rather than analyze it is interesting. I may look at it again. But now I want to try that process of pasting in all the notes I write on scraps of paper. I'll have to think of some method to identify them, but perhaps all I need is to label them as notes written on a particular day.

At the same time, I hope to do some other writing, although it's doubtful I'll find the time over the next three or four weeks. I have two separate notepads started right now; one is labeled, "Plans for September." The other is about my specific project of praying with *Bhagavad-gita* verses.

The idea of writing on, and then saving, little scraps of paper is attractive to me because it gives me some impetus to write even when it looks like I don't have time for more than a moment or two in an odd place—a temple room or at a gas station or wherever. I can dare myself to write in any place.

That's the proposal, so what follows is a collage of pasted-in notes written over the next few weeks.

<J/flways
fs writing. Express yourself. Why not be quiet and hear Lord Krsna speak? Use spare moments to recite a verse of *Bhagavad'gita*. Or both notes and prayer.

Xe ss than two hours to go for the day. The roads get rougher and the ride gets bouncier, noisier. Looking out the back window, I see small towns with their churches and full graveyards. The roads are narrow here. Cows and sheep are pasturing on the hill. Madhu passes trucks, and as he does, he flashes his lights. They flash back in a friendly way. The back window mists over from the rain. It's all familiar. The whole world is familiar. Everything rests in Krsna.

X_{rsna}'s body and ours – what a difference. When we pray, let it be fully concentrated on Krsna. *Bhagavad-gita* teaches that. What need is there for me to study the methods of desert fathers? Study *Srimad' Bhagavatam*. The desert fathers present God in a vague way. We know Him as Krsna. This Lord Krsna teaches in ABC way in *Gita* – don't disbelieve. Come up to accepting Krsna as Supreme Person. Only *mudhas* of various kinds do not accept Him.

Difference: “The Lord’s body is transcendental, spiritual, but because the conditioned soul has a material body, he has many bodily and mental troubles.” (*Bhag.* 6.16.21)

LJ wrote in a letter that I like Ireland because the people are softer than in America. I don’t know if that’s true. You write without knowing or feeling carefully. Cliches, gibberish. People in America? Maybe people are simpler in Ireland, but they are just as ignorant and unlikely to take to Krsna consciousness, so why say they are softer? Also, there are “good” people in America. Everything is confusing to me and I can’t make sense out of it—why not say that? Or say nothing. Nothing foolish.

LJ cleaned the dishes and pots and sink and stove and floor. It was fun. Ate a pear, offered to God in mind. I can’t gather myself to *think*, not in words or coherent feelings, not extended and directed to Lord Krsna or Srila Prabhupada.

Still, we live in joyful excitement of going to the temple and lecturing and being with disciples here in Dublin. Creative juices for writing projects bubbling.

But head is weak. I can’t go from one thing to another constantly. I want to read Srila Prabhupada’s Ratha-yatra speech in a deep way, but I can’t seem to. One could contemplate each sentence. I don’t know how to read . . .

Evening descends and I need to rest soon. Tomorrow is Ratha-yatra.

“Process” notes? Catch flow of creativity and inspiration. Serendipity? This note beginning with “I cleaned the dishes” is mostly a diary. I am a living diary. “Damn it, Thurber, stop writing.”

y idea-head limits the flow. I want to be a devotee, not an artist, unless as artist I can serve in Krsna consciousness simply.

But being an artist is so consuming, it sometimes feels like a competition or in conflict with being a devotee. Work this out so there is no conflict. Be fixed in basic Krsna conscious practices and attitudes and write Krsna conscious art, stories, poems, writing sessions, etc.

-yatra lecture in public:

- (1) Introduce ISKCON historically – Lord Krsna, Lord Caitanya, Srila Prabhupada.
- (2) ISKCON’s mission is to cleanse. Philosophy: we are not this body. Spirit soul. Eternal. God and servants.
- (3) Chant Hare Krsna. He is absolute. Be with Him through chanting. It’s easy.
- (4) Tell Ratha-yatra pastimes and inner meaning.
- (5) Invite them to chant and take *prasadam* and watch play. You are in a process of creativity. Writing sessions is for yourself and gives you confidence to write. Be alive. Prose and poems.

I have an editor and a team of workers who love me and who work to publish what I write. This is Srila Prabhupada's gift. Don't take it for granted or exploit it. Evolve and write.

cSsilsfis

9L ar what Srila Prabhupada says. In the heart. Usually I read and think how it might affect others (newcomers), or I observe it as a presentation or note it with an act of recognition, "Here is the philosophy: the self is *ananda'mayo 'bhyasat*. Here is ... " And then the mind goes to daily affairs. Look for occasions to read better than that.

^Waiting for Dublin Ratha-yatra to begin. Sitting in back seat of car. The cart tower is in view—red and yellow strikes me. Try to relax neck and eye. So many bodies. Do neck exercises. Someone gave me a marigold garland. *Haribol*. I hear horses' hooves.

I am not a rabbit. It hurts, shames me, to be such a word-mongering nonsense.

Be deeply silent and depend on Him. The process of writing is to gain mercy from *antaryami*. I don't feel so great, but maybe when I get out.

^What a nondevotee artist can do that a Kṛṣṇa conscious artist can't do:

- (1) Go to parties and stay up all night, intoxicated.

- (2) Enjoy illicit sex.
- (3) Defy God.
- (4) Write his speculations “without fear.”
- (5) Get into James Joyce and everyone else.

What a devotee artist can do that a nondevotee artist can't do:

- (1) Sincerely praise Krsna in *parampara*.
- (2) Help people come to Krsna consciousness.
- (3) Go back to Godhead through his art.
- (4) Perform art as a direct service to Krsna.

devotee's theory of writing needn't conform to any non-devotee's theory on creativity. Anyway I hate to rewrite. Let me keep writing and saving what works. What doesn't work I may love, but let it go and don't publish it. Doesn't seem I should hate anything I write. It's all written in earnest. Why call it a “mistake,” “trash,” etc.? Peter London's book was good on this (I quoted from it in *Shack Notes*. “Why do these mistakes move me so much . . .”) And Ueland's general encouragement not to keep polishing a pearl, but start on something new. My present process is just right with writing and editing. Keep at it.

Write daily. The creativity book also suggests that one affirm his vocation daily and ask himself why he writes. Not *too* much analysis.

Inspiration, intuition, blocks, etc.—they don't talk enough (or at all) about God. I should be aware and pray to Him. Distinguish myself from nondevotee writers.

They say tension is important for writing. I admit it.

^Dusy, busy, adrenaline. Hand shaking? No time for writing. On a vacation from it. Disciples—who loves me most? I must be careful, be plain and not exult in worshipers, servants.

Simple joy in washing dishes and pots in kitchen. M. says, “You should be the servant, you are so good at it.” Now *Gita* lecture at Sunday Feast in Dublin. Thank Lord Krsna.

^Dublin center. How you doing? Into corner, sitting on floor. Two women guests very close in front. First signals in head of headache coming.

“I’ll be back,” the bum said, and went out to get toilet paper. Then he came back.

I’ll be back to do some service. Forget stiff neck, sweaty, weak, trembles. But I do desire peace.

How can I help others? Just speak what Srila Prabhupada and *Gita* say.

Reach out to your relationship with Srila Prabhupada — that’s the best way to reach disciples.

“Glorious is the master” who saves his disciple. How to do it? I go alone often to pray for *bala* to cope.

If they do the same, I can’t blame them.

Oh, look he’s writing in his notebook. You could write a book or writing session (flash bulb).

Govinda madhava, navanita-taskara . . . legal pads to fill. I’ll be happy preaching and reading my spiritual master’s books.

Your books are light, she said. Yes, I wish I could be light with *sakti* from my Guru Maharaja. I am his *cela*. Please let me serve and not be envious of others.

'11 be traveling at 6:30 this morning. Heavy rain. Looking for ideas for my radio show.

I was thinking, however, that instead of a radio show, to try and tell stories as I was doing in France earlier this year. I can use both writing and talking. The idea is always focused on finding a light and interesting form of presenting Krsna consciousness.

It was said of one artist that he always had to outdo the previous image of himself. Oh, that was said of Merton. He was no comedian, but a serious writer. Don't imitate yourself or others. Maybe the best way to do it is to talk even without the plan "to tell a story." It could go under the rubric of radio shows, but still be free to accept whatever comes.

I may not be Krsna conscious in my attempts at writing art.

Vow at Inis Rath. Things went wrong. No one to meet us to take us across the channel, cold water in rooms, *dal* served cold, heater not working. I am worried the guests coming for the seminar will meet similar and worse austerities.

Edit some Prabhupada poems. Got a few hours to myself. Tomorrow starts the disciples' meetings. First one is to read *Srimad' Bhagavatam* selections from Prabhupada's purports and say why I like them and what they can mean to everyone.

Nothing to say about creativity according to nondevotees. Just write and hope it will be inspiration from *antaryami* and that it will serve the devotees.

Behave yourself so you don't fall down.

There's a lot of hype. Seems people want recognition for what they do—newspaper headlines even in ISKCON, and approach officials for recognition and money and men. I see much of this as a hype, or at least not as the heart of devotional effort. The heart is just to do it, the preaching, the worship, the service, and to please the *deary as* and the Lord. Work together with devotees in your area. If someone elsewhere in the world wants to know what you are doing, you can tell them. It's as simple as that.

(Sometimes a story may carry a metaphor whereby the author gets carried away in ecstatic self-revelation, writing even more personally than if he wrote autobiographically what's actually happening. Kafka seems to be under that muse in "Metamorphosis." That's how he feels, like Gregor Samsa. He's the narrator (author) of the story, but the bigger-than-life metaphor carries him along until he's not writing artificially or for show (although he's aware of "art"). He also writes like this in *The Castle*. It's a dream story. Could this happen to me?

(Sorry for my pride. Radha-Govinda—His *dhoti* is nicely folded. I do want to worship Radha-Krsna—in accordance with my spiritual master’s direction.

Please be kind, begs Srila Rupa Gosvami to the Divine Couple.

(Second day of seminar. *Prabhupada Meditations* is the topic. I look forward to it. *Haribol*.

getting tired of myself as lecturer and emoting to a room full of devotees.

M. reminds me, “It’s only three times a year,” meaning I shouldn’t complain. Don’t be intimidated. Come on, be up for it. They’re doing their best to hear you attentively, putting up with austerities of crowded living and bare facilities of Inis Rath—so you on your side should give them all you can.

Janmastami, Belfast

Today is the Supreme Lord’s “birthday.”

Gave one Janmastami lecture this morning. I’ll give another tonight. I can’t think of what to say. Maybe something about the life of Lord Krsna on this earth. All day devotees will be reading out loud from *Krsna* book, so I don’t want to simply repeat “The Birth of Lord Krsna.”

Hmmm. He came to kill miscreants and rescue devotees. Maybe give examples. Killed Kamsa. Rescued ladies who became His wives. It's said He actually came to have pleasing pastimes with devotees, so give some of that too – with *gopas* and *gopis*. (He broke their hearts.)

It could be a selection of readings based on those points.

- (1) Kill Kamsa (*vinasaya ca duskrtam*).
- (2) *Paritranaya sadhunam* (to rescue princesses and kings imprisoned by Jarasandha and others).
- (3) To enjoy pleasure pastimes (Lord Brahma's prayers praising the residents of Vrndavana).

3:30 P.M.

ITi-ey, I'm gonna write for writing's sake. I'm not going to strangle that simple, unassuming drive. Like NG says (and as I have done in recent years and am doing right now), write as *bhajana*, as release. Don't look back – it's not important to even read it.

M: Write as much as possible and don't worry about quantitative publishing.

Travel Diary too, for the fun of it. Keep at a distance the thought of publishing. It will come.

And continue to do a few things a year for devotees. But even that you don't plan; it just comes. Take each day one at a time.

We have been parked outside a farmhouse in Newcastle for five days. Two householders are renting this house, and it's the beginning of an ISKCON farm. I gave two morning classes on verses chosen by Bhakti-rasa—both from the Tenth Canto. The second class was on 10.13.60, which describes Vrndavana as a place where beings naturally inimical to each other live side by side in peace.

My plans for the immediate future are to spend time learning how to be open to Krsna's direction. That means specifically learning how to pray with the verses of *Bhagavad'gita*. We also intend to drive our van to Italy and leave it there while we're in India. Maybe I can capture a little of the transit mode here.

Of course, we're traveling even when we're not traveling. By that I mean that we don't have a home. I recently got a letter from a devotee who made a tour of some Western countries and then returned to his home in Australia. He said he was so glad to get back to his closet and to put his suitcases out of view. A few weeks traveling was enough for him. I sympathized. I don't have any such home—except this van, I suppose. But even that's not a year-round thing.

Madhu has completely renovated the van. He put in all new woodwork mainly to lower the center of gravity so that the van wouldn't sway so much on the highway. Things are clean and fresh and within arm's reach—literally. I have a full set of Prabhupada's books and tapes in here. The weather is starting to turn cold. It's hard to give your heart to anything when you know you're going to have to leave it behind in this world. I have mixed feelings about everything. I think of death, the spoiler of everything, and that feeling underlines everything.

Still, I feel a joyful anticipation when I think of my writing service – creative writing, creative reading, and trying to enter a life of prayer.

I'm in the back of the van. We've been driving for over two hours and it's raining. I'm looking at some of the writings I did previously and trying to get a feel for what I'll do in the future. I'm always looking for themes. I say I can't write straight Krsna conscious glosses, but need to write something of my own. "My own" isn't as elevated as I'd like it, and so the story goes. I'm looking for whatever is authentic.

It's 3:30 P.M. and the cars are already using their headlights because the overcast sky is so dark. Madhu tends to pass everyone on the road, so from my back seat in the van, I can see headlights and more headlights drifting behind us through the gold-colored curtains.

Sometimes when I prepare to write, I think about solitude. It reminds me of something Thomas Merton wrote about the need to be alone: "You should be able to unfetter yourself from the world and set yourself free, loosen all the fine strings and tensions that bind you, by sight, by sound, by thought, to the presence of others. Let there be a place somewhere in which you can breathe naturally, quietly . . . descend into silence and worship the Father in secret." It's not that easy to do. It's hard to switch off distraction. We're always continuing our inner conversations.

We shouldn't get caught up in too many prayer techniques, but read with concentration. Here is a quote I came across recommending prayerful reading: "Daily reading of scriptures, read slowly, cradled and rocked in heart as one would cradle

and rock a small child ... to strive or to strain for results, or to feel that by now you should be getting somewhere, achieving something, is the wrong approach."

I remember experiencing something like this when I went to Saranagati last January for a few days. I didn't want to launch into any projects, but just to be quiet and allow something within me to speak and turn and reach a deep and natural Krsna consciousness. But it wasn't long before I came up with something to "do."

On Merton: "Merton wrote because he had to write. For him, his writing and his life of prayer were inseparable. He needed both in order to live. . . . Right from the start he found within himself a deep and intense need for more and more time for prayer and solitude." In the last three years of his life, Merton was given permission by his superiors to live in a hermitage. During that time, he wrote, "There is nothing left for me but to live fully and completely in the present, praying when I pray, and writing and praying when I write, and worrying about nothing but the will and the glory of God, finding these as best I can in the sacrament of the present moment."

Our prayer life is already with us. This reminds me of something Prabhupada said to Hayagriva. Hayagriva asked Prabhupada if LSD could enhance his spiritual life. Prabhu- pada told him that his spiritual life was already here. We simply have to give ourselves in prayer a chance to realize that we are already Krsna conscious. Krsna will reveal Himself to us when we reveal our vulnerability to Him. We have to become honest and put aside our illusions. We can do all this by hearing Krsna speak through the *Bhagavad'gita*, but in order to hear, we have to stop talking long enough to listen.

Another important point is that solitude doesn't mean avoiding people's problems. It does mean being apart from

others, but it is a way to better be with people—you go alone and discover your compassion in prayer. Solitude leaves you aware of the world's needs.

c/m trying to pass the time now. We still have a few hours of driving left today, so I've switched to listening to a tape of Sadaputa giving a lecture called, "Indian Adventures." It's a talk he gave while showing slides from his tour of South India. As soon as it began, I thought about going to South India after my visit to Mayapur in November. I could go to the places where Lord Caitanya went on His South Indian tour. Then I wondered how going to South India would further my Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Then I reflected on the realities of my health limitations and what a South Indian tour would really entail. The most luxurious kind of travel is by airplane, but even that is wearying for me—what to speak of dragging suitcases on the Indian trains! I think I'll zip up to the front of the van and discuss these things with Madhu. But I have a hunch that our conclusion will be that it's easiest for me to skip the South Indian tour.

6:15 P.M.

°We are parked by the roadside. We parked in this same spot a year or so ago. There are so many places like this around the world—places where we have stayed before. I remember the park bench facing the sea here and something I wrote about it

was published in “Among Friends.” I don’t remember what it was, maybe a line about being gypsies in sweat pants. It’s funny how the mind can be completely diverted from one thing to another depending on what you hear. I was listening to Sadaputa Prabhu’s tape on his “Indian Adventures.” He was talking about how he interviews people about UFOs. That has taken my mind off the anticipation I was feeling to practice prayer. Now I want to get back to those other thoughts.

Cars going by. Heavy traffic. We hope it will slow down or at least that we’ll be able to rest. I’ll have my earplugs in. Madhu is preparing mint tea and biscuits.

a was a short night. The earplugs kept the traffic noises out. I’m always shocked when I look out the window in the morning and see big trucks parked nearby. I turned on the 12- volt light and wrote a writing session for half an hour. Then I chanted eight rounds and took a cold shower from our water bottles. Madhu slept “late.” He wanted to rest up for today’s drive.

*3t*s not wrong or perverse to remind myself that I will die. I can’t go on forever driving in my van with everything strapped in tight and all the overhead bins locked. I can’t forever be taking ferries and having breakfast on the road while Madhu and I discuss future travel plans. Prabhupada used to say that even if a person is willing to accept the ups and downs of life,

"You cannot stay here, sir. You must get out." We will all be kicked out by death. An intelligent person tries to remember Krsna by "keeping death in his front."

°We had to weigh in on the ferry. We weighed 160 kgs over the limit for this ferry. The man who weighed us underlined the number and now we'll have to see whether it will cause us trouble when we try to get on. Madhu says if it comes down to it, we could argue that we'll carry on the suitcases. Their ramp is not supposed to take more than three tons. Anyway, I'm trying not to worry about it. Better I read and be patient.

It's dark—5 A.M.—and raining. The raindrops streak the windshield like tears on an old face. I see a young man, the night watchman, walking with his big, white dog from place to place. Our van is first in line. We're parked facing a gate with a big stop sign, and above that, the ferry's name and "Welcomes You."

e

Onboard

a was a trip getting on the boat. They made us go back to the scales where the guy told us to pull the van a little forward off the scale so we weighed in at 2 tons, 290 kgs. In other words, he cheated. But why? Anyway, it was ridiculous and last minute, and we lost our place in line. Then an immigration official came forward and asked why we had such an odd combination—an Italian van, an Irish driver (born in London), and an American passenger. "What is your occupation?"

"We are monks." He wanted an itinerary of our past travels.

Now that we're finally onboard, we have to sit with the passengers near the video games room. The kids are bawling and the ferry plays loud rock music for our entertainment. The slower ferries don't provide such "entertainment." Anyway, we're lucky to have gotten on board at all.

M. told the immigration man that we were going for a "spiritual tour." I just tried to stay calm. I noticed the pink clouds and uttered the Hare Krsna mantra to myself. I thought of Lord Krsna as Madana-mohana dasa drew Him on the cover of *The Daily News*. He stands in His *tribhanga* form in silhouette. Krsna will take care of the demons and everything else. He will take care of His devotees.

"Good morning, the captain . . . fast craft . . . forty minutes . . . good weather . . . no smoking . . . keep children under control. In the unlikely event of emergency, pay careful attention to the safety broadcast . . .

"In the unlikely event of having to abandon the craft, on the order of the captain, stay calm" (all this enunciated by a British actor) "and get into the survival craft." Announcement complete. Back to the music. Is it going to continue for the whole trip? Little botherations—and I shouldn't complain. Find peace within.

an hour at sea. The recorded music began with "Unchained Melody" when we first entered the cabin and now it's repeating, "O my love, my darling,/ I hunger for your touch,/ a long, lonely night." An insult.

Levels of reality—the sea is even, yet producing waves of motion as our boat plies through it. The music and people

moving around in and out of the toilet rooms and talking and playing the video games—all this is a distraction to my own spirit. “Time goes by so slowly,/ and time can do so much—/ are you still mine?” On another level, I’m reading Sri *Isopanisad*. I understand the terms, but can I go so deep? A human has greater responsibilities than an animal. Therefore, a human is given more facility in life. But there are *suras* and *asuras*. That’s another level—the reading. Another possible level is to fall asleep. I do it for a few moments and then surface, hearing the “music.” ... “I need your love, God speed your love, to me.” The levels intertwine and I look to my watch, eager to be done with it.

Prabhupada Meditations

Introduction

LJ began the *Prabhupada Meditations* series in 1989. The *Prabhupada'lilamrta* was already completed and I had written a few other books about Prabhupada, but I remember feeling at that time that I wanted to write something more about him. I had no idea what. Sometimes we get clear ideas how we want to serve, and sometimes the ideas form themselves more vaguely in our minds. The closest I had to a plan was to save some time for writing at Saranagati Farm in British Columbia.

By the time I arrived at the farm, I still had no indication what I should write. I was waiting for inspiration, and that waiting built into a kind of pressure. Everything was arranged for my convenience—Jaya Gauracandra had built me a small cabin, there were typists, pens, paper, and time—but I didn't know what would come up.

Saranagati is a beautiful, silent, pine-filled place. I was studying *Bhagavad-gita* and trying to be close to Krsna at that time. It was summer, and quite hot. I took walks outside the cabin with my *Bhagavad-gita* and read and prayed to Krsna, and waited.

Then ideas started to come. A devotee sent me a copy of *A Room of One's Own*, by Virginia Woolf. There was something in the beginning of that book that set off a spark in me for a way to begin *Prabhupada Meditations*. Her book is based on a series of lectures she gave before a women's society in England in the 1920's. She begins:

When you asked me to speak about women and fiction, I sat down on the bank of a river and began to wonder what the words meant. They might mean simply a few remarks about [and she names different women authors], but at second sight, the words

seem not so simple. The title “Women and Fiction” might mean, and you have meant it to mean, women and what they are like . . . Maybe what you meant is that all of these different themes are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. But when I began to consider the subject in this last way, which seemed the most interesting, I soon saw that it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion and present before you in an hour’s discourse, a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks.

What sparked me was that she had an assignment, a commission. An assignment is given to you by someone else and you just do it. Here I was without an assignment and not knowing what to do with my freedom. Nobody was asking me to write about Prabhupada, so I decided to pretend someone was asking me. I began as it is printed in the first volume: “The manager of the Vaisnava Institute for Higher Education wrote asking me to give a series of lectures as part of an upcoming seminar to be held in Vrndavana, India. He suggested that my topic could be ‘Prabhupada Meditation.’”

I worried about the ethics of this little white lie, although now it seems completely harmless. I don’t think anyone even noticed it. No one ever asked me about it, including the managers of the VIHE. Anyway, it was an important start for me because that fictional beginning allowed me to write the whole bode.

I also took from Virginia Woolf the idea that the subject matter could be considered in different ways. I wasn’t using her musing as a gimmick, but as a way to face the fact that the subject of Srlla Prabhupada is so vast that it cannot be contained in one idea. Everyone has their idea of who and what Srlla Prabhupada is. It helped me to admit in the beginning

that the territory is huge and I can only address “Prabhupada meditations” as they are meaningful to me.

What could the words “Prabhupada meditation” mean? It might mean simply a few thoughts about Prabhupada. Maybe those who gave me the assignment wanted me to give a series of biographical sketches modeled after the *Prabhupada'lilamrta*. On second thought, the words were not so simple. “Prabhupada meditation” might mean the way Prabhupada meditates. Or it might mean the technique by which we meditate on Prabhupada. From the Introduction to the first volume: “It might mean that all these themes are inextricably mixed together and the VIHE wanted me to consider them in that way.”

Therefore, this is an opinionated series of books and I tried to make that clear in the beginning. That’s why some devotees don’t like to read them. They are interested in Prabhupada, but not so much in my personal meditations on him. The *Prabhupada Meditations* series tells the story of how I have taken up Prabhupada meditation, pondered it, and made it work in and out of my daily life.

That’s how these books gradually evolved. They are a way to contact Prabhupada memories. It was a challenge. I hadn’t really exhausted my Prabhupada memories because I hadn’t really remembered them in depth. What I had to do was find a way to remember and actually live in the different times I had been with Prabhupada. I wanted to remember the sensory impressions, the smells, the sights, the way things felt. I wanted to remember what I heard at those times that I was with Srila Prabhupada. I was looking for the whole experience of being with Prabhupada again.

There are professionals who help people to remember things that have been forgotten or buried. Often, they use hypnosis. I had thought about this years before when I was beginning to

write the biography because as soon as I would try to remember Prabhupada, I found I couldn't do it. Not just me, but almost everyone we interviewed had trouble accessing their memories in detail. It was so much work to track someone down and get their permission for an interview, and it would be so disappointing to find that they couldn't remember anything. I remember I bought a paperback on self-hypnosis while I was at Gita-nagari writing the *Lilamrta*. The first lessons teach you to put yourself into a relaxed state. Then you are supposed to be able to let your hand move by itself. I could never get my hand to go up. I thought I must not be a fit subject for hypnosis and I put it aside.

When I began *Prabhupada Meditations*, I wanted to try something that would help me get at my memories. This time, I took the help of a friend and disciple, Baladeva Vidyabhusana dasa, who had among other qualifications, an intense desire to hear me talk about my relationship with and memories of Prabhupada. He was prepared to be patient and to go through the many hours it would take to get at the memories.

When we remember something that happened long ago, we usually remember it in an encapsulated form. Some people call that "canned" memory. To actually go beyond the canned memories and find the fresh details that are also stored in the memory takes more work. Baladeva and I would work at my memories in what I began to call "recall sessions." If I came up with even a small detail that I hadn't remembered previously, we would consider it a great gain. And the quality of the writing produced from that energy was encouraging. There was a new vividness to it.

In one of those first sessions, I came up with something new. It was something I had never remembered, but suddenly, by talking about it in this way, a little bubble of detail came to

the surface. It was a small detail, but I liked it very much. It was about how we used to say “Mmmm,” imitating Swamiji. Almost all of us did it, but I hadn’t thought about that detail in years. Later, when I showed this manuscript to people before I published it, some of them liked this detail too.

Baladeva and I felt encouraged that there was plenty of work to be done, and since that time, I have gone on and done several more volumes.

In addition to the recall work, we had to edit down the raw memories into something that could be read. You don’t just start remembering and everything comes out smooth. A lot of it is “ah,” “uh,” and “urn.” I decided to mix the recall work with short, philosophical essays and some poems for variety.

At first, I was writing poems in the mood of “Satsvarupa dasa Brahmachari.” Later, I switched to writing poems with a wider range of expression and called them “Prabhupada *Smaranam*.” These later poems weren’t confined to the 1966 days, but could range over all of Prabhupada’s *lila*.

I compare the recall process—I thought it was a humbling process—to panning for gold. In areas where there is rumored to be gold, prospectors used to go and pan the river. Pan after pan they would take up and search through the pebbles for gold nuggets. Going through the memories was like that. You have to go through a lot of dust.

When I left Saranagati to go and preach, I didn’t want to give up the process of meditating on Prabhupada. After performing Prabhupada meditations for an uninterrupted month in the solitude at Saranagati, I resumed the normal duties of an ISKCON *sannyasi*, traveling, preaching and mixing with devotees. But since I did not want to entirely abandon the regular practice of thinking and writing about Prabhupada, I attempted to do it in the midst of a busy schedule. More often I

noticed I was not doing it. That led me to discover ways in which I could fit Prabhupada meditations into my schedule. I don't think I have ever recaptured the concentration I had at Saranagati, but I did learn ways to keep the meditations alive in my mind.

I found that I could dictate material onto tapes and send it to a typist. Wherever I was, I could use the tape recorder and speak something about Prabhupada into it. Although these recalls were crude and groping, I made a discipline out of them and gradually developed volumes of *Prabhupada Meditations*. I also continued to write the short essays exploring the different attitudes in relationship with Srila Prabhupada and trying to make observations and applications for devotees.

I found myself not only speaking about 26 Second Avenue, but about life in ISKCON after Prabhupada's disappearance. That also felt like a valid meditation. It seems that the more we try to think about Prabhupada, the more thoughtful we become. Often, the essays I felt like writing explored what it means to be serving Prabhupada in separation since his disappearance. This is one difference between *Prabhupada Meditations* and books like Hari Sauri Prabhu's diary. *Prabhupada Meditations* does not only consist of memories, but it contains reflections too. That may be disappointing to some devotees because they are not looking for a subjective presentation. I think, however, that when the memories of Prabhupada's association are exhausted by those who were eyewitnesses, in order to write further about Prabhupada, we will have to resort to our own devotional expression, meditation, and personal feelings. It is not that these should be rejected by someone who is looking for Prabhupada nectar.

For me, *Prabhupada Meditations* has become a genre. Genres are not only different ways to create books, but are the variety

of expressions in which I look for self-purification. My writing life is going best, I think, when I am not meditating on how to write an ISKCON best-seller. Therefore, although all writing can be judged according to its literary quality, we cannot judge a person's service relationship with Srila Prabhupada. I have written a great deal about Srila Prabhupada—someone estimated that at least seventy-five percent of my books are directly about him.

Books like *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta* are official, objective biography, or memoir. Those books form a genre unto themselves. *Prabhupada Nectar* and *Remembering Srila Prabhupada*, my own memoirs based on the letters I received from Prabhupada, and *Life with the Perfect Master* are also in that genre. But different than those objective accounts are books in which Prabhupada is the subject, but the approach is subjective. The *Prabhupada Meditations* volumes are in that category.

The days at 26 Second Avenue are special. There was no big ISKCON institution then, and Prabhupada was accessible, intimate, and fatherly. We were a close-knit family. Those days are worth remembering, not just from an objective viewpoint, but from a more personal one.

As I said, the various genres represented in *Churning The Milk Ocean* are written for self-purification. I don't like to write for an audience. I prefer to speak from my heart. Still, it's true that I want to share my expression with anyone who would like to read it.

That's not a sin, and I don't even think it's a vanity, but it's a way of life. If a writer is deeply committed to both selfpurification and preaching, it becomes possible to execute both simultaneously. It is, however, something that always has to be refined and purified to protect it from falling into a prostitution of his most confidential feelings. Therefore, I hope

readers will respect the privacy of expression in the *Prabhupada Meditations* series as well as the heartfelt sharing of that expression, and take Prabhupada's association along with me.

Calling out to Srila Prabhupada #J

O Prabhupada, you inspire me to speak your glories. Please make my heart big like yours so I can be fit to serve you. O Prabhupada, you have quoted so many Vedic sastras, but I'm slow to learn them. Please give me the strength to become a student you'll be proud of, a preacher who is willing to disturb the nondevotee mentality and to make Krsna conscious waves in this unhappy world.

O Prabhupada, when you were born, you received many names like Nandulal, Kacauri-mukhi, and Moti. Your father named you Abhaya and your spiritual master added Caranara- vinda. Now we know you as Srila Prabhupada because you exactly followed the order of your spiritual master. Not only did you follow, but you took his instructions to heart and considered them nondifferent from your life breath. O Prabhupada, just thinking about you makes my mind fresh and strong and eager to search for ways to praise you more.

O Srila Prabhupada, you want substantial work from us, but you were kind enough to recognize a few lectures at a college as "substantial work." You were pleased with the photographs we sent, showing you the simple decorations in a room we called a temple. You wrote back and told us, "It gives me a nice idea." O Srila Prabhupada, when you had only a few temples in America, you knew everything about your devotees' lives and service, and you were involved in so many of their personal details. As the movement grew, this kind of rapport seemed to diminish, but I see that it has been replaced by something enduring and affectionate: service to your vani. There is so much more we can discover in our relationship with you if we are just patient and sincere. Please bless us, Prabhupada, because we have no good qualities except what we receive while serving you.

O Prabhupada, the winter is not far away. Soon devotees will be stoking the fires of the annual Prabhupada book distribution marathon. They are dear to you who go out and face the harsh cold of passersby, offering them your books, even in the face of scorn and rebuke. Who is willing to receive so many insults except those proving themselves real Prabhupada followers? I bow at their feet and thank them for the good example of courageous discipleship.

O Prabhupada, it is a great privilege to be able to see you and hear from you. I never want to take this for granted or think that there is something better to do than to gain your *darsana*, which is available in so many ways.

O Srila Prabhupada, in your commentaries on “The Prayers of Queen Kunti,” you elaborate on her mood of wonder at the Supreme Lord’s glories. You tell us that actually Mother Yasoda is the more advanced devotee because she has forgotten Krsna’s opulence. Yet you want us to be fully aware of Krsna’s inconceivable glories. He is invisible to the nondevotee mental speculator. He can only be known in the submissive heart of a devotee engaged in His service. O Srila Prabhupada, you are most expert in presenting Krsna to us in all the *rasas* and in teaching us to honor all pure devotees of the Lord.

O Srila Prabhupada, one of your *sannyasi* disciples has written a song about you in American English. He cries out, “Srila Prabhupada, you’ve gone and left me all alone.” He sings that you are his only hope and there’s no reason to go on unless we can serve you in separation. “Lost and found by your grace/ without you I’ve got no place/ at the Lord’s lotus feet.”

Dear Srila Prabhupada, you have many disciples who are calling out to you and I am only one of them. What is it that we want? We want different things, but all of us want to see you and serve you to our heart’s content. We want clear recip

rocaution with you, just like a man wants to see the dawn after the dark night is filled with thieves and demons. We want to see our lord, at least in our hearts. We want to feel that you know who we are and where we are, we want your caresses, but if you must reprimand us for our own good, then we want to take that medicine. Yes, we want to take it. We are not sentimentalists. We want to sing your glories as we march in the ranks of your *sankirtana* movement.

O Srila Prabhupada, please make my words come true. Let me not waiver in my determination to call out to you now and at the hour of my death. Please let me hold on to you and go to you in my next life as I deserve or as you assign me according to the wishes of your Lord Krsna.

All glories to Srila Prabhupada, and all glories to his devotees!

One time Prabhupada . . . Another time he . . .

One time, Prabhupada wrote a letter to all the devotees and said that his sickness was caused by their being slack. But that letter wasn't sent out, was it? Or did he even write it? At least we heard that Prabhupada said that from the devotees in Vrndavana. (Come on, let's get it straight. Tell a Prabhupada story that's factual without a doubt. Can you remember one?)

One time I was Prabhupada's secretary. He became enthusiastic about starting Hare Krsna restaurants. He had me write a letter for him about opening restaurants and it was distributed to all the centers. It was such a different side of Prabhupada to hear him talking not just once, but in several sittings, about the importance of Hare Krsna restaurants.

Restaurants? It seemed so strange and yet so natural. There are so many aspects of Prabhupada that were uncovered at different times.

If you approached him the right way, you could get all kinds of new projects and plans from Prabhupada that revealed his varied interest. He could teach you how to make soap. He could teach you how to sell books to people in their homes and get standing orders.

He told me not to waste my time writing a fancy form letter to politicians and influential people. He said their secretaries would just throw the letters out. He said it was better I go and see them in person.

What else?

One time Prabhupada told us—this is when he was quite ill, in January 1977—that he knew a man who lived into his nineties just by eating fruits and nuts. Or rather, one of Prabhupada’s disciples said he knew such a man in Calcutta. (Come on, get it straight.) Yeah, that’s it, Gargamuni Swami said it. I was in Prabhupada’s room at the time. Then Prabhupada said, “All right, I’ll do that too from now on. I’ll just eat fruits and nuts.”

That night we took a train to Calcutta. It was an over- nighter. Although we had heard Prabhupada say he would only eat fruit and nuts, devotees had gone ahead and cooked the usual *prasadam* for his trip. I’m sure it included fried foods like samosas or *pakor*as. Prabhupada liked those things. Prabhupada took the *prasadam* with relish, and when one of us mentioned the “new diet,” he just brushed it aside.

One time Prabhupada told me I had always been sincere, even from the beginning of my spiritual life. Another time he told me I should not have participated in the special GBC meeting in New York. He said I, along with the others, was

displaying that I didn't know even the first principles of Krsna consciousness.

I said many foolish things in Prabhupada's presence and he often corrected me. One time in a BTG editors' meeting, I suggested to Prabhupada that we increase the size of the magazine so people would get more for their money. Prabhupada said I should be more businesslike. He said they should get less for their money. Of course, he didn't mean they should get less Krsna consciousness, but as a magazine publisher, I shouldn't naively think that we could increase the page count while at the same time decrease or maintain the present price. After all, publishing a magazine was not only a service to Krsna, but it had to be a practical economic operation.

