

Begging for the Nectar of the Holy Name

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Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

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A person who is actually a follower of Śrī Bhakti-
vinoda Ṭhākura must immediately accept the re-
quest of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu by offering
respectful obeisances unto His lotus feet and thus
beg from Him the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*. If one
is fortunate enough to beg from the Lord this Hare
Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, his life is successful.

—C.c., *Ādi* 9.36, purport

Preface

Begging for the Nectar of the Holy Name is an account of a three-week period where I concentrated on improving my *japa*. In a sense, it can be seen as a sequel to *Japa Reform Notebook* written ten years later. In the earlier book, I took the stance of a teacher of *japa*; in this book, I feel more like a practicing student.

In *Begging For the Nectar of the Holy Name*, I have had to confess that I am still struggling on the lower limits of *nāmāparādha* and *nāmābhasa* (offensive chanting and shadow chanting). I have also given śāstric evidence and personal realization about the goal of chanting.

We can all benefit from this range of primary to advanced instructions. We should be more advanced than we are, but since we are not, we must deal with our level of advancement honestly. For example, it is best to sit erect when chanting, but often devotees fall asleep when they adopt this posture. This is a basic instruction meant to help us concentrate on the chanting, and if we cannot follow it, it is our disqualification. So we hear the instruction but have to adjust. Instead of sitting, we may pace back and forth. Similarly, we are meant to think of the name, form, qualities, and pastimes of Kṛṣṇa

while we chant, but we are rarely even attentive to the sound vibration. Our inability to be attentive is another disqualification. Until we are able to stay awake during *japa* and to hear the mantra above the mind's disturbances, then thinking of *kṛṣṇa-līlā* will not be possible. Therefore, we should hear instructions in the basics of chanting to help us progress toward spontaneous love.

In this book (and in *Japa Reform Notebook*), I have tried to allay any fears that I am advocating we all become full-time *bābājīs*. Service to the guru will enhance our ability to chant, and therefore we should chant within a life filled with service appropriate to our *varṇa*, *āśrama*, age, and propensity. Chanting is never performed independently, but is always done under the guidance of the spiritual master.

During these three weeks, I hand-lettered two signs which I posted in my room. One was a quote from a song by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī:

Duṣṭa mana! Tumi kisera vaiṣṇava? My dear wicked mind, what kind of a devotee are you? Simply for cheap adoration you sit in a solitary place and pretend to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, but your chanting is all cheating.

This sign served as a reminder that I was not special for having taken time out just to chant; rather, I was in need of remedial work. As soon as I forgot my humble position, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura reminded me that I had become a cheater.

I placed the other sign on a different wall. It is a quote from Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura:

Nāma-kara bahir haya, nāma nahi haya. Merely reciting the external syllables of the holy name does not mean that one is actually chanting the holy name.

This served to remind me that my poor chanting needed to be rectified. Therefore, there was an important reason for my taking time out from normal activities to do “woodshed” work for *japa* reform. I do not want to remain in this condition, chanting only the outer form of the holy name.

I kept this diary as a record of my endeavors, but with the awareness that only Kṛṣṇa’s mercy can make *harer nāma* appear on our tongues, in our ears, and in our hearts. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

[Devotional service] is a great transcendental science and begins with the process of hearing and chanting the name, fame, glory, etc., of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Revival of the dormant affection or love of Godhead does not depend on the mechanical system of hearing and chanting, but it solely and wholly depends on the causeless mercy of the Lord. When the Lord is fully satisfied with the sincere efforts of the devotee, He may endow him with His loving transcendental service.

—*Bhāg.* 1.7.6, purport

Midway through my three week *japa-vrata*, my interest was sparked with a new awareness of the connection between *japa* and remembering Kṛṣṇa’s

pastimes when I began to study the verse by Rūpa Gosvāmī in *Nectar of Instruction*. Prabhupāda called this verse (text 8) the essence of all instructions. But rather than tell you about it here, I will let you read about it in this account of my three-week endeavor to chant with more love and attention. I hope you will derive some benefit from this book in your own struggles to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Part One, Introduction

February, Stroudsburg, Pa

I acknowledge that my *japa* is the “weak sister” in my *sādhana*, and yet it is the most important. My writing tendency is strong, and my ability to read with concentration is not so bad when compared with my *japa*. I am proposing that I take three weeks out in Italy to improve my chanting of the holy names. Writing can help my *japa*. This is the inspiration behind keeping this notebook.

This morning I was chanting *japa* with the usual inattention and lack of taste, but then suddenly I had a feeling of meeting the holy names for a few moments. I have always liked chanting *japa*. It *has* been a strong element in my *sādhana*. Or rather, I have always liked the *idea* of solitary *nāma-bhajana* and the simplicity and beauty of this form of *bhakti-yoga*.

It is difficult to express exactly what my friendly meeting with *harer nāma* was like this morning, but it went something like this:

Me: “My dear Harer Nāma, we have known each other for many years. It will be a great shame if I don’t develop love for You and don’t allow You to pervade my life.”

Harer Nāma: "Learning to love Me means you have to pay specific attention. I am Kṛṣṇa. My form, qualities, and pastimes are nondifferent from me."

There was a little more to it than that—the moment eludes me now—but I felt like the holy name was inviting me to recognize that I have let my relationship with Him dwindle down to a poor state.

So here I am, planning three weeks in Italy to simply try and re-establish a strong relationship with *harer nāma*. I plan to chant at least thirty-two rounds a day, to read relevant *śāstras* on chanting, and to keep this journal. The Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I am meant to chant it in spontaneous love for Them rather than as a mechanical duty. I need the name's mercy: "Please grant me devotion to You."

I cannot *write* my way through this attempt at praying for devotion; the notebook is just a reminder, a helper, and a place to report and think out my *japa* life.



February 27

A few years ago when I was in Mayo, Ireland, I chanted thirty-two rounds a day with the following schedule: twelve rounds on rising (then four during a walk outdoors); eight rounds after a post-breakfast rest; and eight rounds after a post-lunch rest.

My planned retreat is a month from now. What can I do *right now* to feel the friendly reciprocation of the holy name? He is my dearest friend. How to understand that? (A good sign that my consciousness is turning to *japa*: I'm chanting during the night, between dreams, etc.)

Today, I rose at 1 A.M., said brief prayers, and started *japa* by 1:10 A.M. I kept going for two hours and chanted twelve rounds. But *I don't think of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes when I chant*. Why is that? I say I don't have time for it, that I can't stop to read something that will remind me of *Vraja-līlā*.

Still, it is worthwhile to focus on chanting and hearing, to try to escape the plan-making mind. At the chanting retreat, I will be able to reduce all my other activities and concentrate on *praying* the holy names.

Saturday, alone in room for almost one and a half hours of *japa*, 2:30–3:45 P.M. *Something*, a little spark of earnestness, was there and I was attentive. Later, I became sleepy.

Śrī Nāmāṣṭaka: "O Harināma! The tips of the toes of Your lotus feet are constantly being worshiped by the glowing radiance emanating from the string of gems known as the *Upaniṣads*, the crown jewels of all the *Vedas*. You are eternally adored by liberated souls such as Nārada and Śukadeva. O Harināma! I take complete shelter of You" (text 1).

March 5, Long Island, New York, 4:30 A.M.

I stayed awake for thirteen rounds, but it is amazing that I hardly once paid attention to what I was doing. The mind's demands and thoughts dominated. One doesn't pray, doesn't hear the mantra, doesn't *think* Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra . . . This is poor chanting. I hope that by doubling my quota to thirty-two rounds, I will start to listen.

It is all based on desire. Do I actually *want* to improve? What is my motive in trying to increase the quantity of rounds I chant? It shouldn't be merely a *vaidhī* concept—"you *should* improve, the scriptures say so" . . . I should be aiming to learn how to *beg* for the nectar of the holy name. I want to feel the name's mercy and I want to feel my lack of qualification. Please let me pray to improve.

•

11:00 A.M.

"O Harināma, O name sung by the sages, O transcendental syllables that bring bliss to the people, even if you are spoken only once, and even if you are spoken disrespectfully, you at once remove the many harsh sufferings of everyone" ("*Nāmāṣṭaka*," text 2).

•

March 6, Santo Domingo

In a sense, planning a *japa* retreat is not natural. One could say that it is artificial to set time aside to simply chant. Don't we have to learn how to chant even while carrying out the duties that have been assigned to us? I could also say that my plan to write about it is artificial. But one has to jump-start the engine when the battery goes dead. You can't sit around waiting for something exciting to happen. Let me therefore post advertisements on the walls of my mind: "Coming Soon! Twenty-one-Day *Japa* Retreat with Journal. Chance For Revival."

The temple president here insists that all devotees stay in the temple room after *tulasī-pūjā* and chant two rounds together. He tries to encourage devotees to stay in the temple room for the duration of their sixteen rounds because the Deity and *tulasī* help one to be attentive. I was attentive, at least while he was telling me this.

"O sun of the holy name, even the dim light of Your early dawn gives the sight of pure devotion to those who are blind to the truth. What learned person in this world is able to describe Your transcendental glory? ("*Nāmāṣṭaka*," text 3).

•

March 8

"The *Vedas* declare that although meditation on impersonal Brahman cannot bring freedom from

past karma, O Holy Name, Your appearance at once makes all karma disappear" (*"Nāmāṣṭaka,"* text 4).

I say writing and chanting can help each other. In a negative sense, it is possible for writing to spoil the purely private nature of prayer. At worst, prayer and chanting can become subjects to write about rather than the internal practices that they are. I am aware of that danger, and therefore, I will try to use my writing as prayer. The writing should not draw energy from the prayer life, but infuse it with fresh energy by helping me to dig deep into my heart.

"O Holy Name, I pray that my love for You in Your many forms, such as Aghadamana (crusher of Aghāsura), Yaśodānandana (son of Yaśodā), Nanda-sūnu (son of Nanda), Kamalayanayana (lotus-eyed), Gopicandra (moon of the *gopīs*), Vṛndāvanendra (king of Vṛndāvana), Praṇatakaruṇa (merciful to the surrendered souls) and Kṛṣṇa, may greatly increase" (*"Nāmāṣṭaka,"* text 5).

"O Holy Name, You are manifest in two forms: (1) The Supreme Person described by the holy name, and (2) the sound vibration of the holy name. We know that the second form is more merciful than the first. Even a person who commits many offenses to the first form, may become always plunged into an ocean of bliss by serving the second with his voice" (*"Nāmāṣṭaka,"* text 6).

I listened again to a Godbrother's speech on the disappearance day of Śrīla Prabhupāda, 1991. He

said that the only way followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda can make advancement is by pleasing Prabhupāda in his preaching mission. We fall asleep when we go to chant our rounds and we get tired when we read—we make so many mistakes. But by spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we will receive the blessings of Lord Caitanya and develop love of Kṛṣṇa. My Godbrother said Prabhupāda wanted two things from us: that we preach, and that we develop love of God. Unless we advance in attachment to Kṛṣṇa, how can we distribute it to others?

I accept these points. It helps me to appreciate that my present work of traveling and preaching in the Caribbean is not a distraction from my desired *bhajana*; rather, it is the required austerity I must perform to earn the right to perform *bhajana*. Preaching validates my desire to take a prayer retreat in a month because I will be coming straight from the active field. When the twenty-one days are over, I will again go back to the active field.

“O name that destroys the many sufferings of those who take shelter of You, O name that is the form of delightful and intense spiritual bliss, O name that is a festival of happiness for Gokula, O perfect and complete holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa, I bow down and offer my respects to You. I bow down and offer my respects to You” (*Śrī Nāmāṣṭaka*, text 7).

Attitude for *japa*: be small and awake, like a forest animal.

As I read of great devotees, I realize that I am nothing in comparison with them. The great devotees actually *love* Kṛṣṇa, and they desire to give Him the topmost pleasure. Is this my goal in wanting to improve my *japa*? If my desire to improve is not related to a desire to please Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, then what do I expect to gain by extra time out for *japa* or extra rounds?

“O life of Nārada’s *vinā*, O flood of the waves of sweet nectar, O holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa, please sweetly appear on my tongue” (“*Nāmāṣṭaka*,” text 8).



March 12, Puerto Rico (three weeks and two days
until the *japa* retreat begins)

I want to include in my first chapter of “*japa* life,” a statement about the connection of *japa* to *rasika* study. I am approaching improvement of *japa* from a quantitative point of view. One might say that this is *vaidhī-bhakti*. What am I doing to nurture my desire to perform more spontaneous service?

But the first stages of *japa* are the appreciation of the mercy of the holy name and regret for sins and for my fallen nature. This is what I am trying to cultivate. In other words, I feel that by chanting an increased quota, I will better be able to fight against inattention. Paying attention to the holy name will enable me to surrender to Him, and that, in turn,

will help me enter the more advanced stages of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

I cannot neglect *harer nāma* and vault myself into *rāgānugā-bhakti*. I will not be able to understand the connection of *japa* with *mādhurya-rasa* if I fail to pay attention when I chant. Thus the retreat is connected to my attempt to make serious advancement. The writing is integral also—the writing clarifies and releases thoughts and emotions and pushes me ahead.

•

March 18

Someone wrote to me, “I understand you are particularly strong on *japa*.” I wish it were true. Perhaps I emphasize *japa* as a compensation: I don’t do outward preaching well, so I seek shelter in the “easy” practice of chanting on beads.

I have always loved the idea of chanting *japa*. I like the idea of sitting and intoning the Lord’s names in love and separation. Now that I am learning of *rāgānugā*, spontaneous devotional service, I desire to link *harer nāma* to meditation on *Vraja-līlā*.

•

March 23, Guyana

Today my *japa* was especially poor because I’m ill, but I still had to lecture this morning on a *Śrīmad-*

Bhāgavatam purport that states, “Inattentive hearing is offensive.”

This leads to thoughts of my upcoming *japa* retreat and the general advice: live a life conducive to attentive chanting and hearing. In *Nectar of Instruction*, Prabhupāda writes that tasteless chanting is a disease. It is cured by “regular cultivation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.” He states, “The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is especially meant for creating an atmosphere in which people can take to the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra” (text 7, purport). Here, Śrīla Prabhupāda means the beginning stages, but it has to continue, that good atmosphere for chanting, or else twenty years later we will still suffer from the old disease.

The ideal situation is described in *Nectar of Instruction*, text 8, “. . . one should utilize one’s full time—twenty-four hours a day—in nicely chanting and remembering the Lord’s divine name, transcendental form, qualities and eternal pastimes.” Reside in Vṛndāvana, or live there at least in the mind. ISKCON should be conducive for chanting, not otherwise. It is up to me to find it, fight for it—make the mind a friend, see the world as auspicious. Today I couldn’t do it, but . . .

I would like to read over *Japa Reform Notebook* during the retreat. There was a special positive energy occurring during the time I compiled *JRN*. What was it? What was the lesson? Can I learn it again?



March 30, Trinidad

“The Lord’s holy name is always present, therefore it is the most efficient process” (*Harināma-cintāmaṇi*, p. 10).

The *śāstras* state that the holy name of Kṛṣṇa is a touchstone (*nāma cintāmaṇiḥ kṛṣṇaś*). “A touchstone can grant all desirable objects . . . To a surrendered devotee, it offers pure love of Kṛṣṇa” (*HNC*, p. 12).

Fill your thoughts with praises of *harer nāma*; listen with faith to the statements of *harer nāma*’s potency. Then as you go on limping through your poor *japa*, it may become infused with association from the reminders of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura.

“Always situated in pure goodness, the holy name descends to this world in the shape of letters as the complete incarnation and embodiment of the highest sweetness: *rasa*” (*HNC*, p. 12).

In the beginning, you will have to chant extra rounds with no additional satisfaction except for the poor fact of numerical increase itself, and some faith that this will help.

If you are going to your prayer retreat in the mood of spiritual sense gratification, then you will never be able to taste the *rasa* of the holy name. The pure holy name produces *kṛṣṇa-prema*—the desire to please Śrī Kṛṣṇa. If you do not chant seeking to please Lord Kṛṣṇa and His internal energy, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, then whatever you taste in *japa* will be an insignificant shadow of the actual taste of *harer*

nāma. (I have gathered these conclusions just after reading *Śrī Prema-saṁputa*, "The Love Locket," by Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, wherein the topmost form of pure love is revealed in the words spoken by Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.)

I am ignorant of the pure motives for loving and serving Kṛṣṇa. I only know that I have been chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra for what seems to be a long time and I still don't derive *rasa* from the name. It is self-interest that drives me to improve, but still I hope that Lord Hari will be kind to me and show me the true path of chanting with devotion. I am chanting on the order of my spiritual master, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, and his order is all-auspicious.

I am sorry that I have so far failed to taste the nectar. Perhaps it means that I am afraid to actually surrender and go through the required austerities and purification. Dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, dear Śrīla Prabhupāda, you see this fool. Please give him the right direction.

Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura said to Lord Caitanya: " . . . chanting the holy name is the prime religious activity of a Vaiṣṇava. From the holy name gradually blossom the Lord's form, qualities and pastimes. The entire panorama of Lord Kṛṣṇa's pastimes is present in the holy name. You have personally declared that Your name is the highest Absolute Truth" (*HNC*, p. 15).

Realistically, I tell myself, I cannot expect to attain *śuddha-nāma* just by a quota increase and some striving in prayer. *Śuddha-nāma* will appear when my all around devotional service is free of *anarthas*. “One obtains love of Kṛṣṇa only after reaching this stage of pure chanting.” At least I am able to rid myself of the Māyāvādī conception that imagines Lord Kṛṣṇa’s name and Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself are different entities. Or *can* I free myself of this? At least theoretically, I accept the śāstric conclusions in this regard, but I don’t yet realize Kṛṣṇa in name or form or qualities or activities. I have to keep reminding myself—this is Kṛṣṇa, the nectar for which I am always anxious.

Sambandha-jñāna: knowledge that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead and I am His eternal servant. If one doesn’t understand this, his chanting remains in *nāmābhasa* (the shadow of the pure name). “By pure chanting and by following the rules of *sādhana* as instructed by guru, *sādhū* and *śāstra*, one slowly but surely acquires *kṛṣṇa-prema*—love of Godhead. But *nāmābhasa* chanting can never give *kṛṣṇa-prema*” (HNC, p. 23).

“He [the Māyāvādī] must chant while continuously shedding tears of contrition; only then can he invoke the mercy of the holy name” (HNC, p. 26).

“If the *chayā-nāmābhasa* chanter is not contaminated by atheistic concepts, then he has a good chance. His position is that he is ignorant about the potency of the holy name, but it is the inherent

nature of the holy name to impregnate that knowledge into the chanter's heart. . . . once the clouds disperse, the sun shines through in full glory. The chanter gains great benefit from taking shelter of a bona fide spiritual master and in a short time is able to attain the pure name and *kṛṣṇa-prema*" (HNC, p. 27).



March 31, on the plane

I had nightmares while we were flying, but I took to the continual chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra *within*, and I was not afraid. During the nightmare, I kept struggling to wake up and I did, repeatedly, and chanted. But then I let go and chanted within the nightmare and nothing could harm me.



April 1, Rome temple

I want to go to our prayer retreat as soon as possible, a secluded place where I can be alone, chant thirty-two rounds, and write about it. And yet this morning in the temple, chanting *japa* with the devotees, isn't this also an ideal place for prayer? Others are also intent and committed to repeating the holy name for two hours at a stretch. It is *not* distracting to chant together like this. Distraction is all in the mind. My own mind is filled with plans

for the future and with impressions from the long plane trip here.

This evening I lectured on the holy name. I am trying to prepare myself for my own attack on inattentive chanting. I am not a hypocrite, but it's just so ironic that I, a poor chanter, always find myself speaking about trying to chant with love and taste.

Tonight's class was lively. I told jokes and gave examples. The audience was interested. Some of the devotees were obviously deeply concerned about their own *japa*. One man asked about continuous chanting. He said there are two scriptural statements that seem to be in contradiction: a *śāstra* which states that you can chant for many lifetimes and not get love of God, and the *Padma Purāṇa* statement that the cure for offensive chanting is to chant continuously (*C.c.*, *Ādi* 8.16). I responded by saying that even though our chanting is offensive, we can still chant, but we must try to improve. We can pray, "My dear Lord, I have read the statement that offensive chanting cannot bring love of God, but I myself cannot improve my *pramāda*. So I am chanting continuously in hopes that You will give me Your mercy. Only by Your mercy can love of God descend."

M. asked me how we can take better care and have more dedication to our whole devotional life so that the *bhakti* will carry over into the two or three hours spent in *japa*? I praised the world of *bhakti*. Śrīla Prabhupāda has given us a society of

devotees, *prasādam*, Deity worship, melodic *kīrtanas*, etc., in which we can worship the holy name. Prabhupāda did not give us the same austere conditions accepted by the *yogīs* in the Himalayas as they sat in mountain caves and chanted mantras. Yet there is an austere element to it—we have to face the stark fact that we have no desire to chant. At least for some time, we will have to chant without taste while serving honestly in Prabhupāda's mission.

Part Two

April 3, Travel and Arrival Day

Blessings upon us from Śrī Pañca-tattva. How foolish I was to think that I could not relate to these Deities or that they were not full of *rasa* for me. This morning, as we were about to depart, I glimpsed Their mercy and the bliss of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra in Their presence. The Deities with upraised arms! They increase the ocean of bliss and give us the taste of the nectar for which we are always anxious. I seek Their blessings for *japa* reform. May I live always in the association of Śrīla Prabhupāda's devotees.

Yesterday, a person new to the temple told me she thought "it wasn't necessary that we put eyeglasses on Śrīla Prabhupāda during the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class and changed the Deities' dresses every day." I asked her, "What *is* necessary? We do it because we want to render more loving service to Śrīla Prabhupāda and the Deity." This morning too, I looked over to Prabhupāda while singing—is it necessary? Yes, I need Śrīla Prabhupāda. His *mūrti* form enables me to see him.

En Route to Mahāvākya's House

Remembrance of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes and the chanting of *harer nāma* occur in two ways: *āroha-panṭha* and *avaroha-panṭha*, by the ascending and descending methods. When we try to chant and remember by our own endeavor, that is the ascending method. The way is beset with many obstacles as our mind presents so many thoughts. Of course, we have to chant anyway, we have to work; but only when the *guru-mantra* appears of itself, descending by the mercy of Lord Kṛṣṇa or His associates, or by our *gurudeva's* blessing. Only then are we free of obstacles in *śravaṇam-kīrtanam*.

My *japa* increase will be sheer endeavor, but I am sure some mercy will come too.

(Writing this in the van. It is a cold morning drive to our destination. Just as the sun rises, we suddenly see the massive, snow-covered mountains we have been driving through up close, via the Italian tunnel system. Cold mountains—my heart, the rock edifice of inattentive *japa*. It's an exciting sight. Gray sky outlining the peaks, God's majesty and mystery. These are the surroundings for our retreat.)

When *hari-kathā* is spoken by a *rasika* devotee, that *hari-kathā* is Kṛṣṇa Himself. The pure name is Kṛṣṇa, the son of Nanda Mahārāja (*'bhinnatvān nāma nāminoḥ*). When such *hari-kathā* or *nāma* descends, then there is no sleepiness, laziness, or distraction.

(We come out of a tunnel and suddenly there is morning light gleaming on the mountains—a vista of bridges and roads below, layers of clouds above. And always the still, cold, deep, snow-covered mountains. Madhu and the Renault van are both competent, yet I am aware that everything is hanging together fragilely. Only God’s grace protects us and maintains us.)

There is no *āroha*, no *bhaya*, when Śukadeva Gosvāmī speaks. Mahārāja Parīkṣit forgets all else. This is the best *hari-kathā*. Kṛṣṇa enters in the door of one’s heart and removes all offenses and *anarthas*.

We don’t hanker for Kṛṣṇa like Mahārāja Parīkṣit. Our pasts and futures are crowded with mental images and sense perceptions, but when we hear with *śraddhā*, we too can forget all else and chant and hear.

When Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes appear to a pure devotee, they don’t come in chronological order. Whatever appears, the devotee remembers. When a *sādhaka* is trying to remember Kṛṣṇa by the ascending process, he tends to speak or write his thoughts in a very organized way. The spontaneous, descending remembrance is more powerful. Often in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, when Śukadeva Gosvāmī recalls *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, he does so without adherence to strict chronology.

How can I link my *japa* to Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes? How can I remember the *līlās* Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī describes in prayers like *Vilāpa-kusumāñjali*? I want to go beyond my own endeavor, yet I can’t force

Kṛṣṇa to appear. I am left with what Śrīla Prabhupāda told us from the beginning, "Pray and endeavor."

•

12 noon

We have arrived at Mahāvākya's house. It is unseasonably cold here. My writing hand is also "cold," unwilling to get started.

Mahāvākya and his wife welcome us. We don't know them very well and she doesn't speak English, but my purpose is to keep to myself, chant, and try to improve.

There are farms on all sides, no close neighbors, and it is quiet. Looks like there's a road I can walk on in the early morning with no traffic to speak of, but hilly. It's cold. Even to lie down and rest for a few minutes you have to get under all the covers to keep warm.

I put my books, papers, pens, and other stuff all over the room. I put my pictures on an altar. I probably won't be doing much reading, although it always helps me focus. This is a *japa* retreat. Hope I don't catch colds or get too many headaches. Hope I don't feel too "dead" out here in the country, taking time away from active preaching. Maybe the weather will warm up.

•

5:00 P.M.

You will have lots of time—at least it will seem like that. Even if thirty-two rounds takes six hours, you still have time. Throughout the day, these three activities: chanting *japa*, writing, and reading (or hearing a tape). After about a week, then perhaps you can add other activities: preparing for the seminar or proofreading *Remembering Śrīla Prabhupāda*. But don't do too many things and don't abandon the "vow." When you think of doing less chanting, remember the purport about being tolerant in order to chant:

"There may be so many impediments for a person who is chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. Nonetheless, tolerating all these impediments, one should continue to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare, so that at the end of one's life one can have the full benefit of Kṛṣṇa consciousness" (Bg. 8.5, purport).

The verse *tṛṇād api* also states that one has to be more tolerant than a tree in order to go on chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. This includes tolerating dryness and inability to make a prayer from the heart.

Have faith in the process. Simply work as a servant of the name and the diary. Be also in a quiet, yet celebrative mood. I am not here to punish myself.

From *Harināma-cintāmaṇi*, p. 33: "One who humbly says he is a poor soul surrendered to Lord Kṛṣṇa, who constantly chants Kṛṣṇa's name, is a real *sādhū*."

"The purity of a Vaiṣṇava is judged by how much attraction or *rati* he has for the holy name. It has nothing whatsoever to do with his official status as a Vaiṣṇava, or his wealth, erudition, youth, pleasing appearance, strength or following" (pp. 34–35).



April 4, 2:10 A.M., first day of proposed
thirty-two rounds quota

Nāma-kara bahir haya, nāma nahi haya, "Merely reciting the external syllables of the holy name does not mean that one is actually chanting the holy name" (Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura).

Free-writing means as much as possible. An immediate parallel to my *japa*. Is this my life, running along superficially?

A picture of Rādhā on my desk and the saying, "Śrīmatī Rādhikā is the teacher of the mellows of conjugal love. Pure love between Rādhikā and Mādhava is meant to be discussed and contemplated" (Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura).

When will the day come? You want an answer like King Khaṭvāṅga? You just want a figure? A number like twelve lifetimes or a hundred life-

times or immediately? Will a number make you happy?

I chanted seven rounds so far this morning. Were they “good”? Good rounds have come to mean, “I didn’t fall asleep. I got them done at a fast clip. I paid attention to the sound.”

When pretensions or hopes for thinking of Kṛṣṇa fail, then we return to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s basic instruction, “Just hear. Chant and hear.”



Snapshots

Every day I want to take a photo of Prabhupāda and comment on it. I think it will help focus me. A *japa* retreat without being close to Śrīla Prabhupāda is useless.

This is a picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda walking on the road in Māyāpura, around 1975, surrounded by disciples. He seems to be moving quickly. Hari-śauri is just starting to unfold Prabhupāda’s *cādar*. Puṣṭa-Kṛṣṇa Swami is looking at the controls of the tape recorder. The microphone isn’t visible yet. I think I am there somewhere in the middle ranks; one of the upraised *daṇḍas* is mine. We negotiate our places. It’s almost like a game, a sport, like soccer or football. Śrīla Prabhupāda is the central, main figure—where he moves, we move.

The gate has already been built. Oh, now I see—Śrīla Prabhupāda is *returning* from the walk. The

tape recording is complete and the *cādar* is being folded because Prabhupāda doesn't need it anymore. Golden clothes and his skin a darker golden hue, as he walks in Gauracandra's land. He holds a rose in his left hand.

I cannot know the mind of the *ācārya*. His life is public, shared with hundreds of devotees to whom he is giving Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Śrīla Prabhupāda is coming back from a walk, heading for the temple and the grand routine there—ringing the bell, circumambulating the altar, worshiping Rādhā-Mādhava—then giving the lecture. He looks very simple and small—one hesitates to say “ordinary.” The snapshot has caught or distorted an image where Prabhupāda doesn't look like a grand monarch. He is obviously the central figure, surrounded by worshipful disciples, but his simplicity has been caught by the camera as he heads for the temple pageantry.

My dear Śrīla Prabhupāda, I am writing this almost twenty years later, trying to be as true and honest as possible. The falsity, the “routinization of charisma,” closes in on us. We fight it off, but that sometimes means we have to appear rude or rough. We don't ever mean to be that way toward you. But we have to clear the falsity that gathers around your name and form—whether it's my fault or time's fault or no one's fault, like dust on a mirror it has to be brushed away. No one should think I am trying to brush away Śrīla Prabhupāda himself or reverence to him, but the dust and the

false figures and the wrong attitudes *and the lies*. Get rid of lies.

I've come here to chant, to chant the same Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra Prabhupāda gave me in 1966. Eternal mantra sound. I want to join it, to reform.

From *Japa Reform Notebook*:

"The power of bad habits is such that it may even become a bad habit for life . . ." (p. 8).

" . . . after chanting for years, you are still inching along in the vast stretches of the intermediate zone" (p. 10).

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa. One doesn't know what to say or do to improve. I have to be tender and demanding with myself and accept that all I can do is try. I am submitting to a timed quota and that is humbling. Part of me wants to be more *rasika*. I don't want to wait for this. I tend to suspect that my increased quota is just more *vaidhī-bhakti*, that it is not connected to concentration on *mādhurya-rasa*. Anyway, I have to be reasonable with myself. My *japa* needs work. A month ago I took time for reading and writing and I noticed that although I was interested and enlivened, my *japa* was neglected. Now I have promised to give *japa* this time. JRN: "If you make offenses to Hare Kṛṣṇa, then it is to Hare Kṛṣṇa you must go for relief."

I am always adjusting my environment—a pillow for the back of the chair this time. I don't need much for this *yajña*—just feet to walk, a heart, two

dictaphones, an ankle brace, lungs . . . Where am I going? My eyesight will eventually dim. That will be the first sense to go. Then the other parts of my *sādhana*—writing, reading, traveling, lecturing—will start to diminish. As they gradually fade, only the *japa* will remain until the end. Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “If one wants to achieve success at the end of his life, the process of remembering Kṛṣṇa is essential. Therefore, one should constantly, incessantly chant the *mahā-mantra*—Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare” (Bg. 8.5, purport).



5:00 A.M.

This diary will be filled with complaints and laments. The *mahā-mantra* eludes me. My mind goes off somewhere else and doesn’t think of *mahā-mantra* and Vṛndāvana. During one round, I was reviewing the war between Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands. Remember that one? How did I get there? I think—yes—it was yesterday when I told Mahāvākya that I had recently visited the Caribbean. He didn’t know where the West Indies was, so I started telling him. This morning I recalled that and began a geography review of South America. This included thinking of the Falklands. That is just one example of hundreds and thousands. There is no end to the possible

combinations—they don't even have to conform to reality.

Anyway . . . I'm awake and slugging it out—my Falkland Islands' war of the mind—to return my attention. In between, I have read a few pages from the Tenth Canto aloud ("The *Gopīs* Praise Kṛṣṇa's Flute"), a few pages of *Saṅkalpa-kalpa-drumaḥ*, and a few opening pages from *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta*. Link these to *japa*: "Falling down like a stick, may I offer my respectful obeisances to all the residents of Vṛndāvana" (*Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta*, Śataka 1, verse 14).

The ten offenses in chanting are a bit puzzling. When we actually go to chant, it is too late to avoid the ten offenses, although we can still try to cure inattention. But it is never too late to reform our lives.

The first offense in chanting is to blaspheme the devotees who have dedicated their lives to propagating the holy names all over the world. Bhakti-vinoda Ṭhākura says, "*Bhakti* recedes at the first indication of *sādhū-nindā*, which then becomes *nāma-aparādha*. Let the aspirant devotee disapprove of *sādhū-nindā* and serve and associate with the *sādhū*" (HNC, p. 35). Offending devotees includes finding fault with others for their past sins, or for the remainder of some sinful reaction, or even for sinful behavior performed accidentally. It also includes finding fault with devotees for their caste or bodily designation. "This offender will never develop a taste for chanting the name."

I know I commit those offenses. I offend devotees from the greatest down to the smallest. It takes mental discipline. How can I stop myself? It also takes discipline of speech. I have to become more aware of the connection between offending devotees and poor chanting. Otherwise, even in terms of self-interest, I am working against myself. I'm undoing all that I may want to achieve in chanting just by saying or thinking something against a devotee of Kṛṣṇa. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says that a devotee is judged only by whether he has *rati* for the holy name. He is not judged in terms of erudition, official Vaiṣṇava status, and so on.

I have my "favorites"—those whom I regularly offend. It is unfair and illogical to think I am better than anyone. I cannot see into the hearts of anyone else, just as no one can see into my heart. We often fill in our lack of knowledge about each other by creating stereotypes. No one is asking me to judge other devotees, nor am I a manager. Managers sometimes have to discriminate between devotees. Even a spiritual master has to discriminate between disciples sometimes, as to who is competent or responsible and who is not. But all this has to be done with love and not with a sense of judgement.

But aside from all this, sometimes we experience a gut reaction about someone or about their dealings with us. "The body doesn't lie," we are told. The body tells us exactly how we feel. But that doesn't mean our gut reactions are always justified. St. Francis of Assisi was repelled by lepers, that was his gut reaction. But then he overcame it and kissed

a leper. From then on, he felt differently toward them. We can change. We don't have to remain victims of our stereotypes—"I only like certain types of devotees, and I always dislike these other types of devotees." I shouldn't be presumptuous. I have to admit that I don't know the suffering another person is undergoing or what has brought them forward to the stage they are at now. Sometimes we see devotees working on particular *anarthas* and we judge them. They may be angry or have some other quality we consider negative. But we just don't know what they are going through or how Kṛṣṇa is dealing with them.

Sādhū-nindā occurs both outside the *japa* time and during chanting. I have to be more vigilant. I have to be humble and go on looking to myself. *Japa* is such a solitary practice; we are meant to work on ourselves.

In ISKCON, we are meant to be preachers. Since so much of our energy is dedicated to helping others, we have to do regular internal work through *japa*. Otherwise, always helping others, always preaching—so many bad habits can develop. We may begin to think ourselves better than those we help. Or we may become passionate do-gooders and lose our inner focus. We may also fall victim to superficiality because we have to repeat ourselves so many times. This is a real danger for lecturers: they speak profound and sensitive truths so often that they can lose touch with what they are saying. Or they emote and speak rhetoric. It is hard to constantly go to the heart in our preaching. Therefore,

a preacher's only recourse is to be himself in touch with the holy names.