One time Prabhupada came into this world. He said that Krsna asked him to come. Krsna had told him not to worry about having to be too austere. Krsna said He would make all the arrangements. When Prabhupada appeared, the astrologer predicted that Prabhupada would cross the ocean and open many temples when he was seventy years old.

One time Prabhupada came to America for the first time in his life. He sailed over on the *Jaladuta*, which landed first in Boston. He wrote a poem there revealing his mind to his dear friend, Krsna. After that, Prabhupada went forward and gradually revealed Krsna's plans for worldwide Krsna consciousness. One time he chanted Hare Krsna in Manhattan. Then he did it again, and again. He sang in his wonderful voice full of his inner mood and dependence on the Lord. He sang at Dr. Misra's *asrama* in midtown Manhattan, then in a Bowery loft amid hip musicians, then finally at 26 Second Avenue. I heard him there too.

One time we all became Prabhupada's disciples. That was the best thing we ever did. That is our best memory, and we

should capitalize on it. Yes, one time Prabhupada said to each of us, “I accept you as my disciple.” One time we promised to obey him always. Even if we fail, he accepts us if we are sincere. One time we will join Srila Prabhupada in the spiritual world where there is no anxiety. And now, which is one time, the present, let us serve him to our best capacity.

Telling Others’ Memories

The other day I remembered Suresvara Prabhu’s memory of his first meeting with Prabhupada. It occurred to me at the time that these memories, even if they are not my own, can be meditated on and repeated. If I do that, it will dramatically open my range of Prabhupada consciousness. A writer sometimes experiences this when he breaks out of autobiography into fiction. Instead of being limited to his own experiences, his characters and stories become unlimited. Prabhupada memories are not the same as ordinary storytelling, and they’re not fiction, but they can be seen from more than one perspective.

Becoming broad-hearted and nonenvious is one of the qualifications for being able to live in and tell others’ memories. It requires the simple faith that what they have said is true and worth repeating. We have to feel the genuineness of their stories and then give our life breath to repeat them. Then it becomes not just someone else’s story, but a picture of Prabhupada, a memory.

If this weren’t true, then what could I expect for those devotees who don’t have personal memories of Prabhupada? Am I trying to push myself forward as a rare, great soul, one of the few who can speak Prabhupada memories? And if so, then all

others can do in this regard is to appreciate *me*. But that's not the reason I tell my memories.

A Prabhupada memory is anything that Prabhupada actually did which has- been retrieved in an accurate way, either through somebody's memory, on tape, or whatever. When that Prabhupada story is told with affection by one of his followers, you have a memory.

Granted, there are different kinds of memories. One of them is to remember your *vapuh* with His Divine Grace. But memory can also be thought of in a bigger context. So can the telling of Prabhupada stories. I wasn't there on the Battlefield of Kuru- ksetra, but I like to hear how Krsna spoke to Arjuna, smiled at Arjuna, and accepted Arjuna's surrender in the end. Unfortunately, I cannot remember being in the groves of Vrndavana with Krsna's friends, but I like to hear what they did. It's the same with Prabhupada, isn't it?

Sentimentality in my devotion to Prabhupada

The dictionary defines sentimental as "susceptible to tender and delicate feelings." Sentimentality has an added connotation of excessive sentiment—mawkish or maudlin emotion. The dictionary goes on to state that sentimentality is suspect. I would like to explain how we can be guilty of sentimentality in our adoration of Srila Prabhupada and how we can avoid it.

I share the adoration of Prabhupada which all ISKCON members express. I offer respects to him and I accept him as my ultimate authority, as do all ISKCON devotees. How is it, then, that we can become guilty of sentimentality in relation to Prabhupada? Should praise of Prabhupada be limited to more

staid expressions? No, but praise should be real and based on our life's surrender.

At this point, I feel on safer ground speaking for myself rather than others. I want to be a hundred percent in agreement with Srila Prabhupada, but sometimes his preaching hits against my own conditioning and I don't agree. Because I *want* to agree, I have to keep going back to Prabhupada to have my misunderstanding clarified. To do that, I have to acknowledge the difficulty, submit myself at his feet, and be prepared for correction. Even though this process may take place over time, it does not stop me from offering wholehearted allegiance to and praise of Prabhupada. I want to accept what my spiritual master says absolutely, but blind following doesn't work. If we follow as honestly as we can, then our praise will be honest.

Another form of sentimentality is simply a lack of devotion. We say, "*Jaya* Prabhupada!" but we don't follow him or work hard for his aims. Prabhupada wants us to give every ounce of blood to serve his mission. If we avoid that surrender yet call out, "*Jaya* Prabhupada! I love Prabhupada! There's nobody but Prabhupada!" then there's something wrong with that praise.

Devotion to Prabhupada has to be realistic. That's why I fear the Prabhupada Centennial rhetoric has sometimes put the cart before the horse. We are eager to get all the nondevotees to appreciate Prabhupada's greatness, but do *we* fully appreciate him? And how do we express our love and appreciation?

Returning to Srila Prabhupada

'the phrase "returning to Srila Prabhupada" implies that ultimately, we can go to where he is. We often hear statements

by devotees in which they say they just want to go wherever Prabhupada is in their next life. These devotees say that they don't aspire to return to Krsnaloka, but they want to be wherever Prabhupada is pushing on the *sahkirtana* movement. Sometimes that statement is modified: they want to go wherever Prabhupada sends them to serve his mission. If that means taking birth again in Kali-yuga on this planet, then they are willing to serve in that way.

I also want to think like that. I already know that at the time of death, I will have to turn to Prabhupada. He saved me from doubts, skepticism, and sin, and he knows me. He is the one who can petition Lord Krsna on my behalf. He is the one who will tell me where to go next; whose order I will willingly accept. He is the one to whom I have surrendered. Therefore, I want to stay strictly lined up with him in this lifetime. Then, at the time of death, I will be able to surrender to him, to cry out to him, and to ask him for reciprocation and direction. When I get it, I will accept it and follow it wholeheartedly.

This is what I mean by "returning to Prabhupada": if I'm shaky in my surrender to him during this lifetime, then at the end, I will have to make up the distance. I will have to convince Prabhupada that I will accept his order and beg him to allow me to serve him. Therefore I am trying to become as surrendered as possible now. I measure that surrender in how much I am living my life for Prabhupada's aims and how little I am pursuing the temporary goals that will be taken away at death.

What are those goals in Prabhupada's service? Detachment from this world. Disinterest in fame. Freedom from envy. Devotion to guru. Actually pleased to hear *krsna'katha* from him. Satisfied in spiritual life. Being able to speak from the heart in preaching the *Bhagavatam*. Speaking to Prabhupada

and hearing him speak to me. Fearlessness in service. I know these things are basic, but I still need to achieve them. Pray to return to Prabhupada.

Calling out to Srila Prabhupada #2

O Prabhupada, I think any time is a good time to praise you. Why should my mind and tongue be afraid to do so? In his “calling out to Krsna” poem, Srila Rupa Gosvami says, “O fickle mind, please worship the prince of Vraja.”

O fickle mind, please turn to Srila Prabhupada and find solace in his presence.

O Prabhupada, I like to think of you wherever I am. To do so, I have to battle through so much mind stuff, so many objections. But it’s right, isn’t it, that I live always thinking of you? And it’s right that you won’t reject me?

O Srila Prabhupada, I heard you say that we should take Krsna’s message as it is and that there’s no need for interpretation. You said Krsna didn’t speak in such an incomplete way that He left His cloudy message to be explained later in future centuries. Krsna’s words are eternal. In a similar way, I want to accept that your teachings fully anticipate everything I will go through in this lifetime as I grow up in Krsna consciousness. Your teachings are not only good for the 1970s, and they are not only for neophytes. Neither is it true that everything you said has to be explained in the light of modern science or in the light of a more advanced understanding by a subsequent *acarya*. Please protect me from feeling the need to reinterpret your teachings. I want to protect my trust in you and in your Bhaktivedanta Purports.

Dear Srila Prabhupada, I know that you don't need my letter, my calling out, my reassurance about the durability of your message. I am saying this for my own benefit. Still, I am calling out to you. Please deliver me from thinking you are far away.

If I call out to my mind, if I chastise my mind for being a demon and preventing me from loving you, that is also a calling out. Only by taking shelter at your feet can I become free from these demons. I will do my best to kick on the heads of the poisonous snakes I find within me, but some of them are too big and dangerous and I am a fearful person. Srila Rupa Gosvami also prayed that as Krsna danced upon Kaliya's hoods and kicked the envious serpent, so Krsna might also come and kick on the *anartha* serpents in the pure devotee's mind.

Little Wisps: Prabhupada's Popularity

takes sensitivity, from the objective viewpoint, to see Srila Prabhupada as extraordinary. Not everyone appreciates him. The evidence of that is that he is not so famous. Some people say that popularity is an ultimate gauge of a person's worth, but we could counter that there are many great things in the world that have been neglected by popular opinion. For example, there are great works of art or literature which were ignored until long after their creator died. Finally, a few sensitive people discovered the work and it began to have its influence.

If we define “popularity” like that, then Prabhupada was certainly popular. Fame is one of Krsna’s six opulences, and Prabhupada possessed it. Although he had a relatively small group of disciples, they had firm faith in him. Therefore, even though they were few in number, they were able to increase the influence of the Hare Krsna movement far beyond what one could expect from such a small group of people.

Especially in the early days, nondevotees were amazed that such a small number of devotees were propagating Krsna consciousness in America because the devotees were ubiquitous. They were on the street corners in many cities and in practically every major airport. Prabhupada’s books were being circulated by the millions. Prabhupada was influential in that way, even though the majority of the world’s population were indifferent to him. We don’t measure Srila Prabhupada’s popularity according to the whims that make or break someone’s reputation in the material world, but according to the more enduring principle.

Prabhupada and Hider

This morning I was reading Prabhupada’s letters. I found a letter written to a man who was planning an interfaith conference and who was inviting Prabhupada to attend. I was a little surprised at Prabhupada’s response. He gave no credence to the interfaith dialogue, and he presented himself in a way that was sure to be rejected by the man who had invited him. After all, here was a man who wanted to hold a conference to bring the world religions together. Prabhupada insisted that nothing would come of it and that all real answers would be

found in the *Bhagavad'gita*. This made Prabhupada look sectarian.

The fact is, Srila Prabhupada welcomes whatever good can be found in other religions, but he contends that the *Bhagavad-gita* teaches *bhakti* more scientifically than any other scripture. That's why the *Bhagavad'gita* is not a Hindu book and is nonsectarian. He also likes to point out that the *Bhagavad'gita* has been studied widely throughout history.

I remember one time when Prabhupada described famous people who had read the *Bhagavad'gita*. He named Einstein (and described him as a German Jew living in America). Then he named Gandhi and Hitler. Hitler? I thought, "How can you say that, Srila Prabhupada?" But Prabhupada then added to the list: Dr. Radha-Krishnan (he called him one of the greatest religious philosophers) and a few other world leaders. Obviously, Prabhupada doesn't think Dr. Radha-Krishnan a great philosopher, but when he said that, it made me realize that he must have been aware of the impact of using Hitler's name. Prabhupada didn't usually mention his name, but he sometimes reached left and right and used whatever was handy in his preaching.

It also occurred to me that his mention of Hitler may have more significance. He said Hitler was great because he had so much power. It took the whole world's efforts to thwart him and still his spirit lives on in neo-Nazi movements. What is shocking about Prabhupada's use of his name is not so much that he named Hitler, but that by his listing Hitler with the others, he was lumping all the materialistic world leaders together—it's too much "kicking the skunk" to name them all here—all *mudhas* who don't know Krsna.

Prabhupada in New York remembering Vrndavana

At I had to single out one of the sweetest sections in Prabhupada's talks, I would surely include a section from a lecture he gave in New York in March 1966. Prabhupada was still living uptown at that time. It was before he moved to the Bowery or came to the Lower East Side. From the tape, it sounds like there were only a few people in the room with him. A middle-aged-sounding woman was directing questions at Prabhupada while he spoke on the *Bhagavad-gita*. The section I am referring to is when Prabhupada starts talking about holy places. He is making the point that it is not enough to visit a sacred place and take bath, but that we should hear from the saintly persons who live there.

The woman then asks whether it's also true that the holy place has its own magneticism. Prabhupada says, "Yes, certainly." And then he says, "It is practical . . . " Whenever Prabhupada said "practical," it meant he would now give an example from his own experience. In this case, he told how he was living happily in Vrndavana. "Now here I am sitting, New York, a very great, the world's greatest city, so magnificent city, but my heart is always hankering after that Vrndavana. ... I am not happy here. ... I shall be very happy to return to my Vrndavana, that sacred place."

Then why have you come here? Because I have a duty. I have a message to give to you people which my spiritual master asked me to give. You can get the tape if you want to hear it for yourself, but I just wanted to tell you how much I like it.

Of course, Prabhupada is always speaking as a preacher, but in giving his own life as an example, he speaks so much from his heart about his love for Vrndavana. He explains clearly why he left Vrndavana, and it becomes poignant to think of the

difficulties he must be undergoing in New York City to fulfill his spiritual master's order. He even says it: "I have taken all risks and inconvenience to come here."

Prabhupada didn't hide his reasons for being in the West. He didn't mind reminding people occasionally that he had come to a foreign country with no financial security and at great personal sacrifice just to help them. It's not that he *had* to be here; he was not a beggar. He had been living in ecstasy in Vmdavana-dhama. He also didn't mind reminding them that his heart was actually in Vrndavana, even though he was living in New York.

It makes us yearn for more from him. Prabhupada is only hinting at his love for Vrndavana, and we would like to understand more about it.

When he mentioned his coming to New York City, he wasn't complaining. He just presents it as a fact, that he is a surrendered servant of his Guru Maharaja and therefore he has come despite all inconveniences. It makes us want to be like him—to love Vrndavana, but to leave Vrndavana to preach on his order. It is wonderful to have a glimpse into the heart of His Divine Grace.

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Cheering Prabhupada on

lien Ginsberg compared Prabhupada's preaching to a fundamentalist Christian evangelist because of his literal presentation of the scriptures. Ginsberg didn't like how Prabhupada repeated the same example so many times in one lecture as if logic—blunt logic—would convince someone that the soul is eternal or that Krsna is God.

I listened to a tape this morning where Prabhupada was doing just that—repeating the same analogy over and over and pushing his points home. I accept Prabhupada’s lecturing style, but sometimes I sense the awkwardness that those who are not his followers may feel. I don’t like it when others misunderstand him. Prabhupada told us that some of his God- brothers were afraid of their guru’s chopping technique. It reminds me of the time Prabhupada went to Venezuela. A psychologist in the audience was so outraged by Prabhupada’s lecturing style that he went to the government and said Prabhupada should never be allowed to return to his country. It was as if he thought Prabhupada was trying to brainwash his audience by his repeating the points.

I say all this because I am recognizing that I am sensitive about my spiritual master being criticized by others. By saying this, I have also had to recognize that I am the one who is thin- skinned. Prabhupada is powerful. He is ready to kick on their faces. Prabhupada repeated his points to make them clear. As I listened to his lecture this morning, I found myself admiring his presentation, his straight and simple use of logic. He dared to use examples to prove something that can’t be proved, but that has to be learned by realization. Prabhupada was aware that logic professors and other academically-minded thinkers would find ways to reject him, but he didn’t care. He just kept delivering his blows in hopes that innocent hearers would accept what he said.

Perhaps I have in me a fastidious college professor who wants to say “perhaps” and “maybe” and prefers to be genteel. I don’t like to punch people in the face with my lectures. But Prabhupada isn’t like that. He is a fighter in Krsna’s army. I admire Prabhupada for his strength. He has to protect the

whole movement from these very people who misunderstand him. I cheer him on. I feel protective of him, but I don't have to worry. He's powerful.

Returning to Prabhupada in separation

The separation that I have been experiencing for the last fourteen years is different from the separation I felt when Prabhupada was on the planet with us. I have written about this before. Of course, we have a new freedom now that we didn't have in Prabhupada's manifest presence, and we have the responsibility to use it properly. It was quite different to know that even though you hadn't seen Prabhupada in some time, you would be seeing him again in Mayapur or that he would be coming to your center, you could be writing him and receiving letters. He could send you on a mission for him—"Go and see the man at the immigration office in Boston and ask about my case." Simply by carrying out those little duties, you could have a nice exchange with Prabhupada.

It's different now. I used to be excited when the mail arrived because it often brought Prabhupada's dictation tapes. Then I could hear his voice and type his words. I was young in those days, and innocent, and when I think of Prabhupada in separation now, I feel I want to return to him by recapturing some of the simplicity of our relationship. I want to remember Prabhupada's letter telling me, "Govinda dasi is making me *upma*. Perhaps you have never tasted *upma*. If Jadurani can make it, I will send you the recipe." I want *that* relationship with Prabhupada, where I can receive his letters and then run

to the other devotees in the temple and we can all be delighted reading them together.

It's not only that Prabhupada is not here, but his institution has changed. There have been so many disappointments over the years, and even though the institution has recovered from its mistakes, it's still more institutional than it was. I'm not complaining, but I have to admit that I am seeking the sweetness of those days when Prabhupada was here.

I am trying to feel the inspiration to make a contribution. One way I see myself contributing is that I keep myself alive in memories of Prabhupada and Prabhupada consciousness. Then I share it with others. Those pastimes are not forgotten. They didn't happen so long ago. They are not irrelevant, not sentimental, not useless. They are wonderful. If I have changed, then let me use any gains I have made to enhance my remembering and presenting of Prabhupada's pastimes. If I have lost something over the years, then let me return to Prabhupada by remembering his pastimes and instructions.

There is such a thing as sentimentality or indulgence in old memories and that might not be healthy. But that doesn't mean that I shouldn't try to return to the past at all. Returning to Prabhupada can mean hearing his *bhajan*s and remembering him, or doing things the way he did them, or continuing to read his books while overcoming the obstacles of over-familiarity and inattention. Returning to Prabhupada in separation means overcoming obstacles, then taking the nectar of the old days with Prabhupada, and then seeing how he is present now, with each of us. Then reaching out in prayer.

The pleasures of reading Prabhupada's letters to me

c/ I am having a nice time reading Srila Prabhupada's letters to me. I have them typed separately and gathered in a stack on my desk—about a hundred and fifty pages. Bit by bit, I am reading the letters and highlighting the sections that seem most memorable with a pink marker.

I really like how these letters show my ongoing, affectionate relationship with Srila Prabhupada. Now I'm reading the letters from 1968-69, and I can see how my serving in separation in Boston made for such wonderful intimacy. It couldn't have been better by always being with him. Neither was our relationship starved by the separation. In one letter Prabhupada wrote that he had just sent three *Krsna* book tapes for me to type and edit, and he promised to send me more soon. These tapes were always arriving in the mail, and Prabhupada and I exchanged at least two or three letters a month.

Our lives were interlinked. Sometimes Prabhupada wrote asking me for money to publish his books. Sometimes I wrote and asked him for money to pay Pradyumna's hospital bill. Prabhupada wrote that my wife should go to Hawaii to recover her health. We weren't just writing letters back and forth with no relation to our personal lives, but there were so many personal dealings.

I know that even in those days, politics were developing between some temple leaders, but basically we were a happy family. We were naive about what was to come and what would develop because of our *anarthas*. There was also the threat of violence from outsiders, as when they attacked our new house in Boston. I am not trying to paint a rosy picture of those days, but throughout those trials, Prabhupada was kind to each of us. He encouraged us and assured us personally of Krsna's

protection. Whatever Prabhupada said we took as absolute. No one disagreed with him. There was no such thing as a disciple who interpreted Prabhupada or had a relative viewpoint. Anyway, those were good days.

What does all this mean to me today? It's simple, really: it means the letters remind me of my tangible relationship with Prabhupada. They are treasures now. In other words, that person, that eternal pure devotee, was my personal instructor and leader in every sense. It means he still is my instructor and leader. The letters are not about Prabhupada, but about my service relationship with him. They are proof to me that I was able to please him sometimes and that he counted on me as a reliable, responsible devotee. The letters also give me proof that he accepted me despite my faults. They assure me about the past and give me hope for the future. I shouldn't become forgetful about all this. The letters are here to remind me.

Calling out to Srila Prabhupada #3

^Dear Srila Prabhupada, I remember you on morning walks. I remember you sitting behind your low desk, playfully fingering an object—an envelope opener or a *tilaka* mirror—on your desk. I remember seeing your lotus feet facing us as we sat opposite you. I remember coming into your presence, falling flat like a rod, and feeling that I could surrender to you and surrendering at that moment. I remember looking up, prepared to hear anything you had to say.

My *sarikirtana* partner and I were newly-made *sannyasis*. We traveled to American colleges. We told you their reception was discouraging. You said you knew what we meant, but you en

couraged us. You were also ready to analyze whether our service was the best and whether we could do something better. Whatever it was, you thought it over and gave us your conclusion. We were always ready to leave your room, our chests filled out like brave soldiers, ready to fight. You enlightened us.

Prabhupada, you are a great *dcarya* and I am a small person born in the West. Only lately have I been trying to understand the meaning of Krsna consciousness. There is no reason for me to become puffed-up or to think myself your equal, but neither should I think I need a teacher other than you. I have so many faults. They don't seem to go away. We live in an ocean of vice. I have my share of *anarthas*. In this age, there is one good quality, and that is that you, Srila Prabhupada, the bona fide deliverer of Krsna's holy name, appeared. You have entered my life and my heart. You have taken charge of the ship of my life and you are guiding me back to Godhead. All I have to do is remain alive and obedient. Despite my faults, I ask you again and again to please accept me and keep me in your charge.

Prabhupada, I can never express everything that I feel for you in a positive way. It also seems like I can never come to the end of the trouble I experience when I try to be a wholehearted lover of Your Divine Grace. There is no fault in you. You told me that if we see fault in the spiritual master, then we are at fault. Please help me banish all disgusting things from my mind. I want to be your child, but a worthy son with a cool brain, one who knows the philosophy and who is always ready to preach Krsna consciousness. I don't want to jump over you, I don't want to misrepresent you, I don't want to be displeasing to you. Please help me.

I wish to be submissive to my Godbrothers and also a good influence on them. Most of all, I crave to be determined to follow you. I want to clear the dirty mirror of my mind. I want

to see my spiritual master as dear to Kṛṣṇa. You are enthusing me. Let me enthuse you the way you enthuse me.

Prabhupada, I want to be happy in the congregation of your devotees. Certainly I want your sidelong glance to fall on me, but I am also one in a crowd. I belong in this assembly. It would be nice if sometimes, just occasionally, you could call me apart from the others and say a few words, but please know that for the most part, I am happy to “stay in Boston” in separation.

Prabhupada, you know what I want. I want that clear consciousness whereby I always look up to you. I feel genuine enthusiasm while reading your books and while doing tasks that you ask me to do. Sometimes you may ask me something that’s not to my liking, but I want to be able to carry out your request with absolute surrender. Have I lost some of the enthusiasm and purity I had as a young man serving his guru? Or maybe I was never as surrendered as I thought I was. In any case, you are always my leader. I want to use my intelligence and creativity in your service.

Prabhupada, you walked down so many streets, got into so many cars, and stopped for *prasadam* in so many places. One time you stopped by the roadside in France and your servants set up a little box for you to eat on. You seemed at home wherever you went. You were regulated, but you were also willing to disrupt your routine to do the needful. Your custom was to take a massage and bath around noon, but if you had to travel on that day, you would take the massage early in the morning and then go out clean, gentlemanly, sweet-tempered, and determined.

Prabhupada, my Godbrothers and I also travel on your behalf. May we travel like you. When we leave the temples, may we place our heads at Kṛṣṇa’s feet and pray to do His bidding. May you grant us a safe journey. When we arrive, may we

Speak on your behalf. May we remember you as a transcendental gentleman, as a traveler, as a swan-like person.

Prabhupada, I want my *rasa* with you. Please understand that I am unintelligent. You have to teach me again and again. I'm bound to make mistakes like a dog who chases the wrong stick again and again. But I am faithful. I want to see you smiling and I want to find a whole heart of my own which I can surrender to you. I pray to Krsna that these things can come about.

All glories to Prabhupada who came and left us before we even knew what had happened. All glories to Prabhupada who is increasing our desire to know him even after his disappearance. All glories to Prabhupada who lives in his Samadhi Mandir and in the hearts of all his devotees, who lives in his books and who sits on his *vyasasana*, who is actually a humble servitor of his spiritual master and who accepts the honors in *parampara*. All glories to Prabhupada and the secrets in his heart. All glories to the open secrets which he teaches us and teaches the world: chant Hare Krsna and be happy.

*Prabhupada's integrity in maintaining
many relationships at once*

^Prabhupada maintained the integrity of individual relationships even while having many of them. He also maintained many affectionate relationships even while carrying out his single-minded desire to push on the Krsna consciousness movement. In other words, Prabhupada's disciples were also his

manpower. He used them in Krsna's service to carry out his Guru Maharaja's desires.

In the material world, using your friends to carry out your aims would lead to cynicism. Big politicians flatter people for votes and for different kinds of patronage as they glad-hand and socialize to fulfill their political ambitions. The majority of their relationships are shallow. The political profession is based on "winning friends and influencing others."

Prabhupada had as much drive as any politician, and he was more intent in his cause than anyone can be in the material sense. But Prabhupada cared for the devotees who came to serve him. Krsna consciousness is so nice that the mission includes caring for the devotees. The spiritual master is like a father. He takes the responsibility to train the devotees and bring them back to Godhead, and he simultaneously engages the devotees in practical service.

A sincere devotee appreciates everything his spiritual master does for him and understands that serving his guru is in his own best interest. Thus there is no conflict or exploitation in the relationship. The guru-disciple relationship is based on trust. The guru's engaging the disciple in work is part of that trust, and guru and disciple work together to bring Lord Caitanya's movement to others.

Srila Prabhupada's only desire was to please his spiritual master. He also had compassion for the fallen souls. Those who were willing to help with the preaching were Prabhupada's hope to carry out these two aims. Prabhupada wrote in one letter to me, "As you are talking of myself that I am your only shelter, similarly I am always thinking that you all boys and girls are my only hopes. When I was first in Boston in the same Commonwealth Port, I was thinking how I shall be able to establish my mission in this country. Now, by Krsna's grace,

the time has come when I see Boston is the first center and in Boston, we have got so many nice devotees. Please offer my blessings to all the others.” We had work to do together and that was our happiness. That work was what made our relationship substantial and not sentimental.

By following Prabhupada’s instructions, we came to trust Krsna. Our love increased as we worked for Prabhupada and went through the difficulties of trying to push on this movement with him. We would go out and preach and often be rebuffed. Then we would come back and tell Prabhupada. He would tell us what to do just the way Krsna told the cowherd boys what to do when they were rebuffed by the yajnic *brahmanas*. He increased our faith.

Therefore it is amazing that Prabhupada was able to have affectionate relationships with so many devotees in so many places. He could turn to any of us, even if he only had a few moments for us, and speak the right words or look at us with the right expression. His instructions would glow. He would give us a program of work to carry out and which would sustain us. He might do that for me in Boston. In the next minute he might turn to Syamasundara, Gurudasa, Mukunda, and the other devotees in London and be immediately involved in their project. We were all working on Prabhupada’s projects, which he saw as Krsna’s projects, so he had the capacity to satisfy us all.

If someone didn’t accept his authority, however, then reciprocation couldn’t be there. I was reading in one letter how Rayarama left Prabhupada. Prabhupada wrote, “I called him when I was in New York, but his attitude is different. I did not see him in the airport on my arrival or departure, neither did I see him at the function held on Sunday.” (Letter to Satsva- rOpa, August 27, 1969) It is possible to allow the relationship

to wane, but if the disciple maintains his integrity as a disciple, then the spiritual master will never allow our relationship to wither. He will always have some service for us. It might be work similar to what we were doing in the 1960s and '70s, or it might be something more internal, but it will be exactly right for us. As Prabhupada's followers, we have no other existence or purpose.

Thoughts on Srila Prabhupada's disappearance day

Prabhupada's disappearance day. Srila Prabhupada left this world sixteen years ago. There will be a function today in all ISKCON temples. The devotees will gather and speak homages one after the other. In a sense, we observe Prabhupada's disappearance day in the same way we observe his appearance day.

Aside from how we observe Prabhupada's disappearance day in ISKCON, I recognize my tendency to avoid the sadness connected with this day. As a movement, we tend to emphasize the transcendental aspects of Prabhupada's disappearance. That is, that there is no difference between the pure devotee's appearance and disappearance. The spiritual master is eternal—all souls are eternal—but a pure devotee like Srila Prabhupada does not come into this world like a conditioned soul. He comes to this world to do the compassionate work of enlightening people about their spiritual identities and their individual relationships with Kṛṣṇa. He does this work and then he leaves. We shouldn't lament his coming or going because he is always with Kṛṣṇa.

But this absolute philosophy was contradicted on the human level when we watched Prabhupada leaving us. He didn't show signs of physical suffering, and he certainly didn't lament his own departure, but his body showed signs of the last stages. Prabhupada never complained. I remember how in the last days, Prabhupada's breastbone began to curl outwards. We asked the *kaviraja* about it and he told us that this happens at the end of someone's life. The symptoms in Prabhupada's body were undeniable.

The *kaviraja* saw that Prabhupada was transcendental because he was not expressing pain. He asked only for the medicine of *harinama*. The doctor was astounded and impressed. On the other hand, the doctor saw Prabhupada's body steadily dwindling. I remember how on the last day, he told us that Prabhupada had about four hours left and he was right.

We could not understand Prabhupada's mind at this time, but we could see he was glorious. It reminded us of the passing of Bhlsmadeva. Prabhupada was in an obviously uncomfortable situation, but he maintained pure consciousness. He was surrounded by disciples chanting the Hare Krsna mantra in the holiest of all places, Vrndavana-dhama, during Karttika, just after Govardhana-puja.

Our reactions to Prabhupada's disappearance were typical – feeling bereft, feeling great sadness, or feeling nothing at all, feeling stunned, numb. Gradually it has become clearer that we need Prabhupada to keep ISKCON together. Many devotees have left, dissatisfied, top leaders have fallen down. Although there has been a change for the better and there's new hope, we feel an emptiness. There are still people straying from Prabhupada or searching for something or frankly being unable to keep his standards. Some devotees question whether what Prabhupada gave us is still relevant or whether it has to be

adapted more to the West. It's not the same as when he was here. But Prabhupada and Krsna knew what was best. It's up to us to carry on the *vani*.

Devotees quoted Jesus's words about his own disappearance when Prabhupada left. Jesus told his disciples he was leaving, but he would live in their hearts if they were pure and devoted to him. Prabhupada offered that too.

Part of the heaviness of this day is that we thought it was heavy for Prabhupada and not for us. In other words, Prabhupada had to leave his body. It's the greatest difficulty in a person's life, even in the life of a transcendentalist. Of course, we can't imagine how a pure devotee feels about it; and we can't imagine his relationship with Krsna. The depth of Prabhupada's feelings and realizations about leaving his mission and returning to Krsna are far beyond me. Neither could we know how he was feeling in a physical way. Was he in pain? He wasn't talking to us during his last twenty-four hours. He was completely internal. Was there anything we could do? How could we help? We just gathered around to be with him in those last hours. Prabhupada was doing the most difficult thing a human being can do, and we were all gathered around like bystanders. There was no austerity we could perform to equal what he was going through. It was so difficult and yet he went back to the spiritual world. It brought on such a confusion of emotions.

Then when we had bad thoughts like, "I have been in Prabhupada's room now for eight hours and I haven't eaten," we would feel guilty. Our inconvenience was so minor compared to what Prabhupada was going through, and we were complaining. We would feel guilty and just want to be left alone or wish it weren't happening or simply feel numb. We couldn't trust our own feelings, especially the animal feelings of just wanting

physical comfort and peace and not wanting to be around so many people and being, perhaps, examined by them to see whether we were expressing appropriate emotions on our spiritual master's disappearance day.

There's still a level of ignorance that we think we are going to continue to live. Therefore, we continue to enjoy the taste of food on our tongue and to see beautiful sights with our eyes. We tend to forget 1977 and the pain of that day, the shutting down of Prabhupada's body, his heart stopping. We tend to forget all that, how he was lowered into the *samadhi* pit. We don't want to think about it.

It's not that we have to dwell on the details of Prabhupada's leaving. I prefer to think about Prabhupada returning to the spiritual world and enjoying his blissful service to Krsna. I prefer to think about following him honorably until my own death comes and then joining him. With time, the details of his disappearance day have been replaced by a long-term picture of him in his *nityaAila* and my aspiration to follow him.

I also think of my own life's duration and my own attempts to enjoy and avoid suffering. It's all such an illusion. I heard Prabhupada describing this on a tape. He said if we look at the ocean, we will see many bubbles of froth and foam. They all appear and then disperse. Our lives are like those bubbles appearing on the ocean and then dispersing. As the *Bhagavad-gita* says, we were unmanifest, then we became manifest in these particular bodies and egos, and then we become unmanifest again. Dust thou art, and dust thou shalt become. We don't need to accept this manifest state as the all-in-all. Why do I strive only to improve my present situation? This kind of reflection is also proper on this day, especially if we have a foolish idea that he is gone and we are still thriving.

On this day, the 16th anniversary of Srila Prabhupada's disappearance, I want to see things in the right light. I am grateful to Prabhupada that I'm still his devotee, and I beg him to accept whatever service I can offer. I hope that I can increase my offering and have a clearer understanding of *bhagavata*'s *dharma*. I hope to increase my sacrifice in his mission. I am growing older and I am more sensitive to pain. My tendency is to perform less sacrifice, to be less bold and active in his service compared to when I was younger. But I'm hoping to find ways to increase my sacrifice because that was Prabhupada's spirit. He was 70 years old when he expanded his preaching, and with each year from 70 to 81, he took on more burdens and did more glorious preaching, saving more people from *maya*'s clutches by spreading the Krsna consciousness movement.

I don't know how long I have to live, but at least I want to finish up honorably as a devotee, following the four rules and chanting sixteen rounds. More than that, I want to increase my active service in his mission.

The day after Prabhupada's disappearance festival

°We had a ceremony last night. It was an intimate, unpretentious gathering. We tried to follow some of the elements of the Vrndavana observance of Prabhupada's disappearance day. We turned off the lights before 7 P.M., and at 7:20, I performed an *arati* to Prabhupada's picture. We also opened the *Bhag' avatam* (10.13) to the picture of Prabhupada's room and the picture of the Krishna-Balaram Mandir. Madhu sang "*Gurv-astakam*."

Before the *arati* I spoke to the devotees, but I was hesitant to express what I had spoken to myself earlier, that is, this seeming duality about Prabhupada's disappearance day and the images it brings up of death, decline of the body, pain, and so on, and the transcendental celebration of the pure devotee's going back to Godhead. Anyway, I expressed some of it.

Then during the *arati* I got a brighter feeling. According to the Gaudiya Vaisnava *siddhanta*, this is a joyous occasion. Of course, Prabhupada said appearance and disappearance days are the same. The pure devotee is either in this world doing Krsna's work, or he is in his *nityaAila* serving the Lord. When his work is done in this world, Krsna calls him back to the spiritual world. There is no reason to lament either his coming or his going. This is not just a day of Prabhupada's leaving, but a day of his ascension to the spiritual world. There is no doubt that Prabhupada is with Krsna, just as there is no doubt that Bhismadeva went back to Godhead. Prabhupada's disappearance day is the day he departed for the spiritual world.

Now it's up to us to make the best of the situation. His departure is certainly our loss, but we have to take stock of what he has left us. Prabhupada left us a tremendous amount of guidance in the form of his *vani*. The *Srimad'Bhagavatam* says that the great sages, by virtue of their Krsna consciousness, pass over the ocean of birth and death and go to the spiritual abode. Their going is compared to taking a boat to cross the ocean, but the miracle they perform is that although they use the boat to cross, they still somehow leave that boat on our shore so we can also cross. We cannot calculate this point materially; spiritually it is clear. Prabhupada went back to Godhead by pure Krsna consciousness, but he left behind the boat of his instructions for the conditioned souls.

After the *arati*, we continued our *kirtana* for some time. It was a weekday, so devotees were still arriving home from work. Then I read from *Srimad'Bhagavatam* 10.13. As we read, we were all aware that these were the purports Prabhupada composed in his very last days. I chose a purport where Prabhupada says that devotees are not afraid even of death because Krsna is with them. In the verse, Krsna is assuring His friends not to be afraid that the calves have wandered off. He says He will personally go and get them. In the purport, Prabhupada quotes:

*samsritd ye pada'pallava'plavarh mahat'padarh
punya'yaso murareh bhavambudhir vatsa'padam
param padam padam padam yad vipadarh na
tesam*

“For those who have accepted the boat of the lotus feet of the Lord, who is the shelter of the cosmic manifestation and is famous as Murari, the enemy of the Mura demon, the ocean of the material world is like the water contained in a calves hoof- print. Their goal is *param padam*, Vaikuntha, the place where there are no material miseries, not the place where there is danger at every step.” (*Bhag.* 10.14.58)

The world is certainly a place of danger. It is an ocean of birth and death. But if we take shelter of Krsna, the killer of Mura, then the ocean shrinks to the size of a calves hoofprint. Devotees are not afraid even of death.