But to really be in touch with the holy names, we cannot be committing *sādhū-nindā*. We have to concentrate on tending to ourselves. Now is the time to take care of our own attachment to the holy name. This is the solitary nature of *japa*. And because we are missionaries or preachers, we will use our internal realization for the good of all.

The remedy for *sādhū-nindā*, according to Bhakti-vinoda Ṭhākura, is this: "If anyone offends a *sādhū* in a moment of delusion and madness, he must fall at the *sādhū's* feet and repent bitterly; weeping and full of contrition, he must beg forgiveness. He should declare himself a fallen wretch in need of a Vaiṣṇava's grace. A *sādhū* is very merciful; his heart will soften and he will embrace the offender, thus exonerating him from his offenses" (HNC, p. 37).

The problem with this remedy for me is that first of all, I may think that some of the people whom I criticize are not so exalted. When I read Bhakti-vinoda Ṭhākura's remedy I think, "Oh yes, certainly if in madness I said something to a very advanced devotee, I know I would be in great danger and I would have to fall at his feet," but what about the "ordinary" devotees in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement? Even those who have been practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness for twenty years still have bad habits. Obviously my logic is faulty. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura clearly states that offense to *sādhūs* includes offense to "little devotees."

Another problem I have is that it seems so melodramatic to fall down at someone's feet and cry. We Western devotees have seen people do this so many times, bowing down and saying, "Please accept my obeisances, please excuse my offenses." It has become routine for so many of us. Sometimes one devotee will offer obeisances but the other devotee will suspect that he is not really sincere. Sometimes we aren't sincere. Or sometimes we are sincere but we are unable to actually bow down out of embarrassment. We don't want to appear superficial or to be rejected. But it is helpful to our spiritual lives to offer obeisances, even if we appear artificial or foolish. Even if the other person doesn't speak so gracefully or forgive us, still, because we sincerely made the attempt, Kṛṣṇa will accept our obeisances. We should actually look for occasions to ask forgiveness.

I can also acknowledge that since many of my offenses are committed only in my mind, I can sincerely approach that devotee in my mind. I am not saying that this excuses me from also asking the person for forgiveness, but offering obeisances in the mind is a good place to start. It is the first place to recognize the wrong and ask forgiveness; then we can go personally to the devotee with honest repentance. I want to be more vigilant in this regard.



10:50 A.M.

Sitting on the windowsill, my back facing the outdoors. When you do extra rounds, you find yourself doing odd things, sitting and chanting them in unusual places, looking at objects in new ways. A different attitude toward time passing.

Yes, but how is it *rasika*? How is it this? How is it that? Most important is chanting itself, the hearing. I promised.

What do I think of between rounds? What do I think of during rounds? I record it here partly to amuse myself. Listen to this: while chanting *harer nāma*, instead of thinking myself lower than the blade of grass, I was complacently reviewing some of the books I have published. It's embarrassing.

I recalled the Zen meditation advice: notice the distractions and put them into groups—envy, fear, pride, whatever—then put them aside.

Chanting extra rounds, I sit on the bed and lean forward, my forearms resting on my knees. I imagine prisoners spend many hours in this posture. Remember the Carmelite wooden kneelers? They enable one to sit and kneel at the same time. No back rest, but a good, humble posture. Madhu has the measurements for those kneelers, or he had them a year ago, but I'm afraid to do anything that's not Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava.

We are in the Marche region of Italy, a few hours drive northeast of Rome, near the east coast, by the Adriatic Sea. This is farm country.

"The chanting of the holy name of the Lord is perfect; even though one does not know how to please Lord Viṣṇu or His associates, simply by sincerely chanting the holy name of the Lord, everything becomes perfect. A devotee, therefore, either in danger or in happiness, constantly chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. When he is in danger he is immediately relieved, and when he is in a position to see Lord Viṣṇu or His associates directly, by chanting this *mahā-mantra* he can please the Lord. This is the absolute nature of the *mahā-mantra*. Either in danger or unhappiness, it can be chanted without limitation" (*Bhāg.* 4.12.21, purport).



1:45 P.M.

I am feeling pleased that on the first day, I chanted the increased quota without much difficulty. I have only four more rounds to go, and it's still early afternoon. I still have time for reading and writing. (I don't want to have *too* much extra time, though.) I am trying to shape this retreat around chanting and trying to hear with devotion.

Busy chanter, I fly from one flower to another. But how deep, how meaningful? Chanting is tasteless, a chore for me, I admit it. Still something is

there. Maybe a small, tight bud on an early spring flower branch. But where is the favorable warm weather and sunshine and rain—and the inner drive from God—to bring about the blossoming? Or will I have to work perpetually at chanting without taste? Will I conclude that the ecstasy of chanting is not for me? I serve and I don't expect more? Will that be all right? If that's my lot, if I am so limited in this lifetime, then will I know and accept it? Will Kṛṣṇa be pleased with me for at least remaining a poor beggar who never made riches in *bhakti* but never abandoned his *guru-niṣṭhā*?



4:45 P.M.

Finished thirty-two rounds and started doing an extra one. Go above the quota, the duty, the chore.

Thoughts like old newsreels in my mind. You can't resist from watching them, like dreams . . .

I am far away from Vṛndāvana, but the weeks are passing and soon we will visit there again.

This is what Śrīla Prabhupāda asked us to do, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. *Japa Reform Notebook*: "Always remember that you promised your spiritual master you would chant Hare Kṛṣṇa without offenses, including the offense of inattentive chanting. It is a personal obligation . . ." (p. 23).

I have to admit that I am lonely and empty now that I have finally secured my space for solitude. For weeks I thought about it and even felt some injustice at having all my time taken up by meetings and lectures. Now after thousands of miles of air travel, I have arrived. This place is serviceable, quiet. I chanted over thirty-two rounds. Can I find Kṛṣṇa in this lonely place?

I have twenty more days of this. I have to face the empty note pads. My inky words seek an honest utterance. Kṛṣṇa is already here, but I have not seen Him.

The heaviest offense to the holy name is *sādhunindā*. It lingers in my mind: "This offender will never develop a taste for chanting the name . . . *Bhakti* recedes at the first indication of *sādhunindā*."

Some offenses are committed in self-defense. Your friends say it's only human to strike back at those who have unreasonably criticized you. But what is my gain?

Last year at Kārttika in Vṛndāvana, a devotee criticized all writers in ISKCON. Then he thought he had offended me. He knocked on my door and said, "I'm sorry." The next day he gave me a garland and repeated, "I'm sorry." Another man was sincerely afraid that by speaking badly of me, which he admitted he had done, that he would bring himself trouble. These are not superstitions. *Bhakti* is a science.

A brother asked me, "Have you spoken yet with X Prabhu?" X and I had been in conflict but the

situation had passed. X has lost his influence, yet he was still his old, blustery self. I know he doesn't like my "confessional" style of writing, and once he even said that my books should not be allowed to be published. So when my brother asked, "Have you spoken with him?" I said, "Only for about thirty seconds." Later he asked me again if I had spoken with X. But I see no need to renew our relationship. Better to keep a distance but commit no *sādhū-nindā*. Aloofness from certain relationships may not be bad, but I shouldn't be hurt or think critically of anyone. *And I shouldn't take mental pleasure in hearing that those who were once my rivals are being diminished.*

Sādhū-nindā is mysterious to me in its cause and effect. Someone said a Kṛṣṇa *mūrti* broke because the women in the temple were not allowed to stand near the altar, but that is speculation. Some people say that my headaches are due to *sādhū-nindā*. Kṛṣṇa's ways are mysterious. We don't see all the connections and agents by which Kṛṣṇa turns winter into spring, but we know that Kṛṣṇa is the intelligence behind it. Similarly, *sādhū-nindā* has a resultant karma. We will receive a reaction for our offensiveness, so beware. "The purity of a Vaiṣṇava is judged by how much attraction or *rati* he has for the holy name. It has nothing whatsoever to do with his official status as a Vaiṣṇava . . . Therefore one who takes shelter of the holy name must rescind the propensity to criticize *sādhūs*" (HNC, pp. 34-35).



April 5, second day of increased *japa* quota

Loudly whispered *japa* for the first rounds because I didn't want to wake the others. Rounds are quicker, all under eight minutes, but inattentive. My cry is not genuine. Genuine states of being are hard for me, especially when it comes to simple emotions. So far away.

But I do have some concentration in chanting and hearing. I notice it, like now, when someone suddenly went to the bathroom and the noise startled my line of thought and feeling.

"What do you want to achieve," someone asked, "constant remembrance of Kṛṣṇa?" Sure, we all want to achieve that. But I am not claiming that it will be easily achieved. I want to achieve a first entrance into devotional feeling and attention that the name is Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa is the all-protective, all-sweet Personality of Godhead. When I chant, I want to be aware of the name's wonder and depth. I cannot yet claim the right to be drowned in that ocean of awareness, but even when one is on the shore of the ocean, one is aware that it is beautiful, vast, mighty, and has no comparison.

Through me, the nectar of Kṛṣṇa consciousness can come in writing. Why do I hold it back? Or how can I let it flow? Other writers, nondevotees, even when they expertly deliver their realizations with artistic style, and even when they have paid dearly for them or have religiously delved into their experiences of temporal reality—even if they present

their flashes of insight into what is beyond—still, they cannot touch the ocean of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I can touch that ocean because I am an authorized messenger.

Yet I seem unable to really touch the meaning of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I am not in the front ranks where devotee-writers directly tell us the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa but just as I hope to one day be the recipient of the pure holy names, I hope to write *kṛṣṇa-kathā* that will be relishable.

At this stage, I don't even know what to ask for, what to expect. I am writing what comes and spending each day and night as it comes, as my time dwindles. It is only due to the *kṛpā* of the *ācāryas* that we have any access to Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. I too can repeat some of their statements:

"I shall fight with lust, anger, bewilderment, greed, madness, envy and pride. Defeating them, I will become blissful at heart, and I will easily become able to worship Lord Govinda.

"Lust I will engage in offering the fruits of my work to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Anger I will direct toward the enemies of the devotees. Greed I will engage by being greedy to hear the topics of Lord Hari in the association of the saintly devotees. Bewilderment will be manifested because I cannot immediately attain my worshipable Lord. Madness will be there when I madly glorify the transcendental attributes of Lord Kṛṣṇa. In this way I will engage each of these in the service of Lord Kṛṣṇa" (*Prema-bhakti-candrikā*, Song 2, verses 9–10).

Unless I stay in constant touch with the *ācāryas*, I am howling in a desert. On my own, from past impressions, I can only speak of American baseball heroes, rock 'n' roll, jazz, and Shakespeare. Or the hollow space in my stomach or my LSD madness. I would be lost.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī is chanting his *japa* in his *sādhaka* form. Śrīla Prabhupāda is also chanting with *japa-mālā* in his photo. He desired more than anything to give us the names. He possessed what he gave us and preached to us—devotion to the holy names and to the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement.

Dancing down the road with joy
 an innocent boy,
 piping down the lanes with glee,
 what have I to offer thee?
 He plays his wooden flute,
 praising Śrī Kṛṣṇa,
 naming Śrī Kṛṣṇa,
 and telling secrets he himself
 doesn't know but he's heard
 and even the birds in Vraja sing,
 "It's Rādhā, it's Rādhikā!"

The female parrot sings,
 tell us quickly
 who is the be-all of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's life,
 who has such intense dedication
 to *only* Kṛṣṇa,
 that by comparison the dedicated birds—
 the *cataki* who waits for raindrops,
 the *cakora* who waits for the moonbeams
 and the lotus who waits for the sun—
 all seem fickle and not at all
 dedicated to their objects
 of meditation—
 tell us who
 is the most beautiful
 in form and devotion and—
 it's Svāmiṇī Rādhikā
 whose name I am not fit
 to utter, but I must.

There, you broke through a little. Humble yourself. Become arrogant enough. A lout singing. He knows the most precious songs, so let him sing. Sometimes a fallen man, a drunkard has a heart filled with gold, if only we can make something of him.

Go faster now. You talk of how to get past your false ego—that's the attempt in *japa*. Sitting before the little candle flame, wrapped in sweaters, your virtue is that you rise early and mouth the *mahā-*

mantras. But I can't speak highly of your mind. It is lowborn, low quality (*nica-jati*, *nīca-saṅgī*, *patita adhama*). You never knew what was good for you. Śrīla Prabhupāda said in a lecture ten years ago that these boys and girls never heard of Kṛṣṇa. You did not know and you wasted yourself. A pot in which liquor is kept must be thrown away—don't bother cleaning it. Get a new one. Don't tell us you are scrubbing a piece of coal clean. But I am spirit soul somewhere within.

If I were to live in Vṛndāvana, India in this lifetime, I would always be judged by my white skin and American karma. And they are right, even though they may be mean-minded. Śrīla Prabhupāda appreciates us, made us into *brāhmaṇas* and *sannyāsīs* . . . into gurus ("All of you become guru, it is not difficult"). But Śrīla Prabhupāda, how kind you were . . . You saw the glory of the holy name and the teachings of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, that the soul is the self of all—a non-Hindu, non-Muslim, non-Christian truth. You blessed us to walk in Vṛndāvana with head high, not proud of ourselves, yet asserting "Lord Caitanya's mercy is this." So I wish to chant the *harer nāma* which you say is the way for us to become Vaikuṇṭha people, *gosvāmīs* and all good things. I want to cry the name and attain the Vaiṣṇava qualities as you would like us to do.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, you say that the best quality is having the mercy to give it to others.



5:45 A.M.

I complain, but let's remember that even shadow chanting brings freedom from sins and all miseries. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings, "O Holy Name, from the very moment you first appear on the horizon of the heart, the darkness of this material world is almost totally devoured" (*Gitāvalī*, "*Śrī Nāmāṣṭaka*," Song 3, verse 3, *Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura Songbook*, p. 105).

I don't know exactly where I am situated, whether in *nāmāparādha* or *nāmābhasa* or both or in between them. I know I am not in *śuddha-nāma*. There are offenses in my chanting. But the holy name has carried me out of the worst darkness. That has already been done by uttering sincere Hare Kṛṣṇa mantras under the powerful guidance of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

It is not wrong for me to be distressed that after twenty-five years of practice, I cannot control my mind and cannot bring the name into my heart. My heart is steel-framed.

The second offense in chanting is to consider the names of the demigods like Lord Brahmā or Lord Śiva to be equal to or independent of the holy name of Lord Viṣṇu. In one sense, this seems like an offense that is relevant only to Hindus and not to me, but there are other ways to consider this offense. For example, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says that *māyāvāda* thought is offensive under the second offense in chanting. If we think that ultimately,

the Absolute Truth is formless and that Kṛṣṇa's pastimes are just illusion, then we are offensive. Any consideration that the name is different than Kṛṣṇa is *nāmāparādha*.

Therefore, just to fail to come to the realization and appreciation of the holy name as Kṛṣṇa Himself (*nāma cintāmaṇiḥ kṛṣṇaś caitanya-rasa-vigrahaḥ*) means we commit offense. If in the presence of Kṛṣṇa's most merciful form, we don't pay attention, don't worship, don't fall down on our knees, don't cry, it means we don't love Him. We insult Him. Yesterday I thought that offense to *sādhus* was obviously my biggest obstacle and that this offense of not appreciating the uniqueness of Kṛṣṇa's name doesn't apply to me, but actually, neglecting the holy name is equally bad. The second offense is not a minor offense.

I don't think of Kṛṣṇa, I just chant His names out of duty. In one sense, I could call this dutifulness *guru-niṣṭhā*, but that does not excuse the fact that I go on jawing and moving my counter beads and moving my fingers along the *mālā* without thinking of Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam: Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This is the truth and no other form of God is equal to Kṛṣṇa. The second offense actually means that we should accept the names of the Viṣṇu-tattva as holy, but never think of the demigods or any person as equal to Viṣṇu-tattva. When I study it further, however, we have to conclude that among Viṣṇu-tattva, the name of Kṛṣṇa is supreme, the names of Vṛndāvana Kṛṣṇa. I

shouldn't be attached to any other names but the names of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana. Therefore, my vagueness when I chant is also a failure. Where is my specific attraction to Vṛndāvana Kṛṣṇa?

To think of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, I have to read about His pastimes there. Unfortunately, nothing is quickened, nothing is awakened. I don't have the emotions of a young man seeing the woman he is in love with. But it has to come to that—some awareness, some appreciation of the power of the name. If we don't have that awareness leading to love, then we are committing the second offense. It means that we think Kṛṣṇa is different than His name.

The Supreme Lord is so powerful that He can strike fear into anyone; in His form as Time He destroys everything; in His sweet form, He completely enchants the pure devotees of Vṛndāvana. That Kṛṣṇa, in all His majesty and sweetness—especially His sweetness—is kindly appearing in His holy name. To think that the names we chant are different than wonderful Kṛṣṇa, this duality is offensive.

We may not create this duality out of some intellectual impersonalism, but inadvertently we live in that duality. Our offense is not one of picking the wrong doctrine or of being misled, but by our misfortune, we live in this duality. We live in the consciousness that we are the body and that our bodily affairs are very important. Therefore, fear, hunger, thirst, fatigue, lust, envy—these affect us so much that they cover our consciousness. The holy

name doesn't appear to change that much in us. This can only mean that Kṛṣṇa is not appearing fully in our chanting. He is not responding to our calls; something about our chanting doesn't move Him, doesn't attract Him. Thus we live in this duality. Therefore, when Kṛṣṇa says *nāhaṁ prakāśaḥ sarvasya yoga-māyā samāvṛtaḥ*—when He says that He puts a curtain between Himself and foolish people, doesn't this include us too?

When I examine this duality closely, I see that it is not only based on my lack of realization that Kṛṣṇa and His names are nondifferent, but there is also a duality in my own intellectual acceptance and my failure to actually have any live sense of this. Therefore, although I don't ascribe to the *māyāvāda* philosophy, I inadvertently fall into this kind of *māyāvāda* dilemma.

Regarding the second offense in chanting, Bhakti-vinoda Ṭhākura writes, "The only remedy is to repent intensely and meditate on Lord Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, for by His remembrance offenses are dissolved. Thereafter, one must meticulously avoid committing the same offense again. Remembrance of the Lord is the most effective penance; the *Vedas* always recommend imperiled *brāhmaṇas* to meditate upon the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu for protection. Remembering the Lord's name is the same as meditating upon His lotus feet. The holy name can disperse all previous offenses, for it acts as the devotee's best friend" (*HNC*, p. 46).

10:30 A.M.

I completed twenty-five rounds so far today. When I come to the page to express my experience, there is a big gap between what I write and what it was actually like grinding out those last five rounds (each one lasting about ten minutes or more). I can say negative things about myself, but what's the use? The experience is beyond words. I sat on a stiff chair in the backyard facing the hilly waves of grass crops. Every once in awhile a rifle sounded, always two times. I couldn't see anybody, just green and brown hills and a few trees. Chanting, chanting, not even sure why it was taking so long to complete a round, but unaware of the wonderful sweetness or painful separation from sweetness, or of Kṛṣṇa the person, or of the mercy of His name, or of service. It is embarrassing to say that the chanting was arduous, a penance.

These extra rounds are an extended penance. Others will think well of me for "chanting extra rounds." Someone may say, "I don't know how you do it. I couldn't sit that long just chanting." They know I'm sticking it out. But will life continue like this even if I chant for most of my remaining lifetime—just staring at blank green fields while I count the beads, not sure why it takes so long? Will this continue to be the source of my sense of accomplishment and nothing else?

(You see, I told you I wouldn't be able to express in words what it is actually like. There is more, something that makes it worthwhile, something

that also makes it more difficult than I am expressing here, but I can't capture it.)

M. was saying how country people know all of their neighbors and even their neighbors' visitors. They know what time their neighbors go to sleep and when they get up in the morning. They know what time they start work. Strangers are never accepted, although they are treated civilly. M. said if devotees were to live in a farm area, they would be respected only if they did some demonstrable work. If that's the case, then they wouldn't like me. They wouldn't understand what I'm doing, passing my time indoors and taking strange walks very early in the morning. They wouldn't understand my Eastern saffron. Yet in my own way, I work as hard as they do digging their furrows in the earth in the warm, spring sunshine.

M. said that if we were to grow a garden and they saw me spending time in it, they could appreciate it as worthwhile work. I already have a garden.



1:05 P.M.

Hard to admit, to know that this is my precious life, the last minutes of it passing through. The grass is growing and it is spring again, a cold spring, but I am in my early autumn years. The skies are fair, but how can I defy the chronology of age which spells dissolution?

I thought of Kṛṣṇa in Imlitala and places where Lord Caitanya sat and chanted. Haridāsa Ṭhākura chanted at Siddha-bakula in Puri. Lord Caitanya approved of his *japa*. When I go there, I have to worry about my passport and shoes and feet and money and there are always people checking me out. Somebody wants money and I don't speak the language.

Srila Prabhupāda did not send me to these places to chant. Neither did he say I could chant without *prīti*. He said not *that* chanting, that slurred pronunciation, but with *prīti*. Say each word: here is Rādhā, here is Kṛṣṇa.

So we have come to a comfortable place in the West as fools, as guests, and I am chanting. At least I can report, "I chant, but nothing comes. It's dry." This seems right; this is what should happen. I will experience dryness when I try to increase or hanker for *rasa*. I should face the brick wall. Even if nothing else happens, I will continue my dry chanting and report: "Yeah, nectar chanting doesn't come to the likes of us. You have to be pure and surrendered, serve more in preaching, get God's favor, spend more time devoted to *harer nāma*."

The devotee who lives here has gorgeous Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā *līlā* paintings from India. Some of them seem a bit strange, like the one in this room of Kṛṣṇa playing the *vīṇā*. But He could do it to please the *gopīs*.

Kṛṣṇa's name reveals His pastimes. More rounds.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes:

Within the fourteen worlds, those demigods, men and demons whose fortune is very great, perpetually drink the nectar of the sweet mellows of the holy name, casting aside all kinds of fruitive activities and speculative forms of knowledge.

The eternally liberated souls, however, always worship the holy name in beautifully composed hymns and songs and sit in Goloka Vṛndāvana constantly singing the name. Therefore they do not know any separation from the holy name.

. . . Falling at the lotus feet of the holy name, Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda says, "O Harināma, I pray for residence at Your lotus feet."

—*Gītāvalī*, "Śrī Nāmāṣṭaka," Song 1,
verses 4–6, p. 103

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4:00 P.M., Snapshot

This is an early picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda in Vṛndāvana with some disciples. I think they are on the veranda of the Rādhā-Dāmodara temple. Bright sun. Śrīla Prabhupāda is in the sunlight, his disciples stand in the shade. He wears a rust-colored sweater, a garland of orange marigolds, and holds a bamboo cane at an angle in his right hand. You can see the usual wrinkles in his *dhōṭī* and *kūrta* (because his habit is to sleep overnight in the *dhōṭī* and change it after his noon bath).

There are four disciples with him. One looks like Professor Rao (later called Rāmānanda dāsa from Gorakhpur—he has since passed away). The other is, I think, a young man who later left ISKCON, maybe the one who became a Buddhist. Śyāmasundara dāsa and Subala dāsa are also there.

It is easy to see Prabhupāda's dark golden hue and the red *candana* markings on his forehead. His bead-bag is hanging around his neck to remind me today that I too should chant Hare Kṛṣṇa on beads as his follower. They are standing under the arch with its Mogul or Vaiṣṇava decoration, hundreds of years old, the place of Jīva Gosvāmī. Hard stone.

So far I have described the externals. It's a nice candid snapshot. It captures me, but when I look away, I return to Italy 1992. The fact that Prabhupāda and two others wear sweaters may mean it's Kārttika '71 or '72. A cold morning. Prabhupāda stands straight; I don't think he was ill at this time.

This is one way to look at the spiritual master. I haven't said anything about his desires to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness, nor have I described why he is trying to organize and push his disciples to construct a temple in Vṛndāvana. It is unusual to see Śrīla Prabhupāda outside his own ISKCON building. This was before Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Mandira was built.

I think of Prabhupāda at Rādhā-Dāmodara before he came to America, writing his books, unknown, no American followers. In this photo, he has come back. The Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is growing all over the world.

Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda, I see you in this photo and yet I don't see you. When you were here, I saw you but could not fully understand that you are an eternal associate of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Even today, how little I understand as I look into the sunny archway of the old Vṛndāvana temple, and you look back with your little group of fragiley held together devotees, most of whom have now dispersed.

May we carry out your will, although we are not lion-hearted. May we chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and follow you to Vṛndāvana and stay at your Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Mandira and serve the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. Someday, may you and Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā reveal to us further entry into Vṛndāvana-*dhāma*.

I feel sad sometimes. I am afraid and unwilling to enter deep waters (or any place likely to produce stress). But what if my advancement calls for it? Will I draw back, preferring ease? Yet unless I go through austerity when required, I will have to come back to the material world fully at risk in Kali-yuga's miseries. Be brave now and transcend once and for all.

See into the truth of events and persons and yourself. Throw yourself down like a rod at guru's feet. Beg for service.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. I have completed my new, minimum quota of thirty-two rounds for today. What shall I do with the remaining hours? I made a tape of my chanting—the sleepy spaces will be

obvious, the mood of just jawing. If the chanting sounded good and filled with *bhāva*, I would turn it off in shyness. As it is, it will probably confirm my suspicions of mechanical, negligent mantras.

What did you expect me to write in this diary?



April 6, 2:15 A.M.

The indulgence of thinking over things while chanting *japa*. This is the basic distraction. Chewing cud. You think and think over, so there is still a solid duality between chanting and hearing and the thinking.

There seems to be no way to pay attention for long periods of time. It's too easy to say the names, at least in the superficial sense. You have so much reserve energy and intellectual capacity for other thinking. Just as when sweeping a floor or washing dishes, there is plenty of mental capacity left over for thinking of something else. The chanting is so simple that it seems impossible to keep a grown man (or even a child) focused on the repetitive sound. Out of submissiveness, he agrees to chant his quota, but he has to keep himself otherwise occupied during the chanting. These are offensive estimations of chanting and I don't advocate them, but I fall into this kind of *aparādha*.

The true chanters realize Kṛṣṇa's presence in *harer nāma* and there is no need or attraction for them in discursive thinking. All thought leads to

this: praise Kṛṣṇa and lovingly serve Him by chanting His glories. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings, "O Holy Name, Your glories are boundless! I therefore bow at Your lotus feet again and again."

I very much like to say *praṇāma* prayers to the *paramparā* before I begin chanting. Why can't I continue this spirit of bowing down to the holy name? One needs to be humble and not sit back while chanting. Maybe I am too lazy to chant the way it should be done. There is so much mental resistance.

A devotee in Rome asked if quantitative *japa* hurts quality? This made me wonder, "Do we avoid the difficult too much? Do we devise whole methods of doing what is easy, do it profusely, then exclaim how much work we are doing? The answer is not to avoid quantitative chanting but to chant continuously and attentively. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings, "At the lotus feet of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda constantly begs that at every moment there be the transcendental vibration of the holy name" (*Gītāvalī*, "Śrī Nāmāṣṭaka," Song 7, verse 8, p. 111).

Ideally, I could be roaming over thoughts of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in Vṛndāvana as I chant His divine names. Or I could be meditating on internal service to my spiritual master. But it's nearly impossible to sustain any of these. The mind is flickering, *cañcalā* . . . I beg for mercy.

The *ācāryas* in their *sādhaka* forms are chanting with their hands in their beadbags, showing us the way. Almost whenever they sit for a formal picture, they do so with their hands in their *japa* bag. They love to chant; it is the ideal pose for an *ācārya*. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura at the end of his life, Śrīla Prabhupāda in his preaching drive in ISKCON, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī under a tree, all are chanting *harer nāma* on their beads. Their *tulasī* beads are now on display, worshipable. Please let us chant on this ring of strung beads and at least try, try to bow down to the names and render service.

Dear *harer nāma*, dear Śrīla Prabhupāda, I know I have failed to do the needful. There is no big mystery why I cannot reciprocate with you deeply in *harer nāma*. After so much misbehavior, I cannot expect to come to the beads and lock into meditation on your holy form. Yet I beg for this. Please see me as persistent and throw me some crumbs of desire to serve you by chanting.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings, "O Holy Name, You destroy all his offenses, even those he might have committed to You directly. Cleansing him of all impurities, You, who are the supreme shelter, sit upon a throne within his heart" (*Gītāvalī*, "Śrī Nāmāṣṭaka," Song 7, Verse 5–6, p. 111).

The lamp sets up an annoying vibration when I press down with my pen and write on the desk. I can't get out of the central moment of now, and neither do I want to escape it; I want to transcend and see Kṛṣṇa in all things. The chanting is also a

central moment—it is available now—but unless I say the names with devotion, or with sorrow for my lack of devotion, I will only catch a slight glimpse of the rays of the holy name. Those slight rays will also do me immense good, but I will not achieve *kṛṣṇa-prema*, the goal of human life, as long as I chant offensively. I am so needlessly proud and preoccupied.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings, “O sun of the holy name, when you arise on the horizon of the living being’s heart, it becomes completely purified, the bondage to materialistic activities and speculative knowledge disappears, and the soul’s worldly existence comes to an end without any difficulty” (*Gītā-valī*, “*Śrī Nāmāṣṭaka*,” Song 4, verse 4, p. 107).

The third offense in chanting the holy name is to disobey the order of the spiritual master or to disrespect him.

I want to discuss the ten offenses in a personal way, concerned for my own improvement and rectification. I tend to think that I don’t disobey Śrīla Prabhupāda. I have a good record as far as the four rules and sixteen rounds are concerned. But if I go deeper into the matter, my self-image as an obedient disciple may begin to crumble. I chant those sixteen rounds mechanically. I don’t feel attachment for the holy names. Of course, even as I write this, I know it is not really true—I do have attachment. I am just sorry I cannot pay attention when I chant. In other words, the chanting is something wonderful that Prabhupāda has given

us and I do obey his order to chant, but I am sorry that I do it poorly.

These are typical failures in my relationship with Prabhupāda that I have always been aware of. I don't have to recite them again. What it usually comes down to is admitting that I don't carry out his order more fully and boldly; as I grow older, I am becoming less unconditional about my surrender to his movement. But then to balance my self-denigration, I have to recognize that I am doing what I can. Prabhupāda is merciful and lenient, and he accepts me. There is no point in talking about a failure and leaving it at that; we have to also give ourselves *some* credit and try to go on developing our relationship with Prabhupāda from there.

One always requires faith in the spiritual master to chant the holy names. I feel this *japa* retreat is a time where I am trying to link up with Prabhupāda by trying to improve my service to his most basic and important instruction—to chant with love. I think Prabhupāda would be pleased to know that I am trying to improve. Even the fact that I am sorry I am not doing better is a connection with Prabhupāda. It is very personal.

Prabhupāda, you gave us the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra to love and to chant, and I am definitely not satisfied with the way I am chanting. I want to appreciate the personal gift you gave me. I want to chant the mantra which you gave, our *guru-mantra*, the mantra given by guru. This is the mantra which will bring me all the way to actual realization of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. This mantra will bring me to my

spiritual form and to being with my spiritual master in his eternal spiritual form. Śrīla Prabhupāda, I am going back to the basics of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and trying to improve.

It is important to ensure that one is not committing offenses or disrespecting Prabhupāda. It is also important not to be unnecessarily guilty about it. We have to be cautious, both on the side of offensiveness or minimization, and also on not having a kind of paranoia about our potential offensiveness. Our relationship with Prabhupāda has to be kept alive, which means it will change and grow. We tend to think that any change will be unfaithful, but we ourselves are changing, and with us, ISKCON will change. There will be change in how we realize Prabhupāda, both institutionally and individually. Our sentiments for Prabhupāda, that Prabhupāda we perceived and with whom we were so happy and satisfied, will mature. We grow out of our sentimentality in a sense; we demand more from Prabhupāda. He can give us more if we are prepared to let go of our previous conceptions and lackings and move forward.

I think we always have to be praising Prabhupāda in a new way. We don't want to concoct, but we want to get new realizations in our service to Prabhupāda. We want to be experiencing fresh feelings. Let us find new directions and thus help ourselves and others to appreciate Prabhupāda.

It is a challenge. He is the eternal guide. We should never minimize his place in our lives. What he has already given us is enough for us to be

eternally grateful. We can never think that we will ever be more advanced than he is, more advanced than he was. And we should not find fault with him. Fault-finding is called *kuṭi-nāṭi*, and the worst kind of fault-finding is criticizing the guru. What is the worst form of *sādhū-nindā* but *guru-aparādha*?

There are all kinds of *guru-aparādha*. A subtle offense is to superficially praise Prabhupāda while giving a speech about how everyone should follow him, but to be dead underneath, to not read his books, to not study his life, to not write about him, to not have an ongoing, developing love. Dead ritual. The guru-disciple relationship needs constant work. Part of that work is to sometimes go through difficult stages, awkward stages, questioning stages, stages of having to have the answers revealed to us over time. All questions will be answered, but sometimes the asking of them is itself painful. We have to do the necessary work, go through doubts, and come to resolutions.



7:00 A.M.

Chilly. My foot hurts, walking, limping, on the white stone paths between farmhouses. The narrow roads lead right up to people's doors. I avoid approaching their houses by walking back and forth. A buzzing sound comes from a tall, steel, electrical tower. Dawn arrives and the sky lightens. I spoke what I could and have now gone back inside. Not a

single one of the past nineteen rounds has been attentive or prayerful. It is hard to say what your chanting actually is. But it is.



Snapshot

Here is a picture I have never seen before. Prabhupāda is sitting on a stone floor, no mat, I think in the courtyard of Rādhā-Dāmodara temple. He wears that rust-colored sweater, an orange marigold garland, and orange *candana* on his forehead. He is surrounded by Indians, a man, two women, a child. They too are sitting on the stone floor. Prabhupāda has his hands on his legs, like a *yogī* in a sitting posture. His cane is lying on the ground behind him. He looks full-faced and pleased, head held back so that there are wrinkles in the back of his neck. An unusual photo. The man seems to be a *vrajavāsī* and he seems pleased to be looking at Śrīla Prabhupāda. At first I thought no ISKCON disciples were present, but then I saw a white man's hand in the lower right corner holding a pencil-shaped microphone.

Is Śrīla Prabhupāda facing Rūpa Gosvāmī's *samā-dhi*? He looks so at home. His right hand is well-shaped, aristocratic, placed on his knee. It is Vṛndāvana. Prabhupāda is in Vṛndāvana. He is not preaching to a Ratha-yātrā crowd in San Francisco or London. He is in his residence, *Vraja-dhāma*. He likes to be in San Francisco too, for preaching, but

then he wants to come back to Vṛndāvana and tell people there about the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement expanding all over the world. In Vṛndāvana, he has special moments like this one, sitting with the folks who live there and who worship there, in front of Rūpa Gosvāmī.



10:30 A.M.

I wrote our host a note thanking him for the accommodations and adding, “My *japa-vrata* is going well.” That’s a general comment. One doesn’t say in a quick note how terrible the inattention is. I didn’t write, “The *japa-vrata* is revealing to me that I am dead to the holy name. It can be concluded that I am a great offender, but I am also dead to that.”

While chanting the twenty-fifth round, I noticed a bug flailing on its back. I saw one recently in Trinidad in the same predicament. They flail their spindly legs in the air and rock their bodies back and forth to get leverage, but they can’t do it. It reminded me of how I feel when I am being pressed down, unconscious, in a dream. I try to become conscious by a jerk of my will, but I can’t get out from under the weight. I know from the bug in Trinidad that eventually they catch the right angle or something happens—they get some mercy from their centipedal prayers—and suddenly they are upright again. I am like that, helpless in *japa*. My note was just a social lie, written with the same

ingenuousness by which you tell lies to keep things pleasant. But your *japa* doesn't lie.