Prabhupada wrote that to assure us. Certainly he was fearless. An ordinary person might feel anguish at the time of death because he realizes how much he has wasted his life. If he is a pious man, he might suffer from doubts about whether he will go to heaven or hell. Regardless, he is aware that it's too late to rectify himself. Srila Prabhupada had no such doubts or

fears. He was perfectly Krsna conscious and Krsna would protect him. It reminds me of Lord Caitanya's words to Haridasa Thakura when he was leaving the world. Haridasa appeared to be ill and could not chant his quota of 300,000 names a day. He was lamenting his inability to chant his quota, but Lord Caitanya said, "You have sufficiently preached the glories of the holy name in this world." (Cc. Antya 11.25) Haridasa was liberated many times over by his own glorious activities. He didn't have to keep chanting. Similarly, Prabhupada didn't slow down. He produced that last chapter when he couldn't even sit up in bed or push the button on the dictaphone. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

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Homages from his grandchildren

Yesterday we honored Prabhupada's disappearance day again, although it was actually earlier in the week. The devotees hadn't all been available on our first observance, so yesterday, seven families in the community got together and spoke about Prabhupada. Rather than try to recall the various offerings, I want to express my feelings about them.

When it was over, I was left with a feeling of amazement that people could have become Prabhupada's followers without ever having met him. I always remember Hayagriva's remark that he could not have become a devotee without having personally met Prabhupada. Hayagriva's statement was also a statement of humility, that there was no way he could have taken up the Krsna conscious philosophy and given up sinful life without Prabhupada's personally pulling him out. But perhaps there is also an implied superiority when we say that. We

may be trying to assert ourselves as better than the newer devotees by reminding them of our great fortune in having had Prabhupada's direct association.

Aside from our motives, it's still a fact that many sincere devotees have joined ISKCON since Srila Prabhupada's disappearance, and in many cases, they credit Srila Prabhupada as the main person in their lives. This usually surprises me. It also fills me with admiration for these people and their sincerity. I felt this again yesterday as I listened to the homages and heard how they got one of Prabhupada's books or met his devotees.

One devotee described himself as rebellious against elders and authority. When I met him, he had just come out of the IRA. He was raised in a tough situation. But when he met Prabhupada's books, he felt he wanted to accept Prabhupada's authority. Somebody else said that when they read Prabhupada's books, they thought they were the most wonderful books they had ever read. It impresses me to hear these statements. I can't imagine what it's like. Maybe in a future birth I will have to see for myself—pick up a book, start to read, and decide this is it. It's quite an experience to hear about the power of Prabhupada and his books.

One woman read her homage and said she thinks of Prabhupada in whatever she does—taking care of her child, serving her husband, and so on. A simple and direct Prabhupada consciousness. We credit Prabhupada for kicking out *maya* from our lives, for dismantling the illusion of the material world, and for teaching us about the most wonderful person, Krsna, the Personality of Godhead.

In his presentation, another devotee mentioned a snide remark someone had made to him: "Vaisnavism existed before Prabhupada." This devotee's reply was, "But it didn't exist for

me.” I held my tongue, but I felt like saying, “Yes, Vaisnavism existed for many centuries in India, but it was locked up there until Prabhupada brought it out. There wasn’t much benefit for us in Vaisnavism existing until he came to the West.” Prabhupada personally taught us how to live. I’m not the only one who Prabhupada taught how to live as a human being. Every devotee who comes to Krsna consciousness in Prabhu- pada’s line credits him for making changes in their life. I don’t really know what it’s like to come to Prabhupada after his disappearance, but I always try to assure those devotees who have come that they have not missed out on Prabhupada’s *vani*. Of course, whatever I say is from my point of view. Therefore, it’s always a pleasant surprise for me to hear that they are indeed praying to Prabhupada, that they are thankful to him, and that they feel he is actually sustaining them personally through his *vani*. In a sense, these devotees seem more advanced than I am because they feel so sustained by Prabhu- pada’s instructions. Even if they feel a lacking, they can develop it into feelings of *vipralambha* and yearn to have personal exchanges with His Divine Grace. So many of us who did have face-to-face exchanges with Prabhupada have wasted our time or not appreciated that association. Now everyone can pray to Prabhupada in separation and help each other.

Happy to be reading his books

^Prabhupada, I'm happy that I'm regularly absorbing myself in your *Srimad'Bhagavatam* First Canto and the middle six chapters of *Bhagavad'gita*. One result is that when I speak, so many references come to my mind. It's not just a matter of being a better speaker who can use references to spark dull lectures, but it's a feeling of personal satisfaction and being in touch with the spiritual energy. I remember feeling "high" when I was first awarded *sannyasa* and would speak on every occasion. I was elated to have no home, but to be traveling to different temples and to be asked to speak the philosophy either in a lecture or in private. I was ready to give whatever I was reading and I was consumed by it—speaking the *parampara* and living in that preaching. I thought that Krsna would provide for me and whatever happened, I would simply go on preaching and thinking in Krsna consciousness. That was what being a *sannyasi* meant to me. It's not that I was wrong, but the elation was short-lived. If I thought I could attain that level so completely, so quickly, I was wrong, so the elation died down. Even as a *sannyasi*, I became bogged down in management duties, other people's troubles, and my own *anarthas*. But I haven't forgotten that "high," and maybe it can return in a more tangible way again. Anyway, I wanted to let you know that I am reading your books and I am happy.

“When I see one of my books published, I feel like I have conquered an empire”

JsKCON devotees have all heard some of Prabhupada’s statements about the importance of his books. He said that if a nondevotee could read even one page, his life could become perfect. He said that in the future, history would prove that his books had saved humanity from barbarism. Prabhupada also said that it was important for his students to read his books. It wasn’t enough that they were enthusiastic to sell the books, he also wanted his students to study them scrutinizingly. He said they were filled with his personal ecstasies. “Whenever you have time, read my books,” he said. And he promised we would encounter him personally if we did. “If you want to know me, read my books.”

Devotees treasure these statements. They reflect Prabhu- pada’s deep respect for the written word and his particular feeling about his own writing. His feelings are not a mundane author’s pride, but Prabhupada said Krsna was speaking through him in his books. Prabhupada also learned from his spiritual master that books would be the basis of spreading Krsna consciousness. He saw his books as the personified order of his spiritual master. He wrote them to bring about a revolution in the impious Kali-yuga civilization. His books were Krsna in His most potent and merciful form. It’s natural Prabhupada was dedicated to them.

One of the most thrilling aspects of studying Prabhupada’s life is getting a glimpse of his dedication to book production. He said that when a book was published, he felt like he had conquered an empire. We also know that there were many campaigns before the empire was conquered. As those who worship worldly adventures like to read how an explorer found his first

inspiration, how he found a patron to pay for his voyage to the Antartica, how he suffered obstacles and crises during the exploration, so we like to read of Prabhupada's adventure when he was writing and selling *Back to Godhead* magazine. He was a householder at the time, and he published at his own expense. Later, he turned to translating the *Bhagavatam*. The story of his writing, publishing, and distributing is an adventure story full of struggle, reward, and triumph.

As Prabhupada's followers, we can focus on this adventure and remember him by it. For example, we can remember Prabhupada sitting in his room, dictating, methodically translating each word from Sanskrit to English, pressing the microphone button off and on, then speaking the purport. Imagine sitting there and listening to him. You hang on each word. How fortunate were those devotees who were able to take part in Prabhupada's adventure as typist, editor, or early reader of the manuscripts.

Sometimes Prabhupada's disciples expressed their appreciation for Prabhupada's books in conversations with him. If Prabhupada saw they were sincere, he would become enlivened. It was one of his favorite subjects, and he would speak eloquently about his books. Usually, he would turn praise away from his personal accomplishment to the wonder of Krsna as He was revealing Himself in the written word. Prabhupada was convinced that Krsna was present; therefore, the books could change people's lives. Often, a conversation like this would end with Prabhupada asking the disciple how they could help distribute his books.

I like to think that kind of conversation is continuing as I read Prabhupada's books. By my reading, I'm affirming to Prabhupada that I really like his books. "Srila Prabhupada, when I read your books, I always find something new. Whatever

you say becomes real to me. Even if I read similar words in another book on Vaisnava philosophy, it doesn't have the same effect as when I read your words." I know that Prabhupada will understand what I am saying when I read. He will tell me more about his books, how to read them and how to find their hidden treasure, love of God.

What I'm looking for in Prabhupada's books

^What am I looking for when I read Prabhupada's books? Lately, I have been reading the middle chapters of *Bhagavad- gita* and the First Canto and highlighting sections that appeal to me. I don't have any particular criterion. I go with what I feel at the time. There are passages that jump off the page. Some of them are classics that everyone knows to be special. Devotees tend to have a consensus about what those classic phrases and purports are. One example of a classic purport is *Bhag.* 1.6.37. Prabhupada describes the word "freedom" as the whole pivot in devotional service. That purport is so. attractive that we want to read it again and absorb the wonderful spirit of freedom Prabhupada describes.

Aside from the entire purports, there are classic phrases within purports that stand out. An example is where Prabhupada says that the process of chanting and hearing is not mechanical, but is dependent on the Lord's mercy. There's another purport where Prabhupada says Krsna likes to hear His holy name and pastimes recited.

It is a natural psychology in every individual case that a person likes to hear and enjoy his personal glories enumerated by

others. That is a natural instinct, and the Lord, being also an individual personality like others, is not an exception to this psychology because psychological characteristics visible in the individual souls are but reflections of the same psychology in the Absolute Lord. The only difference is that the Lord is the greatest personality of all and absolute in all His affairs. If, therefore, the Lord is attracted by the pure devotee's chanting of His glories, there is nothing astonishing. Since He is absolute, He can appear Himself in the picture of His glorification, the two things being identical.

— *Bhdg.* 1.6.33, purport

Aside from these classics, I always find things when I read that I don't remember reading before. Some of them express the philosophy in a way that I don't remember hearing and it strikes me. Some of them I find vital to my present attempts at Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Some of them discuss things that I am weak in, so I mark it to remind myself.

It's hard to say exactly what it is I am looking for, but I could boil it down to this: I'm looking for a state of ecstasy, and I'm looking to get beyond dryness and lack of love. Anything that looks like it will help, I underline.

It's possible I could become feverish in my looking, or start looking only for stimulating passages. I try to remind myself that reading is a quiet occupation. I want to serve Prabhupada's books and savor his words without thinking I have found a new way to get high. Spiritual sense gratification is, after all, another kind of selfishness. I want to please Kṛṣṇa. To do that, I have to hear about Him.

Having stated that caution, I do admit that I am looking for an inner thrill—nothing cheap—but the thrill of falling in love with Prabhupada's teachings. I would like to live my whole life absorbed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness by reading Prabhupada's

books. I would like reading to be more of a joy to me than the simple daily joys of eating and sleeping. "When, oh when, will that day be mine?"

My guru is always right

D recently read a purport where Prabhupada said that no one can know the mind of the pure devotee. As the Lord is above criticism, so His pure devotee is above criticism. Even if the pure devotee does not act according to the Vedic injunctions, we should not judge him. Everything he does is pure Krsna consciousness.

This is certainly the right attitude in approaching His Divine Grace. Don't criticize and don't judge the guru's activities, but try to understand them. If you come across a passage in the guru's book that you don't agree with according to your moral conditioning, then don't become disturbed. It may not be possible to adjust everything at once, but simply imbibe what he says. Be a simple student.

We want a relationship of absolute guru and submissive disciple. Arjuna is Krsna's eternal friend, but he suspended that fraternal mood in order to hear the *Bhagavad-gita*. In Arjuna's case, he was play-acting that he was in *mahd-mayd*, but we are not pretending. We need to be submissive disciples of an absolute guru. If we try to go forward with all our "educated" Western concepts, we will be defeated.

We are like Lord Brahma when he stole the calves and boys. He only exposed his inferiority by trying to defeat Krsna with his inferior mystic power. Why make a fool of ourselves in that way? Better to be simple when we go before the guru.

We should like whatever our spiritual master does just the way a son loves his dear father. Father and son, guru and disciple, have gone through so much together. The disciple has received direction from his guru and together they have served Krsna. The disciple, over the years, should have seen again and again that his guru's way was right. He should now be relaxed and confident in his following. He should also be free from the need to prove something to his guru. He should just try his best with faith that the spiritual master accepts him in his sincerity. With these deep relations assured between them, the disciple can appreciate whatever the spiritual master says.

A disciple accepts his spiritual master as absolute. Even if his spiritual master makes some relative mistake according to material calculation, or if he forgets part of a verse, a faithful disciple is not disturbed. The disciple knows that his guru is fully surrendered to Krsna and the previous *deary as*. The disciple knows there is no other criteria by which to measure his guru. Surrender to Krsna is all that counts. Therefore, the disciple listens with faith and acceptance.

Anyone who tries to remain independent, reserving the right to pass judgment on his guru's words, and yet acknowledges himself as a bona fide disciple, will find spiritual life difficult. Prabhupada says if you don't want to surrender to a guru, don't waste his or your own time. The only person who needs a spiritual master is that person seeking the absolute truth: *tasmad gururh prapadyeta, jijnasuh sreya uttamam*.

Dear Srila Prabhupada, you helped us grow into our relationship with you with such tenderness and care. You let us serve you during the burgeoning years of ISKCON's beginning. You stood at the helm of our little ISKCON boat and we served

as your children-helpers. I wish to preserve the essence of that spirit even as I grow older. Please keep me young and simple beside you.

Charity begins at home

emories of Prabhupada are wonderful things and they should be encouraged in myself and others. Recently, in the *Srimad' Bhagavatam* class in Vrndavana, I heard Suresvara Prabhu recount a memory he had. I had already heard that story and I have also read it in his memoir in *Srila Prabhupada' lilamrta*. Suresvara tells the details more or less the same each time, but the last time I heard him tell it to that large audience, many of whom hadn't heard it before, he was full of life and conviction. It is a real memory. Suresvara was actually there. He actually heard from Prabhupada. Over twenty years later, he is still a faithful disciple.

Suresvara begins the story: "The setting is Detroit airport, 1970. Prabhupada is returning to America after a couple of years away. Devotees have gathered from all over the Midwest and other parts of the United States . . . " He tells how they anxiously awaited the first sight of Prabhupada. Suresvara had never seen Prabhupada, although he had read his books and heard his taped lectures. Then suddenly, Prabhupada appeared out of the tunnel, out of the flow of incoming passengers. All the devotees bowed down, and so did Suresvara. Or as he describes it, "I suddenly felt a weight hit me in the back of my knees, so I fell down and offered obeisances to Prabhupada." He bowed by force in the presence of Krsna's pure devotee. Then he describes how many devotees cried when they saw Prabhupada.

Prabhupada was offered an improvised *vyasasana* and he began to lecture. Suresvara tells us that this was the same philosophy he had been hearing from Prabhupada, but on hearing him speak it in person, it hit him very heavily.

And here I am, walking down a country road in freezing weather. Snow is dusting the hilltops. I am remembering Suresvara and his Prabhupada memory, remembering him telling it from the speaker's *asana* in Vrndavana. With a little luck, I can also go back to 1970 and feel the weight behind my knees forcing me to bow to Prabhupada. Maybe I too can see the tears devotees are crying and hear Prabhupada's heavy statements about the misery in the material world and the hope of Krsna consciousness. If I can be receptive, this kind of memory will open up to me.

If I am not receptive, then I will become cynical. When Suresvara begins to tell his story, I'll think, "Oh, I've heard this before. He's not *really* going to tell it again, is he? Who does he think we are?" Then today when I remember it, it will just be another layer of cynicism. It will make me cynical toward my own memories. What good will come of all that?

Therefore, I am asking you, dear mind, please be charitable. We know that charitable people are praised. We are encouraged to be charitable. We also know that charity begins at home. Please be kind to my Prabhupada memories.

One time Prabhupada came to Boston in 1971, not long after he had been to Moscow. We were thrilled to get our spiritual master back and to have him visit Beantown. We weren't living in Boston, but in the transcendental world Prabhupada had created for us.

Prabhupada came into the temple room and saw our little Radha-Krsna Deities on Their red velvet altar. He encouraged us as always, but also took time to criticize our shortcomings

in his gentle, fatherly way. I remember that we had first wanted him to stay at the Boston Sheraton Hotel in the most expensive suite, but they had no cooking facility and anyway, Prabhupada would not go there. He said a hotel was a brothel. We were quite unprepared for him to stay at the temple. Our big, so-called Victorian mansion was actually a run-down house by this time in its history. We didn't even have enough money to heat the place. The rooms were not nicely painted, and there was no question of clean rugs or good floor coverings, drapes, and so on. But Prabhupada came into our bare atmosphere and accepted it.

I was secretly thrilled that he set this example, but embarrassed too that he had to live so uncomfortably. He had to use the same bathroom as everyone else, and although we set aside special times for him to be the only one to use the bathroom, it still didn't seem right. I remember him coming out of his room into the main hallway carrying a *lota*. I remember him finding a devotee's beadbag hanging off a door knob almost to the ground and him asking, "Whose beads are crying here?"

He must have been pleased to see the happiness in our faces when we were with him, but he also saw our open foolishness and lack of good management. What to do? We were his poor students. We still are.

After Prabhupada left Boston, I wrote him a letter apologizing for the room we had offered him. He replied that he thought it was all right. He was a *sannyasi* and could stay anywhere. But a disciple should offer the best to his spiritual master. Prabhupada said, "In your country, even an ordinary person lives with opulence." It was a nice exchange.

I'm grateful to Krsna that I have had so many moments and exchanges with His pure devotee. I want to treat the memories

properly. One way to respect them is to tell them from time to time. Sometimes a Boston memory, sometimes a Dallas memory, sometimes a Hyderabad memory. Don't be cynical toward that which you actually love. Bring it out. Re-live it. Re-love it. It will help you remember who you are and what you want to do. You will remember that you have always been Prabhupada's man. You still are, by his grace.

In between the peak and slough

I feel bad when I waste time. I try to use my time well, but I have my ups and downs during the day, especially in the morning. What can I say? It's disappointing when I am trying to read and feel drowsy, but I'm not a machine. I have to forgive myself.

Some of my down times come when I am tired. They are due to my physical limits or because my other duties steal concentration from my *sadhana*. I have to look for times when my consciousness is clear and I can read and chant attentively.

I can take a variety of attitudes toward the fact that I am not able to constantly meditate on Prabhupada. One thing I can do is become more appreciative of my peak moments. I can also structure my time so that peak moments are more likely to come. And I can be more conscious not to miss service opportunities.

I can also try to shape my life so that I am always connected to Prabhupada whether I am "in ecstasy" or not. I should always be working for him in our basic relationship as guru and disciple. I don't want the chaotic life of living on the edge in Krsna consciousness and having to pull myself back to

Prabhupada by intense prayer. I want a life where the spiritual naturally out-balances the material, and that means a life dedicated to following Prabhupada's instructions. I want a service approved by him. I want to be on the map of *guru'seva*, even if my service is slow or unimportant.

Prabhupada consciousness is not an all or nothing meditation. We may have peak times and we may have sloughs, but most of us probably spend most of our time in the middle. Even if we can't read with a clear mind, or even if we can't approach Prabhupada in prayer, we can still read and pray. If we develop a taste for only the rarest nectar, then distraction will lead us to the bottom. Instead of picking up the *Bhagavatam*, we will reach for the newspaper. We have to serve constantly, not only when we are feeling ecstatic. Prabhupada meditation can be done all the time. It is only the clarity and intensity that varies. We have to honor even the little emotions of love for Prabhupada, even the inattentive ones.

We need to serve Prabhupada always. Prabhupada defines *bhakti* as engaging our senses in the Lord's service. If we simply engage in Prabhupada consciousness, there will always be a profit, even if it is imperceptible to us at the time. And the opposite is also true: when we waste time and pass up opportunities to serve him, they are lost forever.



Talking with Prabhupada

'Bear Srila Prabhupada, I have read that pure devotees have almost the same facility as Krsna, although they always remain the Lord's servants. They are able to travel throughout the universe and they can see into others' hearts. They are free

from the bonds of matter and they preach in their spiritual bodies. As the Lord is inconceivable, so the devotees are inconceivable.

I know you are able to see me right now. I know you are with all your disciples. The science of the guru associating with his disciple after his disappearance isn't much described, at least not as much as we hear of the Lord's association with the *jiva*, but I think some of the same qualities are operating. The Supreme Lord is present in the *jiva*'s heart. Krsna says in *Bhagavad'gita* that He helps the devotee to come to Him. You have also stated that Krsna is accompanied in our hearts by His pure devotees.

That is the *siddhanta*, but more important than theory, it seems, is our actual feeling and experience of it. Before we can fully experience your presence in our hearts, we have to accept it on faith. Surely you are with us, Prabhupada. Eternal doesn't mean that you went back to Godhead and now our connection with you is broken, or that it is only accessible when we die, *if* we become perfect, and join you in the spiritual world. Therefore I talk to you, knowing you are listening.

Prabhupada, I am listening to your lectures. When I hear a tape, I make a red mark on it and put it back in the collection. I like to listen to your lectures, although I can't always be as attentive as I would like. Neither can I listen with *bhava*. I must have misused my time and intelligence even since I met you because I am so impure. I am unable to feel ecstasy at every moment when I hear you speak. But I'm trying to become pure by hearing from you.

Right now I am spending a few days reading your books fulltime. Even when I am back on the road again, I will continue to read them for an hour a day. I also want to continue my duties, even those that aren't pleasing to me, because I am meant to

serve your mission in this world. As a *sannyasi*, that means traveling, lecturing, and being there for devotees who want to hear from me. You have given me this responsibility, so I can't keep my Prabhupada consciousness to myself. You want me to share your association with others.

Both the congregation and newcomers want to hear about you. I can't be a miser. I have a wealth of Prabhupada recollections. It's my responsibility and privilege to be able to speak and write on them. Sometimes this means I have to keep a demanding schedule – staying up late, holding programs in people's homes, social demands – but I want to do it anyway. Behind the rhetoric about who is a *babaji* and who is a preacher, there is the basic fact that you want us to spread and maintain Krsna consciousness in the devotees' lives.

Srila Prabhupada, even when you were physically present, you had us preaching to each other. After only two years in your movement, you started referring to us as "older devotees" or your "more experienced students." Now that sense of duty has only increased, and now we actually are elders. Part of the resolution I am offering to you is that I don't want to just meditate internally on you, but preach as you requested me.

Active service produces some of the best kinds of meditation and reciprocation with you. When I feel I'm really working on your behalf, you catch me almost unaware. Then suddenly you are beside me, helping me to face the difficulties in my attempt to push on Krsna consciousness. By being a regular worker, I get to associate with you in a tangible way. It's like getting a taste of what you went through and then becoming identified as your man.

Mini *memories*

One time we went with Prabhupada to Staten Island. I lived there for thirteen years of my growing up life. It was a special treat for me that Prabhupada went there. It's really an odd, almost obscure, day in his life, but it was captured in at least one or two photographs showing Prabhupada on the Staten Island ferry with Gargamuni.

We drove to Staten Island in somebody's car. We wanted to look at a beach cottage to see if it was suitable for Prabhupada's use. He had just come out of the hospital and he needed to rest and recuperate.

I have told this memory before, so I am hesitant to repeat it, but I love to think of the details—how he told a shivering boy that he should go back to the car. Then they all went back to the car. Then Prabhupada went apart from us to pass water. On the way home, I seem to remember him falling asleep. That memory, the way it's just folded up and lost in time, tossed there so carelessly, is amazing to me now. It's as if we had so much association with Prabhupada that we could carelessly spend it here and there without any idea of recording it. If I knew then how precious these things would be to me now, I certainly would have done everything I could to preserve the details of that day.

As I'm recalling these stories, it's cold. Sometimes I go outside and walk, wearing a coat and using a cane. It reminds me of Prabhupada walking in Manhattan. In the picture, you can see the parking meters behind him. You can see his cane and his long, black coat. He was so alone and so dear to Krsna. At the same time, he looks tough to endure. That picture flashes in my mind when I walk in the cold and wear my coat and walk with my cane. It's not that I think I'm Prabhupada,

but this walk with coat and cane is reminiscent of Prabhupada. In such simple but total ways, we can suddenly think of Prabhupada.

It's a little bit like the *gopis* in their madness playing, "I am Kṛṣṇa! Just see me lift Govardhana Hill." We can do that in an almost unconscious way with Prabhupada. I'm not talking of deliberate imitation. We should not try to gesture the way Prabhupada did, or lean forward and open our eyes wide to try and create the same effect he did. But as we move through the world, his gestures and actions will flash on us—Prabhupada took a walk in his black coat and I am walking in my coat too. This is all a private meditation and I am finding it hard to communicate. I hope you will know what I mean. I am describing a secret way to be with Prabhupada.

For example, say you go to sit in the back of a car. As you get in, you say, half aloud, "*Sri'kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu nityānanda ...*" As you say it, you remember Prabhupada saying it. Someone could say you are imitating Prabhupada, but you are not imitating. You are saying his words just for yourself. It's done out of a kind of mild yearning to be with him again and you consummate that yearning, you create a union with him, by saying "*Sri'kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu nityānanda*" just the way he did.

It's not that you are identifying yourself *as* Prabhupada— That would be imitation—but you might find yourself making a similar gesture that he made. You don't think you are making it with the same emotion Prabhupada felt, but at least you remember him gesturing like that. All these miniature memories flash by all the time, just like daydreams or images that surface and then disperse. We have millions of such daydreams always waiting to come up. Most of them don't have much Prabhupada content in them. I welcome these little half

unconscious images. By them, we can live in a kind of “dreamland” of always being near Prabhupada through his mannerisms and teachings.

If I’m tired at the end of the day and I collapse heavily into bed, I can remember that Prabhupada did that once. His servant told me about that. When Prabhupada stayed at a house in Boston for a few days at the end of 1969, he layed back just like a child, pulled the covers up under his chin, and went to sleep for the night.

Sometimes you can imagine being with Prabhupada. For example, say I’m walking up a hill and I start feeling tired. I can imagine that Prabhupada is with me. He says the hill is too steep. He doesn’t want to walk there. It’s not good for his heart. He stops walking and I stop also to hear him. Or I can play-act that I have “become” Prabhupada: “Oh, this hill is very steep.” As I say these words “as Prabhupada,” I make a little gesture with my hand or the cane the way Prabhupada did. Or maybe a memory floats in, a visual image of Prabhupada on Venice Beach walking with the devotees.

All these things come and go in such a subtle way that you don’t even notice it’s happening. You rarely take the time to explain it to anyone else. It’s your own little world of Prabhupada consciousness.

I would like this subtle activity to increase and increase. I wouldn’t mind appearing “spaced out” to others and walking around in a daze of Prabhupada memories, imaginings, and meditations. Of course, that wouldn’t make me a very effective preacher, I suppose, but it’s something to think about. I wouldn’t mind becoming a madman in love for Prabhupada.

To those <who want to hear what Prabhupada said

LJ heard Prabhupada lecturing in the early days of 26 Second Avenue. I could hear all the noises in the background of Prabhupada's lecture—cars, people out in the street—he remarked about it several times. He also caught my attention by mentioning Jesus Christ several times. He went from one topic to another, but returned to say Christ's name. It occurred to me that he was saying it to give his audience a framework of relevancy. Then I realized again what a task Prabhupada took on to present the *Bhagavad-gita* to American audiences. It's not that the members of his audience were Christians—they were more like hippie atheists—but their background was Judeo- Christian. Any concept they would have of someone coming from the kingdom of God would be Christ.

He counted on his audience, despite the fact that they were not typical, middle-class Americans, to be sympathetic toward Christ, at least as a saintly person. He explained why Krsna came into the world, and every time he said "Krsna," he added, "or His representative." Prabhupada was placing Krsna and His representative in the same category. Both are free of the material nature and are completely spiritual.

He went on to explain that when Krsna or His representative come from the kingdom of God, they come to deliver the fallen souls. But it does not mean that Krsna or His representative are under the material energy. He said it would be superficial to think that Christ was crucified. Therefore, the Christians teach the doctrine of resurrection.

I am mentioning all this because hearing this tape made me appreciate Prabhupada in another way. I imagined how various devotees who have gone back to Christianity could say, "Here's proof that Prabhupada accepts Jesus Christ." It's true that

Prabhupada does have a basic sympathy for any saintly person, regardless of where in the world they appear, as long as they preach that God is the Supreme Person, that we should follow His law, and that the goal of life is returning to Him in the spiritual world. Prabhupada was convinced that saintly people all come to preach on behalf of Kṛṣṇa, even if they appear in different places in the world.

In the same lecture, he spoke about Lord Buddha. Then he quoted Jayadeva Gosvāmī's song and explained that Lord Buddha is an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa. He put Kṛṣṇa's and Buddha's names together the same way he juxtaposed Kṛṣṇa and Christ. Vaisnavism, as Prabhupada teaches it, embraces other religions at least in a basic way.

In ISKCON, and in my own life, we accept that Prabhupada is the ultimate authority. It is vitally important to know what he teaches. We are not only trying to learn Vaisnava philosophy, however, but we don't want to learn them apart from Prabhupada's presentation. We want to embrace Vaisnavism as he presented it. With all its faults, ISKCON upholds the standard -of hearing only from Prabhupada, and I love it for that reason.

Calling out to Srila Prabhupada #4

O Srila Prabhupada, your multifarious qualities come to mind one after another and I want to receive them like worshipable Vaisnavas. In Vedic culture, they say that an uninvited guest should be worshiped as good as God. How much more so the invited guest, the spiritual master, whom the disciple always hankers to see. When the guru visits your

home, it becomes the most auspicious day. I am calling on the road outside the ramshackle hut of my mind, asking, "O Srla Prabhupada, please come and visit me. O please call me to you."

Srla Prabhupada, when everything gets dark and frightening, then I know I'll call to you. Thousands of your devotees will do the same. In our last minutes, we want to hear you chanting and speaking in our ears. But until death, we wish to be your lively servitors because you always wanted to see a sincere show of activity. You said a Vaisnava is not a fool or an inactive person. He is a living transcendentalist. You wanted your followers to always have Krsna's names on their lips, and with their body, mind, and words, serve the Lord. Your devotees are known by their appearance with Vaisnava *tilaka* and *kanti-mala*. They chant Hare Krsna on beads: Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare. When they speak, they quote verses from *Bhagavad-gita* to prove their points. They teach that we are all spirit souls. When the body dies, the soul lives on. Then the soul takes another body according to his karma, but in every species of life, there is suffering and illusion. The only way out of this illusion is to realize that we are all the eternal servants of Krsna. The easiest method to gain this realization is to chant the holy names of God. We should find a bona fide spiritual master and serve his order. All activities in life should be molded as loving service to the Supreme.

Srla Prabhupada, please count me among your followers who like to preach this philosophy.

O Srla Prabhupada, what should we do about our imperfections? There have been so many disappointments in your movement after your disappearance. How can we rectify our mistakes? Will they clear up in time? Will it take a few generations? I know it will take hard work. I hope to do my bit,

although I can see it's not a job that can be done even by committees of leaders. It will take Krsna showering His mercy on us.

By Providence's arrangement, sometimes bewildering things take place in the material world. Those bewilderments are different ways in which you teach us the hard lessons we cannot seem to learn on our own. But Srila Prabhupada, we are not abandoning our faith in you. We want to follow in your footsteps. Let us be open enough, and intelligent enough, that when a Godbrother criticizes us for doing something that is not your way, we are willing to accept it and rectify. I don't claim I am the only one who knows how to please Your Divine Grace or that I never make mistakes, but I wish to be lined up and fixed as your devotee.

O Srila Prabhupada, you are completely spiritual. You are no longer with us in this world the way you used to be. We cannot expect to meet up with you in some city of the world. I know we can see you in separation. You wrote to Brahmananda in 1969 that he should not be sad over the fact that you were not spending much time in New York City that year. You said that in the material world, separation is always occurring like the waves at sea, but in spiritual life, separation produces a feeling more relishable than being together. This is a great mystery, Prabhupada. Now is the time for me to understand it.

Perhaps that is one reason you left us behind. Therefore, I know you are with me even now, although I express my feelings for you in terms of emptiness and vacancy. So I talk to you.

O Srila Prabhupada, I am a simple-minded person. I don't want to be a nondevotee. I don't want any prize other than shelter at your lotus feet. I want to be accepted as one of your followers by your other followers. This is the society I crave. We all want a sincere society, real love, not something phony or

official. In the name of seeking such affection, I don't want to look outside of those who hold you as their most beloved *acarya* and guide, and who wish the best for your movement. Therefore, optimism and positive thinking means to look for the good in ISKCON devotees as well as in those who are following Prabhupada, although they may be estranged.

O Prabhupada, I don't know what I'm talking about. All I know is that I saw you on a number of occasions and you recognized me. You called me your son, and you were kind enough to keep me close. You made me feel worthwhile. Maybe that made me proud, but I have gradually been corrected of that pride also.

O Prabhupada, please hear me. I am ready to take more responsibility as a reader of your books. Please give me an assignment to chant the holy names under your guidance. I want to proclaim that all good can come from single-minded devotion to your lotus feet. I want to be able to say it based on my deep conviction and on my good record of working for you. If you think I'm ready for this, or even if you think I'm not, please give me a chance. When I asked you to give me the chance to open a center in Boston, you readily agreed. When there was a vacancy in the leadership at *Back to Godhead*, I volunteered and you thanked me for my straightforward offer of service. When I heard you thought the GBC men should get out from behind their desks and take *sannyasa*, I volunteered and you accepted. You have always been kind to me. When you had the system of posting a GBC secretary to be with you every month, I reminded you that it was my turn in February. You wrote back and told me that we were all welcome, just work it out among yourselves. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Please know, Srila Prabhupada, that I want to be with you again. If you think I'm not fit for such close contact, please

give me an instruction to carry out in separation, one that will keep me in full remembrance of you.

Because I cannot think of him in silence

What are these blocks that keep me from my Prabhupada memories? Whatever they are, they are antagonistic to my spirit. Why should I be silent?

Spiritualists usually consider silence as good. When we are with friends, we don't always have to talk. When we pray to God, we don't have to fill the air with chatter. It takes concentration to pray in silence and I can't always do it. I feel silent, for example, when I massage my Prabhupada *murti*. I don't need to talk to Prabhupada at that time. Rather, I like to listen to him. But most of the time, if I am silent, my mind goes off into different places. Speaking turns me to Prabhupada. Anyway, we are rarely silent. Either we talk *prajalpa* or we speak *krsna'katha*. This is another reason why I prod myself to talk about Prabhupada.

One time, Prabhupada told us that we could always wear our *japa* beads in the streets, "If you are not ashamed."

One time, I told Prabhupada I was chanting, but that I had no system of counting the rounds. He told me that Vaisnavas use counter beads and that I should get some so he could show me how they work. I immediately went to Tandy's where I had bought my *japa* beads and Prabhupada chuckled, "You are so prompt." Then he showed me how Vaisnavas count on beads.

One time, Prabhupada said that we had missed the whole point of Krsna consciousness, thinking it could be achieved by material formulas and committees. He said the real purpose is

to become mad after Krsna. How could we have missed that point?

One time, we took Prabhupada on a walk in a German forest. He didn't like it. He said it was like a jungle. He preferred trimmed gardens.

On one of those same walks, he heard of the U.N. proposal that girls should not have children at a young age. Prabhupada said that it was untrue that girls are harmed by young pregnancies. He said the U.N. was making propaganda favoring illicit sex.

Sometimes, some of us "more intelligent" devotees would talk among ourselves about how some of Prabhupada's other disciples were not so bright. We pointed out that they would instigate Prabhupada's criticism of some philosophy or situation by giving him incomplete or exaggerated information. Or they presented bizarre activity as the norm or a straw man for Prabhupada to knock down. We lamented that they gave Prabhupada distorted information for his debates. Somehow, Krsna arranged it that way, didn't He? Were we so much more intelligent? Why then, didn't we put forward our intelligent talk? We were all more or less foolish. All we could put before Prabhupada was what we manufactured in our brains, or what we had read in the *New York Daily News* or in Camus' novels. Now that I am listening to Prabhupada's conversations so long after they were spoken, I can see that Prabhupada didn't spend his time knocking down straw men. He improved on the quality of what people said to him and he spoke in *parampara*.

(Why am I saying all this? I'm trying to clear away all the obstacles and *anarthas* so I can worship my spiritual master in full bliss. I don't want to be guilty of enjoying him, but I want to be his menial servant and enjoy *that*. I'm helpless and crying out for direction.)

Once Prabhupada wrote a long letter to Nehru commenting on Nehru's speech, "Let us be true to one another." I did not read the letter carefully. I have to go back and study it patiently. Then I can tell the devotees what Prabhupada said. I do remember the letter he wrote to the President of India in which he said, "I have learned the secret of how to go back to Godhead. Please don't think I am a madman that I speak like this. I have actually learned it from my spiritual master and it is taught by Krsna in *Bhagavad'gita*. I want to share the method of my success with others. Please meet with me. I have a batch of workers who are willing to help carry out this program. It is the best program for social upliftment."

Let me remember Prabhupada in the silences. Let me read in silence. Let me stir up Prabhupada-katha in silence and then release it to happy ears eager to hear of His Divine Grace.

Praising Prabhupada as service

I am aware that my service of writing about Prabhupada is not necessarily the best service. In one sense, it gathers together all the other services and talks about them. It talks about book distribution, about spreading Krsna consciousness, and it praises these other services and servants. It may seem that the person who gathers all the other services together must be superior to each individual servant, but I know that's not true. Praising is just another service.

We could compare what I do to the descriptions in the *Vedas* of professional praisers or reciters or poets. Sometimes we think of them as *brahmanas*, or perhaps we think of them as *sudras*. Anyway, I'm aware that I'm not the best servant. I may be

laughable to Prabhupada and his generals. Still, there's a place and a need for a praise-maker, a panegyrist.

Dear Srila Prabhupada, as I say these words, I am walking down a country road. It's as dark as midnight, although it's 6:30 in the morning. There are no lights to guide me, but by the reflection in the puddles, I can just make out the road. I'm trying to keep myself right in the middle of the road. If I become inattentive, I'll stray from the road and become completely lost.

This is a good image for how I want to follow you. I must go right down the middle of the road you have provided for me. Otherwise, I'll get into trouble. By middle, I mean the heart center, without deviation. As I walk, keeping my eyes open for any indication of light or obstacles ahead, I sing "*Jaya Prabhupada*" and remember your pastimes to chase away fear, to amuse myself, and to share with others who are walking the same road.

The Six Gosvams were poets. Being poetic is one of the twenty-six qualities of a devotee. The Six Gosvams, especially Rupa and Raghunatha Gosvams, wrote in constant streams of metaphors which they drew from nature. They are always plunging into Radha-Krsna's pastimes and surfacing again with new metaphors from nature, philosophy—from anything. The Vaisnava poetic tradition is a great tradition. I can't claim to be part of the society of Vaisnava poets who knew how to expertly praise the Lord according to time and place with references to the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*.

Still, I want to preach in Prabhupada's movement, and I too want to make a metaphor out of apparently ordinary things. I want to repeat the philosophy as a *sannyasi* should and to work hard to worship Krsna and bring about His desires. I want to offer praise in whatever words the Lord gives me, not pom

pously, but with sincerity and love. For me, nature and its images used in praise teach me the ways of *sambandha*, *abhi-dheya*, and *prayojana*. All this is a gift from my Srila Prabhupada, and it is the way he has given me to offer menial service among the others that serve him.

Searching the purports

I have read the Bhaktivedanta Purports, all of them, quite a few times, but now I am going back over them, searching through them for my lost relationship with Krsna. Although I have understood something from my previous readings, I still haven't learned how to surrender to Krsna. I get up early and sit under the desk lamp, reading and hoping to find the greatest treasure. The Krsna consciousness I am hankering for stares me in the face in the form of the English characters in this BBT book. It's Prabhupada's book, and it was produced the way he wanted it. Krsna is there. I have come to meet Him and serve Him with attention.

What I'm discovering as I read is that no matter what the topic of the verse, Prabhupada teaches love of Krsna in His original form. We should never think that the sections on Prahlada Maharaja or Vidura and Maitreya are going to lead us to some other spiritual planet.

Right from the beginning, Prabhupada talks of Prahlada as a devotee of Krsna, Govinda. The ISKCON artists have even painted Krsna with a peacock feather, His body the color of fresh rain clouds, catching Prahlada as he falls from the mountain into the sea. In his purport, Prabhupada brings us to chanting Hare Krsna and serving the Lord.

Right from the early chapters of *Bhagavad-gita*, before Krsna has even begun to teach *bhakti-yoga*, Prabhupada informs us of Krsna's purpose. Prabhupada doesn't waste time. He kicks false commentators aside and we learn that Arjuna should give up his nonviolence and fight *because Krsna wants him to*. What may be considered good in the public's estimation may not be what Krsna perceives. Krsna is beyond good and evil. Like Arjuna, we need a spiritual master who will teach us pure Krsna consciousness. That guru is Srila Prabhupada. He is available in his books.

I am searching the purports for my lost relationship with my spiritual master. I underline phrases that seem particularly dear, phrases I can return to, but as yet, I lack the power to pray and re-read, to stop reading the words yet keep a meditative focus on what is being said. I cannot ruminate. I cannot hold a sacred reading for long. Although I stray, I come back again. Prabhupada is waiting for me like a tolerant, ever-loving father. It is not a minor ambition, but a worthy one, to hope to become a serious, spontaneous reader of his books.

Reading Prabhupada's books is a reward for doing other services, yet it's not something we have to save up to do in our retirement. We can take our reward now, even if we don't deserve it. Serve and read, work and read, but learn to read.

I'm returning to the purports and searching for real life. I don't listen to those voices nagging me with doubts or criticism. I'm sailing beyond them. I still have to work on fatigue and lack of attention, but slowly, I am building up my ability to read. Now I have a personal vow to read at least an hour a day. Prabhupada won't reprimand me when he sees me reading his books. He won't say, "Don't you have anything better to do?" He knows it's a noble undertaking and that a disciple engrossed in his books will profit immensely.

I'm searching Prabhupada's books and finding gold nuggets—love exchanges, Krsna and His eternal devotees, their pastimes. Last night we read to the end of Lord Brahma's prayers. Young Krsna gestured that Brahma could return to Brahma-loka, then He quickly went and rejoined the boys. It seemed to them that Krsna had only been gone for half a moment, so they laughingly welcomed Him back. It seemed to them that Krsna was so attached to their friendship that He couldn't keep away. "Come on, best friend," they said, "don't worry. We haven't eaten without You. Please come and join us." At the end of that day as the boys returned home, they proudly sang, "Today Krsna saved us from a terrible serpent."

I'm searching Prabhupada's purports. I am letting his words sink in, allowing them to go to the depths of my being. I see how I have been wrong on so many issues. I want to learn Prabhupada's way of doing things, his way of thinking about Krsna.

I read in a purport in Bhlsmadeva's teachings that the pure devotee appreciates Krsna in all His *rasas*. He sees Krsna as the origin of all qualities. Prabhupada says that some foolish people think that the Krsna on the Battlefield of Kuruksetra and the Syamasundara dancing with the *gopis* are two different people. The pure devotee sees that they are all Krsna or emanations from Him. He appreciates the pure devotees' service in their various *rasas*. He knows Bhlsmadeva's arrows piercing Krsna's body are as pleasing to Krsna as the *gopis*' kisses. I want to learn to think of Krsna as Prabhupada thinks of Him. Prabhupada writes that Krsna's sweetness cannot be approached directly, but through the transparent medium.

I am learning to read Prabhupada's purports with confidence. I am leaving behind my Western tendency to speculate.

I am leaving behind Western mythology, all Western rubbish. I don't need those Western ghosts looking over my shoulder. Just let me read faithfully.

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Prabhupada is with us

O Prabhupada, you can be with us wherever we are and wherever you are. You wanted to see Lord Caitanya's prediction fulfilled. It is being fulfilled by your efforts. It's natural that the devotees will be thinking of you in so many places. Someone is building his house in a rural devotee community in Northwest Canada. Sometimes he and his wife wonder if they're doing all they can to serve Krsna in the best way, but they've made these decisions to dovetail their household life as you prescribed by practicing simple living and high thinking. Thus they are regularly thinking of you as they work and as their life goes by. In the winter when there's no gardening, they stay indoors and read your books.

A devotee in China is working undercover. He is enrolled as a student in a university. He can hardly say anything openly, but he is always thinking how you want Lord Caitanya's message distributed even in oppressed situations. He hopes to find a way and to be protected by your grace, as you have promised your preachers.

These are real examples. I could give hundreds and thousands of them. Even in one country, there are hundreds and thousands of persons who are thinking of you and who want to please you. Therefore, Prabhupada, you must expand yourself in one way or another to be with your devotees. Krsna will help us. He is the biggest of the big and the smallest of the small.

He can enter within the atom. Therefore, I know Krsna can deliver you to the hearts of sincere devotees.

We may think of you as living in Vrndavana-dhama in your Samadhi Mandir, or in your rooms at Krishna-Balaram Mandir, or at Radha-Damodara. Those are focal points for inspiration. Like Krsna, however, you appear wherever there are sincere devotees chanting your names and taking up the service you gave us.

To disbelieve this fact is to be an atheist, or at best, faithless. The truth is obvious. In my case I talk about you as one way to assure myself that you are present, but I find you regularly in my day.

Mostly I am satisfied to know you are here with me, but sometimes I wish I knew it more intensely. I want to lose my false self, my complacent nature, and *give* myself more to you. I can't be with you unless I want to serve you. Service is how we discover your presence. You are the eternal spiritual master coming at different times, places, and in different forms. You wrote that you are the guru for all, but some obey you and others do not.

Prabhupada, you are with me as regularly as the rhythm of my own heart, and you are also beyond me. I can understand the meaning of the universe by your words. I know why the birds sing and why there are trees and a sky. I know what is God and where the living entities go after death. Although all these points were explained in *sastra*, the *sastra* was locked to me until you opened it with your key. We contact you whenever we breathe in transcendental knowledge. Our whole perception of material and spiritual reality is another way of being with you. You are with us when we sit down and take *prasadam*, and with us when we try to comprehend God. You live forever and your followers live with you.

One person's reading plan

^Dear Srlla Prabhupada, I want to keep reading your books and hearing your tapes when I am most receptive. I want to go deeper and deeper into your teachings and leave behind all concepts that would minimize you in my life. I want to free myself from any idea that you are not teaching the most nectar or that we can get nectar better from somebody else.

Why is it when I think of Prabhupada that I always have to slog through these negative impressions? Why do they keep coming up? It's not that I love to think like this, but I so much want to clear the road for honest love of my spiritual master. I want to take it in like a new devotee just coming to Krsna consciousness. You know the kind of person I mean—he tells us that he was in deep *maya*, maybe even contemplating suicide, and one day he found himself with one of Prabhupada's books. Then everything changed. He stayed up all night and read the book. He realized, "This is what I have been looking for all these years! This is the truth! How wonderful!" I want to read with that same thrilling absorption.

Hanuman goes on hearing about Rama. He feels the thrill of his association with and attachment to Lord Rama. Hearing their pastimes together solaces the pain of his separation from his beloved master. His ecstasy increases as he listens to the *Ramayana* over and over again.

Srlla Rupa Gosvami is another example. He becomes more and more absorbed in hearing of Krsna's Vrndavana pastimes that his ecstasy and love are ever-increasing.

I shouldn't think I have only a slim chance of appreciating Prabhupada's books. If I allow him to mold my life, then I will be ultimately successful.

That's why I mention the negative things, because they stand in the way of my spiritual desires. Let me go forward and gradually attain those desires. Of course, I need the mercy of the *dearyas*, but I also need determination and confidence. I have to be determined to read at the best time. There's no doubt that reading Prabhupada's books guarantees us pure devotional service at his feet.

Even if reading is all I do in a day, my day is bound to be successful. There are so many ways to pray, but for me, the best thing I can do is to rise early and approach Srila Prabhupada's books.

When I think of reading, I get an image of filling up the way a jet fills up on fuel. Refueling is so necessary to the jet's working that there is no way to get around it. Refueling with Prabhupada's books is fulfilling. No matter what you feel at the time you read, just get the fuel into the tank. How can you fly in Krsna consciousness without it?

The goal of spiritual life is not spiritual sense gratification. We are meant to mold ourselves into practicing devotees and awaken our dormant love for God. That dormant love is based on being happy only by pleasing Krsna. In the beginning, we may not be able to feel genuine bliss, but we should know that reading (*sravanam*) is the most direct way to attain pure Krsna consciousness.

Part of my reading reform is returning to appreciate that whatever Prabhupada says is good for me and is best. I have been looking for sections where there is intense personal exchanges or where pure *bhakti* is preached. With that in mind, this morning I skipped over a few verses at the beginning of the First Canto, Chapter Ten, where Yudhisthira's reign is described. I remember the purports as being eloquent. They describe how in a God conscious government, even the weather

is mild and no one feels mental agony. Prabhupada really vents his devotional anger on the misleaders who promote cow slaughter and discourage God consciousness. Prabhupada raises a number of rhetorical questions and then asks, “Is this human life? Why are we acting cruelly, as less than animals?”

I skipped over those verses because I thought I didn’t want to read about government. I wanted to read about *bhakti*. I wanted to read about pure love. Then I thought, “Wait a minute . . . ” I went back, slowed down, and read them. There were three verses and purports in a row discussing these points. As I read them, I saw that they are classic purports. They certainly contain *bhakti* and by learning them, I can become a competent preacher. It was wonderful to read Prabhupada’s compassion. I want to attain that patience that I can appreciate whatever Prabhupada is saying and understand how it’s good for me.

Srila Prabhupada’s preaching in the 1950s

(S^rila Prabhupada, I have read some of your letters to big men in India before you came to America. You wrote to the biggest—prime ministers, presidents, leading advocates, judges, and industrialists. Your letters were those of an educated man, a respectable disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvatl Thakura, but you had no material means and you admitted it. You asked them to give you time for interviews so that you could present things better. You enclosed copies of your *Back to Godhead* magazine and told them if they didn’t have time to read them, they could at least look over the headlines of the different articles. Probably you anticipated that they wouldn’t take you seriously. Years later, when some of your disciples

wanted to start a mailing program to big men, you remarked that it's not so easy. You said that these men's secretaries would throw out our pamphlets and letters. Still, you tried, because that was your duty to your spiritual master. You actually wanted to be the friend of the government, like the Vedic *sadhu* who offers advice.

Srila Prabhupada, when you heard that an Indian national was going to travel to foreign countries, you wrote to him and told him to become an ambassador of India's culture. You made a few suggestions—he could give an intelligent presentation of cow protection, he could teach the *pandita's* vision of equality, he could speak on the basis of the *Bhagavad'gita*. Actually you yearned to go yourself. You knew these different industrialists traveling abroad would do nothing to spread Lord Caitanya's message. Neither did they do anything for you. They gave you little money and no cooperation. One man who had the financial ability to fund a religious movement finally gave you an interview. But as you said later, "He kindly gave me Rs. 11 and a glass of milk, but my mission is unfulfilled."

It's history how you finally got out of India and how you achieved tremendous success broadcasting India's spiritual message all over the world. Now people claim they knew that you were great in the old days and that they were the ones who told you to go to America. The letters tell us the truth. No one wanted to give you the time of day.

It's sweet to see how you were so determined in those days. Someone could say you were naive to invite the Prime Minister to retire from worldly dealings and devote himself to studying the *Bhagavad'gita* with you. Someone could say you were crafty to write to the Gandhi Memorial Fund and ask them for money. But we see what you did when you actually did get money and men, how you used it all for Krsna. You were

neither naive nor crafty because you weren't engaging in sense gratification. Those letters inspire us even when we are crying in the wilderness like you cried, trying to represent our spiritual master. We can't expect to be as successful as you were, Srila Prabhupada, but at least we can try to please you and not give up our faith or resolution to somehow tell people about Krsna and make ourselves Krsna conscious.

Srila Prabhupada, if I can do nothing else, please let me fill myself with Prabhupada-katha. Let me drink deeply from the fountain that flows from your life and teachings. Then when I meet someone, let me tell them about you.

Srila Prabhupada, somehow my drinking at this fountain is slow. It's as if I am drinking through a thin and pinched straw. Why can't I take in more? You have given so much and I have a limited amount of time left in my life. Who knows how much longer these eyes will be able to see and these ears will be able to hear. Who knows whether I will become senile or feeble. Please give me a better straw. Let me learn to drink from all the flowing things you have written in the accounts of what you have done.

A "Prabhupada now" meditation

a was such a beautiful pre-dawn this morning. It's November, so the sun rises late. This morning when I started on my walk, the constellations were shining brightly. I recognized the constellation in the shape of a box, but there were many other groups. Although there are many stars, the sky is so vast that it doesn't look like salt and pepper, but big spaces of black illuminated by starlight. It was cold.

I wasn't star-gazing as I walked, but something caught my eye. It was a shooting star moving horizontally but down. I watched it burn out like a Roman candle and disappear.

I took the walk to meditate on and speak about Prabhupada. Slowly the dawn arrived, but the sky remained subdued. I felt joyful to be walking and talking, dovetailing my energy in Prabhupada-katha. Otherwise, whatever elation I was feeling would be animal spirit – walking and poking holes in the iced- over puddles with my walking stick. What a waste.

As far as spirituality, I might have a vague feeling of being one with Nature. But that wouldn't lead me anywhere. It certainly wouldn't save me at the time of death. Therefore, it's nice to walk and think of Prabhupada in the unavoidable feeling of well-being.

Even when we aren't feeling physical well-being, real joy comes from serving Prabhupada. We're always looking for immediate physical or mental gratification, but when we apply that gratification in Prabhupada's service, that is solid Krsna consciousness – chanting, hearing, and doing other forms of service. Let us follow the path enunciated by the *Srimad- Bhagavatam* and offer everything we have and are to Krsna. Life is not meant for sense gratification. Our happiness should be long-term (*sreyas*), not short-term (*preyasa*).

When I talk like this, I think of it as a "Prabhupada now" meditation. Usually, I am looking for memories. They are hard to find; they take a lot of concentration and mercy. But we also want to see Prabhupada in the present. Our tendency is that if we stay in the present moment, we won't remember Prabhupada unless we are actually reading his books, but if in a particular country at a particular time of day we see roadside bushes and a lightening sky, silhouettes of chimneys and rooftops, hills and slopes, how is this Prabhupada conscious? How

is the feeling in my body Prabhupada conscious? Is linking up these present moments to Prabhupada artificial?

Prabhupada is with us in all circumstances. We don't want to concoct his presence, and we don't want to dishonor him by connecting him to the material world. Prabhupada is not the source of everything, the Supreme Controller. He understands that Krsna is in everything and is controlling everything and He understands that Krsna and His energies are simultaneously one and different. Therefore, even in the variegated elements of the world, he sees Krsna and he feels love for Krsna. Prabhupada compares it to the way a mother feels when she sees her child's shoe. She feels love not for the shoe, but for her child, who is associated with the shoe. That shoe becomes a stimulus for loving emotion. The *mahd'bhagavata* sees everything as promoting his constant absorption in Krsna.

It was with these conclusions in mind that Lord Caitanya said to Ramananda Raya, "You see Krsna everywhere." Ramananda Raya had just told Lord Caitanya that He was Krsna. He said he saw Him not as a *sannyasi*, but as Krsna holding a flute. At first Lord Caitanya did not want to reveal Himself. He told Ramananda Raya that he could see He was Krsna because a pure devotee sees Krsna everywhere.

How do all these conclusions apply to Krsna's pure devotee? We can't say that the sky is Prabhupada's energy and the sun is his eye. We can't say that he is the taste in water. Still, if we are convinced that we are made only of our guru's mercy, then he will always be present in our thoughts. When we see the sun, if we're fortunate to remember the *Bhagavad-gita*, we may think of Krsna's eye. Then we will also think, "Thank you, Srila Prabhupada, for presenting *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. Thank you for coming to the West and convincing us that the sun is Krsna's eye."

That's how we can think of the pure devotee in the present. For example, when a perfect devotee is fixed in a particular *rasa*, he sees everything from that point of view. A *gopi-manjari* sees things and thinks of Srimati Radharani's interest. Yasoda-mata sees everything in terms of maternal feeling. If she hears a thunderbolt, she is afraid for Krsna's life. Therefore, if we are fixed in our dependence on Srila Prabhupada, why shouldn't we think of him at every moment of our lives?

He is our friend and guide. We want to share everything with him. When we see a shooting star, we want to show it to Prabhupada. We might want to ask him whether it's true that seeing a shooting star diminishes our lives. When we are feeling excessive joy even in the cold tingling of our fingers, we can convey that joy to Prabhupada and ask his blessings.

This experience goes beyond words. Whatever we feel, we feel we are with him. We want to see everything through his eyes. We want to be accountable to him. We don't want to go off on a tangent, away from his teachings. We want to come home with whatever good we have gathered and offer it to Prabhupada. We want to use nature's beauty in glorification of Krsna and Prabhupada.

This has been a "Prabhupada now" meditation.

Try this:

not try a "Prabhupada now" meditation of your own? Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, see how it is linked to Srila Prabhupada. If what you're doing seems to be *maya* and not connected to Prabhupada, then make a change. If you can see it in a positive way, then glorify Prabhupada, thank him, or

at least see the relationship of whatever you're doing to your spiritual master's service. Of course, this service connection will be obvious if you are doing something direct like distributing books or lecturing, but even within those acts, you can try to see if all your different sensual perceptions are tuned to Prabhupada and whether you can relate the many things that are going on around you—things that apparently have no connection to Prabhupada—to your own Prabhupada consciousness.

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Prabhupada Samadhi Diary
Vrndavana, India, 1993

Introduction

^When I went to Jagannatha Puri in August-September, 1993, I felt an unmistakable pull to become more focused on my relationship with Srila Prabhupada. By the time I arrived in Vrndavana in September, I was meditating on different ways I could do that. One idea I had was to again take up the worship of a Prabhupada *murti*. Another was to increase my reading of his books. Of course, I was already preaching in his movement and serving him as a *sannyasi*, but I wanted to increase my feeling of being close to him. The third thing I took up was praying to be directed by him.

This diary was written in that mood of trying to return to Prabhupada in a very tangible way. Since we are discussing genres in this book, I will say that this is the genre of diary, written to explore a specific feeling or event in my life.

Diary does that for me. When I see the approach of adventure – whether inward or outward – in my life, I like to carefully note it down so that I won't forget what actually happened and how I actually felt about it. The genre of diary means you record daily events by dating them and writing on them as honestly as possible, as privately and personally as possible.

The writing session defies the concept of diary. Someone doing sessions writes whatever comes regardless of time and place. Diary is more faithful and attentive to progressive life, to day after day living.

I remember, for example, keeping a diary when I went on an emergency GBC mission with a committee to England. I also kept a diary of the events leading up to my resignation from the GBC. I didn't keep a diary, unfortunately, while I was Srila Prabhupada's servant, but I did keep somewhat of a diary

when I felt the impending crisis of wanting to leave his personal service so I could go out and preach. That particular diary has proven important to me now, because it prevents me from exaggerating what I was thinking or what actually happened at that time.

Therefore, a diary arises out of a life. I mentioned previously that it is possible to live a life around writing, such as I did when I wrote *Lessons from the Road*. It wasn't until I wrote *Journal and Poems* that I actually thought of the diary as a genre. I wrote those three volumes mainly at Gita-nagari when I was ill and could not travel. To research the genre, I looked at various diaries written over the centuries by all kinds of people, and from those books, I learned that the genre of diary was meant to be artless, simple, and personal.

For some people, all they will ever write is diary. I think of the great diarist, Henry David Thoreau, and how so much of value has been culled from his voluminous diaries. For me, diary has become a genre I don't work as often as I used to. I have so many other options now in my writing—writing sessions, poetry, improvised stories, and so on. Diaries now feel almost restrictive. They tend to record external events and be more self-centered than I prefer to be.

The "Samadhi" diary is different in that it was written as a deliberate attempt to contact Srila Prabhupada. It was written while visiting two *tlrthas* at Krishna-Balaram Mandir—Prabhupada's rooms and his *samadhi*. I would go into each of those places every day and pray to Prabhupada. For me, praying includes writing. I am not as able to sit and allow my thoughts to wander. I wrote in the diary, "Because my mind is too restless to practice silent meditation, I write these notes. The notes are meant to free my mind, to clear out the static, and to open the channels for spiritual commerce from me to him and

from him to me.” Writing also helps me maintain my privacy. People tend not to interrupt me when they see me writing.

I went to Prabhupada’s rooms immediately after *mangala-arati* every morning. I was always the first one there. Later in the day, I would visit the Samadhi Mandir, which is usually filled with tourists and pilgrims, sit in one corner, and write for half an hour. On the way back to the Guesthouse, I would stop in his rooms and write some more. In this diary, I asked Prabhupada what he wanted me to do.

I also spent some time reading Srila Prabhupada’s books in those places. For example, I remember trying to decide whether or not I should initiate more disciples. At that time, I read a paragraph in *Easy Journey to Other Planets* where Prabhupada writes that a spiritual master should not initiate too many disciples. That passage helped me in my own decision-making process.

I decided that I wanted to dedicate myself to reading the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* for a year. I carried out that determination in 1994- I carefully read the *Bhagavatam* and made a compilation of my favorite passages, and in so doing, I felt closer to Prabhupada.

The diary also helped me reaffirm my writing life and how I am trying to turn that experience into a whole life’s offering to Prabhupada and Krsna.

I wrote near the end of the diary itself: “We all hope we can improve. Why else do we come to Vrndavana and roll in its dust, and go out on *parikramas* to the most sacred places? We ask for a boon. We ask the dust to grant us a drop of appreciation for Vrndavana and for devotional service. I do the same when I come to Srila Prabhupada’s room. Here it’s most direct. I face my spiritual master. One might even say it’s frightening to come so directly in front of he who can order you to do

whatever he likes. ... I used to like to come before Srila Prabhupada. I fully trusted him. I knew it was in my own soul's interest to do as he said. That full faith of my youth—I want to recapture it. Maybe I'm more surrendered now. Now I take into account more my total self and I'm more aware of my limits. I act maturely on his order. But there was something nice back then. 'What do you want me to do? Where shall I go?' "I'm waiting for the meetings to end so I can go forth and try to do it, to serve Prabhupada without the close support of these *tirtha* visits (I'll miss them)."

Jagannatha Purl

LJ want this to be a diary for writing letters to Prabhupada, talking to him, praying to him, sometimes speaking to him in the first person and sometimes in the third person. Some of my thoughts may be sentimental, but I want to speak to him anyway because good words, good attempts, will lead to good actions.

LD just spoke with one of the leaders of the Prabhupada Centennial committee. It leaves me thinking how I am not alone worshipping Prabhupada. My relationship with Prabhupada is not only vertical, but horizontal. I have relationships with all the other devotees, even the nondevotees, and we are meant to help each other serve Prabhupada. Nevertheless, especially in this diary, I want to speak mainly of my vertical relationship with Prabhupada. If I am fixed and confident in how Prabhupada is present in my life, then I will be better able to share that realization with others, and then I will be willing to undergo the austerities of reunions with disgruntled devotees and activities like that.

TH ere is a method of prayer which I like to practice in the evenings. You think of how you contacted Krsna during the day, how you served Him, and then you feel some emotion about that. This recall is meant to bring assurance and confirmation of your active relationship with Krsna.

When I think of today, I remember back to the morning when I talked with my Godbrother about the Prabhupada Centennial. We discussed one kind of Prabhupada consciousness, but it was mostly *ideals*—intellectual.

Today I spoke with Madhu about my desire to again worship a Prabhupada *murti*. He suggested that before I make a commitment, I could start a simple offering of incense and flowers to a picture of Prabhupada.

Where did I contact Prabhupada today? He was in the usual places—his books and lectures. I was interested to hear Prabhupada speaking today to different people in Melbourne.

I sometimes feel challenged when I hear Prabhupada discussing with different guests and not actually answering their questions. For example, I heard a room conversation where he was speaking to Franciscan seminarians. Twice in a row Prabhupada didn't answer their questions, but spoke on something else. One man asked something about Prabhupada saying the chanting of the holy names is the best means of God realization, but what about other paths? Prabhupada replied as if the man had asked, "Could you tell us about the chanting of the holy names?" He went on to describe the glories of the holy names without making reference to other systems.

The next question was about the nature of evil. The man said that there are different theories about the nature of evil, and asked Prabhupada to explain his theory. The man added that some people say that evil is due to our own consciousness. Instead of discussing evil, Prabhupada picked up on the word "consciousness" and described the difference between the supreme and individual consciousness.

It's possible that Prabhupada simply didn't understand their questions. Some disciples think of it in a more mystical way and say that Prabhupada always did know what they were asking, but that he gave the answer they needed to hear. Of course, whatever Prabhupada said was good for them, and sometimes he did clearly answer with that in mind. Sometimes he purposely didn't answer their questions because they were foolish.

When I think of these things, I feel some sympathy for what it must have been like for Prabhupada having to face hundreds of seminarians and his own disciples and not only deal with their questions, but with their languages and differing pronunciations of English. Prabhupada was surcharged with what he wanted to say about Kṛṣṇa, and practically anyone who said anything to him would inspire him to talk more about the subjects that were most urgent for him and for the audience to hear. In that sense, we can say that Prabhupada didn't care that much about what they were asking. He had his own agenda and that was best for everyone.

There is a humorous example of Prabhupada misunderstanding a guest. Reverend Powell of Melbourne mentioned to Prabhupada about the Gospel story of the ten talents. This came up, I think, when they were discussing Communism and the idea that each person should get a share of the wealth according to his needs and his work. The Reverend compared it to the parable of the talents and told the story of the man who gave different people wages according to how they worked. The word "talent," of course, was an old Biblical currency. Prabhupada's response focused on talent as propensity or skill and how it can be used in Kṛṣṇa's service. The Reverend didn't correct Prabhupada, but listened to what he said.

w else did I contact Prabhupada today? I appreciated Chapter Fourteen of the *Madhya-lila*, how Prabhupada spoke such deep philosophy about the spiritual world.

I am looking for even closer contacts with Prabhupada – wisps of memories (I want to catch myself remembering him and record it) and states of prayer, real calling out to him and hints of him responding. I hope to have dreams and remember them.

11 P.M.

I had a dream about Prabhupada. I was his servant, but I had been called for at the last moment and things weren't arranged. I suddenly realized that I would have to stay up all night. There hadn't even been an arrangement for Prabhupada's lunch, although others had lunch, so I ran around the temple asking for volunteers to immediately cook for Prabhupada.

At one point I entered a place where there was an auction and devotees were standing around. The auctioneer was pulling the head off a chicken. After one of the items was auctioned, I announced that anyone who wanted to cook for Prabhupada had to have a preparation ready within an hour. After that, I went into a room that was like a warehouse, where Prabhupada would sleep for the night, to prepare things for him. Then I tried to arrange the buzzer so he could call his servant during the night. I was ready to do whatever was required and I was excited, although frantic, to make arrangements for Prabhupada.

Later that night I dreamt again that I was in a rush and that I had to dress different Deities, including a Prabhupada *murti*. The Prabhupada *murti* kept turning into Prabhupada. I wasn't familiar with his clothes. We found a cape that he liked and suggested he could wear it when he went outside. Prabhupada was about to leave our temple to go look at land that was being offered to him in Virginia. I was impressed with how thorough and dedicated he was. He told us that someone had advised him not to buy the property because it was in Washington, D.C. I explained to Prabhupada that Washington, D.C. is just a small area and that this property is not near the city. I finished dressing Prabhupada with a cape (he was the *murti* again) and placed him on a table in the outer room. Then I finished dressing the other Deities and we got ready to go with Prabhupada.

I'm looking forward to feeling Prabhupada's presence in his *murtis* at Krishna-Balaram Mandir in Vrndavana. Deity worship can be seen as external because Krsna or His pure devotee is manifested in stone or brass or wood. But Deity worship is not external; it has been given to us to facilitate an internal exchange with Krsna or His pure devotee. Therefore, I don't want to take the Prabhupada *murti* for granted. It's a problem I sometimes have, especially when the temple is crowded and I feel my worship is too public. How close can you get to Prabhupada when so many other devotees are there? How long can you pray to him in full *dandavats* before you become conscious of people watching you? Still, I can't expect to have everything to myself. I wouldn't want to walk around the temple with nobody there! Therefore, I should tolerate whatever conditions inhibit

my ability to feel full devotion and when I see Prabhupada, bow down to him with full presence of mind. At the same time, I understand that temple worship is more than just tolerating others. It is sharing our Krsna consciousness. Those people who bow down to Srila Prabhupada are so rare in this world.

(Someone said to me, "In Krsna consciousness, there are no old days." It's true that service to Prabhupada is eternal and never grows stale, that the present is equally happy and filled with Prabhupada consciousness, and that the future is brilliant because we will be with him again. I pray for his mercy and hope to intensify my remembrance of him at the time of death.

One reason I am trying to turn more to him now is that he is the one I want to turn to at the time of death. I don't trust anyone else the way I trust Prabhupada. Srila Prabhupada came to us, to our world and language, and he converted us and the Western cities to Krsna consciousness. Then he gave us those Western cities and told us to take care of them. On returning to Los Angeles he expressed satisfaction.

Amazing how thousands could work for him in his mission and feel access to him. It continues today. He gave us real work. Take up that work, whoever you are. Read his books and be with him.

Krishna-Balaram Mandir, Vrndavana

LJ want to go immediately after *mangala'drati* to Prabhupada's rooms and write down notes for a letter or meeting with Prabhupada. But the door is locked. Of course, Prabhupada is everywhere and a sincere disciple will find Prabhupada in the heart. But it certainly is something special to be in his room and to sit before him, provided you are not distracted by the presence of the other devotees there.

I am confident that I am in Prabhupada's movement and under his general direction. I never think that he rejects me. I am asking Prabhupada to please let me know what will please him most. What can I do? I know I don't ask the question in an absolute, unconditional way. Prabhupada knows this too. But what's the use of living if I am not living according to my spiritual master's desire? I ask him to take into account my limits, but to let me know how I can please him.

I'm trying to read his books, and if I can chant Hare Krsna nicely, that can please him. He wants to see me preaching along with the other devotees. I'm sure that any department in ISKCON in which I engage myself wholeheartedly will be pleasing to Prabhupada. Anyway, I try to come before him and pray in this way.

Dream:

was somewhere with Prabhupada and other devotees. Prabhupada was sick, but I wasn't paying attention at first to exactly what was wrong. When I looked more carefully, I saw

that the whole left side of his face was red and swollen. The other side was also partly swollen. I became alarmed and wanted to give him some personal treatment. I thought maybe we should call a doctor. I pointed out Prabhupada's condition to the devotees.

I could interpret this dream as follows: my devotion to Prabhupada is somewhat ill and needs attention. In a dream I was given a chance to give him special care. It was unfortunate that he was suffering. If it was my devotion that was actually suffering, then why did Prabhupada have to suffer for that? I think the answer is that the dream presents my Prabhupada who suffers.

Prabhupada's Room

proposal, dear Srila Prabhupada, is to become your servant again. I am grown up, but I am your child. Please know me better and please let me know you. I want to read your books more, but also to know you in the heart, by prayer and as a result of service.

Sitting before you, I recall that I used to sit before you like this. I don't recall it well. I remember I used to be afraid of you, but also surrendered to whatever you told me. Forgive me for wanting to be alone with you. I don't want to be selfish, but we all need this some of the time. You are able to be with each of us just as Krsna is able to be with each *gopa* and *gopi*.

From this room you can teach me all the mysteries of Radha and Krsna. You can also give me the inconceivable *sakti* of the preacher. I want to please you as a soldier. I want to come here

and imbibe your mood and then go around the world again only to return to this room and you.

Today on your desk there is a letter to Satsvarupa, 26 May 1971. The letter is filled with at least a dozen specific instructions, most of them answers to practical inquiries. Some of them are not permanent (no pictures with the recipes in BTG, no drawings should appear in the magazine etc.), but when I received that letter, I followed whatever you said and if I had doubts I inquired further. Thank you for your instructions. "Encourage them more and more," you told me. Let me always remember to do that.

Samadhi Mandir

jZet me direct myself to you. I realize I don't have to come here to do that. There are some visitors here this morning. In one group, there is an old man with some old women sitting together. Some of them have stopped to stare at me.

By coming near you, you will see me. Often, before November 1977, when a disciple you knew came before you, you would recognize him and direct a question to him. You might ask, "Is everything all right? What are you doing? Do you want something?"

The disciple could then take that as an opportunity to speak and ask direction from you. If you see me today, Srila Prabhupada, this is what I would say to you: "I am trying to physically come to your special places of worship and *murtis* so you will see me and I can render some service. I want you to know what I am doing. Please tell me what you think is best for my advancement as your disciple."

There are so many *mandir as* and *tirthas* in Vraja, but this is where I feel most comfortable. I belong here. People are coming by and throwing coins on your altar. There's the noise of workmen and the loudspeakers from nearby *asramas* and shops. This is ISKCON, your home. I can circumambulate all of Vraja simply by circumambulating on these grounds.

will all have to follow you soon enough through the portal of death. I want my death to be the death of a Vaisnava servant. Perhaps I won't accomplish such wonderful things during the remainder of my life, but if I can come closer to you,

to your lotus feet, then all my purposes will have been achieved. I want *sraddha*. The white lions that stand guard around your *samadhi* guard me too, your worshiper.