Can't even keep track of how many you have chanted. That means you can't keep attention as to which direction you are going on the beads, and so you change direction in mid-round and go the other way, and drowse, notice it's over ten minutes and you are not near the end. What did I mean when I wrote him, "The *japa-vrata* is going well"?

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, I see your picture on my desk. You are chanting *japa* in a sublime mood, emanating an aura of *kṛṣṇa-prema*. I pray to you, Rūpa Gosvāmī Prabhupāda, *tivreṇa bhakti-yogena yajeta puruṣaṁ param*, please let the powerful ray of *bhakti-yoga* strike me and raise me from the dead. Let that miracle occur. I am on my back, flailing. I pray at the lotus feet of your pure chanting, that a stray drop of your *harer nāma* honey may fall upon me and transform me.

This is the confessional side of the truth. Is there a yearning side? Yes, but should I paint imaginative pictures of what I would like to be? "When my offenses ceasing, taste for the name increasing, when in my heart will Your mercy shine? When, oh when will that day be mine?" ("Kabe Ha'be Bolo, verse 1).

Go ahead, imagine it. I am chanting, sitting on the windowsill, looking into the room. Suddenly I become aware of the mercy of *harer nāma*. A sweet-

ness descends and tears come to my eyes. I feel contrite for all the years of poor chanting and poor service. I jump down and make obeisances with no consideration of fatigue. Kṛṣṇa, His name, and His pastimes are all one, and they are speaking to my heart and mind.

But that is fiction. When will I be able to stay awake and think of the holy name—acknowledge that *harer nāma* is an entity worth paying attention to? When will I put aside the flow of thoughts and concentrate on chanting and hearing the *mahā-mantra*? I can only go on striving. I am being carried on a long wave. There is nothing else to consider. I go past thirty-two rounds and keep on going. When in my heart will Your mercy shine?



4:00 P.M.

Tire marks in the brown fields—I look out the window. Then back to my hands. Then back out again. You have done thirty-two rounds. But hardly does it ever occur to you what you are doing. You don't think you are calling someone's name. You don't think you are spending time with Rādhā-Kānta, Rādhānātha, with She who is dear to Śyāmasundara, or the Supreme Personality of Godhead appearing in His name. You don't. You stand by the window noticing your sore feet, or you sit on the bed (that's the worst), or you sit on the windowsill

and wonder what the neighbors will think of your gray-sweatered back as they drive past.

Look out at that friendly sky. Mahāvākya dāsa is also friendly. And Madhu. And your friends in America. Everyone wants you to succeed in chanting. “You learn and give it to us.” Well, I’m out here spending six hours daily at it. If it gets better I hope I’m not too shy or too self-destructive to tell you some good news.

The bees were angry today because the bee-man came and did his thing, smoked them out. They roamed around stinging people. I stayed indoors. I hear a saw cutting wood.

I have already explained why chanting may be so difficult—because it’s so easy. There is nothing to occupy your intelligence and not enough work for the body. It’s all soul, devotion, and if you lack in those areas, then you get bored and sleepy. You think of something else. That’s one explanation.

The explanation based on *nāmāparādhā* is this: You did stuff that shuts you out from God’s mercy. He is deliberately withholding because of your disqualifications. Lord Caitanya states, “My dear Lord, although You bestow such mercy upon the fallen, conditioned souls by liberally teaching Your holy names, I am so unfortunate that I commit offenses while chanting the holy name, and therefore I do not achieve attachment for chanting” (C.c., *Antya* 20.16).

In *Mādhurya-kādambinī*, Viśvanātha Cakravartī Thākura quotes the statement that if one hears the

holy name once, he is liberated. "One should have no doubt that the holy name has such inestimable power. But the holy name, being unhappy with offenses committed against it, does not manifest His complete power in the offender" (Chapter 3, p. 5). Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura compares the state of an offensive chanter to a subordinate who is offensive to a master. He is denied proper care and is treated indifferently by the master. But if he surrenders again to the master, he will receive all care.

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura: "'I have not committed any offenses.' One should not make such statements. One can infer the existence of either recent or long-standing offenses by their effect. The effect of offense is that a person will not manifest any symptoms of *prema* by performance of *nāma-kīrtana*" (Chapter 3, p. 5).

Repeated chanting is recommended along with the performance of other *bhakti* activities. And sometimes the Lord, "In order to increase his humility toward and longing for the Lord, bestows on [the devotee] all sorts of sufferings as His mercy. This suffering is not the effect of sinful actions in previous lives" (Chapter 3, p. 6).

While still in the Caribbean, I felt guilty that the desire to write during the *japa* retreat would steal energy from the chanting. I don't think that way now. My writing arm is friendly and willing to help, although it doesn't seem to help my chanting yet. But it is possible. Just writing down statements

from the *ācāryas* helps. The diary is a solace; at least there is a record, a purpose. If I keep on writing more, maybe it will help more.

“Just as during a serious fever, losing all taste for food, it becomes impossible to eat, a person who commits a serious offense loses scopes for hearing, chanting, and performing devotional activities. There is no doubt about this.

“However, if the fever lessens with time, some taste for food develops. Even then, nourishing foods like milk and rice cannot give their full power of nourishment to the person suffering from chronic fever. They bestow some benefit, but cannot relieve him of his wasted condition. An invalid’s diet and medicine can, however, with time, restore him to his previous healthy condition. At that time, the full potency of normal food can be utilized by the body.

“In the same way, after a long period of suffering the effects of *aparādha*, the intensity reduces somewhat and the devotee develops a little taste. Again the devotee becomes qualified for *bhakti*. Repeated doses of hearing and chanting the Lord’s name and performance of other devotional processes, gradually, with time reveal everything up to *prema*” (*Mādhurya-kādambinī*, Chapter 3, p. 6).

“If the nāmāparādhas, though they be long-standing, have been committed unconsciously (but their presence is inferred by the results, lack of advancement), then one should chant the name constantly. By that steadiness,

bhakti will be attained and gradually the offenses will be neutralized" (Chapter 3, p. 2).

I am going to try to do better. This drowsy stuff is something you can control. It's not so subtle. You have got to stand up and walk and chant loudly and keep track of time with your stopwatch. Say, "Hey, no more of this." Don't sit on that bed if it's no good. Go for improvement on the lowest level and work up. Now you have to deal with fatigue—and inattention. Pay attention just to the simple operations, the willing return of the mind to hearing. Don't get into a big reaction against *pramāda*, as if you are astonished at inattention. It's normal. As you wrote ten years ago, "Maintain a fighting spirit. The mind *always* wanders. The senses *always* tend to drowse in the early morning hours. Therefore, good *japa* is a matter of successfully combating these things. Like the example of steering a car: keeping control means keeping from going out of control—it is natural that the car heads off the road" (*Japa Reform Notebook*, p. 4).

You knew it back then. Don't think you have a more advanced problem now. It's the same old one. Take advice from your younger self and from anyone who knows the most beginning advice. You need it.



7:30 P.M.

Pretty night. I am thankful to those who help me find this time and space to seek my spiritual self-interest. I owe it to them to achieve better use of my *japa* time. I have always been production-oriented; now employ that drive in the service of Kṛṣṇa. Produce humble *japa*. Produce *mahā-mantras* by the tens of thousands, by the *lakhs* and crores. At least a few will be good.

My mouse friend, Choṭa, once had to whisper his *japa* in a room full of nondevotees, and he felt he was supplicating the holy name.

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April 7, 2:10 A.M.

Early morning improvements: sitting in the standard *japa āsana*; chanting quicker rounds (under 7 minutes 40 seconds, which is fast for me, and the sixth round was 7.00); bringing the mind back patiently without frustration, from wherever it wanders; simple faith like we used to have, to hear the mantra, think of it like a sign on which the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is printed and all we have to do is pay attention to the words as they pass across our consciousness. Just pay attention and the *mahā-mantra* will do it's own work.

So this is "good" *japa*—not sleepy, but paying attention to what you are doing. On a scale from

zero to ten, I rate this as five. This is what many devotees in ISKCON count as good rounds. I have been below this, especially in my post-breakfast *japa* and also around 6 A.M. when I get sleepy. So be humble enough to keep working at bringing your *japa* up to the fifty percent mark.

Thinking more about myself as “a nice guy” and how this can work against more intense endeavors. I remember my mother was telling me at the dinner table (I was at least twenty years old) that I would succeed in life in my own way because I was so “easy-going.” Easy-going was a compliment I gratefully accepted. I think of it as perhaps inherited from the Italian side of the family. It is a stereotype, but it meant no *angst* or Kierkegaardian spiritual dilemmas. But an easy-going guy might be complacent with himself and say, “Look, I’m not perfect. I chant my rounds every day. What’s the big deal about reforming? Let’s go take *prasādam*.”

The word ingenuous means “lacking sophistication; artless, straightforward; frank.” This is not exactly the way I recall my Godbrother using this word to state that I was too pleasant and sweet-tempered for deep, personal reform. He meant I am very attached to people not quarreling; everyone should get along. Let’s have peace, please. No fights, no throwing bricks, no back-biting, no raised voices. Just be happy people. And I act that way toward my own “selves”—“Stop fighting. Don’t be angry. Don’t cry. See the nice day it is today. God is very kind to all creatures. Let’s sing Grace.”

Too ingenuous to gnash his teeth, cry bitter tears and not be pacified. Some other dictionary words: "Mollify: to soothe the temper of; placate. To soften. To make less intense." And only two words down in the list, "Molly-coddle: a pampered boy or man. To spoil by pampering; coddle." Interestingly, the next word on the list is Molotov cocktail! Blow it up and set it on fire! "Molest" is also nearby, and also, "moll," the girlfriend of a gangster. Better get out of the dictionary before it's too late. "Vast is the domain of words."

It is not by my own endeavor that I can achieve *kṛṣṇa-prema* in chanting. I know that. But gee whiz, we can't be a molly-coddle either. Got a lot of work to do to get a mantra through and get back out of this material world, by Kṛṣṇa's grace, to the spiritual world.

O *mahā-mantra*, You ocean of virtues! From the shore in dark night we hear You splashing and sense Your vastness. Your infinite nature is out there. You are dangerous and yet comforting.

I'm feeling okay, peppy, awake and all that. Don't knock it. The old man has life. He wants to chant.

Early in the morning, my energies are for prayer. Prayer can be simple enough. You make obeisances without much delay before each dear and worshipable Deity in your mind. This is the right use of the mind. Then although you could linger in thoughts of Rādhā's *dāsīs* in Vraja and the flowers and trees and Yamunā there, you have to chant your *mahā-*

mantras as your spiritual master ordered. You begin chanting, before anyone's alarm clock goes off. Just chant and hear before the candlelight; eyes more often shut than open, seven minutes plus, but always under eight. Be modest about it: I will be glad if all day I can keep at this standard of non-drowsy, looking-at-the-mantra-poster-*japa*.

The fourth offense in chanting is to blaspheme the Vedic scriptures or scriptures in pursuance of the Vedic version. How am I guilty of this? I can say that I haven't been studying my spiritual master's books enough. I recently heard one devotee strongly advising others to read Prabhupāda's books for an hour a day. I don't always do that and that could be construed as a minimization of the scriptures. On the other hand, whenever I *do* sit down to read, I can appreciate Prabhupāda's instructions. Just this morning, I opened the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. The pages fell open randomly at a section I didn't think was particularly nectarean, at Lord Caitanya's dialogue with Sarvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya. Prabhupāda's purport discussed how the Absolute is both personal and impersonal, but the personal is the strongest. I appreciated the purport, and in particular, Prabhupāda's expert preaching.

Prabhupāda has his own unique voice. It is impossible for a writer not to have his own voice. His voice will be evident even when he translates someone else. Prabhupāda definitely comes across in a personal way and makes his own contribution. In this purport, I really *felt* that Kṛṣṇa is the Ab-

solute Truth from whom everything comes, that He is distributed throughout the energies of the world, and yet He is the same Vraja-Kṛṣṇa. The way that Prabhupāda insists we understand that Kṛṣṇa is God is very forceful. We have to always remember that Prabhupāda was speaking to all the people of the world, more so than any other *ācārya*. He was trying to convince people who had no knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, that Kṛṣṇa is the Absolute Truth.

In this one purport, Prabhupāda quoted the *Upaniṣads* about the nature of the Absolute. He also quoted confidential passages from *Brahma-saṁhitā* that this is the same Kṛṣṇa who is the son of Nanda and the beloved of the *gopīs*. It is amazing how Prabhupāda presents his particular appreciation of Kṛṣṇa as He who fulfills all of the qualifications of the Absolute Truth, and whose confidential form is Govinda.

Often a pure devotee who is immersed in the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana doesn't simultaneously assert that Kṛṣṇa is the all-pervading truth. Or if he asserts, as Mādhvācārya does, that Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Person beyond Brahman and Paramātmā, then he doesn't so much concentrate on the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa as a cowherd boy. Prabhupāda gives both.

My point is that if I want to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa purely and get the blessings of the holy name, I have to be appreciative of the Vedic scriptures and of my spiritual master's presentation of them. Any kind of doubt in the scripture would come under this offense. Personally, I take the position that

what I don't understand is beyond me, but that does not make it false. I don't expect the Vedic scriptures to satisfy the material scientists in all respects; neither will there be total agreement between the scriptures and the Western philosophers or the Christian theologians. Since I may be influenced by those Western mind-sets due to my own upbringing, I cannot expect to be "satisfied" with all the particulars and come into harmony with the *Vedas*. I *can* accept the axiomatic nature of them.

One has to pray for faith; one has to culture faith. Faith can be cultured by studying the Vedic commentaries so minutely that one gets a sense of their being formidable, philosophical presentations. One can also study works like the writings of Sadāputa Prabhu. In this way, we can understand better the superiority of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* over modern science. But beyond that is the axiomatic nature of Vedic knowledge. Because it is spoken and breathed by Nārāyaṇa, it cannot be wrong and it cannot be judged by us.

Recently in Rome, I gave an example of how Prabhupāda, when he was asked, "Who told God His knowledge?" replied that God is independent. A guest in the audience said to me, "This is an intellectual or logical statement about God, but where is the actual proof of God's existence?" I replied that the proof of God's existence has to be learned from the science of God. She was alluding to the need for material science to support the *Vedas*, but I said the only science that gives us the full understanding of God is the science of God. We shouldn't feel

intimidated by other sciences and what they have to say about God, because knowledge of God is not within their jurisdiction. God does not come under the scientists' microscopes and He doesn't have to be proven by their theories and formulas. This is a faith that we have to live up to in order to avoid the fourth offense in chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa.

What is *my* faith in the scriptures? I savor them in what time I have left after chanting. I am not making any kind of study to strengthen my intellect during this retreat (although there has to be time for that too). The point of these comprehensive *nāma-aparādhas* is that you have to chant within a well-rounded life. You cannot only chant with the tongue while your mind goes somewhere else or your intellect is unfaithful (or your belly is over-stuffed or you have illicit sex or you are unkind to others). As I approach my *japa*, I am becoming more aware of the link between dozing off while chanting and *nāmāparādha*. Here lies the success or failure of my concentration and prayer.



7:00 A.M.

Tired from walking, you speak always from your own point of view. What is Śrī Kṛṣṇa to me? He is the God of my religion. He is the Absolute Truth. He is the Deity form in the temples where I worship. He whose name I utter all day and night (when I can remember or when I have a bad

dream), is in the heart of the mantra given to me by my spiritual master.

Kṛṣṇa is He to whom I am always loyal. He is behind the teachings I study. Kṛṣṇa is Kṛṣṇa; Rādhā is Rādhā.



10:30 A.M.

I slid down from the peak of early morning attentiveness into a valley of slower rounds. Still, they weren't as bad as yesterday's. Good points: I took only fruit and yogurt for breakfast, that's important. Then when my rounds were at their worst, I turned on the tape of Śrīla Prabhupāda chanting *japa* and he and his devotees kept me going a bit more quickly. I am ambivalent about listening to the Prabhupāda *japa* tape. There is a story that Prabhupāda heard devotees listening to it and said it was more important that they hear their own *japa*. I also heard someone say that this tape is Śrīla Prabhupāda chanting publicly at an initiation ceremony, "Now do like this . . . sit properly!" It doesn't represent his normal, private *japa*. Nevertheless, it kept me going when I was sagging.

Some of the rounds were close to ten minutes long, but they were always headed in a determined direction, slow but sure, always bringing the mind back under the control of the self. My goal now is modest—just hear the mantra with faith that the *harer nāma* sound will reveal Kṛṣṇa as a person.

Then His pastimes and qualities will also manifest. This is how I am spending my time. Poor as I am at it, I know that this is time well-spent.

Here in the farmlands of Marche, Italy, they predict a week of rain. We have never come to Italy when the weather is beautiful. I am keeping the windows closed; it's too cold and gray out there and it is already misting. I can take a gray-day atmosphere just as well as a sunshiny one. I want to chant until nothing else matters.

Two pencils on the desk . . . When you pause for a moment to take stock of your surroundings and tell that truth to others—it *is* a truth—then you can go forward on a foundation of truthfulness. Everything (*jagat*) isn't *māyā*—it is raining out and birds are singing. I took my walk in Wellington boots. The phone is ringing. This is a break in between *japa* sessions.

I have been thinking of a poem I wrote in my First Street apartment in 1967. It's called "Separation." The gist is that I am chanting *japa* on my red beads, sitting on the floor beside the radiator. The hours are passing in *japa* and it occurs to me that I can aspire to become perfect in Kṛṣṇa consciousness just by chanting. I had recently heard from Swamiji and from his books about the Vaiṣṇava teaching known as "separation from Kṛṣṇa." So it came out like this, partly honest and I suppose partly pre-tentious, trying to be a Vaiṣṇava poet:

What difference will it make?
if I go down to the river to look for You
in the stream of the water—
or if I sit down here before Your picture,
Either way it is the same because
I have Your Name to recite over and over
and it seems I have actually done both,
by thinking of the river I have gone there
and I've come back to where I have not left—
sitting before Your picture
Everything seems empty and vacant
because I am not worthy
and do not really have You as my Lover
and Friend.

Or I do not understand
that You Love me beyond what I can measure
—I cannot realize that.

I think only that You should love me
more than anyone
and then I think I am unspeakably low.

Nothing saves me but Your Name—

To say "KRISHNA," and say all
the words of the mantra

together, HARE KRISHNA

HARE KRISHNA KRISHNA KRISHNA

HARE HARE HARE RAMA HARE RAMA

RAMA RAMA HARE HARE

—and actually saying it hundreds and thousands of
times, alone with You—then I'm pacified.

Though the truth is I am lazy and
as empty-handed as any impersonalist philosopher,
still recitation of Your Name is a balm
to this separated soul who is trying to come back
just on Your Name.



4:07 P.M.

Quantity, quantity—until you get past your own face and past worrying whether the posture is comfortable, and until the long, long rounds stop coming and they become no more than eight minutes thirty seconds, and until you keep going, more, more . . .

The writing is an extension of the *japa*—rolling, unconscious, with faith in the process.

There are some pastimes we don't discuss with unqualified persons. He has so many pastimes all occurring at once—even Sesa-Ananta cannot describe them all with His thousand heads. Some pure devotees go on chanting His glories without end. Don't you see how pitifully small you are and how tiny is your devotion?

Prabhupāda on the back cover of *Nāmāmṛta*: he is holding one of his student's beads. He is showing how to chant. He looks knowing, pleased, very fatherly, or even grandfatherly. Don't touch the beads with your index finger. Two garlands hang around his neck. His *cādar* is wrapped around his lap. It is chilly where he is in South America. More beads hang around the microphone stand. He is formally initiating new devotees into the chanting of the holy names.

How many raindrops on the windowpane? You start counting things now that you are chanting

more *japa*. How many heartbeats? How many lifetimes? How many rounds until you become a pure devotee? What will it be like? What will your service be? When can I chant in loving service?

Now it's turning toward late afternoon and you didn't do splendidly, but you were putting more things aside in order to chant. After all, this is a chanting *vrata*. Other things will take care of themselves later—answering letters and speaking lectures. Now plod on, stagger on, run blindly careening into buildings and not doing it right, but reeling on incoherently, poorly pronounced, everything wrong but somehow going right also. Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.



Snapshot

Where is Śrīla Prabhupāda in this picture? I see many ISKCON Rādhā-Dāmodara *brahmacārīs*. By the *gamchā* on Ghanaśyāma's head, I can tell that they are in India and it's hot. I see some newly shaved heads. Śrutakīrti is readying a tape recorder. Tamāl Krishna Goswami is sitting near Prabhupāda, dressed in the vest he wore in those Rādhā-Dāmodara days, exposing biceps. Viṣṇujana Swami, Jagadīśa, Keśava Bharati, Śukadeva from Seattle, Ōmkāra the *pūjārī*, Brahmānanda Swami . . . A few women way in the back. I can't figure out where it

is. Maybe somebody's building outside of ISKCON, yet all you see are Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers. Śrīla Prabhupāda is looking in the direction of Viṣṇujana Swami. A big crowd of young people with their spiritual master. I am an outsider to this photo. Śrīla Prabhupāda is going to speak. Better I just be quiet and listen.

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April 8, 2:15 A.M.

"The words should be chanted with clear utterance, and the whole body should be concentrated on the chanting. We can't expect to do other things while chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa" (JRN, p. 33).

Don't brag here or anywhere. Be lowly. You are lowly. Don't say, "I chanted one round surprisingly fast, and on another round I found myself deeply concentrating and praying—this is how we should do it." Then what shall I write in a diary on *japa*?

I am happy I am spending time chanting. I won't give up; I want to encourage myself and fan the spark of *utkāṇṭha*. I want to let myself flame up. Protect the *japa* solitude. Pray to Lord Nṛsiṃha for protection. Pray to Lord Nityānanda.

It is expected that I will enter an improved state of consciousness by so much association with the holy name. Don't forget those who want to chant, who have vowed to chant but whose duties prevent them. Give them more hope in this diary.

Give them a hint that we really have to give our time to *harer nāma*.

I am an example, although not ideal. But after such a long time of abusing the practice, I find it hard to chant, although there is mercy here too. Once you get going, it becomes easier. I desire to improve. Rūpa Gosvāmī says, "If only I had millions of heads and tongues, then I could begin to satisfy my desire to chant *harināma*." I say, "What good is this inattentive-prone head?" If only I had spent my years more carefully and fervently chanting, but better late than never.

What about the fact that our very duties in Kṛṣṇa consciousness seem to distract us from *harer nāma*? We go to chant and other services run through our minds. Some of these services are connected to worldly dealings, strategies for preaching, how to deal with the lawyer and the bank, how to deal in a sometimes political way in temple life . . . In the days when ISKCON GBC men were going to see Śrīdhara Mahārāja of Navadvīpa, I asked him this question. I said (and it is printed in one of their books) that our spiritual master gives us demanding duties and sometimes they seem to conflict with attentive *japa*. I wish I had phrased that question differently. Śrīdhara Mahārāja praised the many preaching duties our *guru mahārāja* was giving us. He said that if we chant without service, it is like firing blanks from a gun. He gave as an example a disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī who took to constant chanting in the jungle.

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura asked him to come back and help manage the Delhi branch of the Gaudiya Math. Good answers.

But I wanted to hear assurance that somehow *japa* is also very important and that a beleaguered servant of the guru's mission still has to implore the holy names and bow down early in the morning and throughout the day praying at the feet of *harer nāma*. I wanted to hear and believe that the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa is most important. I wanted to hear that it is attainable. I want to be pushed and inspired in that direction. I want to see leaders and peers intently chanting on their *japa-mālā*. I want to hear heroic stories about Haridāsa Ṭhākura chanting *japa* so ecstatically that even Māyā-devī couldn't entice him but instead became converted.

Is this a romantic desire of mine? Is it unrealistic? Is it wrong to want this? No, of course not. "Then, rise tiny spirit soul, in gratefulness, security, and protection—and chant, chant, chant. Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare . . . " (JRN, p. 18).

Early morning. I feel I have to chant with a whisper because people are sleeping in the next room. It's all right, but I see the need to chant louder. It helps. I am grateful when at 4 A.M., I can chant aloud. (Whispered rounds go quickly. I try to make up for the lack of volume by intensely using my lips and mind for pronunciation and emphasis.)

I think of Brahmānanda when he went to the University of Florida at Tallahassee and stayed in a

student's room in the dorm. He rose too early for the student, so he had to sit chanting silently in bed.

O Kṛṣṇa, please let me chant. I am lacking in basic ways, so You please do the needful to bring me to You. This *japa* retreat in comfortable surroundings is one offering to You, and there are many others I may attempt. But they will all come to nothing if they do not attract You and if they do not please my spiritual master. Please guide me.

Remember that the chanting is service. It is not hunting for buried treasure to make me rich. It is service by a blade of grass. Therefore, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura speaks of contrition, atonement, tears, piteous cries. "O Gopīnātha, I am a sinner. There is no good in me. Please lift me up. Place me as one of the atoms at Your lotus feet. Please give me this service."

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura sings: "O Lord, You are an ocean of mercy. You are the friend of the fallen souls. Please notice me. I have become like a non-devotee, swallowed by the *timṅgila* fish of lust. O Lord, please protect me.

"In every birth I repeatedly offended You. In every birth I failed to worship You sincerely. No one is as fallen as I. Nevertheless, You are the only goal of my life. O Lord of my life, please do not abandon me.

"O Lord, You are known as *patita-pāvana*, the deliverer of the fallen, and You are also known as Śyāmasundara. Please do not ignore my appeal.

Even if I am an offender, I think that You are the real goal of life. That is the truth.

“O Supreme Personality of Godhead, please do not neglect me. O master of my life, please hear my words. Even if I have committed offenses to You, I always think of You as my master. Please allow me to serve You as Your associate and follower.

“Narottama dāsa is very unhappy. O Lord, please engage him in Your *saṅkīrtana* movement and thus make him happy. O Lord, I am very afraid that I will not be able to overcome the many obstacles that stop me from advancing in devotional service. O Lord, at every moment I beg You to remove all those obstacles” (*Śrī Prema-bhakti-candrikā*, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, Song 3, verses 1–4, 7).

Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya.

It's dark and cold outside. Cold in this room too. The page is bright yellow under the lamp light. On this field I press my pen, desiring to praise Kṛṣṇa,
with the pressure of the pen
and the flow of this ink—

Let Kṛṣṇa be praised (as the male parrot sang in Vṛndāvana).

Let Rādhikā be praised (as the female parrot sang).

Let Vṛndāvana be praised (as Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī sings).

Let all the Vaiṣṇavas rise and chant, even the demigods, so that the whole universe is immersed in a blissful *kīrtana* (as desired by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura for the pleasure of Kāna).

Let me join too. And now let me utter *mahā-mantras* on my beads. It is for this that the Swami gave me these beads and chanted on them for me. He wants me to be happy chanting. Don't we widely advertise on our invitation cards, "Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and your life will be sublime"?

Go after it. Be greedy for this. Collect mantras. Cram mantras. Give yourself three weeks for the exclusive practice of chanting. Neglect other duties at this time. For so long you have done the other things dutifully and pushed the *japa* into a corner like a neglected child. How many devotees do I know who must admit, "My chanting is poor"? So go and do it. But don't be proud that you have increased your quota by a minuscule amount. Premature saint, *nāmācārya* coming back to the pack boasting, "I did a big *vrata*. I discovered something." Bosh.

You have discovered you have no taste. That's why you didn't want to get into it. You thought, better leave it in its state of perpetual neglect because once you pay attention, you will see how bad the case is. Advanced cancer. Too late? No, never. It's just in time. It's the perfect time. Go on chanting now and tell us about it as honestly as possible. Let your loud pen scratch us a simple report of these days and nights. Come back again for more retreats like this and write more of this simple and sublime theme: "This is what happens when you spend time chanting."

“There is no difference between chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and meeting Kṛṣṇa eye to eye, face to face. Simply one has to realize” (lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda, 1/12/73, Bombay).

I am concentrating on the lowest common denominator—hearing. Kṛṣṇa will help. Kṛṣṇa will reveal more. Serve the mantra by uttering it and hearing it with attention. I say “it,” but *harer nāma* is She and He, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I cannot concoct a realization, but I believe in chanting. I come to You, Harer Nāma. Please smash my indifference and laziness.

Let me regret all my years of poor chanting. Let me be open to You—never afraid of *harer nāma* and what You will do if I surrender to You. Let me lose myself in Your names. I have to struggle. Give a sense of meaning, Lord, to my inevitable struggle. Let me rejoice in it. Let me grow addicted to it so that I can say, like the fisherman who came in contact with Lord Caitanya, “I don’t know what this is, whether it is ghosts or hypnotic influence. Maybe I need to see an exorcist. I have gone mad. I cannot stop chanting Hare Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa.”

The fifth offense in chanting is to consider the glories of the holy name to be imaginary.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes, “For instance, it is offensive to think, ‘The scriptural presentation of the glories of the Lord’s holy name is not entirely true, because hyperbole has been employed to increase the reader’s faith in the chanting of the name’” (HNC, p. 63).

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura also states, “The *smṛti* says that anyone who chants the holy name, whether with faith or neglect, attracts the mercy and attention of Lord Kṛṣṇa.” I sometimes think that I am chanting and chanting, but Kṛṣṇa doesn’t notice me or give me any mercy. Indirectly, this is committing the fifth offense.

This offense is similar to the fourth offense, which is to blaspheme the Vedic literatures. In particular, the many glories of the holy name, which are told in all the *Vedas*—the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Purāṇas*, etc.—are important for the chanter. Śrīla Prabhupāda himself has written enough purports on this point that they filled an entire book (*Nāmāmṛta*) about chanting. So to have any doubts about any of these statements regarding the powers of the holy name is offensive.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says that the remedy for the fifth offense is to confess it in the company of Vaiṣṇavas. Viśvanātha Cakravartī warns us that one should not think, “I do not commit offenses.” If we do commit offenses—and that is proven by the fact that we do not experience any of the symptoms of *kṛṣṇa-prema* when we chant—then we have to confess.

A person who does not think about offensive chanting has nothing to confess. First he must become conscious. Perhaps our first confession will be that we don’t even think about the offenses or about our chanting. We will have to admit that we chant only out of habit, as *guru-dakṣiṇa*. We are afraid of death and we want to be saved. Therefore,

we chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. We have heard and been impressed by the *Bhāgavatam* narrations of Ajāmila and Purāṇjana. We are afraid of hell. We have understood that we need some religion, and we have abandoned Christianity (or whatever religion we were raised in). How long can we keep it up? This attitude is filled with offenses.

We have to dig beneath the surface of our complacency. We may think we are innocent of this particular offense, and we may not exactly blaspheme the scriptural descriptions of the holy name. Do we believe that even the shadow of the holy name can bring liberation? Do we chant Hare Kṛṣṇa as if we believed it?

We commit this offense just by the fact that we chant so poorly. If we had faith in the scriptural statements of how wonderful the chanting is and how Kṛṣṇa is present as His name, then how could we chant lackadaisically? Prabhupāda gave an example. If Kṛṣṇa came into our temple now, how attentive we would be to Him. We would care for all His needs and happily serve Him. But Kṛṣṇa *does* come fully in the holy name. Why aren't we attentive? This is a sign that we don't completely believe. This is the offense of considering the glories of the holy name to be imagination.

We may not want to admit it, but when we scratch below the surface of our Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we find a latent atheist lurking there. That atheist is not only thinking that the glories of the holy name are imaginary, he is thinking that *Kṛṣṇa* is imaginary. He is thinking that there is nothing

but this life that we see with our senses and that there is no other existence. We have to be very sorry for this and kick off all bad association. We have to pray for faith, hear the *śāstras*, and live on the good side, not the bad side, of our own characters. Because we do have spiritual experience, we just have to fight to defend it against its enemies. Therefore, by associating with the devotees and the learned Vaiṣṇava scholars, and by taking shelter in the scriptures, we can increase our faith and go forward. Then we can also accept the glories of the holy name and chant with taste.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī says in *Upadeśāmṛta* that although at present we don't taste the sweetness of the holy name due to jaundice (*avidyā*), the holy names are so wonderful that by repeatedly chanting them, the taste will return. This statement is not Rūpa Gosvāmī's imagination. The chanting is very wonderful, it does have a sweet taste, and we will attain it. Therefore, we will show our belief in the statement by acting on the basis of it. We will go on chanting.

So let us come into the company of the Vaiṣṇavas and admit that we sometimes doubt the glories of the holy name as they are described. We wonder how they can really be true. But actually, dear Vaiṣṇavas, we want to be free of this offensiveness. We want to have full faith in the statements of the holy name even before we attain the right experience. And we do have that hope; we are chanting on that hope. Therefore, even by confessing it, we are feeling renewed strength. We realize

that we are not confessing anything real, only our false contamination. We want to study the scriptures. What we don't understand, or what we have not yet experienced, we want to recognize as the goal of our aspirations. We want to qualify to experience the name's glories. All we can do is practice and hope against hope.



6:45 A.M.

Once during *japa* hours in Māyāpura, a God-brother burst into my room and said, "I wanted to see what the author of *Japa Reform Notebook* was doing—whether he's chanting his rounds like he tells us to do."

Writing this in the van, rain pouring down on the steel roof. I have a few minutes before I am due back in the house after my walk. A full sixteen rounds left in my quota.

Attentive chanting: "Hearing oneself calling on Kṛṣṇa's name . . . not that we are repeating the name dully, or unconsciously . . . think of calling on Kṛṣṇa's name while you actually recite that name" (*Japa Reform Notebook*, p. 33).

I am going in there. This diary voice is sometimes like the boxer's manager spoken into the ear of the fighter between rounds while he quickly massages his man and gives him some brine to soak in his mouth and spit out, wipes his

face, repairs cuts as far as possible—before the bell, “You’ve got him, kid, just keep hitting, but watch out for his left hook.”

Back into the ring. Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, I spar around my enemy, *pramāda*, and he throws his right hand laziness punch, then feints a left “*cañ-calā*” punch, and I step back dancing, bobbing, weaving.



10:30 A.M., Snapshot

It’s Māyāpura. Śrīla Prabhupāda is ringing the bell. From left to right behind him are Brahmānanda, Jaya Patāka, and Paramahaṁsa Mahārājas. Śrīla Prabhupāda wears wrinkled, shiny silk. His feet are bare. The photo is dark and Śrīla Prabhupāda’s clothes are bright. Everyone is barefoot on the marble floor. Ringing the bell, tugging the cord, singing Hare Kṛṣṇa *kīrtana*. Śrīla Prabhupāda is looking down, grave, dark, with yellow *candana* on his forehead. I was there, trailing behind, when you rang the bell in Māyāpura Chandrodayā Mandira. They still ring that bell to enact your pastime.

I am not worthy to speak of my spiritual master or of Māyāpura-*dhāma*, but let me not dwell on my inadequacy. Śrīla Prabhupāda, I love you.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, we are so often imperfect. The world seems full of faults. Our moment to moment practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is also full of faults. Not only that, but we have the propensity to always

find the faults (*kuṭi-nāṭi*). Please rescue us from that tendency. Let us hear the bell ringing loudly in worship of the Lord. Let us follow you and desire to serve you, although this *ahaṅkāra* rides on our backs. It makes us look dark, like the darkness of the photo. I see the marble floor in the temple room and only think of complaints. Śrīla Prabhupāda, you see Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. You see Bhaktivinoda Thākura's mission and the pleasure of your spiritual master. And somehow you see some good in us, although our faults are so prominent. Please reprimand us and push us to become better. No nonsense. Serve and chant.