“Gurudeva, give to this servant just one drop of mercy. I am lower than a blade of grass. Give me all help. Give me strength. Let me be as you are, without desires or aspirations.”



Prabhupada's Room

CPrabhupada's picture, how he looked in the last months, last weeks, here in Vrndavana. His face gaunt: “These are my last days.” His feet were swollen. Our glorious master. He inspired us by his example right up until the end. I don't want to be unfaithful. I think I am in a good position now to be a simpler servant. (My head is cluttered and complicated, but I can be simple in my faith and allegiance to him.)

“I offer you all respects, for thus I may have the energy to know you correctly. Then by chanting the holy name in great ecstasy all my offenses will cease.” I want my *rasa* with you. Chanting as you taught us, offering *prasada* as you taught us.

Jaya om prayers and *gayatri*,
importance of preaching and
working in ISKCON, the
meaning of *sannyasa* as
worldwide preacher —
Srila Prabhupada you have given us a
wonderful home to live in wherever we
go.

You said, "Live with the devotees and
 if you feel some inconvenience, tolerate
 it. Don't go away . . .
 Don't l-e-a-v-e
 but l-i-v-e."
 Teach me, Gurudeva,
 how to pray.

September 15, Prabhupada's Room, 5 a.m.

It's hard to have the privacy here for prayer. Even my own secretary gets in the way. He says, "There's a beadbag that you can put on Prabhupada." And two *matas* stand in front of Prabhupada's door and bow down to me.

I can't go back to those days and don't want to exactly. I want to know you now, Srila Prabhupada. Do I dare? I'm afraid of you and what you might say, what you might order me to do. (I hear the click of a camera behind me. Just see, Satsvarupa is sitting alone with Srila Prabhupada.)

I cannot expect to live in a vacuum with him, and I cannot disown disciples I have accepted on Srila Prabhupada's order. It was in this room that he said they will be our disciples.

Prabhupada wants us to live and give all our energy to his movement. Srila Prabhupada was progressive. Time has moved on from November 14, 1977 to September 15, 1993, and it will continue to go on. I can't (don't want to) create a dream that I'm alone in his room and he's here and that Madhu doesn't exist and that the ISKCON devotees are not gathered in the temple listening to Brajabihari's morning announcements. But I do want to go deeper in my relationship with Prabhupada.

Yesterday I prayed at Govardhana. I repeat that prayer privately to Prabhupada now.

The letter on Srila Prabhupada's desk today is that long one to Yadunandana (Boston, April 13, 1968), answering his many philosophical questions. I wrote about that letter in my memoir.

I want to come closer to you, Srila Prabhupada, in all your aspects – as you taught in 1968, as you lived in India, as you were in this room in 1975, then in 1979, in 1993, as you are in your *nityaAild pravista*. I can know you by service, beginning with hearing from you.

Samadhi Mandir, 10 a.m.

^Dear Srila Prabhupada,

You told me to encourage the devotees more and more. I tell them to be determined and patient and not to expect to become 100% pure and surrendered overnight. I give myself that advice too. But you are expecting more from your older students. We can't *only* say that it takes time, that surrender is gradual. When one devotee said he could not do as much as you because you are a *paramahamsa*, Prabhupada, you replied, "You also become *paramahamsa*!" Work hard, surrender.

I'm sitting before you, writing. If we leave Vrndavana early this year, it will be to go and preach on your behalf in the temples.

People are coming into the *mandira* and making *pranamas* before your form. You sit and receive them as you used to in your room. Are you telling them about Krsna? You said that even if people don't learn philosophy from a *sadhu* but just

render him service (as the child Narada did to the *bhakti-vedantas*), then they still make great spiritual benefit. You hinted that we should come up to the standard of *bhakti-vedantas*. At least we know you are *bhaktivedanta* and that the people who come to see you with respect get your mercy.

In your golden *murti*, you are fingering *japa-mala* in a bead-bag. Today, group after group comes in, mostly simple villagers from Vrndavana and Rajastan. Sometimes someone asks me something in Hindi, but I can't reply. I just smile and nod. Hindi is not required you said; not so important for someone like me. But I have to preach fully in American English.

I wish I could write a nice poem, and I tried reading your purports earlier, but it was hot in the room and I was too drowsy. I'll try again. I'm determined to gain the greed to go further and further into your books. Bit by bit I can attain it by your grace.

"When will such mercy fall to this one who is weak and devoid of intelligence? Allow me to be with you."

In the past, I lost the opportunity to be with you. I'm coming back to try again. Someone could call me a hypocrite, insincere, sentimental. They could say, "You failed when you had the chance because you couldn't surrender your false ego. Now you are trying in an easy way, when Srila Prabhupada is not here to reprimand your faults. You can't take the real thing—real surrender in Prabhupada's presence." Something is better than nothing. I repeat Bhaktivinoda Thakura's words. "Allow me to be with you."

Every time I look up, I see a new group of your countrymen and women standing in your Mandir. Maybe they're not serious about surrender to you, but they are pious and have a better

birth than me. You gave special mercy and attention to Westerners. I want to reciprocate.

“*Jaya Sri Radhe Radhe.*” Someone said that to me as he passed me. I reply, “*Jaya Srila Prabhupada.*” This is your Mandir, and by serving you, we can serve Srimati Radharani.

“Swami Prabhupada belongs to India?” A man asks Madhu. “Not from America?” I can’t hear Madhu’s reply. Some of them know so little about you. That’s funny, isn’t it, to think that you came from America? The truth is that you came to America, but not from India. You came from Goloka. You don’t belong to India, although you gave special mercy to the Indians.

More and more people filing in. Madhu told the man that Srila Prabhupada came from the Radha-Damodara temple in Vrndavana and went to America and, “Got people like me to chant Hare Krsna. He also built this temple.”

“Oh,” the man said, impressed.

All glories to Prabhupada.

The streams of people coming to see you never stop. Repair noise doesn’t stop either. Let me not stop serving and striving. Allow me to be with you.

Prabhupada’s Room

Our room is more intimate. Some ladies are lounging here. I guess they like it because the fans make it a cool haven, but let me not assume anything. I also like the cool fans and the sense of rest.

I may not stay this year for your disappearance day. The important thing is to represent you well – to be an honest

disciple, to try for purity, to cooperate with devotees, and to preach. I can improve in all these areas.

“If you examine me, you will find no qualities. Your mercy is all that I am made of. If you are not merciful unto me, I can only weep, and I will not be able to maintain my life.”

Your mercy is all that I am made of. I have no qualities of my own. This is true. I will weep if I don’t get your mercy. I will not be able to maintain my life.

What if Prabhupada asks me, “What kind of mercy do you want? Are you ready to take it?” I become afraid. His mercy may come in a way that exposes me as unsundered. I’ll cry out, “No, not *that* mercy!” Give me palatable mercy.

Prabhupada, I know you are kind to us. You’ll give me your mercy—you are giving it constantly. Now I take the mercy of being honored and served by your followers. That is not a very high order of mercy. Real mercy is to take up preaching tasks and to represent you. Real mercy is when you allow the *vis-rambha* relationship—as friends. But I’m not asking for that so much. I want to feel nearness to you, and confirmation, and your order, your trust, your acceptance of me as a servant. I don’t deserve it, I know.

I come to your places and find that I have discovered the best thing in Vrndavana and thus the best thing in all the worlds. I’m at home here. Allow me to be with you.

I want to recover my past with you, so I have been looking at your letters to me again. I had the best thing in those days, the assurance that I was serving you. I still have that assurance and shouldn’t doubt it. I can pray to you, read your books, encourage them on your behalf, and maybe some day Bhakti-vinoda Thakura’s words will be true for me:

“When kindness to all beings will be appearing with
free heart forget myself comforting,

Bhaktivinoda in all humility prays
now I will set out to preach your order sublime.
When, O when will that day be mine?"

^Prabhupada's bed.

Pain of those days.
Me still selfish and not performing the hardest
tapasya. Couldn't get along with your intimate
servants.
Like a stone in my room alone. Grief-stricken but
numb.

As you passed through what seemed
like a painful ordeal, you
went back to the spiritual world.
Please guide me, Srila Prabhupada.
When I die,
let me remember you.
Please dig out
my *anarthas* and attachments and offenses.
Let me see what I'm doing wrong —
self-comfort
mental indulgence,
false ego artist-writer —
purify me with tears
and let me hold onto your
dhoti and your lotus feet,
then die and go to you.

September 16, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

I put your beadbag on your hand, took off your old garland, and offered you a fresh one. You are friendly and receive this service from a tiny disciple.

I know you are more than "friendly." You have described that there is *gaurava'Sakhya*, friendship in awe and veneration, and another kind of fraternity *rasa* known as *visrambha*, friendship in equality. I seek both in you. You are far more grave than I am, so I submit myself to you. I want to receive your instructions. Maybe I want you to encourage me to go on writing, but most important is that I please you. That's the goal. What shall it be, Srila Prabhupada?

At least I'm coming to you in this way, enjoying your presence. The word "enjoy" usually carries negative connotations for devotees, but I want to enjoy serving you. I like your company.

When I left Prabhupada's presence, I first bowed my head to his foot. Then I scraped the dust from the sole of his foot and put it on my head. How long I have been wanting to do this and missing it. I won't miss it anymore. I also have been wanting to put my hands on his back and give him his daily massage.

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<Srila Prabhupada's description of first-class devotional service:

anydbhilasitd'sunyam
jndna'karmddy'andvrtam
anukiilyena krsnanu- silanam
bhaktir uttama

"When first-class devotional service develops, one must be devoid of all material desires, knowledge obtained by monistic philosophy, and fruitive actions. The devotee must constantly serve Krsna favorably, as Krsna desires." (Cc. *Madhya*, 19.167, quoted from *Bhakti'rasdmrta'sindhu* 1.1.11)

"Krsna wants everyone to surrender unto Him, and devotional service means preaching this gospel all over the world _____ The criterion is that a devotee must know what Krsna wants him to do. This can be achieved through the medium of the spiritual master, who is a bona fide representative of Krsna _____ Therefore, one has to accept the shelter of a bona fide spiritual master and agree to be directed by him. The first business of a pure devotee is to satisfy his spiritual master, whose only business is to spread Krsna consciousness. . . . This process is completely manifest in the activities of the Krsna consciousness movement."

Prabhupada's Samadhi Mandir

There are so many people here that I can't see your *murti*, Srila Prabhupada. They keep standing in my way. The marble floor is dirty from the feet of so many pilgrims. It empties out again for a few minutes and I catch a glimpse of you before the next group of pilgrims enters.

I don't have to consider whether I like the architecture of the Mandir or the exact visage of your *murti*. I'm a worshiper, not a critic. This is where your divine body was placed in *samadhi*. I don't have to understand the spiritual technicalities of "samd- dhi" when it refers to the spiritual master's body to commune with your spirit. I just want to do that simply. I come here to worship, to see you (take *darsana*), and for you to see me—see me and plant new seeds in my heart. I want to serve you intimately. I need strength from you. You don't grant intimate service unless we are deserving.

(I'm trying to preserve my private space. Two Indian men are staring at me while I write. I'm ignoring them. Another man is bowing down to me nearby. I return *pranamas*, but continue writing. Even when meeting with Godbrothers and serving Srila Prabhupada together, we each have our private space. I don't think I'm a fanatic about this, but I recognize that individual devotion can easily get snuffed out or lost. I want to protect it.)

"O venerable Vaisnava, O ocean of mercy, be merciful unto your servant. Give me the shade of your lotus feet and purify me. I hold on to your lotus feet." ("*Ohe! Vaisnava Thakura*")

The Indian pilgrims are looking at Srila Prabhupada and gesturing at the walls of the inner sanctum. They don't know him very well. He's another great *sadhu* to them. They're probably visiting *mandira* after *mandira* without discrimination. But I live here. I discriminate. I stay at his lotus feet.

Nehru hats on men, women carrying bundles on their heads even inside the Mandir, everyone holding tiffins, all standing barefoot – Hindus. A rare birth in this world that simply by habit and upbringing, these ordinary folk worship Srila Pra- bhupada as a great saint.

Srila Prabhupada, as I write, a group of men come up to me and touch my feet. Do I get their karma? Spare me! Make me yours always. I want eternal service in whatever *rasa* you are in, Srila Prabhupada. Please guide me and fill me with this dedication.

Prabhupada's Room

walk around the Srila Prabhupada *murti* in the *samadhi* and realize that this is the chief *tirtha* for me. I touch the wall and touch my head. I was here when Srila Prabhupada left the world. I am part of this part of his pastimes.

I can still report to him: Srila Prabhupada, I'm going to visit all the temples in the Caribbean and encourage them more and more.

You gave me the *danda* and said, "Preach! Preach! Preach!" "Teach me to control my six passions; rectify my six faults, bestow upon me the six qualities, and offer me the six kinds of holy association." ("Ohe! *Vaisnava Thakura*")

Thi

lis room—I was here when he was here. I didn't appreciate it fully. I was "stoned," I was afraid, I was competitive and *bouncing off others*. I wanted to be a big-shot and get honor. Somewhere along the way, I lost something.

But you never let me lose it all. I always wanted to serve you and please you. You *implanted* that so well in me from the beginning that I never lost it. I haven't grown up and left you. Please form me to your liking. Please accept my service.

Room 42, Guesthouse

LJ just brought a Prabhupada *murti* to this room. It's the one Bhurijana Prabhu worships and which presides in the VIHE classrooms. I'm borrowing him for a week. I'll get to know him

better as he stays with me. It's a gradual relationship. I can see that he is different than the original Prabhupada, but Prabhupada has already expanded into so many forms. How many of his books have been printed and distributed? "Twenties of millions." Which can be called the original book? It doesn't matter. All the books are valid and all the expansions of Prabhupada are valid and potent. Everything depends on the sincerity of the worshiper.

September 17, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

^Dear Prabhupada,

Please accept my humble obeisances. I must approach you by being friendly with your disciples. I saw one of your disciples in the Samadhi Mandir. He had been away from ISKCON and has now come back. I took the risk of saying hello to him, and sure enough he asked to meet with me. I'll have to do it. But that's part of my desire to deepen my worship of you. "Encourage them more and more." I won't think that I am meant to be in full-time private *bhajana* and that I have no time to meet with Godbrothers.

Still, these times alone with you are special. I will probably leave Vrndavana in November after the meetings and lectures and try to spend a little time on my own to read your books.

What will help me increase my consciousness of you? I touch your feet again and again. I see you wherever we turn in Krishna-Balaram Mandir. I try to help a brother remember you and serve you. I try to be genuine. I don't want to be a professional "Prabhupada man." I can praise you if I have real feelings for this service.

I want to get rid of any cartooned, stereotyped, or simplistic versions of Prabhupada. I will also leave others to find their own genuineness, even if they do that in ways different than I do it. We all want you to endorse our projects. We build your museum, your restaurant, teach your children, worship your seat, collect money for you – and serve in your movement, which you said was your body. We all want to follow you sincerely.

Now I am visiting your rooms. You liked it here. Your secretaries and cooks and disciples were always hoping to catch a glimpse of you (and maybe a word with you) when you lived here. “Srila Prabhupada, what should I do?”

Preach in America at the colleges and distribute books. Help maintain the temples. As a sanrryasi, travel and preach. Write to help devotees maintain their Krsna consciousness.

I can write better books if you will empower me. Also, Srila Prabhupada, I want to be friendly to your devotees and when I do so, deliberately think of you.

Samadhi Mandir, 10 A.M.

It's obvious, Prabhupada, that you wanted preaching. A *grhastha* may say he has other duties or is not fit for preaching, but a sanrvyasi cannot make excuses.

“Preach! Preach! Preach!”

I do it and “according to my capacity” means I also have to deal with my headache syndrome. You overcame so many headaches and heart attacks and were undaunted, even at seventy.

But I am not a *paramaharhsa* like you.

Become one?

CWot so many pilgrims today. Purusottama-masa is over. Now it's just the regulars.

Prabhupada, I say foolish things to others sometimes, and to you too. Let me wash off such dirt and foolishness. Lord Caitanya said, "My spiritual master called me *murkha*, foolish." How much that is true of me. I was a fool before and I still am. I am so foolish I cannot chant the Hare Krsna mantra nicely, I am so foolish that I act as if I cannot decipher your message and your desires for me, although they are obvious.

"Everything is there. What is the difficulty?"

The difficulty is I don't want to surrender.

"Yes, that is a difficulty."

c^sRs

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***\Z)evotees come to you with their petitions. I see the temple president of ISKCON Tucson standing before you making *pra-namas*. And now poor pious Indian people. One asks, "Who is he?"**

"Prabhupada," replies the young caretaker who carries a pole for chasing pigeons.

"Huh?"

"Prabhupada."

Golden Prabhupada, they don't know you and they don't know Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. They barely know Krsna. In the West they don't know anything. There is a great need to preach.

They are circumambulating. *Tyagi* with big, thick Vaisnava *tilaka*, *babaji* dress, tiffin, and walking stick. Pretty young wives and daughters and old men and beleaguered husbands and masses and masses of people like the sacred earth of Vrndavana.

Who is he? He is Prabhupada. I ask that question in a different way. Who is he? Where is he now? How can I come close to him? There are official answers and more private ones to those questions.

^r
(Srila Prabhupada, I read in your *Caitanya-caritamrta* purport that when Sanatana Gosvami flattered the jail-keeper, calling him learned, the Muslim jail-keeper accepted it as a fact. You wrote that it is natural when one is praised to accept it. I accepted praise from 1978 into the 1980s when they said I was one of the only pure devotees. Do I still accept such praise, such as when they tell me I'm humble, a genius, an artist, a pure devotee?

I'm just a small person. I have no special qualities. I like to practice writing. I want to be with you. Even the good things I do are motivated and impure. But you accept me.

The writing flows when I sit before you. I'm not yet close to you, but I want to be. I'm taking advantage of the larger-than- life-darsana you offer in your *samadhi*.

"I do not find the strength to carry on alone the *sankirtana* of the holy name of Hari. Please bless me by giving me just one drop of faith with which to obtain the great treasure of the holy name of Krsna." ("Ohe! Vaisnava Thakura")

I ask you for strength. That prayer suits me. No pretense, please give me the shade of your lotus feet. Give me good

qualities. Give me the strength to chant the holy name. I said I wanted a more equal friendship with you, but what I actually require is closeness, protection. And the intimacy a guru grants his disciple. It doesn't have to be "equal" — how can I claim it? But I am an old student. I want a little time with you; I want to hear your voice with an inner ear, see your form as you are, but with myself enlightened enough to recognize you better — not as equal, but as dearest friend.

Or should I not say that? At least I'm exposing it here, Srila Prabhupada. You can correct me.

Prabhupada's Room

Everyone has a right to approach you. I should never be jealous if I see my own disciples desiring to sit close to you and to chant the holy name in your presence. Let them pray to you directly. You are open to everyone. We all need you.

I tolerate it when someone in your room is chanting loud, insistent *japa*, or clashing *karatalas* while singing. People express their devotion to you in different ways. I'm just looking for a little corner to sit in and write, at your lotus feet. (How dare that *mataji* come and sit so close to you, crossing over the velvet rope while I sit contentedly in the back. She is more greedy than I am and doesn't care how it looks to the pilgrims.)

"Krsna is yours; you have the power to give Him to me. I am simply running behind you shouting 'Krsna! Krsna!'" ("*Ohe! Vaisnava Thakura*")

a big class of tots just came into your room. The teacher says, “Hare Krsna *bolol*” and the kids recite the Hare Krsna mantra. You allow them to come. You used to give little children sweets. In Bombay you wanted to give them clean clothes and *prasadam* and let them chant and dance with your devotees.

India is sweet that way. You have the power to give Krsna to me. You also have the power to give yourself to me. If I have your personal service, then Krsna and Radha are automatically included. I therefore want to serve your *murti* and read your books and tell people what you say. *Yare dekha, tare kaha 'krsna'-upadesa.*

n old woman whose back is so bent that she can't stand up straight, comes every day to see the Deities at Krishna- Balaram Mandir. She sets a good example. I see all these comings and goings and am amazed at their sincerity.

“*Celo! Celo!*” The teacher chases the students out before they swarm around me and watch my strange script. I write in American language, Srila Prabhupada, which is well known to you. I love to write and to dovetail it in prayer to you.

Krsna is coming home with
Balarama and the boys,
surrounded by cows, dust
rising and the *gopis* casting
their sidelong glances and He
glances back.
Radha and Krsna under a tree.

An ISKCON *harinama* party on Golden Gate Bridge.
Your books on shelves and in cases all over the room.
Pictures of Deities in ISKCON temples.
Flower petals on the floor.
Another chance to see you
and touch your feet before I
can't come here anymore.
Another prayer asking for your inner guidance — inspiration from you in my heart. This comes especially in this room — one of the best places if not *the* best in the world.
Let me carry it with me everywhere.

September 18, Prabhupada's Room

Coming to see you personally is the heart of our Krsna consciousness. It was like that when you were here before November, 1977.

To be called by you was the real thing. It made everything else seem like a preparation to this. I want to remember those days now and I want to store impressions of the sounds outside your room which you also heard when you lived here — conch blowing, the *arati* bell, worship of Krsna-Balarama, Radha-Syama, and Gaura-Nitai.

“How is the book distribution going?” you want to know. Battling the scientists? The anti-cult? You want to know. But in your last weeks you didn’t want to know so much about some things. You surrounded yourself with soft *kirtana*. Still, up until the last breath you were enthusiastic and encouraged your devotees to preach. You thanked Satyabhama dasl for the woolen blanket and sincere letter written in tears. You called GIta-nagari “our Pennsylvania farm.”

Prabhupada, Radha-Syama looked especially beautiful today dressed in red and yellow, the cloth folded into wonderful pleats. I can’t describe it, but They looked artistic and enchanting. Srlmatl Radharani wore a *sari* and a crown. The *sakhis* looked outstanding. Often my mind is taken up with interactions with devotees and how they will see me—a sense of obligation and not so much spontaneous joy, but to see Radha- Syamasundara washes all that away.

Prabhupada, I take it that you are calling me to see you. My desire to approach you more is not only coming from my side.

Today’s letter on your desk is to Jadurani, 1971, to Boston, where I also lived. You refer to the “hard-working crew in our Boston art department.” That’s true. Oh, to work like that, directly under your order and hard-pressed to complete all the paintings you wanted for your books. Srila Prabhupada, you tell them everything must be done with clear intelligence according to *parampara* and “Krsna will give you good understanding for the purpose.” You are confident in this. You call them intelligent devotees of the Lord. “Go on . . . with all enthusiasm. Our Krsna consciousness is so nice. By painting, your love of Krsna will become mature.”

Please let me work like that too—sure that I’m under your order in *parampara*, assured by you that Krsna will help. You bless us with enthusiasm. That’s how it occurs.

Prabhupada's Samadhi Mandir

^Y^hen I meet so many devotees on the stairs in the Guesthouse and then come here, my mind cannot focus right away on this holy spot. Your form is here, Srila Prabhupada. I don't know exactly what that means. But I see there is a grand *mandir* a built here entirely in your honor. You are the only deity here. Through you we receive the entire *parampara*.

Writing may help me concentrate. I cannot forget, however, that this campus is filling up with your devotees. I cannot expect to be alone. I just met devotees from Gita-nagari saying that Sri Sri Radha-Damodara are in charge there and it's very sweet. They invited me to come. That is also a part of my meditation on you. Your family is everywhere. But here I want to think of my own essential need and purpose.

The Samadhi Mandir is special because I can think of the spiritual master as he is described in the *Gurvastakam* verses. You chant the holy names, you dance in ecstasy, you sing and play musical instruments. In your Samadhi, you hold a gong and mallet early in the morning and you chant with us. Now you hold your *japa-mala*.

You feel ecstasy in the *sahhirtana* of Caitanya Mahaprabhu. The temple that you built is right next door. Tears flow from your eyes and your hairs stand on end as you worship your Lordships, Sri Sri Radha-Syamasundara, Krsna-Balarama, and Gaura-Nitai. I offer my respectful obeisances to your lotus feet.

cZsk&s

^Prabhupada, I don't own you. The Vrajavasls and our ISK- CON devotees also worship you and you reciprocate with them. Suddenly the visitors leave and you are alone again, shining

out with the brilliance of the sun. You are like the Holy Eucharist, like a Christ, like the light worshiped by Mayavadis, and for devotees of Lord Caitanya and Lord Krsna, you are the pure devotee spiritual master who comes to teach us surrender. You come to bring us back to Godhead.

Now more brown-skinned men, one in a Nehru hat and all in simple *dhotis*, come in to pay you respects. I am the rough and yet polished Western *sadhu*. I don't know anything, but I'm yours and you are mine.

I read that Lord Caitanya is merciful to the most fallen. You represented Him in that way and brought us to His devotional service. Who can fully comprehend what you did? We don't find anyone else like you, Srila Prabhupada. You love us and train us up and discipline us and give us work. You speak in English, you write in English, you live in New York City and so many other Western and oriental places – and in the hearts of thousands of followers.

compressions: the marble squares on the floor have gold lines between them. The Samadhi Mandir is still under construction, but it's almost finished. The early-morning gathering here. The heat at this time of the morning. The ornate roof. The dome of the Mandir proclaims your glories.

Marble elephants. Above them, stylized lions. Columns and more columns. A certain emptiness here, like a tomb. We fill it with our chants and prayers.

They polish your form every day. At first I complained that it was too bright, but now I'm getting used to it. If I can only meet your eyes.

Prabhupada's Room

CPrabhupada, you saw me cornered by a group of half a dozen Indian guests in your Mandir. They didn't even know you. I told them your name and that you built this temple. "You mean he was the inspiration, not the builder." But I think of you not only as the one who inspired us, but the one who pushed us and built this temple by your desire.

So they asked me about our practices. I told them about the four rules and sixteen rounds. One man wanted to touch my *japa-mdla*. I thought he might criticize my beads because they are made from ordinary wood. He touched the beads that you touched, so he's lucky.

At last I did a little preaching. He smiled and I smiled back. I had to smile at his curiosity and interest and ignorance and what I guessed as his worldliness. He won't follow you. I'm a strange specimen (white elephant) who told him I won't get married for my whole life.

"The whole life?" Doesn't he know there's not much left when you're already fifty-four? If you have come this far in saffron, you should be able to make it the rest of the way – *by Prabhupada's grace*.

I found those same words on my lips last night.

He said, "I'll see you tomorrow."

"By Prabhupada's grace."

The fan sways the flowers on your garland. I glance out the window as you sometimes did and see turbaned Vrajavasls, the rough faces of pious villagers.

Why do I chatter in this room?

Am I afraid of the real Srila Prabhupada? (“There are no old days in Krsna consciousness.” You are eternal and therefore all your pastimes with us are eternal.)

I report from the senses because that information is easily available. The soul isn’t easy to know. Prabhupada, it’s not easy to know you in your *nitya4ild*. Will you reveal more to me? I know it takes more than these solitary visits to your rooms. I have to want to be with you exclusively.

I am reduced in some of my responsibilities in ISKCON, Srila Prabhupada, although I have not decreased my duties with my disciples. I am now free to travel as *sannyasi* and to write. You gave me this freedom. You give me food to eat, a place (places) to live, and honor as a *sannyasi*. Let me not forget you and what you expect in return. You want everything that I have.

Today’s letter on your desk is to Karandhara, March ’71. So many staunch leaders, all gone. But they don’t forget you. Pra- bhupada, you gave us a little at a time in those days—how to observe Vaisnava holidays, you personally installed Radha- Krsna Deities. We didn’t learn from others how to do these things. We accepted that only you could teach us. I like that spirit, although I have strayed from it. Now I’m coming back. You taught us all we know.

You said you were invited to lecture at a prison in Ahmeda- bad and you spoke in front of the room where Gandhi stayed when he was imprisoned. You said that room is considered holy. But your rooms are actually holy. I came into this room when you sat here alone one cold morning in February 1974. You were here again after the Mayapur festival of ’74 and I was your

servant. I'm an ordinary person from New York, but you gave me a chance to serve you and to learn of Krsna. Still, you offer that to me and I eagerly take it.

I pray to the Supreme Lord to keep me chaste. Am I being sentimental? I don't care. Please accept me anyway. You are like the sun who can purify even a contaminated place. Let your rays penetrate into my dirty heart.

September 20, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

I look at you and wait. It may take a long time, many lifetimes. But I shouldn't think that I'm not with you now. I am. This is separation. Your *murti* eases the separation. He can talk to me too; it depends on my purity.

You used to sit in this place and tell us what to do. You are empowered and we accepted you as our perfect spiritual master. Sometimes our false egos were hurt. It's not easy to surrender them.

They have not changed the letter on your desk since yesterday. Prabhupada, a film crew is in the temple this morning shining their bright lights and cameras on the Deities. Your GBC man, Gopala Krsna Maharaja, is visiting Vrndavana. I'm sure you'll be meeting with him. You used to say that you so much pushed him to print your books in Hindi that he would not come to see you in Vrndavana unless he had a new book printed.

^ou are here in silence. I imagine you chanting and calling me to see you. Study my books, you said, and distribute them to colleges.

Someone is looking in here to see me.

Prabhupada, I write notes. I did that in 1966 while listening to your lectures. Now I write whatever is happening, what I feel. It's me-centered, but that's the way to reach my true feelings for you and Lord Krsna.

Prabhupada, I love you.

Jaya, and ask Gopala Krsna Maharaja to come see me.

<*!

Prabhupada's Room, 4:20 p.m.

J/?l one with you, they let me in ten minutes before the doors open to the public. The curtains are still closed. It's hot outside, but cool in here under the fans.

I've come to take down your comments. On Radhastamt I'll speak what you have said about Radharani.

Now they have changed the letter on your desk. It's to Guru- dasa, who was in Vrndavana in 1970. "If you can establish one nice palatial temple for our society in Vrndavana, that will be a great credit for you."

You pushed us to achieve. You set quotas: "Daily three life members must be made in Bombay, daily two in Calcutta, and daily one in Delhi."

I know there is still your pressure on us to do the right thing. Times have changed, yet your order stands. We have to be intelligent how to follow it.

^When I come, Satsvarupa dasa, alone, I take the risk that you will focus on me and give me a heavy order. One cannot come before you just to play a game of “imagining I’m with Srila Prabhupada.” Coming in to your presence signifies surrender and willingness to accept austerity. Then confidential instruction can come.

I am aware of this, yet I’m foolish. I do come “to play.” I come as a little son, as a personal servant who tends to your bodily needs. I used to do that.

I’m aware you want servants to preach and manage your Krsna consciousness movement. I say, “I’m a *brahmana*, Prabhupada. I lecture and write and care for disciples in a personal way. But I get headaches, so don’t ask me to do something I can’t do.”

It’s embarrassing to write like that, but it’s true.

I enjoy the separation from you in that way. I don’t have the pressure of your direct order, but at least when you were here, I did accept your order. You said of me, “*He does what I ask.*” Please let it still be true, although I can’t manage. Perhaps I’m not entitled to so much direct personal association, so I’ll “steal” it in this easy form of sitting with your *murti*.

I admit it, I’m a nonsense, but I want to be an asset to you.

^Devotees went to Kamyavana where we may pray for our desires. I achieve the same purpose here in your temple, praying to you. Please let me speak what you said about Radharani on Radhastami. Please let me serve you and not deviate. Please let me serve your devotees. All glories to you, Srila Prabhupada.

I hear the bell ringing and the conch for the 4:30 *arati*. It's hot. In a similar way, you heard and passed the hours in your last months in this world.

they would bring you your lunch here. In the evening, they would have brought you hot milk with the sugar separate and maybe something to eat. You saw devotees and gave forceful directions.

I'm trying to understand how to follow you. This is not 1970 when you still had no temple in Vrndavana. It's 1993. But we should not presume we are very much advanced.

September 21, Prabhupada's Room, 10:15 A.M.

Today I touched the *tamala* tree in the courtyard and took a leaf. Then I circled *tulasi*. I will touch your foot before I leave the room.

I don't feel centered right now.

Dear Srila Prabhupada,

People are walking past your room. Some are young, some are old. Some will die—all will die. The young in their bright shirts will probably die later, although some of them will die young. Then it will be silent. I mean, we who are now making noise will be silent. New people will make noise. We will also come back in our next lives as noise-makers to be in your rooms again. Yes, let it be. Whatever is best for our eternal devotion and surrender and service to you. If I can't do much more in

this life, then let me at least come back to be with you in some capacity.

A person who asked me to give him initiation in ISKCON said, "You're attached to Srila Prabhupada and will go to where he is in your next life. If I am attached to you, I too will go to him." That's the idea.

I write, a young Indian man wearing denims gets down on his knees and makes *pranamas* to you.

dsk&s

September 22, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

^ou said, "That feeling that you have that 'I am something' is not wrong. But who are you? You are a servant of Krsna." Neither am I the direct servant of Lord Krsna, but hundreds of times removed—the servant of the servant of the servant . . .

I'm here before you, weak and tired physically and spiritually. I don't know. You are keeping me anyway. I know that for sure. I'm one of your followers, for better or for worse. Knowing this and feeling secure, let me increase my service to you.

You want to see the Krsna consciousness movement spread and maintained all over the world. I can contribute to that by my temple visits. My visits seem insignificant, but so is everything else I do, so I'll go to Trinidad or Guyana or Italy or Spain.

Prabhupada, you said the whole world is made up of cheaters and rascals and that we should try to give Krsna consciousness to the bewildered victims of this age. I'm working for that. Diary and autobiographical writing are literary ways, tools of

Krsna conscious culture. I leave behind the history and struggle and triumph over the material world. It's the triumph on your order and blessing that converts a sow's ear into a purse.

Radha-Krsna sit on a throne in the picture high over your head and behind you. The letter on your desk today is to Sri Galim, December 1970, from Bombay to Austin, Texas. I just met Sri Galim the other day. He is now forty-five years old and has been through a lot of spiritual confusion at New Vrindaban. He's doing much better now—coming clear of it.

You wrote him, "As long as preaching work is going on, somehow or other that is first-class program." You also said, "The test of the strength of our preaching work is that we sell many books and magazines. So what is the difficulty?" By preaching sincerely to anyone and everyone, "The demand for our books will increase."

"Krsna will give you all help."

Prabhupada, please be in my heart and Sri Galim's heart and guide us all.

I want to be yours in a simple, giving way, obedient, as I was in the beginning. Basic obedience is my virtue. I pray to always keep it.

You have always been my
well-wisher, protector,
guardian angel, boss, father,
patron saint, model, teacher —
he whose books I read and
whose word is absolute.

You are the source of wonderful anecdotes.

Your *lila* is divine. We don't know you in your *siddha* form, but we consider your form as a *sannyasi* preacher to be a *siddha*

form. On this day as my body moves lethargically in the heat, I pray to keep my inner devotion and my remembrance of you and offer some tangible service. Please grant me a place in your eternal service.

Prabhupada's Samadhi Mandir

golden *murti*. Devotees are finishing their daily cleansing of your form, Prabhupada. You have many forms. Which one is best and original? I don't know these things. I am grateful to know you and be your disciple. I remember, only barely, when you came to rescue us "plain cats" on the Lower East Side. And I saw you throughout the years of your manifested appearance until November 14, 1977.

"Prabhupada! Prabhupada," a man says directing his wife to come into this building. His loud voice catches my attention. His group talks loudly in front of Prabhupada for only a few moments and then they leave.

Ladies circumambulating. A man with red streak on his forehead stands complacently and resolutely watching me write in this notebook. Let me not criticize the ways of Hindus, Srila Prabhupada, or you will reprimand me again, "Mind your own business!"

Routine in the Mandir. I hear loud pop music just on the other side of the wall. We'd like to have silence in here, but what can we do? You are a preacher, Srila Prabhupada, and you rarely sit in silent places. Your disciples must have inner resolve to worship you even in disconcerting circumstances.

Here come four little girls with tiffins, looking at Srila Prabhupada for a few minutes. They are special – born and living

in Vrndavana, their bodies covered with Vrndavana dust. They have no knowledge of American T.V. and madness, so people consider them unfortunate.

Prabhupada's Room, 10:40 A.M.

As we enter, the *matajl* caretaker of this house is preaching to guests in the reception room. Inside, an ISKCON *brahmacari* is taking snapshots of Prabhupada at his desk. Visitors come in and out as they do in the Thoreau Symposium or the Elvis Presley museum. He sits on the pillows and we sit watching him. Sometimes I am more mystically serious, thinking that Prabhupada may directly communicate to me. This morning I feel less ambitious in that way, but light-hearted, happy and sure of connection to my master.

Prabhupada, Prabhupada, breathe in and out.

Uddhava is satisfied to see us eating *bhagavata'prasadam*. I wish I could learn to actually offer the food to him in my mind and prayers.

He is always praising the pastimes of Radha and Krsna and Their names, forms, qualities, and pastimes.

I want to die here, or wherever I am, in intense, positive, dependent Prabhupada consciousness. But I feel "not yet." Let me write more books praising him. I haven't run out of steam. I can remember more, surrender more, read more deeply. Maybe I'll never think I'm ready to die. I'm no King Kulasekhara.

Srila Prabhupada said, “What is the use of begging or striving to increase your life duration? It means increasing sufferings.” Anyway, you can’t increase it much. Do you want to live for 7,000 years as a tree in California? No, I do want to attain Prabhupada consciousness. There is truth in the supposition that it’s best we dedicate our life energies to Prabhupada’s mission and then Krsna will be kindly disposed when He takes us to our next life.

If we think of Srila Prabhupada as His eternal servant and as a result we go where he is, is that not the *parani'gati*? Besides, no other path is open to us. This Bhaktivedanta Swami *marga* is safe, affectionate, enlightened in Vraja-bhava. It’s our identity and purpose.

O Swamiji, tomorrow is the twenty-seventh anniversary of my initiation by you. Please bless me to never leave your lotus feet. I wish to serve you in sickness and in health, in joy and unhappiness, success and failure, wealth and poverty –

at all times and in all situations, in future lives. Whoever you are in the spiritual world, Prabhupada, please let me help you in your service to Radha and Krsna. Please teach me whatever is best. I will preach in praise of all Vraja *rasas* and Vaikuntha too, the teachings of Prahlada Maharaja, Kunti- devi, whatever you feel is best. But I need your inspiration to keep me going. Let me achieve for you so that when I die, it won’t be bitter and gnashing my teeth like a condemned sinner or an unfaithful *sisya*.

September 23, Radhastami, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

Today, twenty-seven years ago, Srila Prabhupada, you gave me initiation into *harinama*. I became your disciple. By your mercy Pm still here serving you. I pray to always be your devotee in this life and the next. With all my faults and my fault-finding, still you accept me and engage me in your service. I appreciate that you are tricking me. Pm so self-centered and bent on artistic expression and writing that Pm going ahead and writing to my heart's content. But you have managed me so that these writings are within the *parampara*. I thank you and the Supersoul for guiding me in this way. But you shouldn't have to trick me. I should be flowing to you entirely for your pleasure. Please let me join you. Let me continue to follow you.

Today Pm pleased to recall my place in your entourage. I don't want to be puffed-up, thinking I'm a superior devotee, yet a sense of well-being is natural. I've been saved from *maya*; I have the best spiritual master—why shouldn't I feel proud and satisfied? I still have so far to go in Krsna consciousness, but let me pause a moment on this day and reflect on my good fortune.

Materially speaking, Pm not a young boy, but a young old man. Spiritually, Pm eternal. In terms of position or progress, Pm a neophyte. Still, I have a solid, unbreakable connection to you. I don't want to ever get so far away from you that I lose my simple identity as Satsvarupa dasa. Therefore, Prabhupada, I thank you today for giving me initiation, for giving me my beads and for instructing me to follow the four regulative principles. Thank you for giving me sufficient strength to fight off *maya*. Please continue to protect me from *maya* in the form of women, prestige, followers, and whatever other forms she takes.

Give me the intelligence to hear only from you and to stay always active in your service. Today is a day to remember that I can't do it without you.

Room 42, Guesthouse /

(Srila Prabhupada, you allowed me to present your words and attitudes about Srimati Radharani. You said we will have so many *prakrtasahajiyas*. Therefore, you didn't indulge in talking about Radha and Krsna. This is foolishness you said — to try to jump over *vaidhi-marga* to *raga-marga*.

My Godbrothers praised me when I sat down after the lecture. I felt as if I had just hit a home run. Now I'm calming down and becoming the little flawed person I actually am again.

Room 42, 5:30 P.M.

It's difficult to leave one's room and head for the Samadhi Mandir or his rooms because it's like running the gauntlet. I meet so many devotees, some of whom I haven't seen in years. I always feel obligated to stop and talk. I'm staying in my room this evening, sitting with you in your *murti* form here.

My worship is small. Mainly I follow your schedule at eleven o'clock when you took your massage, bathed, and then took *prasadam*. I always listen to your tapes while I give you your massage — first your head, making small movements with

my fingers, then your back and neck, then your chest and belly. I still remember the circular rubbing motions and the no- nonsense concentration to do it right. It's a sweet activity for a servant and I do wish to keep it up now, daily, wherever I go. It is what it is; it doesn't have to lead to a further reward, but is satisfying in itself. Then the bathing. Now the weather is hot, so cool water will please you. Later in the year, I'll warm the water. I pour it on your head, chest, and back — all over — then dry you. You're my master, yet at moments while bathing and drying, you are like my child. I pray that you'll be my guide in *vaidhi*- and *raga-mārgas*.

I dress you in saffron silk. No *kiirta* at this time of year, just a *sannyasa* top-piece. You look handsome and graceful. I place you on your seat, put on fresh garlands, and light a stick of incense.

Ocher than that, I offer *prasadam* by placing a dish before you und reciting your *pranamas*. I need improvement in that practice. I have so far to go.

September 24, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

Today there is a throne and Radha-Kṛṣṇa Deities in your room, Srila Prabhupada. I don't know if you ever had them here when you used to live here, but They are giving you Their *darsana* on Radhastaml.

The letter on your desk is to Sudama, June, 1971, from Bombay. You wrote to tell him that you received an interesting letter from a boy in Japan. "His letter I am sending to Sats- varupa and he may publish it in BTG." That's what I want, Srila Prabhupada, to be mentioned and included on your team

and in your thoughts. I don't want to think that you are a person from the past, no longer relevant. Neither should you become a legend and not a person. I don't want to turn you into someone imaginary and then contact my imagination. I want to be in touch with you. I want to pray to you, as I knew you and as you are.

They leave the fan on all night to keep you cool. I imagine your saffron cloth rippling softly in the breeze it creates. Your face is not stern here, but relaxed and serious. Simple villagers sometimes think the *murti* is actually you and wonder when you will move out of your *samadhi* trance. You have that fixed position. The villagers are right: Swamiji is sitting here and if he likes, he can move and start talking. But he prefers to be silent and not moving. He receives our prayers. He is listening. He sits and I sit before him.

What is it I want from Srlla Prabhupada? I can get it from this *murti*. Specific advice for me, little services to do for him, philosophical teachings, a glance of mercy or a warning—he can deliver it all.

Prabhupada, Radharani and Krsna are here. The letter to Sudama mentions a Japanese boy who was planning to commit suicide, but now he's happy in Krsna consciousness. There's a buzzer on your desk, Prabhupada. If you press it, a servant or a secretary or *pandita* or cook will come quickly. "What do you need, Srlla Prabhupada?"

Samadhi Mandir, 10 A.M.

the bare-chested *sannyasi* with *tridandi* asks me. No, I don't know Hindi. I only know my mother tongue, which happens to be the medium for ISKCON. Srila Prabhupada said English is known practically all over the world. Hindi is not so important. Sanskrit is important for learning verses, but not necessary for *sabda brahma* understanding.

Dhanurdhara Swami wrote me a note appreciating my RadhastamI class. He said it is important to establish Srila Prabhupada's presentation of Srlmati Radharani—his combination of caution and generous giving.

Prabhupada, if you desire, I could expand on that class and write a scholarly presentation, but I can't do it unless you inspire me. But I'll try. The RadhastamI lecture came from my full allegiance to you. It was your reward. As I enter into your books and pray to you, you will allow me to become a *bhakti-vedanta* scholar (a lover and servant of, preacher on behalf of).

Madhu reminds me my time for peaceful visits to your Samadhi Mandir and room are limited. In a week or so, we'll move to Tejah's house nearby and the campus will become busier.

Old rickety *sadhu* with a cane and a dirty, Icaupzn-like *dhoti*. He holds a small brass bucket while he circumambulates Srila Prabhupada. Then more young men with their mothers or wives leading the way.

O Prabhupada, please bless us to do something for you, not in a feverish way or in a way that causes clashes between us. Give us substantial, genuine realization and allow us to present your teachings. You used to say that everything was in your books. Therefore, let me find inspiration by prayerful reading. I'd like to establish that you have your own way of

presenting Gaudiya Vaisnava *siddhanta* and that it contains anything we might find from other sources. We say, “Just read Prabhupada’s books,” but if the reader doesn’t actually discover satisfaction, then it’s not enough to demand his allegiance. Therefore, let me help people to read his books and to see how he is leading us from *sraddha* to *prema*.

The

ie white lions in sunlight. The marble columns and roof sometimes look soft, like soap. The inner sanctum is devoid of color, backdrops, *Illas*. The walls are black with a white marble arch behind Srila Prabhupada. Sometimes I think it might be nicer to paint pastimes in there, but perhaps this stark aspect is best, reminding us of death, reminding us that only Prabhu-pada is necessary, and helping us fix the image of his form in our mind’s eye. Under this spot is the form the devotees lowered into the ground on November 14, 1977.

Prabhupada’s Room

^^hen I first became Prabhupada’s servant, they said I was like Lord Caitanya’s Govinda. But I failed in that. All right, let me make up for it now. Let me learn now how to be Prabhupada’s Govinda or his Sankara Pandita.

Nowadays I write busily in your room, but maybe one day the energy will be transformed into internal life. Maybe I’ll be able to chant Hare Krsna the way you desired us to chant it. That is the presentation I would like to learn from you, Srila Pra-

bhupada. I would like to understand your conviction that *hari- nama* can save the world and turn *mlecchas* into pure devotees.

Prabhupada did so many things. He chanted and preached chanting. He composed *bhaktivedanta* purports and ordered his disciples to print and distribute them. He pushed his disciples and managed the temples, especially in India. He did whatever he had to, whatever was necessary to carry out the mission of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati and Bhaktivinoda Thakura, that people everywhere should take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

A devotee is chanting vigorous *japa* in your room. Visitors are filing in and out. Monkeys are running around in your garden. Someone stops to put a few paisa in the donation box. We have discovered a relaxing spot under the fan where we can be with you.

(Write on, even as people stop to examine me. “Hindi?” “*Nahi.*”)

In and out they come, glancing at Prabhupada and the humble objects in the museum cases—his shaving gear, the last bar of soap, his *japa* beads, dictionaries, servant’s record book of his medical condition on the very last days. They usually glance quickly and don’t stop to read anything or look closely. But they’re respectful.

One person tells the others, “This is Srila Prabhupada.” A woman asked me in the Mandir, “Is this statue gold?” No, it’s bronze. I left it at that. I assume she knows it’s Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta Swami.

September 25, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

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(Srla Prabhupada, I come before you with ISKCON controversies in my mind and thoughts about my private writings. I want to hear from you about Krsna and be relieved from doubt and duality. But some controversies we have to face. I want to be true to you.

Today's letter on your desk is from 1970 to Advaita dasa, the ISKCON Press manager. Advaita had left the association of devotees and Srla Prabhupada was relieved to hear that he was back. Srla Prabhupada writes, "I know that Satsvarupa has got too much other engagement to be able to devote the requisite time for managing the press department." At least Prabhupada mentions me as busy in his service. Srila Prabhupada told Advaita he didn't have to attend the *aratis*. In other words, he didn't have to be under my complete authority as temple president. Maybe I overdid it. Those were rough days. Advaita loved to work printing Srla Prabhupada's books, but he had little taste for anything else in Krsna consciousness.

Those days are gone now. The worries are gone too, faded into ISKCON's history. Some of your instructions and estimations seem different to us now twenty years later. You encouraged Advaita and said that you were confident he would not get ensnared by *maya*, but he did get ensnared. Somehow, working on your books wasn't enough. You told him later in New York that he had to attend the *mangala'drati* or else the Press could be closed.

Self-aggrandizement isn't for a Vaisnava. I don't claim I was a wonderful and faithful devotee who always stayed true to you. You have kept me, however, and I'm grateful.

Someone wrote a poem and said Jesus, "I don't know who yOu are." I do know you, Srla Prabhupada, in a real sense. You are

my friend, my guru, the first devotee I ever met. I do know who you are, although only partially. You . . . (the lights just went out in your room. Now I'm holding a flashlight to the page.) Srila Prabhupada, I know you and I'll sit in darkness until you enlighten me further. Let me be true and cross over all the bridges and rivers ahead and be with you throughout my life.

Prabhupada's Rooms, 10 A.M.

There's a big-bodied *brahmacarl* sitting close to you on the other side of the velvet rope, Prabhupada. I'm sitting at a distance from you in the back. When I look up at you, I see him. He just read the letter on your desk. Like me, he seeks your mercy, bows down to you, and now leaves your room.

That letter on your desk, what did it say? I can't remember. Oh yes, it was to Advaita dasa of ISKCON Press. You told him you were confident that he wouldn't get ensnared by *maya*. In other words, he *would* get ensnared by *maya* unless he followed the program of *vaidhi-bhakti*.

I feel head pain and heart pain and nervous tension. Dear spiritual master, please protect me. I don't care—I mean I do care what people think when I say to them, "I have to cancel our meeting, I have a headache." I never cancel my service to you. Thank you.

Prabhupada, you are wearing a multi-colored flower garland, with red and yellow daisies and roses. You also have a fine garland made of small, white, unopened buds. You look kind and thoughtful, fatherly and serious. You are ready to give me your attention. An Indian family stands looking at you in your

museum setting. They walk on, more pious than I, but I am one of yours.

I cheer up when I think
I'm an insider
to your ISKCON *tirtha*,
the residence of His Divine Grace
in Krishna-Balaram Mandir.

^Prabhupada, I often get headaches. I have had these headaches for years now. I didn't have headaches when I was face to face with you. Maybe you would have thought I was a nonsense. Instead, I served you vigorously and took Tylenol and Anacin and kept going, sometimes passionately, foolishly, competing for a high post and your attention. Now I'm physically diminished and at least outwardly, you don't demand as much. Forgive me my thoughts.

I want to serve your high command, but
I'm not a slashing soldier anymore.
I need time alone and even
if that sounds funny, I will
prove that I can write something worthy.
Then you will say, "Leave him alone.
He's doing as much as you,
but he has headaches."

Maybe you doubt that I
am really sick.
But I am. I don't bluff.
And I'm active in my way.

At this rate, I can't expect to go back to Godhead in one lifetime, but I'm trying to make my claim that I am yours. Wherever I go next life, let it be connected to you. Someone said that in the next life –if we are not 100% perfect – we may be born three hundred years ago among the devotees of Lord Caitanya. And then in the life after that, we may be born a hundred years after Lord Caitanya and associate with Narottama dasa Thakura. I can't help but think that I want my *rasa* with you. Let me be like Hanuman is toward Lord Rama. This may sound crazy and insincere since I have a craving to write so "freely," but I do it all for you. I desire to be fixed as your *sisya* and intimate.

ojsk&s

September 26, Prabhupada's Room, 5 a.m.

^V(4iat you are, I am made of You are a gold ingot, I am a chip. Still, I feel the uniqueness of my own being as spirit soul, so let me utilize that in your service.

The letter on your desk today is to Patita Uddharana. How many different persons wanted to serve, and you somehow encouraged us all. Patita was supervising an ISKCON center in Columbus, Ohio. You told him to do the routine work—chanting, speaking, rising early, cleaning, cooking—and said that these are the backbone of all our activities. If preaching is strong, management will be strong. "Preaching is our real business, preaching and distributing books."

You repeat the same instructions in many letters. Sometimes your secretaries wrote those words on your behalf and you signed the letters. I am reading your letters again. Let me carefully consider the instructions you gave in this way. After

so many years, after hearing it so many times, after experiencing mixed feelings after so many changes in ISKCON and my own life, what does a phrase like, "Preaching is our real business, preaching and distributing books," mean to me? I want to understand the spirit of it and carry it out in my own life. Preaching for me can mean preaching to the devotees, visiting ISKCON centers and devotees' homes, and lecturing on *hari'katha*. Book distribution also means book appreciation – read your books and encourage book distribution. I can find ways to respond to your words.

Sunday Afternoon, Prabhupada's Room, 5 P.M.

Je. a nice time of day. Late sunlight is slanting into your room, Srila Prabhupada, reflecting through the leaves. There is a sporadic procession of visitors this afternoon. The monkeys are screeching in your garden. Did they used to intrude and screech when you were here? Of course, we know how they took your slipper and interrupted your lectures at Radha-Damodara.

I spent a mere ten minutes with your books today and then started a reading log. I want to build up the discipline again. My reading schedule has been depleted, but I'm not without hope that I can institute a reading reform in my life. Without reading your books, these visits to your rooms may be a bit hypocritical or sentimental. At least they are incomplete without the substantial *darsana* of submissive and alert reading.

Prabhupada, the temple president here said about my Radha- stami lecture,. "It was fantastic. Satsvarupa Maharaja at his best, in the mode of empowered *Lilamrta*." I'm at my best and

can satisfy the devotees best when I make inspired presentations of Your Divine Grace's life. I seem to be useful in that way. My intentions, my personal campaign of "Back to Prabhupada" is not just a selfish thing; it will make me a pleasing and effective preacher.

I can relax in your room. I sit in the back, distant yet close. This is all the intensity I can take these days. The devotees are assembling out front for a Sunday afternoon *harinama* party into Vrndavana, but I don't feel up to it. No one else is here in your room. You might be sitting here and I'm here with you as your servant and disciple, telling you, "Srila Prabhupada, they're going on *harinama*. Can I get you a drink? Any prasadam you would like?" It's EkadasI and you might not want anything, but if you do, I can arrange for it.

As I write, I'm brought back out of the past to 1993. I look out the window and see two *bhaktas* from Russia, both named Alex, who want to take initiation from me. They would like to meet with me, but I avoid meetings. What do you think, Srila Prabhupada, of me initiating them and others? Should I stop, or is it my duty? One thing is clear: my only credential for initiating is my bona fide link to you. Today, so many people wanted to attend the meeting for my disciples that they couldn't fit into the room. I have never even seen some of them before. Later I thought, "Why would anyone consider me as a spiritual master?" The only answer is my connection to you.

Initiating disciples is a duty I perform for you. It is how I sacrifice myself and serve your movement. But I'm not always sure, and that's one of the important items I'd like to hear from you about. I say "hear" from you, but I don't expect a letter from the spiritual world or to hear your voice from the sky. If you could enlighten my intelligence so that I could know

what you want . . . For now, I initiate only on an exceptional basis, a few a year.

Many of the ones I initiated over ten years ago have gone defunct.

LJ ask you about initiations, but let me also admit to you my inattentive *japa*. Please give me your mercy. Please help me. I could ask you for direction, but what more can you say? You have already said so much. Chant and hear. Serve the guru and the taste for chanting will come. Control the mind, the stubborn mind.

The sun is going down. Your last days and weeks in 1977 slipped away. The bell rang. You laid in bed and didn't eat. Your body gradually stopped functioning. Long hours of silence. Chanting by your bedside. Young men at your bedside, eager to serve you, and very attached to their preaching zones and assignments in various places around world. You trained us like that, to be dedicated to a temple or a service. When we came to see you, after a week or two we were restless to return to our *prabhu'datta'desas*. Partly, we wanted to be little lords in our zones, but the good result was that we wanted to fight on the battlefield as you ordered—to distribute books and to preach, to change the world into a Krsna conscious place.

You didn't like us staying in Vrndavana with no real engagement. You wanted us to get out and preach, to go back to our field. I remember these things about you, Srla Prabhupada.

September 27, Prabhupada's Room, 5 a.m.

^Dear Srila Prabhupada, I led the singing at *mangala'arati*. I'm sometimes afraid that I'll forget the words. To comfort myself against that fear, I remembered how everyone here is my friend—my Godbrothers and disciples, men as well as women, and of course you. You protect me from the material world, which I fear. When there's a threat, I don't want to think of myself as a loner. I'm surrounded by friends, even the flower in your hand and the *pujari* and the Mandir itself.

I am just an average person. Please be kind, Rupa Gosvami prays to Radha and Krsna. I pray to you, Srila Prabhupada, please be kind. Rupa Gosvami knows the Lord and Radha are kind, and I know you are also.

Samadhi Mandir, 10 A.M.

^e stride in past a group of Indian visitors. They watch us bow down and take our seats in the rear of the Samadhi. We know our purpose in coming here. They don't make full *dandavats* to your golden form, but we do. Yet how deep does it go? Is my striding in and out of your Mandir just a show? I pray you'll accept me as sincere.

What do you think of the Samadhi Mandir, Srila Prabhupada? In your last days, you asked only that the hole be, dug and the proper ceremonies and procedures take place. I don't think you gave any instructions as to what kind of a memorial building should be made. The devotees decided to do it in grand style, but it bogged down over a decade of delayed construction.

Now it is almost completed. I think you like it when many devotees gather here as they did this morning, and when visitors come and go during the day. You did not want people to worship you; you wanted people to worship Krsna. If you could serve the Supreme Lord as His representative and collect “taxes” as the king’s viceroy, you were willing to do that. Thus you have written in your purports to convince us of the topmost position of the founder-acarya of this Krsna consciousness movement.

When you left us in New York City in January 1967, we felt keen separation. You wrote back from San Francisco that the main association with the spiritual master is by hearing and following his *vani*. You said that if we felt too much separation, we could put your picture on your sitting places. Those days gave us the first indication of what we now experience all the time. Then, your separation was only for a few months; now it’s much longer.

A poor, skinny man begs Madhumarigala to give him caran- *amrta*. Madhu does so gladly. Workmen are making noise and talking loudly on the mezzanine. A female cinema star is warbling over a loudspeaker somewhere, complete with badly played violin. And you sit here, golden Srila Prabhupada. Of course, I must not think that you have to endure the noise. You are transcendental, like the Supersoul who sits even in the beast’s heart but is never affected. You are present in the Samadhi Mandir in a mysterious way. I come here to be strengthened by your association.

Prabhupada, ISKCON has some strange characters, and I am probably one of them. Let us be gentle with each other. One devotee just sat and had his picture taken with his back to your altar – he sat at your feet. When the photographer did something wrong, the devotee got angry, clapped his hands, and

shouted in annoyance, in Spanish. An Indian family watched all this with interest. I was worried that they would get a bad impression of ISKCON devotees, but when the Spanish devotee left, the Indians also sat just as he did and had their picture taken by a member of their family. This too is a way to observe a visit to your Samadhi Mandir. At least they want to be seen sitting beneath you: "I was there with Prabhupadaji."

May the sight of golden you, dissuade
me from looking upon the curves of a
woman's body and thinking I can
enjoy.

May a few moments here relieve me
of lifetimes of sin.

May I serve you.

(As I write, another group of visitors is intently watching me writing in the notepad. I'm an interesting specimen. They are curious, impressed maybe, and a bit amused.)

May I come here and keep memories
for cold, rainy days in the West.

In my breast let me keep a flame of
the golden one in the inner sanctum,
my St. Francis, my Jesus Christ, my
lord and master,
Prabhupada.

Prabhupada's Room, 10:30 A.M.

I have your little book first published in India, *Easy Journey to Other Planets*. You tell us we cannot go to the spiritual planets with our material bodies and minds. You tell us from Rupa Gosvami's *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu* how to practice *bhakti-yoga* so that we can go to the eternal abode. The first item of *bhakti* is to accept a spiritual master "in order to be trained scientifically. Because the senses are material, it is not at all possible to realize the Transcendence by them. Therefore the senses have to be spiritualized by the prescribed method under the direction of the spiritual master." The second is to take initiation from the spiritual master "which is the beginning of spiritual training." It is implied that the same bona fide spiritual master who initiates you (*diksa*), will train you (*siksa*). Then item number three:

The candidate must be prepared to satisfy the spiritual master in every way. A bona fide spiritual master who is fully cognizant of the effects of spiritual science, learned in the spiritual scriptures like the *Bhagavad-gita*, *Vedanta*, *Bhagavata*, *Upanisad*, etc., and who is also a self-realized soul, having made tangible connection with the Supreme Lord, is the transparent via medium to help the willing candidate to lead to the path of Vaikuntha. He must therefore be satisfied in all respects, because simply by his good wishes, a candidate can make wonderful progress in the line.

The fourth is that the spiritual master will teach us in accord with the disciplic succession, not otherwise. The spiritual master doesn't invent or concoct. "The names of such authorities are disclosed in the scriptures and we simply have to follow them by the direction of the spiritual master. The

spiritual master is never deviated from the path of the authorities.”

Srila Prabhupada, you gave us so many nice instructions. I seem less interested in the details right now. I want to instead fix myself in the substance. Then the details will be revealed. In *Easy Journey*, you tell us we have to change our material “dress” to a spiritual dress if we want to go back to Godhead. “The change of dress will automatically take place simply by desiring it at the time of death. This desire is possible only if we practice it during the conscious state of life.” Here, you do not spell out the practices of *raganuga* meditation, but it is implied; it will take place at the right time only if we sincerely follow what you teach.

I’ve been hearing you say these things for twenty-seven years. In recent years, I have heard more of the esoteric details of what this all means. It is good news, but it’s dangerous too if one doesn’t know how to balance it with your earlier instructions. Right now I want to go back to hearing you teach in your implied way and to work harder at satisfying you so that I can actually become qualified to realize the *rdganugd'tndrga*. I can’t attain that stage by memorizing terms or imitating feelings or by prematurely practicing *raganugd'bhajana*. You taught in a certain way and that’s how I will practice.

It’s interesting to see the many devotees growing up in your ISKCON in different moods. There is a lot of *bhajana* and Vraja *parikrama* spirit here among your devotees in Vrndavana. In other places, such as Northern Europe, book distribution is the main focus. Somewhere else, it’s farm and community development. All serving you. I know my place too and you are directing me. You are training me and the others in the basics of the guru-disciple relationship and readying us

for more preaching. We feel fortunate. I pray not to lose the delicacy of my faith in you.

From *Easy Journey to Other Planets*:

13. He must not create unlimited disciples. This means that a candidate who has successfully reached up to the twelfth stage can also become a spiritual master himself, just as a student becomes the monitor in the class with a limited number of disciples.

14. He must not pose himself as a vastly learned man simply quoting statements of books. He must have solid knowledge of the necessary books without superfluous knowledge in the others.

15. A regular and successful practice up to the fourteenth item will enable the candidate to have an equilibrium of the mind even when there is great trial of material loss or a great material gain in life.

cZsk&s

September 28, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

They asked me to give another *Srimad' Bhagavatam* class and I chose to do it on Thursday, the day you took *sannyasa*, Srila Prabhupada. I want to talk about how you began *Srimad' Bhagavatam* right after that, and how you desired to go to America to preach. And I may speak on *sannyasa*, as you see it and demonstrated it.

The letter on your desk today is to Upendra, December, 1971, from New Delhi. He was supervising your temple in Melbourne. You emphasize book distribution and preaching.

Krsna's dearmost servants are those who are strong preachers. This is your mood, Srila Prabhupada, and I want to follow it.

Upendra put a question before you. Someone told him that human life automatically evolves to a higher stage. You smashed the notion that it could happen without Krsna consciousness. You gave him remedies for asthma. He lost his beads and you said that you did not have to chant on new ones. "Once sanctified by the spiritual master, your chanting is eternally blessed."

Dear Srila Prabhupada, I am asking you to give me intelligence. Should I initiate more? Is it false renunciation to give it up? It's troublesome and I have my limits, don't I? One can laugh and say that I am unlimited, but that's not true. Anyway, I'll do whatever you say.

You are here and I
am here just a little
longer.

Each day takes away from
my total of coming to be
with you for a few minutes
in your Vrndavana room.

Surely I'm gaining each
time I sit before you.

I hope I don't annoy you or that
you're tired of seeing my face. I
inquire from you, but I also want
to bring you good news.

Devotees are reading your
books. Devotees are joining.
Devotees who left you
are coming back.
There's not only good news but
at least I can say I feel good,
resolute to be yours,
I'm happy with worship of my
Vrndavana *murti* of you and I
wish to linger with you.

I'll tell Madhumarigala dasa to look at your letter about asthma. I
won't forget you have eternally blessed my beads, and I'll cling to the
beads you gave me.

The day you took sannyasa —
you were always a pure devotee.

Sannyasa is to preach. I am just writing my thoughts out of an urge
to feel close as a servant of the spiritual master.

"The best news is that you are increasing nicely the distribution of
my books and literature. This is the best activity, to distribute solid
information about Krsna. Our preaching stands solid on these books."

Srlla Prabhupada, I dare to include my books in with yours when
you say writing books is important. Please accept my writing as an
expansion of yours and a service to your books.

Samadhi Mandir, 10:05 A.M.

^r
(Srila Prabhupada, I made an outline from the *Prabhupada-lilamrta* of the events leading up to your taking *sannyasa* in 1956 and just afterwards. You turned to writing *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and printing books, and you expressed your desires to go West.

Now I'm here in your *samadhi* where your larger-than-life golden form sits in the black-walled inner sanctum. Your disciples wanted to remember you this way and offer the visitors the chance to worship you in *samadhi*, as is customary for great *deary as*. The faith and enthusiasm of your disciples to serve you is a strong force in the world. Probably it's the main force driving the Hare Krsna movement. As Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati ordered you and you went alone to America, now hundreds and thousands of devotees, according to their capacities, try to carry out your order to preach and establish Krsna consciousness. We think you are somehow still present among us, controlling lives of sincere devotees. You see how things are developing and you also see how we have failed, but somehow your movement continues, is gaining momentum, and is spreading out into many different forms within and without temples.

Today, a *brahmacari* is chanting *japa* and circumambulating on the white marble floor. It's hot and there are not so many pilgrims. Still, complete quiet comes only in brief interludes. Pilgrims are still arriving regularly. Now it's men in pants and shirts and well-groomed ladies in *saris*. They come in, chatter a bit in front of you, not really focusing on who you are. They stand in a group and don't offer obeisances or circumambulate, then leave after a minute. That's one kind of group, and there are many others. You see them come and go. I take it that

the *murti* is your expansion and that you have many expansions. You appear to reciprocate with devotees and congregations all over the world.

They are fortunate who sense your importance and especially who know a little of your glories. They are more fortunate who consider you their spiritual master or grand spiritual master, who read your books faithfully, and who serve you with the conviction that you can link them to the all-attractive Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Another well-dressed couple has just entered. They have a young boy in short pants and a clean white T-shirt with them. He wants to offer his *pranamas* and looks to his parents for a cue. They don't indicate anything. He climbs up the front before the altar. Within half a minute they leave.

Who stops to look at you, Srīla Prabhupada? Who considers what your work is? Who dedicates himself to you? Relatively few. You are another "saint," another statue, to most people. I'm supposed to know better, but the superficial nature of most people's visits here serves to remind me that I also tend to be perfunctory and shallow. Still, something draws me to you. Every morning when the bell strikes ten, you call me here. I circumambulate your form three times. I touch my head to an outer wall of the inner sanctum. I pray to you here.

It's nice that they come to look up at you. I know you are not lonely. You are with Kṛṣṇa. But it's good that your Mandir is rarely empty. It's good for those who come and certainly good for me. Thank you. I thank your disciples who worked to construct this place.

Prabhupada's Room, 10:30 A.M.

need help. You spared me all these years from falldown and ignominy. Sometimes I was not sincere enough (too eager for position) to get clear messages from you on how to avoid mistakes. If I am sincere now, you'll guide me completely.

You wear an all-red rose garland today and another of small white buds. The letter on your desk is to Bhavananda, 1971. Just seeing that name makes us feel sad and sober. Will those devotees who have left you come back and serve you again as they did when you were here to subdue their passions? You wrote to Bhavananda your pleasure that the New York City center (at Henry Street) was expanding rapidly and the devotees were enthusiastic. You wrote, "Yes, Mr. Farmarz Attar will certainly be a great asset to our society and I'm glad to accept him as an initiated disciple . . . Atreya Rsi." When and how will they come back? "And Cincetta Bologna has also been accepted. Her name is Bhadra dasi ... Yes Svarupa Prabhu has my permission to get himself married to Suzy O'Neal."

You wrote in *The Nectar of Devotion* that sometimes a spiritual master in the line of Lord Caitanya initiates devotees who are not qualified, but later they become qualified. You tried and risked and sacrificed to spread Krsna consciousness. You did it, but along the way, as you knew would happen, many came and left. You are still waiting for them to return. You sit in many places like a forgiving father who awaits back his lost sons and daughters. Some might come here and pray for new direction as I am doing. We all want to be reinstated.

Things are always in flux. May your residence rooms always be here for us. And—dare I say it?—may I spend my last days here or very close to the spirit of you here. The *New York Times* clipping in the glass case says, “Swami Prabhupada, Hare Krsna head.” It’s an obituary and has your picture. The implied word is, “Hare Krsna head is dead.” (I often mistakenly read that obituary headline as “dead,” but it doesn’t even say that.) You’re not dead and neither am I. Not a dead stone.

Now a file of simple people come through. The man carries an old canvas bag and his *dhoti* is that perpetual non-white of the poor. He speaks in a loud voice, but not out of disrespect. The woman with him carries a bundle balanced on her head, even while in your rooms. They come and go. Then young men in Western pants come in. I don’t even look up, but glance at their feet and pants. They go into your inner rooms, look around, and come out again, an Indian museum experience. They can go back to where they came from and say, “I have been to Swami Prabhupada’s house.” I too.

September 29, Prabhupada’s Room, 5 a.m.

^What do I have to say or do in your room that’s so special? Nothing, but I come anyway. Before my busy day begins, I wish to be with you and feel that you are giving me my instructions for the day. You can tell me what you want, considering who I am. You once (or twice or more) said I’m not a good manager; so you’ll consider that in your order to me. You’ll give me something I can do.

The service I do now is “my” service. I think I’m too busy with it to stop here and see you. But my service is for you and you should direct it. Therefore, I come here before you. I look at you like a small child looking up at his father—I mean a very small child, a one-year-old. What can he understand? He simply likes to be picked up in his father’s arms and bounced and humored.

A person goes to where he is loved, just like the widow’s son who went to Lord Caitanya. The Lord’s assistants tried to keep him away, but still he came. Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami says it is the nature of a boy to go to a man who loves him.

The same letter to Bhavananda is still on your desk. The overhead fans ripple the page, so the *pujari* has made the letter secure by placing it under your stainless steel water cup. Ants are running all over the place. I can’t write such clear description. The floors are black.

Time’s up. One more moment, so I can clarify. Oh, let me touch your feet. Take dust from them and put it on my head. Today I can remember that I gave my love to my master in the morning. I belong to his feet and entourage. Everything else is secondary.

Samadhi Mandir, 10:05 A.M.

We rushed from our rooms to get here, not preparing our minds beforehand. Even as I stand in front of your golden form,

I'm thinking of what Madhu said to the Guesthouse manager, and the cinema star is singing her song of 'love.' Love, love. It's on all the signboards and in the songs, but actually it's all lust. Love is for Krsna and His representative.

Man with a big, bushy, *ksatriya* mustache, fat belly behind a clean *kurta* and white pants. He stands surveying Prabhupada while his wife stands a few feet in front of him, closer to Prabhupada, and looks up. Well-dressed pilgrims. Young boy wearing a violet "Los Angeles" T-shirt. A younger one comes to stand in front of me, looking down into my notebook.

"*Celo celo*," the older brother tells him. Pm getting used to it.

"Prabhupadaji Maharaja," one man tells his group.

"Huh?"

"Prabhupadaji Maharaja." They look up at the ceiling. The paid man claps his hands to chase pigeons, but when they don't dislodge he picks up his long bamboo pole and chases them. At least the place is not infested with nests and bird-turds. These things happen every day. Why am I seeing only the outer forms? His clap chased my inner mood and the Indians are interesting to watch.

And maybe I have no deep inner purpose. The golden *murti* seems far away. His garland is of yellow marigolds and roses. At 4 A.M. tomorrow morning, that garland will be shriveled. The *pujari* gives it to me and I wear it for a few minutes and then give it to someone else.

Prabhupada, I seek active guidance from you. I have a small *murti* of you in my room. I search the features of these *murtis*, looking for recognition within myself—"That's Prabhupada." It's like searching for Krsna in separation, in Vrndavana. "Where is He? I saw Him this morning at Govardhana, but now He is gone." Sometimes I see you and sometimes I don't.

From here, out the side door, I see the Western *mataji* in the wooden bookstall selling your books. It's her duty to be there every day. My work is to come here, then to your rooms, my room, searching for you in *darsanas*—writing, reading, and lecturing. And you told us to chant Hare Krsna.

You lectured and explained to the devotees in South Africa that after public lectures, no one had questions because you had offended and torn down their sense gratification. You called them *miidhas*. If anyone did question you there, you said, they were challenging and not submissive.

I pray to you, Prabhupada, to help me approach you in a friendly and honest way, full of genuine adoration. You are giving me Krsna and that is the greatest thing. Please keep me true and appreciative and alive. I pray to Lord Balarama to please fix me in *guru-nistha*.