If we ask you a foolish question like, "How do we control our minds when we chant?" you answer almost curtly, "What is the question of controlling the mind? Just chant and hear and the mind will be controlled automatically." Prabhupāda, it is as if you see our uncontrolled minds as willful misbehavior, just as you recognized the dysentery of your followers in India as the result of voracious eating and laziness. The uncontrolled mind of a chanter is just more nonsense. Stop it. Hear Hare Kṛṣṇa. Control the mind. Hmmm. Of course you are right. I will go to my room and try it again.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, I beg forgiveness for my impertinence, but I cannot and will not fall down and weep. I do not know how to surrender to the divine names. I am surrendering my time and carefully counting the minutes per round, the number of beads. That is all I know.

1:20 P.M.

Lunch soon. *Japa* quota on schedule. My little routines, everything in its place. Everything is on schedule but I feel no emotion. So what if I chant a few extra rounds and quiet down my headaches and write about it?

It's humbling to see that it is not under my control.

A note to myself posted right in front of me:

 Promised:
 Will fight drowsiness
 walk and chant loudly.

 Will fight *pramada*
 by simple willingness to
 return the mind back to hearing.

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4:10 P.M.

The facing of self and the limit. The *japa* that goes nowhere and yet even that little bit leads me on to try more.

I don't even want to go outside for a walk in the yard. I don't want to leave this scene of possible inspiration. Not that much is happening in this little room as I chant, but it could happen, and in private, I can write it down. If I go outside, I may have to say hello and I will be spread out into the sky and hills and . . .

I took down the big map on the wall of the Lazio-Marche-Umbria section of Italy. I kept walking up to it and looking at it, studying the lakes and roads and borders and coasts. MV saw the blank space on the wall and used the nail to hang up a picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

I do respect these little things. To tell you the truth, I very much respect the meals I eat twice a day. One person quit reading *Journal & Poems* when they discovered I talked of “what you had for breakfast.” They were looking for spiritual guidance and here I was writing of yogurt and bananas and walnuts and apples and honey for the yogurt. But it’s *prasādam*. It’s life-sustaining. It’s a world.



From *Vandanam*

“Did we think it would be easier? Did we imagine we would become almost as good as Haridāsa Ṭhākura within a few years? So it is not so easy after all.

“Then, let us show Kṛṣṇa that we really do want the nectar of this service, and we are willing to pay any price” (p. 34).

Why don’t I ever think of Kṛṣṇa as a person? Why don’t I remember His lifting Govardhana Hill? *Nothing*. “After taking good advice, we have to face our own selves and face the Hare Kṛṣṇa

mantra and chant and hear. It is hard work, *tapasya*, but for the best cause" (*Vandanam*, p. 33).

I saw a farmer out in the middle of his brown field, inspecting it. I don't know if he has already seeded it or what he is looking for. It takes a long time, waiting for the plant to grow up through the earth. A man is small compared to an acre. He stands in the middle of it and looks down at the earth. What does he see? What does he think? Did it pain his heart? There is only so much he can do. The rest is up to Nature, the sun, the sky.

"The result of chanting is that one awakens his love for Kṛṣṇa and tastes transcendental bliss. Ultimately, one attains the association of Kṛṣṇa and engages in His devotional service, as if immersing himself in a great ocean of love" (*C.c., Antya* 20.14).

"My dear Lord, when will My eyes be beautified by filling with tears that constantly glide down as I chant Your holy name? When will My voice falter and all the hairs on My body stand erect in transcendental happiness as I chant Your holy name?" (*C.c., Antya* 20.36).

"For persons who are not inclined to clean the dust from their heart and want to keep things as they are, it is not possible to derive the transcendental result of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. One should therefore be encouraged to develop

his service attitude toward the Lord, because this will help him to chant without any offense" (*Nectar of Devotion*, quoted in *Japa Reform Notebook*, p. 39).

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April 9, 2:12 A.M.

Perhaps this writing could take a more active part in assisting my *japa*. One point is to attempt to link the holy names to Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Nothing artificial, please. The names already contain the pastimes, but I don't chant with awareness. I am in forgetfulness.

I could try pausing every three or four rounds and reading or praying. I have abandoned that practice over the last while—lost the muscles I had gained from doing it for several years. I have been reading twenty minutes early in the morning after bathing, and praying for fifteen minutes when I first rise from bed. These are some of the best moments of the entire day, so why not try for more interspersed between rounds? Just writing this down helps.

They bought me a typewriter. It took them hours to find the right store, drive there, and get back. It cost more than in the U.S., over two hundred dollars. It's a Canon Typestar 2. But the letters m, w, z, and the period mark are all in different places on the keyboard than models you buy in English-speaking countries. There is also a potential prob-

lem with the machine. It chews up paper and rips the ribbons. I will try working with it today, but it might be too crazy. Makes me grateful that writing by hand is so simple. Yesterday, one of my four-dollar Shaeffer pens conked out after almost a year of service. No problem; just pick up a new pen. And I have been using the same Tandy *japa* beads for almost twenty-six years without replacement. The same tongue and ears, the same eternal Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. The same problems of a *nitya-baddha* soul.

Ah, let me find my voice, Lord Hari, within my own chanting. Let me focus. Allow me to call to Prabhupāda and beg for service. Here the written word cannot go further. Then stop and allow the chanting its own province. I cannot say exactly what goes on in chanting, and maybe I shouldn't try.

This morning I woke, looked at the clock, and read twelve midnight. I went back to sleep and dreamt that Baladeva wanted me to go live on a beach on the Atlantic coast where hundreds of people were camped. There I would do a barefoot ministry. I was willing to do this, and he was very enthusiastic about it. Then I woke again. It was twenty minutes past one. Usually I get up at fifteen minutes before one, so I felt hurried. I skipped my introductory prayers and started quick whispering of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. The rounds were coming in at seven minutes thirty seconds, and one round was 6:46. They were better than usual in attention. For me, rushing doesn't necessarily mean poor chanting. The main point is to be aware of what we

are doing and to approach the holy name prayerfully.

I have been giving time to *japa* over the years, but I still don't enter the chanting. I think about the saying, "If the girl has come onto the stage to dance, why doesn't she remove her veil?" Or, "If you buy an elephant, then why quibble about the price of the elephant's goad?" Why not give your heart and urgency? Why not abandon other thoughts and taste the sweetness of the holy name?

Go ahead and like to do it, Prabhu. I give you permission and all good wishes.

Years ago I did have a simpler faith—I temporarily recaptured it this morning—straining to only *hear*, with faith in the mantra Prabhupāda gave us. All you have to do is fix your mind and two senses on this *mahā-mantra*. Kṛṣṇa will not remain indifferent to our cry. But if there is no *bhakti*, Kṛṣṇa will not be personally interested. If in your heart, you are not calling to Kṛṣṇa, then He won't hear you, or rather, He will hear that you are crying for something else, *mokṣa*, ecstasy for yourself, whatever, and he will give you some of it. Chanting the outer form of the mantra is not enough.

So when I say have simple faith only in hearing, that hearing must be internal. "But the all-importance of the holy names does not preclude the necessity to chant them prayerfully, with attention. Kṛṣṇa will not appear if we say the names without thought or feeling for He whom we are addressing or if we commit offenses to the holy

names. . . . it is the quality of our utterances which counts the most" (*Vandanam*, pp. 30–31).

Specifically, what about *rasika* pastimes and *japa*? If you want to connect them—to think of Kṛṣṇa with the *gopīs* when you chant—then the best thing I can recommend is to read those pastimes in small installments between rounds. No harm. Don't expect much to happen. My main attention is the *japa-yajña*. Major repair work has to be done on the basic machine before the pastimes will appear. I am like a mechanic on his back under the car, twelve hours a day, replacing parts, oiling, hammering, adjusting. I know what I have to do.

But I agree with you: what good is a smooth-running engine without *rasa*? So you add it, a little at a time. My main time is given to the hearing and chanting, but you are right, the goal is Vraja. Chanting here leads to chanting there.

According to *Harināma-cintāmaṇi*, the sixth offense in chanting is to commit sins on the strength of chanting the holy names. This is the most grievous offense, along with the first offense, *sādhunindā*. But what does it mean exactly? If we deliberately use whatever benefits or advantages or strengths we gain by chanting to counteract our sins, without intending to stop the sins, then we are committing this offense. Prabhupāda says that this offense is committed by religionists when they confess their sins, ask forgiveness from God's representative, and then expect to go on sinning. Bhakti-

vinoda Ṭhākura also explains that there is a vast difference between an accidental falldown and a premeditated sin.

I may claim to be innocent of this mentality. I can even say that I don't understand this mentality. It is such an insidious way to think, and unless one changes his attitude, there will be no way to become released from this offense. It will bring one to worse and worse states because the chanter is abusing the Lord's name. Chanting is meant to save us from sin, to deliver us from sin, and here the chanter is using the holy name to make a career of sinful life.

We should strictly avoid the company of anyone who is committing this offense, and of course, we should be very careful to drive it out of ourselves. We have to be introspective. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says that especially chanters in the *nāmābhasa* stage have to be vigilant about *nāmāparādha*. This *aparādha* is the worst.

Therefore, it's not good enough to just pass this one off, thinking that it is for terrible offenders, people we won't associate with, but certainly it doesn't pertain to us. No, we have to be vigilant, thinking that although I may be following the regulative principles, I might fall down into this *nāmāparādha* unless I am very careful. Don't think that we are above it. And also, don't think that it is not already happening or couldn't happen, if not in the gross form, then in the subtle form. It is ironic that it is the kind of *aparādha* that will be committed by a person with some inclination for religion. It would seem, for example, that a person who never

chanted couldn't commit this offense to chanting. Ajāmila didn't commit this offense. So if we enter the path of religion, then we become responsible for right behavior, and when we pervert religion, then we become worse offenders than ordinary people. The example is that of a policeman: when he cheats and breaks the law, he is a worse offender than an ordinary citizen because the policeman was looked up to as a representative of the law.

You have the example of advantages that come from *sannyāsa*. A *sannyāsī* is honored for his celibacy and his expected devotion to God and his guidance of all the *āśramas*. Therefore, honor is offered to him in so many ways. Sometimes he is honored in ways that are not really good for him. He may be given too many amenities—money or followers. Sometimes he is offered the association of beautiful women *because* he is a *sannyāsī*. Of course, he does not have to accept everything that is offered to him, but if he finds ways to commit subtle or gross sins on the strength of his position, then he is taking advantage of a sacred trust. He becomes a hypocrite.

We should look within ourselves to see to what degree we are being hypocritical and using the auspices of Kṛṣṇa consciousness to further our own sinful ends. What is sinful? We think it means breaking the principles—illicit sex, intoxication, meat-eating, and gambling—but it may also mean the subtle meditations leading up to the breaking of those principles. Any kind of exploitative mentality in spiritual life is at least a beginning of this particular *nāmāparādha*.

The path of devotional service is like the razor's edge. One could start out without any idea of this *nāmāparādhā* but lead up to it. One could practice penances and even cry out for devotion to Kṛṣṇa, and then gradually begin to feel some softening of the heart as a result. At that stage, feeling the dawn of blissful Kṛṣṇa consciousness within oneself, one would also want to share it with others. Then in their company, one would be honored as a chanter of the holy name and one would feel that one's life was being fulfilled. One becomes honored as a guru of the holy name and then one begins to be proud of being such a superior chanter of the holy name. Then, rather than really work to spread the holy name, one becomes complacent, thinks oneself a great saint or even an *avadhuta*, and then crashes down, commits hidden sinful activities—all done on the strength of chanting the holy name. We have seen this happen, that sincere devotees with mixed motives fell down. Unless we regularly weed our own devotional garden, even apparent progress in purity can lead us to downfall.

This offense is the worst thing that could happen. A sober-minded person should be cautious that it doesn't happen to him.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura offers the remedy of going into the association of devotees and asking their forgiveness. This means, of course, that we have to give up our attachment to sin, humbly expose the fact that we are cheating, and take the reaction of having our prestige reduced. We can become clean by the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas. They will console us

and assure us that we can rectify ourselves, and they will engage us in devotional service again.

At that time, we can take up the chanting of the holy name in earnest, and not use it to again gather followers or material rewards. Things that are not sinful in themselves, such as followers or beautiful women or money, can very easily become sinful. It is best that a chanter of the holy name keep a distance from these things. If in the name of service he does accept followers or does have any kind of connection with beautiful women or beautiful things, even beautiful poetry (whatever is implied by the word "*sundarim*"), then he has to be watchful that his association doesn't turn into an enjoying mood. When he falls into the enjoying mood, then his chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra entangles him in *nāmāparādha*.

Chanting the holy name is not in itself an *aparādha*, but if a chanter is committing sins on the strength of chanting, if he is sustaining himself by the mercy of the chanting, then his chanting becomes filled with *aparādha*. This is what it means when we say that when watering the *bhakti-latā*, the plant of devotion, we may be watering the weeds at the same time. By chanting, we can be committing sin. Of course, the solution to this is not to stop chanting, but to stop the sin.



6:45 A.M.

The cantankerous typewriter has been set up for my use. If it gets too cantankerous, I can always go back to the pen.

There is no way to get at the truths of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They descend from the Lord and the *rāgātmikā* devotees as blessings. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura appeared in this world to tell us the intimate pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa which were not disclosed in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (although whatever he said was based on the *Bhāgavatam*). Viśvanātha Cakravartī is both a recipient of mercy and a giver of mercy. Each of us can be like that, at least to a small degree. We have already received the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra from His Divine Grace, and we have already received transcendental knowledge from the Bhaktivedanta purports. We are already recipients of mercy; we are now bound to give mercy to others.

O Lord of the universe, O soul of the universe, kindly deliver us from the fiery *brahmāstra* of the enemy which is hurtling toward us. Kindly break our tie of affection for our material kinsmen. Let our devotion to You flow like the Ganges in monsoon unto the Bay of Bengal.

This van is like an *āsana*. I want to write something Kṛṣṇa conscious, but I don't want to be artificial. When I see a tree swaying in the wind, if it does not remind me of a *gopī* dancing for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa, then I should not claim that it does. O Lord of my heart, please teach me. Let the teach-

ings of Kṛṣṇa consciousness attract this conditioned soul and please allow me to participate in the *saṅ-kīrtana* movement.

O Lord of the universe, who plays the flute in the *śarad* season and attracts the *gopīs* to join him, and who, when the *gopīs* are assembled tells them, "Go home now"—may that Lord give me a drop of mercy by revealing the nature of the holy names. I am chanting and I think it is the best occupation. But You know that it is also a sleepy desert for me. I beg for water, for the inspiration to chant in the mood of service. I beg to be able to go out from here and preach as one who loves to tell the glories of *harer nāma*. This is my request, written in the Renault van on an Italian typewriter keyboard, while listening to the rain on the roof. All glories to Prabhupāda.



10:30 A.M.

"Some bear only the burden, others appreciate the true worth of things" (*Nāma-bhajana*, Bhakti-vinoda Ṭhākura).

Sitting on the windowsill, averaging 8:40 seconds. Not bad, considering that stereotype of "good rounds" in popular ISKCON. But my mind went quickly through my pre-Kṛṣṇa conscious past in this lifetime, combining persons and events fancifully as we do in a dream, like an unconscious playwright . . . Was that a flicker of remorse for all the time wasted? Was that a beginning of compassion

for all the people I knew, for my mother and father? But if I was thinking something noble, was it because I am “supposed” to? Is this a Western mental disease—that we always play games and then catch ourselves at playing games? Is there no end to it, no genuine moment before it is all destroyed?

I think this disease comes from the advertising industry and from low-class comedians. Comedians in our own families—cynical older sisters and strong-armed fathers who consider any deviancy from the norm as wimpish.

This conditioning cripples me when I try to range deep inside simply with the *mahā-mantra*. If you were born in Bengal or the Vṛndāvana area, it might be different. But I have seen some strange cases from those areas too. It’s Kali-yuga. Where there are no good trees, a castor tree is a big tree.

Kṛṣṇa, did You once hear my chanting, or does my rasping voice disturb Your play?



Snapshot

Śrīla Prabhupāda in the Rādhā-Dāmodara courtyard, walking away from his veranda rooms. Those historic rooms! It is about 1971. Mālātī dāśī is there, and Śyāmasundara, Ṛṣi-kumāra (with a blanket wrapped around him and chanting *japa*), Subala Swami with a cane like Prabhupāda’s. Prabhupāda

is looking down at four-year-old Sarasvati, who is looking off somewhere—to her future?

Śrīla Prabhupāda in the sunlight, his foot stepping on an inscribed marble plaque, his cane . . . I cannot see you, Śrīla Prabhupāda, but still I see your figure in photo, that same rust-colored sweater, the *candana* on your forehead, the reddish socks, bead-bag, orange marigold garland. Your hair is gray at the back of your head and your complexion is dark and golden.

Your disciples want to care for you, they are looking to your needs. But are we ready to surrender to your heavy order to work and sweat it out in Vṛndāvana as a manager of cement construction? Can we stay celibate? Can we stay in your movement?

Still, we share the desire to care for you tenderly, to watch where you step, to bring you water to drink, to cook, to ask about Kṛṣṇa in Vraja. It's cold there now. You are looking down . . . I am no better than the others. This photo helps me to remember that.

Subala, I too want to be a *bābājī* in Vraja. I know what you meant. But Prabhupāda wanted us to work under his direction. It must have been hard for you back then during the construction of Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Mandira. Now his followers have more room to serve in our own ways—now that the Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Mandira has been built and Prabhupāda has returned to his *nitya-līlā*. We are left with his order to love him by cooperating together. There is room for everyone now. Together we can keep Prabhupāda's movement vital.

In this picture of close disciples with their revered spiritual father living together in Vṛndāvana, the holiest place, we all had the right idea. We focused on Prabhupāda.



11:30 A.M.

It is so cold outside that the grass looks like it is shivering in the wind. I looked out the window and saw MV in his little garden picking the lettuce we will honor at lunch. I didn't want him to see me, so I ducked back inside. There is a wonderful opportunity in the *japa-vrata*. I refrain from answering mail . . .

If I am honest about the fact that I am only on the beginning level of chanting, it can be a strong position. Even the lower rung of *bhakti-yoga* is important. I am recording, "Look, I know for sure about this lower rung, what the problems are and how to survive. I also know what you have to do to get to the next rung. I have read (and I believe it) that the mercy of Kṛṣṇa and the Vaiṣṇavas is essential. We cannot make it on our own."