This “tomb” is a public place, suitable for accommodating large groups of people who don't have much time or presence of mind. At least they can receive your *darsana*. I shouldn't be upset at the casual mood here. They are always respectful. But for them, it's like going into a public monument. The whole country of India can come and go here and everyone will pay respect to you, a great saint, who went abroad and made *miidhas* into devotees of Krsna. I'm beginning to understand the genius and vision of this building.

A Sikh with a pink turban, black beard, and a wife. Men in white, pajama-like pants and *kiirtas*. Children, one infant crying a little. It's hard for them to pay attention, they are so wrapped up in family maintenance and trying to enjoy within religious bounds. We are more serious. On the subtle plane, though, I have the equivalent of these distracted people—a pink-turbaned thought, a fat-bellied woman, a crying child, mosquitoes. Prabhupada's Mandir, you kindly allow us to be

here even though our mood is not concentrated. Prabhupada is in glowing *samadhi*. We cannot attain an inner *samadhi*, but at least we can observe his mood and take in a little of it.

Prabhupada's Room, 10:35 a.m.

(Surprise. We enter and you are not in your place. A girl is changing your sheets on the mattresses. You are sitting on the bed, your hand posed to hold the dictaphone microphone, but there's no mike there. This *murti* is soft in demeanor. I like him. Your head is freshly shaved. Please, self, go deeper, find feelings and memories.

He sometimes played back what he dictated so I could hear. The idea that Srila Prabhupada didn't teach the inner meanings of our philosophy is wrong. Even if we take it that he mostly spoke the basics of pure *bhakti*, consider that. Consider why he did it and how he was an *uttama'adhikari*, but how he spoke for the understanding of ordinary people. Who am I? What do I need to hear? I need to listen better to the compassion of Srila Prabhupada's strong preaching. Listen to his assertive mood. Be an insider, an intimate who loves his master and appreciates what he's doing and why—and who wants to learn to serve like that also. The servant preaches widely all over the world, to audiences who need to hear.

You sit on your bed, Srila Prabhupada, and hold the dictaphone. In your last weeks, you lay on your back and dictated the thirteenth chapter of the Tenth Canto. When I read that chapter now, let me remember you dictating up until the end. Jayadvaita was holding the microphone. Srila Prabhupada smashed the "four-headed scientists" and told the sweet pas

time of how he desired and Krsna allowed a temple to be built in Vrndavana.

Desert-looking men with old turbans look into your room and hesitate to enter because the cleaning is underway, but we can come and sit by you, even in this unusual situation. You don't mind that we see you in this way.

Outside, they're chasing a monkey over the wall. I bring my mind back to the quiet of the summer and fall of 1977 in these rooms, but I can't bear to think of the heavy expectation of your departure and the hope against hope. That's all gone into the past. Even on the anniversary of your disappearance, no one really tries to recapture it. They glorify you for your active pastimes. But that '77 period did happen and each of us will have his or her own tiny version of it in our own deaths. Let us remember how you left this world with dignity and in full Krsna consciousness, preaching until the end.

The letter on your desk this morning is to Nayanabhirama dasa. I saw him here a few weeks ago. He's not a young man anymore. Srila Prabhupada was glad to see him and his wife, Daivi-sakti, in New York. "Offer my blessings to all the other boys and girls there in Philadelphia. Their presentations were so nice and they showed so much devotion also." (This letter was written from the Henry Street temple in Brooklyn. Srila Prabhupada was going next to Gainesville, Florida. "The fig tree is not worshipable by us. Try to worship *tulasi* instead. That will include all tree-worship.")

I was there in New York in 1971, visiting from Boston. I look up now to see you on your bed. Your eyes are brown.

September 30, Prabhupada's Room, 4:45 a.m.

THIS is the anniversary of the day you took *sannyasa*, Srila Prabhupada. You are wearing a long-sleeved *kurta* today, although it's warm. I put the beadbag on your hand.

Someone might say, "He's communing with a statue." Yes, that's right. They can say it. Matter is matter and spirit is spirit. My body is also a statue of flesh and bone. Srila Prabhupada's spirit is in my heart and he is in his teachings. That doesn't mean that Srila Prabhupada doesn't exist outside my heart, but it means the person, Srila Prabhupada, is within me because I am faithful to him. I suppose I should say that only a part of Prabhupada is within me, but I prefer to think that the whole Prabhupada is in me, just as the whole Supersoul is in me, and He and His pure devotee are waiting for me to purify myself so they can reveal themselves more.

Prabhupada, today we are going to Mathura to the Kesavaji temple where you received *sannyasa* initiation. It's an interesting history, but aside from all history, you are still with us. You're not dead. You're in the spiritual (*aprakṛta*) existence, and we don't know what that means exactly. We still know you as a *sannyasi*. We remember your *sannyasa* dress—the saffron cloth, the *tulasi* neckbeads, the beadbag and white *brahmana* thread and *tilaka*.

Srila Prabhupada, you gave us the exalted titles, Goswami and Swami. Sometimes Indians laugh at us. Sometimes they also say that you made a mistake when you named Deities, but what do they understand of your mood? You were triumphant when you installed Radha-Kṛṣṇa in London after centuries of British oppression in India. You called the Deities Radha-London-isvara. What can they know of your playful name for playful Radha-Paris-isvara?

I've come here to report to you that we are going to Mathura today and to get your blessings for the *Bhagavatam* lecture I will give first at Krishna-Balaram Mandir.

A few devotees are circumambulating the temple and chanting *japa*. The air is a soft breeze in your room.

Please, keep me until I die.

Whatever I do,

please let me chant

a breath-mantra of

thanks, praise, and dependence

on Srila Prabhupada. Hare Krsna mantra is the best

and "Srila Prabhupada, please help me."

And going inside oneself,

fingering beads—

and being a friend to everyone,

a worker in ISKCON

for Prabhupada,

tapasya for him.

If I can do it.

October 1, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

The letter on your desk is to Locana dasa, 1971. It's his first initiation letter. You advised him to attract the students at Berkeley. Give them *prasadam* and philosophy, you said. "We can challenge any nonsense philosophy. Socrates, Plato, Kant, Darwin—all of them . . . who have misled so many people."

We laugh when we hear Srila Prabhupada smash them, but it's not a joke. "Now it is your task to find them out and expose them so that the people may appreciate the real philosophy."

Be convinced. Sell books. “Kindly assist me in this great work and know for certain that by your sincerely working in this way, you shall very soon go back home, back to Godhead.”

^TAndavana is a wonderful place. I am your son and servant. My brain is half-blown out by misuse in my youth. The enemies of my mind—lust, anger, illusion, fear, envy—still attack me. I don’t know when I’ll be free.

Coming to sit with you a few
 moments before the door
 opens and I admit that I am
 not the only one.
 Not the best or worst
 but I make my claim.
 Let me touch your feet
 before someone else enters these rooms.
 At least a few moments each
 day
 I want to be alone with you.

October 1, Samadhi Mandir, 10 A.M.

o/Vladhu says he also has a practice when we go to the Samadhi Mandir and Srila Prabhupada’s rooms: he prays to Srila Prabhupada while chanting extra rounds. This made me think, “Am I praying in writing?” Yes, for better or worse.

I start with description: it's hot, workers are hammering, the Mandir is empty except for a few soft *japa* chanters. The blessed Hare Krsna mantra was given to us by Srila Prabhupada. He instructed us to chant incessantly.

I seek only the very simple consciousness that "I am yours." Remember *The Cloud of Unknowing* meditation? Maybe that approach is Mayavada or at best, *santa-rasa*. I want active service. But we also want a simple prayer and a sense of identity as followers of Prabhupada.

A Catholic priest once told a story that when he was a kid, there was a man who stopped into the church every day, even if only for a few minutes. He entered the church and said, "Hello, God, it's me, Billy." When the man was dying, God came to him and said, "Hello, Billy, it's Me, God." The priest was encouraging us to go to church and pray; don't forget God or the house of God. The Samadhi Mandir is Srila Prabhupada's "church." Hello, Srila Prabhupada, it's me, Satsvarupa.

Prabhupada's Room, 10:30 a.m.

^Prabhupada, when I came into your room just now, several ISKCON *matajis* were talking animatedly in the center of your room. I think they were planning arrangements for your service here, but they kindly exited so that I could be alone. It's a fact it would have been entirely distracting if I tried to sit in a corner while they talked in the middle of the room.

The letter on your desk is to Makhanlal, 1971. Srila Prabhupada wrote that he could not attend the San Francisco Ratha-yatra this year. He went there for three years in a row, but, "This time I have been very fervently requested to attend the

London Ratha-yatra where they are expecting fifty-thousand ... So it is not possible to attend both festivals.” He said he would visit San Francisco when he went to America. “So you should go on with the festival more enthusiastically, even in my absence.” Sṛlla Prabhupada wrote this from Bombay, on his way to Moscow and then Paris.

Our spiritual master flying all over the world, writing us letters and giving us the hope of seeing him again. He also gave us encouragement and expected us to be answerable. There was no question of other gurus in those days. Our simple desire was to put on a festival or distribute his books or to preach somewhere, and to be accountable. He captured us, whether he was mellow and soft with us or acted like a military general.

You wear a garland of all roses and another of orange marigolds. Your desk lamp is on. Nothing is known to us of the future, and we know very little of the present. We are still stumbling out of the past. Impurities lurk in our hearts. I repeat this theme to remind myself of what I have to do to become more fit to serve you.

Sṛlla Prabhupada, here comes one of your *brahmacari* followers. He is carrying a quilted saffron book bag. He prostrates himself fully before you, then leaves the room. Devotees notice me, an old-timer. Let *me* notice me like that way. Wake up, Satsvarupa, and live up to your heritage. Be humble, but exult in inner pride and satisfaction that Sṛlla Prabhupada blessed you — not only you, but you too. Now *do* something with the blessing.

October 2, Prabhupada's **Room**, 5 A.M.

^Dear Srila Prabhupada,

My mind is my enemy, as the *brahmana* of Avanti-desa concluded. I come to you for relief. Your soft saffron, your kind look upon me, your youthfulness, your mercy. You sit behind your desk and chant on your beads. This is your last room on this earth. You preached all over the world and then came here to leave for the spiritual world.

That mind of mine, Srila Prabhupada, finds fault with Godbrothers, feels the tiredness of my body — my mind harasses me. He tells me I'm the best and then says, of course, that it's not true. He stands alone and criticizes everyone and everything as superficial and flawed. What will we do with him? Why is he so insecure? At least I get relief when I see Radha-Syamasundara, Krsna-Balarama, and Gaura-Nitai.

In your last days, you spoke to your disciples about preaching and the basic philosophy of spirit versus matter. You spoke of Krsna's will, which would determine whether you stayed in the world. You didn't speak much about where you were going.

We can speculate on that next life or we can be intent about knowing our own places in the spiritual world, but I want to follow your example and preach in this world while regularly chanting and hearing of the name and nature of the Supreme Lord and His entourage as given in the *Srimad'Bhagavatam* and *Caitanya'Caritamrta*.

% studying and preaching I can forget the petty concerns of my anxious mind. The mind will be engaged in higher topics. You want this, Srila Prabhupada. There is no good reason for

fault-finding or the constant lamentation over superficiality. Simply go to Krsna's name, fame, qualities, and pastimes. Simply preach on the order of the spiritual master.

The double bed is low. I remember crowding around it during your last hours. Srila Prabhupada said we have to die like human beings, like Bhlsmadeva. Think of Krsna at the end. Either serve actively as long as we can and retire at the very end or keep going until the last breath. Where will we go? We may not know. But we will *go*.

c

Samadhi Mandir, 10 A.M.

It's Saturday—sparrows chirping loudly, cinema songs, and more visitors than usual. One lady wears an Indian Airlines cabin luggage tag on her bag. Where are they coming from? So many people were outside we had to thread through them before we could enter. Their clothes are all according to their region, but I don't know how to tell which comes from where.

Srila Prabhupada, your Samadhi Mandir is so full of life. The populace is streaming in and out your doors. An ISKCON *brahmacari* explains to an older man, maybe his father, who you are. The hired pigeon-chaser is active and noisy. One of the Indian *pujaris* is cleaning the altar in front of you. I just came from reading the cleansing of the Gundica temple pastime.

Imagine if we did that here. Now there are a few leaves on the floor and a puddle of water in a place where we want to bow down...

Our *brahmacari* is sweeping up the leaves and the puddle, cleaning his heart. He wears the Vaisnava *dlaka* clear and artistically in twelve places.

Now another large group enters. Today they are well- dressed, not villagers with worn-out clothes, but city folk— men in fashionable Western clothes, ladies in clean *saris*. Some remind you of Americans— blue-jeans, caps with beaks, fat mammas.

The crowds move in and out like breathing. Sometimes it's quiet and empty and then it fills up with people. Srila Prabhupada draws them in and then lets them go, draws them in and then lets them go.

It would be nice if everyone had more to do with Srila Prabhupada and became his follower, chanting on *japa-mala*, and reading his *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. The Centennial aims to increase public awareness of Srila Prabhupada and I'll try to do something too.

He himself says that people are not interested because they are attached to sense gratification. Srila Prabhupada insists, "No illicit sex, no intoxication, no meat-eating, and no gambling. Chant Hare Krsna at least sixteen rounds." For most people, even for a lord of England, this is "impossible."

I look up and can't even see Srila Prabhupada. A solid wall of visitors blocks my view. I wonder what they are thinking as they look up to him. I can't help but feel it's incomplete, the half a moment in which their minds and senses are arrested by the shiny golden *murti* and then they're out the door again.

Out of thousands, only a few seek perfection. Out of those who achieve perfection, hardly one knows Me in truth. What is true for Sri Krsna is also true for His pure representative. Hardly one knows Srila Prabhupada in truth.

As I watch the visitors, I beg for more enthusiasm and depth. I don't want padding or show-off phoniness in my own declarations of Prabhupada-seva. I look for true affection and connection. It's there, I simply have to uncover it. Just as the *brahmacari* is sweeping the floor with a broom, always attentive to keeping the place clean, so I want to be a serious, simple caretaker of the *samadhi mandira* that's in my heart.

When I leave Vrndavana, I want to remember how we circumambulated his *murti* here. I want to feel the pull of this most sacred and relevant holy place. I'm a stranger everywhere else in Vrndavana. I am expected to give my rupees and keep moving. I'm not welcome. I don't understand the people or the mood. The great *acaryas* in the past are unapproachable by me.

They are so intense. But with Srila Prabhupada, Pm at home. I have no material home, so this is my home. He is my father. He knows me. He won't forget me.

(Today I congratulated the *brahmacari* who was cleaning the Mandir. He then told me that he's part of a group who are tending to the Mandir for a period of four months. They're all disciples of H.H. Bhaktisvarupa Damodara Maharaja. This one *brahmacari* and his friend are from Burma and a few of the others are from Manipur.)

Prabhupada's Room, 10:30 A.M.

Of course these rooms are less frequented than the Samadhi Mandir. A lot of people probably don't even know they are here. They're not meant as a mass thoroughfare, so they remain an open secret for ISKCON devotees. I'm in a corner where I can't see Srila Prabhupada so clearly—the velvet rope is in the way, and the pictures on his desk and the desk lamp hide him from view. But I know he can see me.

The mood that I wish to keep is always slipping away from me. I want a deep faith and a mystical sense. Remember some private places in Assisi? There's a cave and a room, solitary places. Once I entered one cave-like place of St. Francis. A nun was alone in there, sitting in a meditative pose. I felt like an intruder and left. But here I am at home. Look for that cave within, that private *darsana* with the saint, Srila Prabhupada. We don't need a dark atmosphere or a sign of extreme *tapasya* performed here. Srila Prabhupada performed austerities everywhere he went. He worried about ISKCON. He heard stories

how they were collecting money in Japan and he couldn't concentrate that night on his *Srimad'Bhdgavatam* translation. He heard good news too, such as book distribution scores, but then he heard of some of his disciples falling down and of opposition from the nondevotees, such as the Muslim attack on the Maya- pur temple.

These rooms are Srila Prabhupada's home. They feel domestic. The flower garlands are cheerful, and I remember him relishing *prasadam* here and seeing his lotus feet on a white cushion. It's simple here, Indian style, but clean and comfortable. Just being in here pacifies my mind so that I can hear Srila Prabhupada's orders for the day.

The letter on his desk today is to Upendra, January 1972. Srila Prabhupada was in Bombay. The caretakers of this room simulate Prabhupada's routine. Each day they place a new letter on his desk. Prabhupada reads the letter, which has been typed by his secretary, and signs it. This proves that letter- writing was an important part of his preaching, a way he managed and inspired devotees all over the world.

Upendra wrote that he wanted to be with Srila Prabhupada. Prabhupada assured him, "Yes, you may be my cook when we shall meet." Prabhupada would soon see Upendra and other devotees in Australia. "Tomorrow I am flying to Africa for Brahmananda's festival in Nairobi." Prabhupada mentioned Upendra's wife, Citralekha, who served him so nicely in India. "She has learned a lot about Deity worship I think, so she may train up the others there in Australian centers."

Things didn't all go smoothly. Devotees fell away. But they may come back.

Center yourself. Forget making something for the main purpose of presentation.

Look to your own purpose.

I pray my resolution, which is substantial – which is the profound hope and which is right for me –

I pray that it doesn't become like the bathing of the elephant which is followed by his rolling in the dust.

What is that resolution?

To return to Srila Prabhupada and ask him to revive in me that exclusive and wholehearted spirit of service to him which I had when I was young and he was here.

He's still here and yes I'm not old and decrepit.

So I'm praying for that.

It has only begun.

I want to protect and you know, Srila Prabhupada, what that means.

I have instigated *puja* of your *murti*, but it requires life and attention and centering on the object with love.

I've declared that I'll read your books when I have time.

That too requires determination.
 I will do whatever is favorable and avoid what
 is unfavorable for unalloyed service to my
 dear friend and spiritual master.

Let me revel in my good fortune.
 Recall the times with him.
 The writing will help with that.
 As long as I'm in Vrndavana,
 with its special Srila Prabhupada *tirthas*,
 I come here to pray, please reveal yourself to
 me, fill me with your presence so that I may
 go forth with great desire to serve your
 preaching mission and desire to find you and
 keep you with me wherever I go.

October 3, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

CPrabhupada, the temple is filled with weekend guests. I took the privilege of standing close to the Deities while the crowds were kept on the other side of the rope. The lead singer was loud and not so sweet. I was eager to come here to be with you in your room. Both today and tomorrow I won't be able to spend the 10-11 A.M. hour with you. I'd prefer to be in your *tirthas*, but I have other commitments. My solace will be to

fulfill those commitments as service to you while thinking of you.

The world is full of threats. Noises. Calamities. Intrigues. Unpleasantness. Breakdowns. Disappointments. You and Krsna said it would be like this. Krsna says as long as we are in this miserable and temporary material world, we should engage in devotional service and plan to go back to Godhead.

There's a noise in the air-cooler in your room. It is disturbing to me and probably to you. Better they turn it off. We try to serve you, but sometimes we create more inconveniences for you. You didn't like noise, but peace and quiet to spend your hours in routine Krsna consciousness, preaching strongly in an atmosphere where people could hear you attentively.

I don't take it for granted that I'm allowed the privilege of standing near the Deities or coming early into your room. I know it's rare and I'm not deserving. Still, I have a beggar's greed and I grab what I can. I'm also looking to get a piece of cloth or some object I know you wore or used. I want to keep it with me.

These things have value only when we come close to you for service. The word *Upanisad* derives from *upaniti*, which means to come close to the guru. We come close so that you can speak mantras and instructions into our ear. These are instructions for performing more austerities. I want to come close to you in order to serve you and to be willing to perform difficult tasks. That's the price of intimacy.

Prabhupada, the monkeys are behaving wildly in the dark right outside your room. They are jumping on the roof and even hanging onto your outer window. I just chased one away. But between chasing monkeys and being disturbed by the periodic, weird sounds in the air-cooler (it sounds like a body is trapped in there), I can hardly make a peaceful prayer.

October 4, Prabhupada's Room

^T^ar Srrila Prabhupada,

I'm in your rooms. You know how mental I am. You can smash me or pacify me. I tend to find fault and I just wish to be left alone. People rub against me and the strain of any interaction seems a botheration. But this isn't your spirit. You "rubbed elbows" with the marijuana-heads, the acid-heads, the hippies of the Lower East Side, and you transformed us. You said those who love you will cooperate. I'll continue to try.

The letter on your desk today is to Ranadhira, 1972. He has since gone from your service. You wrote to him that he was senior and serious and if he kept it up, he would "very soon reach the supreme highest perfection."

I look at this now and feel some sorrow. Still, I feel hopeful because what you promised to the devotees is still true, provided we follow your instructions. You wrote, "We must become \varnothing responsible for seriously practicing this Krsna consciousness, because the world is full of degrading elements . . . Save the people." That was Srrila Prabhupada's concern. Save the people.

"So I count on you and your Godbrothers among those few men who are treading seriously on the path back home back to Godhead ... do not fall back."

It will increase if we keep the standard he gave us: "Otherwise it will gradually become mechanical and fade away like every other so-called religious movement."

Srrila Prabhupada, you are still counting on us. We are still only a few men. The world is full of bad elements dragging people down. We can work to save them. We have to keep the enthusiasm and the high standard you gave us. It has in some ways become mechanical. Hardening of the arteries is occur

ring, but also new life and hope. I'm fighting for my own life and wish to stay as you describe in this letter, a senior disciple whom you can trust and who takes his responsibilities seriously. Now my duties have become refined, but they're even more responsible than before. People look to me to set an example that there is still life in Krsna consciousness even after you practice it for thirty or forty years. Actually, the longer you practice spiritual life, the more enlivened you become.

I want to prove myself faithful. I want to be in the spirit that you want me to be in. I think I know what that means and what I should do.

^ou let me come into your room to write in front of you. It's as if Pm your secretary again, hurriedly writing down something you say so that I can type it up for you later. Pm not exactly receiving dictation from you now, but I'm in that mood.

I want to take the dust from your feet on my head. I'll go now and do other duties for you. I'm your secretary and older student, but still a young boy in spiritual learning who needs to hear from his spiritual master. All glories to you, Srila Prabhupada.

Samadhi Mandir, 4:05 P.M.

The door is closed and we can't see the golden form of Srila Prabhupada with our eyes. The doors are silver inlaid. There is a donation box in front of them. When I'm here, I remember all

my misgivings and central blocks to advanced devotional service. Still, I have this one asset called “attachment to His Divine Grace.”

I may speculate that I am an *atma*. I’m not Stephen T. Guarino, the son of Stephen J. Guarino. I’m an *atma* who deserved to meet Srila Prabhupada. That’s speculation. What really happened is that he came to New York City to deliver Kṛṣṇa’s mercy and I was lucky enough to be there and to take it.

Now I am in Vrndavana, India. Sunlight is slanting through the high, marble, lattice-work window. Madhu is chasing mosquitoes from his head with a white cloth. The electric generator is humming. There are no visitors right now. It’s hot and sunny.

I’ve been doing things—dropped into two different rooms at the Guesthouse before coming here for brief chats—and I’m not centered. I come here to pray. Prabhupada, Prabhupada. A slight Indian *brahmacari* is circumambulating your altar, chanting *japa*. Maybe he is part of the four-month crew who are working here on behalf of their GBC man and guru.

Why don’t I go deeper? I get a sense of allegiance and identity when I come here. For that, it’s even better than a dip in the Yamuna or sitting by the side of Govardhana. And it’s easier to do—I just have to walk out of my room and walk for about one minute. Then I can sit on the white marble floor and chant some *japa* or write my notes. Automatically, my heart travels to Srila Prabhupada. I think of him here.

I read in *Srila Prabhupada-lilamṛta* of his Jaladuta voyage to America. He was seventy years old and had two heart attacks in two nights at sea. He saw a dream of Kṛṣṇa in His many forms rowing a boat and telling him, “Come on, you’ll make it all right.” Srila Prabhupada at sea, his only solace reading *Caitanya’caritamṛta* and deliberating on his spiritual master’s

order. Writing a poem in Bengali to his dear companion, Krsna. Feeling separation from Radha-Damodara in Vrndavana- dhama. Carrying the strong commitment to his Guru Maharaja's order—to flood the world with Krsna consciousness. He arrived in Boston on September 17. At the end of this week, we will commemorate that day.

^Prabhupada and me. I sit in this Mandir trying to actually be myself. I cannot do such nice "Prabhupada meditations," but at least I'm on his holy ground. I feel the power of that. I want to proclaim it and yet keep it a secret.

I don't want to hear all these other sounds, at least for a moment. Let me worship my spiritual master. Srila Prabhupada, I am spending my afternoon here. No more Saturday afternoons in a quiet Catholic church, waiting to make a confession, and no more wandering around New York City or even Vrndavana. I have come here to sit and trust that you know why I have come.

In the Samadhi Mandir this morning, I noticed that the two big bolster pillows were orange colored. Very nice. And Srila Prabhupada's *sannyasa* top-piece was the right shade for a *sanrryasi*.

It's time to go. The *pu.ja.ri* just gave us some *maha* sweets offered to Srila Prabhupada. I popped a piece in my mouth. Someone else brought a fresh, wet, cool rose garland *for me*. It was not offered to Srila Prabhupada. It's time to go!

Prabhupada's Room, 4:40 P.M.

The room was locked, so we opened it. It was like being here in the early morning – the lights were out and Srila Prabhupada's beadbag was on the desk. I went close to him in front of his table and prostrated myself, trying to think of the meaning of the *pranamas*: he is very dear to Krsna, he fights Mayavadis and voidists. I put the beadbag on his hand and took dust from his feet. Learning to do that is one of the best things I have learned in recent years.

Today's letter is to Madhukara. I thought I knew everyone in ISKCON from those days, but this name is unfamiliar. At that time, he was the president of ISKCON Phoenix. "Now you are being forced by Krsna to advance in Krsna consciousness because you must set the perfect example for all others to follow." Good words. I have to do that now for the rest of my life because I have disciples (Srila Prabhupada's granddisciples) and I'm an older student.

He advises the same routine work, "Rising early, cleansing, chanting minimum of sixteen rounds, having *klrtana*, reading scriptures, Deity worship, like that. . . . Then your all other activities will come out successful and you can be very certain that very soon you will find yourself situated on the highest platform of perfectional stage."

Prabhupada encourages him to present Krsna consciousness in the schools and colleges. That's one branch of activities. Mine is to encourage a whole range of devotees in various activities and various places. I tell them to do what Srila Prabhupada called the routine work, which we sometimes call "*sadhana*." Some devotees go out and sell books or stay home and take care of children or do business. I encourage all, that the first aim is the "regular activity" – rising early, chanting,

reading scriptures, Deity worship, etc. — do these and all else will follow successfully. And that means I must do the routine work myself as an example.

Curtains closed against the sunlight. Fans revolving. Srila Prabhupada's *kurta* sleeves moving in the breeze. The *mataji* caretakers have arrived for their afternoon duty of sitting behind the book counter in the reception area. My head socializing, my body getting ready to leave this room, my hands seeking words to write. But the self stays put for a while, sitting in his room.

I watch the devotees come and make *dandavats*. They are your followers, Srila Prabhupada. One young man holds a copy of *The Nectar of Instruction*. I never want to be condescending to you or to your followers. I'm not an outsider, a critic, and I'm certainly not above others. I could be a rat, staring out from the vantage point of my hole in the wall, or an aspiring devotee giving himself to this movement, honoring it, believing in it, fully participating in it. I also read *The Nectar of Instruction*, I also bow before Srila Prabhupada. I'm also on campus at Krishna-Balaram Mandir. I'm also here for purification. And like others, I too have detected my straying mentality and I'm bringing it back in line with Srila Prabhupada's grace. I'm not better than others.

October 5, Prabhupada's Room, 5 a.m.

J/Vly dear Srila Prabhupada,

I won't say that I cannot offer you anything. I will boldly say I offer you my life. I know I myself tire if the same person comes to see me every day, especially if he has no service or is sentimental or pestering. If someone has functional service and is a dear servant, then it's part of your life to receive him and talk. He may open the curtains when the sun comes up or bring in your breakfast or talk over travel plans with you.

I hope I am not coming to you in a pestering, demanding way. That's one reason my visits are short. You have already given me so much. Now I need to carry out your instructions and not keep pestering you for special confirmation of our relationship. "Everything is there in my books," you said. And, "What is the difficulty?"

What is the difficulty? Let me serve you in earnest.

D speak with Godbrothers but don't seem to say anything close to my heart or theirs. I hope they will forgive me as I forgive them. We mean well, or at least by your grace, we are willing to work side by side.

How long will anything last? Your bed in this room reminds us. You preached in the West for only eleven years. You accomplished so much in such a short amount of time! Your bed tells us we will have to move along and that we should try to do something for Srila Prabhupada before it's too late.

^ou are with Radha and Krsna in Vrndavana. I know very little of you, actually. All I know is that you want me to serve. You want me to be a genuine devotee. I'm working on that. You want me to become honest and attached to *krsna'katha*, then hou> I should serve will not be such a puzzle. One way or another I will be able to lecture or teach or give counsel in writing or speech. That's my duty. If I am fixed in Krsna consciousness, in chanting and hearing, and if I have a preaching spirit like Srlla Prabhupada, I will be able to help others.

People are in pain, both physical and mental. You knew how to help them, Srlla Prabhupada. I want to help you help them. I say this, although it's not yet my actual desire, but I wish—or I wish I could wish—to do the right thing. If I stay selfish and indulgent, what good will that do me at the time of death? You please correct me.

Srila Prabhupada, I heard a brother said that he would offer you a Ph.D. I thought it was a bold claim. Someone might think he's getting the Ph.D. for himself, but he's saying he's doing it for you. I know you will accept it. Why don't I declare with confidence like my Godbrother that I want to offer you my writing life? I want to be a poet, a devotee, a chanter, a scholar of your books, satisfied. Whatever I want to achieve, it is for you.

Can we make the whole world Krsna conscious? I am no fighter in the usual sense. But I can change myself, if you will let me.

These thoughts in your room. Thank you for the few minutes alone.

Samadhi Mandir, 10 a.m.

On our way here, we met a *gurukula* boy and his mother. He is just getting over jaundice and is carrying a big jug of water, “because I have to drink a lot of water.” Srila Prabhupada, your devotees are trying their best to serve you.

The ghee lamp inside is brass and in the shape of a rooster, not a peacock. I’m trying to describe things to remember later. I’ve said most of it by now—described the white squares on the floor with the black checks, the elephants in bas relief on a lower border, upright lions as columns. The Vrajavasis—one singing a *bhajana*. Now it’s quiet for a second and I see a tall tree and a patch of sky framed in the tall doorway.

Your *murti*, here, Srila Prabhupada, is larger than life. If we place a flower in your hand, it accentuates the size of your hand. They use counter beads big enough to be *japa-mald* on your beadbag. Every morning your *pujari* gives me the garland that you wore the previous day. I wish I could have deeper appreciation for all these favors.

Now I’m thinking of a lecture to give on the day that you arrived in America. I’ll use the verse, *srnvatarh sva-kathah' krsnah* for the group chanting and then speak about your ocean voyage. I mostly want to appreciate and analyze the two poems you wrote. One was to your spiritual master and the other was to Krsna. In the first poem, you quote Prahlada Maharaja’s prayer, “I was falling into the way of the demons . . . my spiritual master saved me. How could I ever leave him?” I’d like to say that we should never leave Srila Prabhupada, but maybe that’s not so appropriate on this occasion.

I want to say that he came to America, that he was outwardly an obscure figure, but was inwardly meditating on his spiritual master’s order. He prayed to Krsna when no one knew

him. I would like to evoke the feeling of what it was like on the ocean voyage. But perhaps I can't say much. I'd like to. I still have a few days left and hope to get some inspiration by reading the poems.

The lions—they can tear apart elephantine vices. They are good lions, part of the Mandir, yet they are fierce and their bodies are built for attack. Let them attack any demons that try to enter here. Let them swallow my own demons so that I can look upon Prabhupada peacefully and pray to him. Let the roar of the lions frighten doubts and superficiality. Please give me the courage not to run away.

The boy is sweeping dirt and flower petals. The pole-boy is investigating holes on the mezzanine roof to see if any birds have made nests. No question of monkeys frequenting this place. Srila Prabhupada would like it that the Mandir is kept clean. There is life in his worship and therefore it's not a burden. The devotees won't abandon it. But you have to be willing to keep a routine. Me too—regular worship according to the clock, cleaning, bowing down, reading and writing. Always be grateful.

Prabhupada's Room, 10:40 A.M.

new generation *brahmacari* sits before you, Srila Prabhupada, chanting *japa*. He's so young. I think, "I'm senior." What does that mean? Do I think it means that I should be

given honor and privilege? It means I should do more. I should know more and give more. I should freely tell your pastimes to others and assure them of their relationship with you. I should speak from my own experience and encourage them about the power of reading your books. That's what being senior means. It means taking responsibility.

The letter on your desk today, Srila Prabhupada, is to Kesava dasa, January 1972. Big, strong Kesava, Karandhara's brother. Karandhara was the captain of L.A. and Kesava was the captain of San Francisco. Those good old days. He requested initiation for many boys. "I have been receiving so many reports about how my disciples of the San Francisco temple cannot be surpassed in distributing my books. Sometimes they are selling as many as seventy *Krsna* books daily."

The beginning of the tidal wave of book distribution in America. By hook or by crook. How did they do it? Kesava used to say, "No secret. Just go out and try." They were determined and enthusiastic.

"By distributing my books profusely, you are giving me great encouragement to translate. And you are all helping me to fulfill the order which my Guru Maharaja gave me. So I am so much grateful to you and I am sure Krsna will bless you a million times over for doing this work."

That famous "million times" line. All ISKCON knew about it. "I hope you all my beloved disciples in San Francisco are in strong health and jolly mood."

Prabhupada includes his upcoming itinerary in the P.S. — Jaipur, Bombay, Nairobi, Mayapur, Hong Kong, Sydney, Tokyo, Hawaii "and then return to U.S."

Srila Prabhupada, as I sit here, a young *brahmacari* interrupted me. Said he's been reading *N arada-bhakti Sutra* and likes it. He said he used to be Steve and now he's Sudama Vipra

dasa. I remained stern because he was interrupting me, but I said something. He wants me to look at some of his recent poetry. I agreed. Srila Prabhupada, I will definitely encourage him with words. That's what you want, or what's the use of being a senior disciple?

The day you came to America, you didn't have any assistant! I could never do what you did. I complain of headaches, but you had two heart attacks on the way to America. In Boston the day you arrived, you felt helpless, but then remembered what was written in the First Canto. *Krsna'katha* will cleanse the heart of the Americans too.

I see the light from your desk lamp shining on your lap. Your left hand is touching the mattress. You have fine hands. The mattress is covered with clean white sheets. The bell is tolling eleven.

October 6, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

(Srila Prabhupada, while seated in this room, you noticed and criticized Nitai dasa's hatchet motion of *pranamas* to you. You said that he was doing it without love or respect. From this room you walked into the servant's quarters and found them sleeping. That was an earlier year. 1977 was different. You withdrew from us gradually until most of the day you lay quietly on your bed, not talking or communicating.

Today you are still with us. If I cannot understand it, that doesn't mean it's not true. I also don't realize how Krsna is with the gopis in *vipralambha*, even after He left Vrndavana.

This morning, Srila Prabhupada, you saw the young Indian woman dancing extravagantly in front of your golden *murti* at

marigala'drati. She was escorted out, but showed up again in the temple room. In both places she made many full *dandavats* before Your Divine Grace. Crazy woman?

If a disciple is pure and full of yearning, you can be with him. As Krsna can talk with us, so can His pure devotee. This is possible due to the internal energy, which can make the impossible possible.

Your finger is pointing out of the hole in your beadbag. Your gaze is fixed at a point on the table. You might be thinking of what to say next in a purport. Your body is tanned, your cloth saffron, brown eyes, light limbs, and you have great determination and powerful, grave realization. Your methods are expert. You cared. You saved souls. You left India and did the best work and got the most mercy from Lord Caitanya. Preaching is not material. Who can do it except the empowered servant?

I worship you and beg for a drop of your preaching *sakti*. I am embarrassed to even admit it. People might wonder, "Why is he asking that? How is he going to preach? That's not his nature." But something impels me to say it. Being near you and thinking of you, if one wants to please you, if one wants to catch Krsna's attention, this is what you recommended. Srila Prabhupada, please never leave me for a moment.

Samadhi Mandir, 4 p.m.

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(Srila Prabhupada, I cannot center important themes in my life. My viewpoint keeps changing according to the hour of day. I want to be steady-minded like you. Envy and distaste for *sadhu'sanga*—these are not good signs. Anyway, I come here to be with you. Earlier today when I sensed I was confused, I looked

forward to coming here. It's an act that is clear in its purpose and outcome—centering on you and coming close to you.

When all the doors are shut in the Mandir, there is still so much open lattice that the sunlight fills the hall. Air circulates. It's an open hall even when it's locked shut. The emptiness makes it silent. There is no temple quite like it. No pictures on the wall, no inscriptions. Everything waits until the altar doors open and his golden form shines out, dressed as a *sannyasi*, with garlands and a beadbag. We sit and wait.

The way it is decorated with marble bas relief—a column of elephants is marching left and another one is marching right. They meet in the center with two elephants touching trunks. I hear an *arati* bell ringing somewhere.

Dear Srila Prabhupada, I can't think of myself all alone with you. You have thousands of followers and you yourself are with the associates of Radha and Krsna in your *nityaAila*. You are also with Lord Caitanya and His many devotees. Yet here I am, with Madhumangala, alone in your temple. Aloneness is also a spiritual truth, or let us say, individuality. Each *gopi* thinks Krsna is only with her. Each cowherd boy thinks that Krsna is looking only at him. In the miraculous *kirtanas* at Jagannatha Puri, each group thinks Sri Caitanya Maha-prabhu is with them alone. Aloneness with the guru is not simply *maya*.

Samadhi Mandir, 4:20 P.M.

opens the side doors to let a worker out, then closes them again. If we want a peaceful circumambulation, maybe now is the time. Please make it clear to me, my lord, how I

should pursue my plan and desire to be chaste and dedicated to you. How I can attain your service best in this life and the next?

At the end of a lecture in Nairobi, a disciple asked, "Lord Krsna advises we think of Him at the time of death. What if we think of the spiritual master, is that as good?"

"Yes," you replied, "because the spiritual master is with Krsna." That's my hope. And who else am I likely to think of at the end? I know that you gave me so much and I can never repay you. I want to fill my consciousness with you as long as I can. Let me remind myself about death. You said it's not chance what we think of at death. Something odd from many years ago may come to mind. Let me think of you. Sincere love crosses all barriers.

Prabhupada's Room, 4:35 P.M.

It was dark in here when we entered. We are the first to come after your afternoon rest. I hope you are not unhappy to see us. We sit in a corner so as not to disturb you.

The letter on your desk is to Sudama, January 1972. You say to him, "You have always served me very faithfully." You pray that Krsna blesses him with a long life to open many temples "and that in this very lifetime you may return back to home, back to Godhead."

Srila Prabhupada, you asked Sudama to arrange a *pandal* in Tokyo and speaking engagements in universities where English is understood. You said that his learning Japanese was of first importance. "If you remain patient and determined . . ."

Good advice for all of us. To have an order like that from Srila Prabhupada!

Srila Prabhupada, you liked it cool and dark like this. Soon you would ask that we let the guests in. Some of them would not be important people. You get into management, temple construction, restaurant, Guesthouse, book printing . . . Your mail would be read to you by your secretary. It wasn't easy to be the head of a worldwide organization and always have to hear cases, like a judge on the bench. But you were *eka-nisthd*, Srila Prabhupada, always serving guru and Krsna without deviation. I want to hear from you.

You installed Deities all over the world. Then you traveled all over the world to preach and keep company with your disciples. Do you remember all that, Srila Prabhupada? The whole world was your preaching field, and still this world has value for your devotees because you taught us how to preach your message and to encourage each other. Radha-Gokulananda, Radha-Rasabiharl, Radha-London-Isvara, Radha-Damodara. I think of you on airplanes and in waiting rooms, in temple rooms and in your quarters around the world, where you were offered a low desk, a water pitcher, a dictaphone. You walked in those rooms in your bare feet. Some of those temples were only rented houses, but you were always interested in the facility and in how the preaching was going, and you always gave ambitious suggestions like the one to Sudama to organize a *pandal* in Tokyo for thousands.

Now a few guests are coming in. They are quiet. The four ceiling fans are rattling as they create a breeze. It's another sweet day of routine. I didn't know what to write before I came here, but your presence always allows me to say something.

Gradually, I'm learning in a simple, relaxed way to think, "I am with Srila Prabhupada in his rooms." I simply state this

fact and write a few notes like, "Straw mats on black marble floors. Curtains closed and sunlight seeping through. Memories of you here." I hope to be able to recapture it even when I'm not here.

There is one relaxation exercise that tells you to remember a peaceful place where there is no stress. I'd like to remember being here in your rooms, jotting notes and looking up to see you always there, assuring me of your presence. When you were here and I was here with you, it was sometimes tense. I was nervous that I wouldn't do the right thing or anxious about my own bodily or mental needs. It's different now.

October 7, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M. •

put on your beadbag in the morning. It's a duty they allow me do because I'm the first one to enter your room each day. I snap on the light (the fans are on all night), come close to you, and prostrate myself while reciting your *pranama-mantras*, clinging to some of its meaning.

Where else do I belong? Am I actually a Staten Island boy? No, if ever I was, that's gone now; it may live in dreams and the mind, but there's no reality to it. This place is as much home to me as anywhere. I say I fear Srila Prabhupada, fear to be in India, fear his order for me to surrender. The bell tolls. But this is my home and I want no other.

It's dark outside. A light bulb illuminates some leaves on a tree. Occasionally, I look up and see the shadowy form of a devotee passing by on his way to the temple.

Srila Prabhupada, I'll go upstairs and answer some letters on your behalf. I am telling them I can't give them reinitiation

or initiation. Better they take it from someone else. Should I talk with my Godbrothers about this? Air it? Keep it in me? What do you want?

You want me to sacrifice and get the higher taste, surrender to guru and Krsna. You want me to taste the happiness of the surrendered soul. You want me to do something for Krsna. We want to get a certificate from Krsna that this devotee has done some nice service. You said Lord Krsna doesn't need our service, but it's for our benefit that He accepts our sincere offerings.

I make these statements of aspiration when I come in here. I should be more silent and not say all that I'm going to do. Shouldn't I instead simply ask for your help?

Coming to you early for inspiration. Begging for purity. On the Jaladuta you prayed to Krsna to enable you to serve your spiritual master. All glories to you, Srila Prabhupada.

Your room is empty right now and I make that same prayer. Others will come now and make their sincere prayers and fill the air with *harinama japa*. So many love you.

Lizard on wall
ants scurrying on mat.
High ceiling.
My death on the way.

She said, "I came here four years in advance" (of her death). Said one should do this because there is no time to chant and hear in the West. She advises all who get notice of death to come here cheerfully and resigned, hopeful of a Krsna conscious departure. I'm not ready for that yet, I say.

I remember in 1966 one night, I was alone with you in your room, asking you a few questions about Bhaktivinoda Thakura's book and other things. You spoke with me, but then said

that I should leave so that you could do your work. I'm not much different twenty-seven years later, but you allow me still to come to you.

Prabhupada's Samadhi Mandir, 4:05 p.m.

J^ll day on the go. Did I stay faithful? Did I misbehave and use your name to authorize wrong acts? In order to be here and commune with you, I need to be faithful and productive at the times when I'm away from here. I'm not perfect in my Prabhupada consciousness, so when I come here it's a solace. You accept me even if I'm not the best.

Now I'm asking for more Prabhupada consciousness for my own life. I want to go where I can get it. If by leaving Vrndavana I could be truer to you and could read your books better, then I'd want to leave here. But while I can, I come to these special places.

As we walked here, the blazing 4 P.M. sunlight was crashing onto the white marble domes of this Samadhi Mandir. The marble is strong enough to take the sunlight and the sunlight beautifies the domes as they bravely shine back, unafraid of the sun's rays. Ahead of us, the side door was open. It reminded me of the entrance to a cave. It looked inviting.

The Mandir isn't open yet, but the boy at the door—he's the one who uses the long pole to chase pigeons—sat up when he saw us approach. We have free entrance because we are devotees of Srila Prabhupada.

Dear master, please be with me. Please appear in my heart and attract me to you. I circumambulated Radha-Krsna in a temple this morning, and I thought of Prabhupada in this

tirtha. I sat in the *matha* and thought of my ISKCON Vrndavana home. That's where I belong.

Prabhupada, tomorrow I will speak about the day you came to America. I've prepared notes, but when I look at them ... I hope I can recall you sincerely and give my appreciation.

~~Sk&D~~

Prabhupada's Room, 4:40 P.M.

There are two entrances to these rooms, external and internal. They gladly give me external entrance because I'm a recognized disciple of Srila Prabhupada, but the internal is much harder. It depends on Srila Prabhupada's special mercy. Let him see that I actually depend on him and work for him.

I said it's all right if Godbrothers or Godsisters see me here. Actually I like to see them here. I'd like to see them enthusiastic to come in here any chance they get, even if it's only for a few moments. It's a beloved chapel and meditation center, a place of wishes and prayer. Here you come to confess to Srila Prabhupada and expect his direction. If ever you are going to receive something like that, it's in here. You work all year in Russia or Brazil or a farm in Canada or Australia, you get roughed up by the material energy, and then you manage to get to Vrndavana "for a refresher." You come to this room.

I tried it today, Srila Prabhupada. I was sitting on a stone floor waiting expectantly for a stressful meeting that I was supposed to attend. It challenged my spirit. Then I thought of this place where the breeze caresses my face and where I sit with my back to the wall on an ample yellow pillow and look at you. I'm quiet and you're quiet, but we commune. I can't always

say what that means, but it's not empty. I come to be with my master and he reciprocates.

In the Radha-Krsna picture over his head, one *gopi* in the foreground looks like she's picking a *tulasi*. Everyone does service. In a different yet similar way, we come to see Srila Prabhupada to render him service.

Again he asks, "What are you doing?"

"I am considering not initiating anymore, but in any case, serving you with my strength, limited as it is. I want to read your books. I want to hear your lectures."

As I write, a large group of Sikhs in shirts and pants have entered, talking. Let's go.

October 8, Prabhupada's Room, 5 a.m.

That person to whom I surrendered in my youth is still my master; this is the same Krsna consciousness, the same room in Vrndavana; neither do I say that I want to go back to the way it was with him. I am happy to be with him in the present. I am trying to get more access and personal contact. I touch his foot now. I didn't used to do that. Now I have an older man's body and a service befitting my age.

I see a picture of Prabhupada on someone's T-shirt, a good black and white image, like an etching. "Do you like it?" he asks. "Yes," I say, and I mean it.

What do I want? To be absorbed in Prabhupada consciousness and trusting and patient that he will and can give me all knowledge and advancement in his own books, his own movement, his own way. I want to worship him. I want to be a

devotee he can be proud of. I want to feel natural affection and flowing reciprocation. I'll work at it even when it's dry or I have some problem with his followers or his institution. I won't quit. He will, protect me from falldown.

That's what I want—the enlivened state of the preacher, which Prabhupada himself exemplified. The connection he had with Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvatī, his blessings he received from him—why can't I have some of that and the confidence that he's always with me, watching my activities? Srila Prabhupada lives forever by his divine instructions and the follower lives with him.

c

Samadhi Mandir, 10 A.M.

e *pujari* is high on an aluminum ladder in the inner sanctum, cleaning. The two hired boys who chase pigeons are sitting in a corner chatting while their poles rest against the walls. On the stairs I imagined someone asking me, "Where are you going?" And I replied, "I have a little ritual where I go to Srila Prabhupada's Samadhi Mandir." Is that what it is, a ritual? Please make it more.

Prabhupada, I tried. I presented what I could in my lecture about your adventures in coming to America. We all know the story, but I wanted to taste real appreciation. How can I come alive? I spoke of your poem written at sea—how you praised your spiritual master and wished to carry out his will. You asked Lord Kṛṣṇa to give you the strength. You revealed your mind to Kṛṣṇa. In Boston you wrote a poem to Kṛṣṇa as your dear friend. You turned to Him in a helpless way. You recalled the verses of *Srīmad' Bhagavatam* as the means to convince the

people of “this terrible place” that they are eternal servants of Kṛṣṇa.

Srila Prabhupada, I am a living witness of your pastimes. I am one of the boys you picked up. When you returned to visit the Boston pier in 1968 you said, “When I first came here, I was alone, but now I have some boys, so if I die, they will continue it.” You lived for this mission. You wanted it to continue. That was your main desire. Prabhupada, it *is* continuing. It is rooted in many countries. I have lived to see it. I want to continue serving you in that role. Please keep me.

After the lecture, a devotee asked, “When Srila Prabhupada visited the Boston pier in 1968, what did he speak of?” I recalled it because I had written notes at that time, “Swami in Boston.” I can’t write exactly in the same way now because you are not visiting us in the same way. You don’t write a letter and say I’ll be there by May 1st. Your plane doesn’t come in to a roaring *kirtana* at the airport. We are with you now only by your *vani*. Therefore, these are the kinds of notes I write now, a writing life offered to him.

As I write this, musing on your activities in the West, a group of pilgrims enters the Krishna-Balaram Mandir. Many of the women have shaven heads and wear no blouses under their wrapped *saris*. Most of these people are thin and the men have loose turbans — wizened old men and women. Srila Prabhupada, you lived with these people. You knew *tyagis* and refined Gaudiya Vaisnavas and Delhi *wallas* and rich men. Still, you came to us and adapted to our Western ways. Or rather, I should say you came West and were untouched by our Western ways. You made everything transcendental wherever you went, whether East or West. I wish to remember you like that.

Prabhupada's Room, 10:35 a.m.

The letter on your desk today is to Hamsaduta, January 1972. He's working nicely in Germany with Krsna dasa. You ask why after so many years, nothing has been done to present his books in the European languages. "Translators are there, all facilities of German first-class printing machines are there—simply we are not serious to do it." You ask for it: "That will be a great help to me." And in the next sentence you ask them to purchase a van and drive it to India. There were always so many tasks to do for you. "What do you think?" And the handwritten P.S.: "Please know it always that I think of you and your wife as very sincere devotees and whenever you think, you can ask me everything about your difficulties."

You were always willing to answer the questions that were on our minds. I once asked you when was the proper time to have sex with one's wife. I also asked you whether we should fight with the Hells Angels and try to kill them. I asked you to come to Boston and install Radha-Krsna. I gave you news of the house we purchased in Allston. You answered all these queries and responded to whatever information we gave you about our services with courage. You told us to take risks for Krsna. Do you remember those old days, Srila Prabhupada? I let them flow through my blood. They were the best years of my life.

Srila Prabhupada, your "best" years of service to your Guru Maharaja came long after your spiritual master's disappearance. You kept your conviction alive for many years. You followed the basic, strong, mainstream order of your spiritual master in a personal way. I shouldn't think that all I can do is to relive old memories. I can still deepen my commitment to your mission by deepening my own service career, in coopera

tion with my Godbrothers. I can write and write and read and read and speak on your behalf.

Srila Prabhupada, it's becoming clearer to me that I should stop initiating for now. It's too much for me. I have too many "followers." I'm caught up now in how to avoid new ones or how to solve the neophyte problems of those I already have. If this makes me freer, then let me use that energy in your service.

Am I the kind of spiritual master who represents you not only in my teachings, but in my caring mood? You cared for us. Please teach me to care for others.

The weather is still hot. You are directing us how to serve in this world and how to go back to Godhead. The cup of water on your desk is stainless steel. Sweet water.

Now we are going upstairs. I have things to say to Madhu, but I feel too quiet to bring them up right now. This place is meant for meditation. Because my mind is too restless to practice silent meditation, I write these notes. The notes are meant to free my mind, to clear out the static, and to open the channels for spiritual commerce. From me to him and him to me.

When meditation is successful, the pure soul looks over to Srila Prabhupada and asks, "Please fill me with your desires. Please fill this empty cup. Please mend this broken vessel. Please breathe life into your expiring disciple. Tap your cane and keep me in line. Accept me as I am. Tell me what I need. Let me simply be with you."

October 9, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

own pleasure is not automatically identical with Srila Prabhupada's pleasure. Nor is my displeasure. This morning in the Samadhi Mandir, the man who took the lead in singing turned me off. Halfway through he tried inducing us all to dance, but no one followed. At the end he looked to me to lead the recitation of the *prema'dvani* prayers, but I refused to make eye contact with him. Finally, he touched me with his hand. I recoiled at first, but then I responded and recited the prayers. I felt bad about being turned off by this man and his ways. Srila Prabhupada, you appreciated him. Fortunately, I was able to make it up later by complimenting him on the nice *kirtana*. But it was a lesson—we are together and I shouldn't be unfriendly or think that I am alone in this movement.

c/Vtadhu told me he too now takes dust from your feet and places his head on your feet. He prays that he can help me to please you, Srila Prabhupada. Such a nice prayer. I hope we can achieve our goals together. It's not automatic, but there has to be love and determination. With the help of other devotees, maybe I'll succeed in the *prayojana* of pleasing Prabhupada.

Samadhi Mandir, 4 p.m.

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<Srila Prabhupada, you know how ISKCON campuses get controversial with "issues." That was going on even when you were here. In 1976, it was the *sannyasis* versus the *grhasthas*

issue. This year it's something else. I don't come to your Man- dir to discuss the issues, but to get away from them.

It's quiet in here right now. Even the pigeon-chaser isn't here. It's blazing hot outside and the radio is blaring over the sound system. This is my bomb shelter, Srila Prabhupada. Please, Prabhupada, let my inner life continue. I want to remember you and not forget you, just as a faithful wife honors her religious relationship with her husband exclusively. It's called fidelity. Honor.

Some people said they liked my lecture on the day that you arrived in America. Someone said, "We were floating in Prabhupada nectar. Only you could have done it." Who am I? I do want to be able to love like that, always researching something you have written or some event or significance in your life story. That work is never finished. The work you did goes on for me. I keep finding novel ways to present my meditations of you and to approach you.

As time passes, our tests change. Memories are harder to retain. After all, everything is occurring within a small span of time, your lifetime and whatever time of my life is left.

In 1966 you told me, "You are a young man. You will live a long time and I will die before long." You asked me to seriously dedicate my "long" life to Krsna consciousness. By your grace, I am doing it. I am no longer a young man and you have gone on to your *nityaAila*.

eJsk&s

CPi ease, Srila Prabhupada, give me the strength and endurance to grow in my attraction to your books. Today a Godbrother was telling me that he was reading your Second Canto purports and that they were powerful and wonderful. I

liked hearing that. I also want to experience that and then describe it to others. This is what I want to accomplish in this life.

Prabhupada's Room, 4:40 P.M.

LJ say so many foolish things, things I don't mean to say. And I allow myself to feel hurts and slights even when people don't mean to hurt me. If they do mean to hurt, or they are merely clumsy or preoccupied, why should I feel so concerned or injured? I have Srila Prabhupada's lotus feet. No one can take them away from me as long as I hold on to them.

The letter on your desk is to Gargamuni Maharaja, January 1972. You gave us the honorable titles, "Swami" and "Maharaja" and then called us by those names. You created our fortune and status. You drew service from us for Lord Caitanya's mission.

In this letter you said the "Goswami" at Radha-Damodara temple had illegally usurped your verandah. You told your disciple not to bother the Goswami, but "simply go and come and see that no interruptions on my rooms are made."

Regarding the verandah: "Most likely you will have to fight a case against him with the District Manager of Mathura."

Today I heard you answer a question about whether one should serve Gaura-Nitai Deities or Radha-Krsna Deities. You said it is not stereotyped. One has to inquire from the spiritual master and receive instruction. How confident we felt when we surrendered to you and you told us what to do, as in this letter. The devotee could come and go from your rooms without disturbing the temple owners, yet be prepared, if Prabhupada

ordered, to take them to court. What did Srila Prabhupada want us to do? We inquired and then tried to carry out his wishes. We were confident that pleasing him was the best aim of life and the best way to please Krsna. The essence of that relationship remains.

I look up and see the sunlight mixed with the open curtains and the shiny leaves outside the window. Scratching a mosquito welt on my arm. My back is tired. The day turns toward 5 P.M.

I feel satisfied to have escaped from the superficiality and turmoil of the day, to come here and to have written in your *tirthas*. (I remember on the U.S.S. Saratoga, I would escape once a day. I won't write how I did it, but strange as the comparison is, I want to say that I need this visit to your rooms and I appreciate it.)

I don't come here out of my own intelligence, I am drawn here by you. You lived among us, Srila Prabhupada, and therefore these places exist in my memory of you. Because they exist, I am drawn to them. My being drawn to you is as natural as iron filings being drawn to a magnet. As soon as I saw the announcement in your storefront window, I went to see you. I have never stopped. You drew me to you. A guru! India! *Bhakti*! The Hare Krsna mantra, the promise of eternal life, Krsna! Your knowledge and words to convince us. A guru for us on the Lower East Side. An escape from our dangerous lives. I must have a relationship with you from my past life. Whatever our relationship is, you draw me to you.

I beg to break through the barriers. "If you love me, then I will love you." As the rainy season creates muddy water in the Ganges and yet people bathe freely there, so the pure devotee is transcendental, despite his appearance of age and infirmity.

It's dark and cool in here. A few visitors wander in. They don't know quite what to make of this room where Srila Pra- bhupada sits in one corner at his desk, as real as life. They feel as if they are interrupting his intimate life, so they hesitate to go further. He is in the cool, dark of his own room, sitting on the white mattress, chanting *japa* softly. But it's all right, they can enter. They can get one of his books. They can become his follower and sit here and write prayers. They can take up a *prabhu'datta'desa* anywhere in the world. Srila Prabhupada is aware of every place in the world. As stated in the First Canto, the guru is in everyone's heart. He knows the Lord's heart, and since the Lord is in all hearts, so is the guru. At least he is in the hearts of all his followers.

You visitors can take up a *prabhu'datta'desa* and then come to Vrndavana to this room and pray to him to bless you. Pra- bhupada, your followers are your instruments. Even if we waver or stray or grow stale, please bring us back to your lotus feet.

October 10, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

cJ had to sneak in here fast to be alone with you, Srila Pra- bhupada. Maybe I won't be able to keep it up once the majority of devotees arrive for the festival and seminars.

They didn't take the beadbag from Srila Prabhupada's hand overnight, so I couldn't serve him by offering it to him this morning. People may think we are crazy always approaching Srila Prabhupada *murtis*, but what do I care for them? They don't know our Vrndavana and the mood of devotion to His Divine Grace.

There is a new letter on your desk, Prabhupada, this time to Kslrodaksayl dasa. He was proposing to print your books in Hindi translation. You approved, but said, "But I can't pay you Rs. 1000 a month from here. That is not possible."

"With full faith in Krsna and the spiritual master, push on this work with full force. We have got a great mission to fulfill, and these books and magazines are the torchbearers of truth which can save the world."

Srlla Prabhupada, may my books be part of your mission? May they carry some of the torchlight which you ignited in this world? Are my books not, in a small way, an extension of the original fire I received from you? I hope so.

People used to gather in this room to hear from him. He could walk around in here, but I don't think he did it much. The whole house was his residence. In most places, he had only one or two rooms, but here he has three on the first floor more on the second floor, and an outside porch, which he sometimes used for composing purports.

Pushing on preaching all over the world. Big problems were brought before him for decision from America and Europe. In India, Srila Prabhupada managed right down to the paisa. Did he like to manage? I don't know, but he did it to serve his spiritual master. Prabhupada started ISKCON and felt obliged to maintain it. He wanted his devotees to manage it, but everyone wanted their case decided by Srlla Prabhupada himself.

Srlla Prabhupada, I have already left the temple to come here and then begin my duties, but I don't want to miss the real point. Coming to your room I see it better. The goal is to please you. What do you want me to do?

Prabhupada, may I write more to serve you and by writing come closer? Can I help others serve you? Give me the intelli

gence. I am not a clone or a carbon copy of you. As a unique soul, I do what I can for your cause. That's how you want it.

I returned the letter to your desk. Breathe in here in a rush, hurriedly, no deep prayer mood, but confident that coming here is effective. My master is teaching me and filling me. I will change. I will develop a taste for better service to him. I can recover what I have lost and gain a new ability to serve him. I am asking for that and surely he will give it.

Prabhupada's Room, 4:35 P.M.

'Dirty, lovable, little kids come out for the 4:30 *arati* at the Mandir. How glowing Srila Prabhupada was—I looked at him up front, then from the right side, then at a distance from the entrance. You can't capture him, he'll escape. You are not so pure.

An Indian man in stylish Western jeans and a sports shirt comes into the room followed by his young son. The man looks around and goes into the next room. What are they looking for? He seems to have overlooked—barely noticed—the possibility of Srila Prabhupada entering his life right here.

October 11, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

'Dear Srila Prabhupada, I led the singing in your *samadhi* this morning. The *pujari* giggles a little when I talk with him—he is a friend and helps me get through "*Gurvastakam*"

without a mistake. It's good to externalize devotion to Srlla Prabhupada with loud singing. The *gurukula* boys were there. By the end of the *kirtana* it was rocking with a good beat.

I am fallen, devoid of deeper feelings, and even theoretical knowledge of *rasa*. Still, I like to stand before Radha-Syama and memorize Their features. Radha wore a long apron today. Krs- na's chest. Now I come before you in your room. I turned on the fan when I entered—for *my* pleasure. How foolish and forgetful I am. Maybe it's too cool for you.

The letter on your desk is to Sudama, January 1972. Sudama was sticking it out in Japan at that time. You wrote to him, "You are setting the example of determination which others may see and follow. In this way, go on increasing and such sincerity is noticed by Krsna. He is helping you to approach nearer and nearer to His lotus feet."

Srlla Prabhupada, your words imply all the mellows of conjugal *rasa* and any other valuable secrets we may wish to learn. Nothing is missing from your instructions. By following your orders, everything will be revealed to us—when we are qualified.

You also asked Sudama to send you blank tapes for recording your lectures in India. "Mark the mail package, 'valueless.'" Srlla Prabhupada, you said you heard that Karttikeya dasa had returned to our camp. "Engage him artfully; he can become a great preacher."

Srlla Prabhupada, when I was singing, I thought of you approving my actions. You are right and devotees are right and my singing is right—everything I'm doing is right, but the quality needs to be increased.

O Prabhupada, may we live in you until we die; may we serve in this life and the next. May we study your words and repeat them with joy and conviction. May we know Krsna and Radha through you.

Samadhi Mandir, 4 P.M.

Just before coming here, Srila Prabhupada, I made an outline for a lecture on the last chapters of *Caitanya Caritamrta*, *Antya Aila*. It leaves me feeling uplifted — “The Lord’s Madness of Separation.” I know nothing about it, but just to read those verses and assemble them for class uplifts me.

Prabhupada, let me be pure. I read in *Siksastakam* how Sri-mati Radharani cares only for Krsna’s pleasure. I want to be like that too, but I want to approach that devotion through you.

You said that we are moved by desire. You said you came to America because you had a desire to preach. Desire also carries us to our next body. Under all my rhetoric, what and whom do I love? What do I actually desire to achieve? Who am I? The answer to those questions determines where I will go and in what capacity I will live and serve. Who would be such a fool as to maintain or cultivate material desire? Prabhupada, you worked to save us, save me. Therefore, you are the personification of the preaching spirit. Please make me in your image.

Prabhupada's Room, 4:36 P.M.

The door was locked at 4:30, so we sat in an outdoor alcove under the low branches of the trees, sipping water from a coconut which the *pujari* gave us as *mahd'prasadam* in the Samadhi Mandir. Now they've let us in.

Selling beadbags and books at the counter. Her duty is to open the rooms and sit there. She wants to do it. We each have some service, voluntary or compulsory. I want to come here. I'm also compelled.

We all hope we can improve. Why else do we come to Vrndavana and roll in its dust and go out on *parikramas* to the most sacred places? We ask for a boon. We ask the dust to grant us a drop of appreciation for Vrndavana and for devotional service. I do the same when I come to Srila Prabhupada's room. Here it's most direct. I face my spiritual master. One might even say it's frightening to come so directly in front of he who can order you to do whatever he likes. One could also be cynical: "You don't *have* to do what he says. You can make up some excuse and say you didn't hear him or you don't believe he can instruct you after his disappearance. Besides, you get headaches."

I'm not *that* fearful or cynical, although I may have a touch of each. I used to like to come before Srila Prabhupada. I fully trusted him. I knew it was in my own soul's interest to do as he said. That full faith of my youth—I want to recapture it. Maybe I'm more surrendered now. Now I take into account more my total self and I'm more aware of my limits. I act maturely on his order. But there was something nice back then. "What do you want me to do? Where shall I go?" Sometimes the tests were too great. He allowed us to express our inclinations.

I'm waiting for the meetings to end so I can go forth and try to do it, to serve Prabhupada without the close support of these *tirtha* visits (I'll miss them).

dxsk&s

^Prabhupada, Prabhupada, the whirring of the fan and its motor remind me that prayer to you is a constant thing. I like to chant Hare Krsna with a sigh and with a tone that goes deeper than the conversations around me. I chant the *mahd'* mantra in service to you.

The letter to Sudama is still on your desk. Someone said if I liked, I could continue to read one of your letters each day when I'm away from here and imagine that I'm in your room. I doubt it will be the same.

October 12, Prabhupada's Room, 5 A.M.

^Prabhupada, my regular visits to your tirthas are coming to an end. The seminar duties are closing in on me. May Lord Nrsimhadeva protect my devotion to you.

They gave me a piece of a *gamcha* you wore in Vrndavana. I will put it on my altar. I had a flash that if death came now, I'd have to accept that too, and the fact that I have no taste for chanting the holy name. I consign my fate to you.

dxsk&s

JHy mind wants to love you, Srila Prabhupada. During *mangala'drati*, I thought how we sometimes use the word "Pra- bhupada" and speak of allegiance to him, but it's not personal, it's vague. We actually forget him. We run "our" institution and use his name. This is done by every group with every different shade of opinion. I'm not saying that no one is sincere, but I want to go beyond saying only socially acceptable things about Prabhupada *only because they are socially acceptable*. It's better to say something real and sincerely attempted in surrender.

For example someone may think, "I find it hard to accept what Srila Prabhupada says about women." On the surface, that sounds like doubt in the spiritual master. Yet it might be said by someone who loves Prabhupada and who follows him with faith. On the other hand, the pat statement that "I accept women as less intelligent because Prabhupada said it" might appear loyal, but might be said by someone less grateful and dedicated to Srila Prabhupada.

I don't want a cotton wadding instead of the real Srila Prabhupada whom I am trying to love. It's obvious I've failed to love and serve him one hundred percent, but I'm trying to improve.

Samadhi Mandir, 10 A.M.

dirty beggar woman is standing in the middle of the Samadhi Mandir. They allow her to take *caranamrta*, which she collects in a clay pot. Then two guards come in and throw her out. One guard gave her a push out the door and the other

slapped his stick on the ground. They didn't want anyone begging in the Mandir.

Srila Prabhupada, do you notice the change in weather?

All he does is chase pigeons all day by clapping his hands. Maybe he even does it at night in his sleep. And I, with a bubbling spring of writing practice, clap my hands to chase away the blues.

You know my fear, Srila Prabhupada, that I will spend my last years coasting and reaping honors as one of your senior- most disciples. "Tell us about the old days with Srila Prabhupada." I want to tell new stories of your presence in my life. Niranjana Swami, for example, told how he witnessed your potency wherever he traveled in Russia and the former Soviet Union. That's up-to-date Prabhupada-Jila. Prabhupada in Bosnia, at the Miami airport, on television, at a conference in Poland where Saunaka Rsi dasa assures the people that we are not a dangerous cult. Prabhupada of the Centennial. And my Prabhupada in the *murti* in my room.

I can go back to those old days, but not as a museum piece. We have to be interested in your life in all its aspects. Is he vital and pure in his own movement? Can I help keep peace? Can I help fight *maya* and work to purge out an anti- Prabhupada spirit?

Live until you die, as the saying goes. Madhu is going to arrange for some devotees to take photographs of these places for me so I can look at the pictures when I'm traveling. I'm leaving soon. Most important, though, is to plant indelible impressions in my mind and memory. I came here day after day. I looked up to him and saw his shiny features and the light reflecting off the bronze.

Jaya Gaurasundara dasa just walked in. I stopped and talked to him and his wife for a few minutes about his son's marriage

and travel. That always happens — our relationship is so domestic. We're a family and we chat and exchange news. If I were more lofty, I could pick up our conversation, but instead, I stopped. It didn't feel right to discuss these things in here in front of Srila Prabhupada.

Marriage . . . cooking . . . airplane tickets . . . but Srila Prabhupada, these are very dear disciples of yours, rare even among Vaisnava Indian families. So many Gujaratis are born as worshipers of Krsna and follow the four rules their whole lives, but how few recognize Your Divine Grace as their guru and see the need to throw off all sentimental Hindu ideas and fully accept Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu as the Supreme Lord.

Prabhupada's Room, 10:30 A.M.

You said that the *brahmana* is the intellectual. He studies *sastra* and writes books. He doesn't have to do the *ksatriya's* or the *vaisya's* work. Krsna doesn't ask Vyasadeva to fight on the battlefield like Arjuna, you said. He asks Vyasa to write books. Yet when Lord Krsna wanted to teach *bhakti-yoga*, He called for His friend, Arjuna. The writer is employed in service, but he isn't necessarily the dearest friend of the Lord just because he can turn words into print. The friend, the devotee with no self-interest, is the Lord's dearmost. Therefore, I must be careful not to be carried away in sheer writing joy and forget for whom it is intended.

The letter on your desk today is to Makhanlal, January 1972. You accepted the devotees he recommended for initiation. You could initiate without limit. "These are all very nice boys and girls, that I can understand." You told Makhanlal to take

charge of the new initiates and to give them guidance on the path back to Godhead. “Practically the leadership of the Krsna conscious society is now in the hands of you, my older disciples, and I am very pleased that you are taking such huge responsibility very seriously. Be sober, cool-headed and always think of Krsna somehow or other.”

Your immortal words flow through us in the exact way that you said them: “Be responsible, cool-headed, sober, and always think of Krsna.”

“There is no doubt this movement will one day conquer all over the world.” Be convinced of the philosophy, keep up the standards of book distribution, cleansing, chanting, daily worship, study, improve—don’t neglect, “And in every way become the perfect Krsna conscious example of angel.”

New garlands have arrived—all orange marigolds. A small, delicate garland for the pictures—roses alternating with white “*parijatas*.” The letter on your desk, under the water cup, flaps in the breeze. Sparrows chirp outside. The distant thud of a drum, like a heartbeat, coming from the twenty-four hour *kirtana* in the temple. Black floors, black floors. I will remember this place.

October 14, Prabhupada’s Room, 5 A.M.

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tSrila Prabhupada, I think this will be the last morning I’ll come here early in the morning to be alone with you.

I am bursting with news, but better I not speak it. Better I hear what you want for me.

I heard you yesterday, Srila Prabhupada. You were speaking on the disappearance of your Guru Maharaja in 1973 in Los

Angeles. You told how you first met him and how he asked all his disciples, especially his educated ones, to preach in the West. At the end of this talk your voice cracked and you cried in gratitude to your disciples. You said, "You are all helping me to serve my Guru Maharaja. Thank you very much." It was valuable for me to hear such gratitude and feeling. You command us and that is your right. You even said an astrologer read your palm, "Your order will be followed." Yes, we will all follow your order. Now I know a little better how soft at heart you are and how deeply grateful to your disciples when they work on your behalf.

Prabhupada, one of my disciples is sick. The doctors say he may have tuberculosis. His name is Rama-raya dasa, and he reads your books more than anyone I know practically. He also distributes them. He loves Vrndavana-dhama and to serve Radha-Syama. I hope he won't die young, but will live to develop his Krsna consciousness. Yet, one by one we have to go. Please let Rama-raya think of you at the end, Srila Prabhupada, and let him remember Lord Krsna. Please allow me to help him.

dxk&s

Prabhupada's Room

After the class tonight, we went into Prabhupada's room and had a pleasant surprise. Fifteen *gurukula* boys were sitting around your desk chanting. I think they were really talking

among themselves when we entered, but then they all stood up respectfully. I asked them what they were doing and they said that they chanted *japa* at this time. Then they all sat down and began chanting *japa* earnestly.

I chanted *gayatri*, and as I did so, I tried to think of the meaning of the prayers. When I thought of the verse about how Prabhupada gives pleasure to Krsna, I remembered how I used to chant that prayer last year, praying that Prabhupada would reveal to me his form in the spiritual world. Now I think I should pray to Prabhupada to reveal to me whatever he wants to reveal to me. I only wish to serve him and to know him more and more intimately.

When I chanted the last two mantras, I almost laughed to myself how little I realize of those prayers. I chant them because they're the mantras Prabhupada gave me, so I can only hope that someday they will mean something to me. Prabhupada gave them to me knowing that my faithful chanting of the Sanskrit vibrations would purify me. I want to know more of Prabhupada's understanding.

After thinking all this, I glanced at Prabhupada and realized that I simply want to know him as he is, in the form in which he appeared to us – that golden *sannyasi* preacher who came to us in New York in 1966.

The whole visit to his rooms was a real treat this evening, especially being able to chant with those boys. I chanted a couple of rounds and thought, "*This is the nectar. I have to leave Vrndavana, but when I come to Prabhupada's room, I will always see this place as full of nectar. This is what I came to Vrndavana for, to chant with the devotees in Prabhupada's presence.*"

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