Kṛṣṇa's name is both the means and the end. "According to the individual *jīva*'s degree of spiritual perfection, he considers the Lord's name to be either the means or the end. As long as he has not attained self-realization, the holy name is the means to reach this goal" (*HNC*, p. 77).

Prabhupāda says the goal of chanting is love of God. We are chanting in good faith. Theoretically, we accept that chanting is itself *kṛṣṇa-prema*, or is the full bliss of direct service to Kṛṣṇa, but we haven't realized it.

At least we know that chanting is the way, although even that remains theoretical. Therefore, we are both fortunate and unfortunate. We have no way to map out our progress. We know we don't want to try to squeeze out sense gratification from the chanting, but neither can we pay attention. Perhaps we are too proud. We keep refusing to see the obvious conclusion that we are offensive and bereft of self-realization. If we could accept our place as a blade of grass, without false ego, then tears could come, and submission to the holy names.

"One who chants with a pure heart experiences how divine bliss enters his heart and makes it soar with sublime light. This is the essential nature of the holy name" (*HNC*, p. 78).



Haridāsa Ṭhākura's prayer to Lord Caitanya
for receiving the nectar of the holy name

"My dear Lord, my thoughts and my intellect are thoroughly mundane: therefore I simply mouth the names of the Lord. I am too unfortunate to experience the transcendental touchstone qualities of the holy name. O Lord! I beg You to please appear as the holy name and dance on my tongue. I fall at

Your lotus feet and pray. If You like, You can keep me in this material world and deprive me of the spiritual sky; whatever You desire, You are free to fulfill. But please let me taste the divine nectar of Kṛṣṇa's holy name. You have incarnated among the *jīvas* to distribute the holy name, so kindly also consider me, an insignificant *jīva*. I am a fallen soul and You are the savior of the fallen. Let this be our relationship. O Savior! On the strength of this relationship, I am begging from You the nectar of the holy name" (*HNC*, pp. 79–80).



A hearing deficiency

" . . . a person who finds himself 'elsewhere' when chanting *japa* should immediately take precautionary measures. Shake your mental laziness. Ultimately, such a complacent attitude in *japa* means that you think you will never die. If you are conscious of your true position and how, factually, death could come at any moment, then your *japa* would not be so nonchalant. You would actually be grasping for the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa in desperation—that in whatever small amount of time destined you, you must perfect your life, perfect your heart, and the only means is through the mercy of Lord Kṛṣṇa through His holy name" (*Japa Reform Notebook*, pp. 40–1).



4:15 P.M.

Truck going by. It wasn't Federal Express. Van going out, it might have been Madhu going to mail my letter. Phone ringing, might be some heavy news from America. I sit on the cold windowsill and think over the possible news I am missing out on and when it will catch up to me. I have very little stamina for the life of solitude. There is no harm if I stay away from news for a few weeks, but I can't do it. I must find out little affairs. These are ways to distract myself.

Aside from that, I'm pleased to count my total rounds. Oh, Kṛṣṇa.

I have read the prayers of devotees begging You, my dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, for the nectar of the holy name. Please accept my *japa* as a form of begging for that same nectar. I am just a Kali-yuga beggar with no pious credits, but Your pure devotee, Śrīla Prabhupāda, induced me to chant. I can't stop.

I regret that I don't regret my lack of achievement. I cannot tell this to anyone, but You know my heart. I cannot tell the nondevotees because they will use it as ammunition in their war against theism. I cannot tell the devotees because they don't want to hear my continual complaints—they want relief for their own situations. I must tell the truth—I don't want to hide it or be afraid of it or bluff. I chant but can't pay attention. Due to offenses, I am not attracted to the holy name. With these words, I am able to express what doesn't come

out clearly even in chanting. At least let me confess and beg for mercy from the Supreme.

I have heard that pure chanting will solve all the problems for oneself and for the whole world (*param vijayate śrī-kṛṣṇa-saṅkīrtanam*). Please, Lord, descend to me in Your most merciful form. If You will not descend because I am an offender, please let me know what I must do, because now I cannot even face You. I try but I cannot hold my focus. Something is wrong. You are not allowing me to face You and pray to You. I have been given the mantra in *paramparā*. I am trying to follow the order of my beloved, exalted spiritual master, although imperfectly, so why can't I at least pray and be aware of *harer nāma*? Will you help me?

Śrīla Prabhupāda is fingering his beads. He roars, "Sit properly!" and loudly chants by the hour. I can do it too.

"Chanting is very simple, but one must practice it seriously" (C.c., *Ādi* 17.32, purport).

"If one's heart does not change, tears do not flow from his eyes, his body does not shiver, nor his hairs stand on end as he chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, it should be understood that his heart is as hard as iron. This is due to his offenses at the lotus feet of the Lord's holy name" (*Bhāg.* 2.3.24, quoted C.c., *Ādi* 8:25).

In his *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* purport to this verse,

Prabhupāda states that sometimes, neophyte devotees imitate these bodily symptoms, whereas very advanced devotees (*mahā-bhāgavatas*) often do not manifest any symptoms. "The test of the real change of heart that takes place when one chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* is that one becomes detached from material enjoyment . . . The change must be manifested in terms of one's real activities."

Don't expect to enjoy the material world while on a *japa* retreat trying to make advancement in chanting. I am living simply, but I am not punishing myself by living in the cold rain or fasting. I should not be expecting ecstatic bodily symptoms. What are my real activities? Am I attached to the results of this *yajña*? Am I prepared to please Kṛṣṇa regardless of how He reciprocates with me? What does He want from me?

•

6:45 P.M.

Prabhupāda is chanting strongly (I wanted to say savagely) on the tape. I fell into a cloud of unclarity when I chanted the last round. Anyway, I do them, adding one to another, just as I add these pages. "Sit properly." This is the way. Rain is pinkling against the windows. The Lord is revealed. You are not entirely without Him. You are a *japa*-maker.

•

April 10, 2:12 A.M.

Chanting as early as possible, very quick, whispered rounds. I thought, "The Lord will instantly see my low state. Therefore, my honest and actual position—I should realize it and call from there: "Please help me; please pick me up."

I light a votive candle before the "original" picture of Śrī Pañca-tattva; it begins to frame itself in my mind as I continue to look at it. The advantage of the first rounds in the morning is that I am willing to offer *daṇḍavats* after each round while reciting the Pañca-tattva mantra. Later in the day I only half do it, or nod in the direction of a *daṇḍavat* without thinking of the names of Pañca-tattva. Pañca-tattva mantra doesn't accept offenses, whereas Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra won't be fully effective unless you chant offenselessly.

The *śāstras* are more important than my own musings and struggles. Why am I so interested in what I have to say? My "gremlin" claims I am an egoistic madman who revels in self-expression; he thinks I have an artist's disease. But writing needn't be seen in that way. It is important to embrace the *śāstras* and at the same time, to continually express and evaluate how you are living them. As Śrīla Prabhupāda states, "The change must be manifested in terms of one's real activities."

This is the same point I made in *Vandanam*, a manual of personal prayer. I quoted Śrīla Prabhupāda: " . . . therefore one has to pray constantly to

the Lord for protection and the blessing to carry out one's duty" (*Bhāg.* 3.9.24, purport). Writing is prayer. "There is a great benefit in praying with the words of scripture, but there may be a tendency to hide behind the perfect formulas of prayer which others have made. Personal prayer forces us to speak directly and to come out from hiding" (*Van-danam*, p. 20).

Rain slashing all night. Wind buffeting. The road will be muddy, but I will be there in full rain gear. Wellies are great for walking.

"You call this a prayer?"

Yes.

"O enjoyer of the nectar of the name,
when will I touch Your feet till the end of time?
When, oh when will that day be mine?
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, oh when will that day be mine?"

—"Kabe Ha'be Bolo," *Śaraṇāgati*,
Vaiṣṇava Songbook, p. 48

Lord Caitanya asked Haridāsa Ṭhākura, "My dear Haridāsa, what is the news?"

Haridāsa replied, "My Lord, whatever mercy You can bestow upon me" (*C.c.*, *Antya* 11.47).

My daily journal is like that. I am a reporter of spiritual news, but all I can tell is whatever mercy Kṛṣṇa and guru will give me.

A chill in the chest, no heating in this room, but that's all right. It will always be either hot or cold; when is it ever "just right"?

A main sign of a change of heart in chanting is that one doesn't worry too much about the body. It sustains itself while one goes on chanting. We hope to die in Vṛndāvana sooner or later. Where is my urgency?

I offer my respectful obeisances unto the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana. "They can purify all conditioned souls . . . by pouring upon them transcendental songs about Govinda." They accepted only loincloths as clothes and lived as mendicants in Vṛndāvana, but they are always merged in *gopī-bhāva*, the ecstatic ocean of the *gopīs'* love for Kṛṣṇa. (They used their valuable lives in chanting the holy names and bowing down "in a scheduled measurement." They kept high quotas of *japa* and *daṇḍavats*. They drastically reduced their eating and sleeping almost to nil "and were always meek and humble, enchanted by remembering the transcendental qualities of the Lord.")

I offer my respectful obeisances to the Six Gosvāmīs who researched all the *Vedas*. They gave humankind conclusive evidence that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead and His activities in Vṛndāvana constitute the highest and most

relishable expression of transcendence. They transform us into exclusive followers of the Lord's *Vraja-līlā*. We are indebted to them, and we can never repay them. Therefore, we simply wish to serve them in this world and the next.

We follow the Six Gosvāmīs, not independently, but by following our spiritual master, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. All glories to the Six Gosvāmīs "who were sometimes on the bank of Rādhā-kuṇḍa or the shores of the Yamunā and sometimes at Vamśīvaṭa. . . . chanting very loudly, '*He rādhe vraja-devike cā lalite he nanda-sūno kutaḥ: Queen of Vṛndāvana, Rādhārāṇī! O Lalitā! O son of Nanda Mahārāja! Where are you all now? Are you just on the hill of Govardhana, or are you under the trees on the bank of the Yamunā? Where are you?*' These were their moods in executing Kṛṣṇa consciousness" (*Śrī Śaḍ-Gosvāmy-aṣṭaka*, verses 7–8).

According to *Harināma-cintāmaṇi*, the seventh offense is to teach the glories of the holy name to faithless person. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura makes very direct and heavy statements about this offense to warn those who are taking disciples. If an initiating guru desires to derive some material benefit from a disciple and therefore initiates a disciple who has no faith, that guru will go to hell. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says that slowly but surely, the shallow disciple will drag the guru down and ruin him. The remedy? The guru should confess his ill motivations for giving initiation in the company of

Vaiṣṇavas. He should feel remorseful and then should reject the shallow disciple. Then he should vow never to take on such a disciple again.

It is not possible for me to read that without feeling fearful. Even if I won't go to hell for having taken on so many disciples who later gave up their vows—my motivation wasn't wrong—I still realize that it may be a cause of my slowed progress in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. One wonders why he cannot make advancement in the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa. This may be the reason. This may be one of the roots of my disease and it may require a more holistic cure—taking three weeks off in Italy simply to chant may not do that much for me.

It is a delicate issue. We feel encouraged by Prabhupāda to initiate as many people as possible. He wants to increase the members of Lord Caitanya's preaching movement. Prabhupāda even says that we may initiate a disciple who is not qualified, thinking that he will become qualified later. But the highest principle is to save oneself.

We have to be cautious. A subtle version of this offense would be a guru's feeling pleasure at being honored by his many disciples. This desire for honor may push him to initiate many disciples, but we should be aware that some of them, many of them, will not be qualified. They drag him down. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura makes such a strong point about this offense that we should all take it very seriously. Be careful about how you initiate others into the holy name.

By spending time chanting *japa*, we may become enthusiastic about chanting and want to tell people about the glories of the holy name. Again, we have to be cautious. Everyone in the world should be given the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, but we should be careful about revealing the intimate glories of the holy name. "Intimate" may mean telling others that Hare Kṛṣṇa actually refers to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and how They attract each other and enjoy loving pastimes. This area of Kṛṣṇa consciousness should only gradually be disclosed to others as they become qualified by faith.

It is good to be willing to take a risk for Kṛṣṇa, but we have to calculate it carefully. We have to weigh the risks in preaching against our own level of advancement. The more serious we become about succeeding in our chanting, the more careful we will be to consider what is favorable or detrimental. Although we put time into our chanting, we will not want to defeat our progress by committing offenses like preaching the intimate glories of the Lord to the faithless.

In discussing this offense, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura expresses the importance of *śraddhā*. People who have *śraddhā* should be given the holy name. What about my own *śraddhā*? If faith is such an important ingredient, then it is also an offense not to possess faith. Faithless persons are excluded from the mercy of the holy name. This point is covered even more in the tenth offense, which specifically states "not to have complete faith in the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa" is an offense.

The discussion of the seventh offense is a sobering one. It reveals to us that if we want to pursue spiritual life, we cannot maintain material facilities, such as making cheap disciples. We have to either practice spiritual life or pursue material life. If, with a superficial sense of being “merciful” to others, we make cheap disciples, we will have to pay the price. That price is disastrous.

When we chant and try to concentrate on the holy names, so many things come to mind despite our efforts to pay attention. So if we must think of other things, think over how not to become dragged down by the disclosure of the glories of the holy name to faithless person. Think how not to offend the holy name or the giver of the holy name. Think about how spiritual life does not mean enjoying our own followers but pleasing guru and Kṛṣṇa. Think about being obedient to their will. Everything must be weighed against the order of the guru. We shouldn’t be so bold in our preaching that we act beyond our capacity. But neither should we be over-cautious and not take any risks for Kṛṣṇa. We have to take guidance.



7:00 A.M.

Distracted chanting. I haven’t grasped yet what it means to meditate during *japa*. One can think that he is serving his spiritual master and one can think that he is serving Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, but I cannot

sustain that kind of meditation. I am left with the work of a new *bhakta*, straining to hear the mantra itself. I know that there is much more to this mantra-chanting. If I don't think of Kṛṣṇa in Vraja, then even if I go on chanting "attentively," it will not bring me to His sweetest pastimes.

Kṛṣṇa describes in the *yajña* section of *Bhagavad-gītā* that *brahmacārīs* sacrifice their hearing into the fire of *śravaṇaṁ-kīrtanam*. This is the third day of constant rain. I feel like a good-natured apprentice. I am being asked to work some extra hours and I agree, "All right, boss." I am submissive to authority and aware that extra work means extra pay. But I am unable to enter the essence of enjoying the work itself.

"There is no way to atone for any of these offenses. It is therefore recommended that an offender at the feet of the holy name continue to chant the holy name twenty-four hours a day. Constant chanting of the holy name will make one free of offenses, and then he will gradually be elevated to the transcendental platform by which he can chant the pure holy name and thus become a lover of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

" . . . if one is an offender in chanting the holy name, he should submit to the holy name and thus be freed from his offenses . . . " (*Bhāg.* 7.5.23–24, purport).

Plod on. Sit on the cold floor, back to the wall. Sit near that trunk, no wall to lean against. Get up and walk. Keep going with your not-so-good *japa*. Keep

this purport in mind—continue chanting and ask forgiveness for the poor quality.

You are not trying to polish and craft a small number of “good” rounds. You are going for quantity. Sustained quality is hopeless for me now. But better to go for abundance rather than chanting early in the morning and then hanging your beads up for the day. Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport is my guide: “Constant chanting of the holy name will make one free of offenses.”

Rain. Cars can’t even get down the road—it’s flooded. Brown water rushing over the curb and percolating down into the fields. I am chanting in the rain. I will chant when the sun comes out. In happiness and distress, in boredom and excitement, with offense or without, the croaking frog, eyes half-closed, hands and fingers a little numb from the cold, chants on and on, Hare Kṛṣṇa . . .

I wanted to look at *Entering the Life of Prayer*. I am embarrassed by the cartoon artwork. I am different now than when I wrote that book. *Entering* was about my explosion into prayer—it was my first awakening that God (Kṛṣṇa) and I can communicate.

I read the first earnest entry. Amala-bhakta dāsa was explaining the benefit of speaking little prayer formulas in our own language, “Please have mercy on this sinner,” “Please let me chant.” But as I look at it now, they seem too much like formulas. We don’t read much about Prabhupāda or Rūpa Go-

svāmī praying with these formulas, although there are many quotes from the *sūtra* to prove that the *ācāryas* encourage us to pray to Kṛṣṇa in our own words. And Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “We must simply pray, ‘Kṛṣṇa, please pick me up.’”

I think I am more advanced than when I wrote that book, but the flame was genuine at that time. Kṛṣṇa has sent me to Vṛndāvana to find help now; I no longer have to worship the Brahman effulgence or even Lord Nārāyaṇa in Vaikuṇṭha. I only want Kṛṣṇa, the mischievous boy, the speaker of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the lover of Rādhā—the Supreme Personality of Godhead whose name my spiritual master taught me to constantly chant.

I want to learn something from *Entering the Life of Prayer*. Mainly I want to remember the anxiety I felt to pray, the greed I felt to be with Kṛṣṇa through prayer.

Why not pray to Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda to help you bring the mind back? But no jack-in-the-box formulas please: “Hello God, please help me.” It’s a challenge: do you have any depth? Are you content to reply to the challenge by saying, “No, I can’t”?

You cannot do anything on your own. Reading a book on prayer will not enable you to pray. Prayer comes as a gift from the perfect persons. Admit you cannot pray, and then pray to those who can help you.



4:00 P.M., Snapshot

I couldn't even tell it was Prabhupāda at first. He is at the corner-stone laying ceremony in Māyāpura. A more formal portrait of the scene has been widely circulated. This is a snapshot of Śrīla Prabhupāda leaning over and putting an article in the hand of one of his Godbrothers. They all sit together on straw mats. You can only see one side of Prabhupāda's face. He looks like "one of them," Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sannyāsīs*, disciples of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

They look young (but perhaps that's because nowadays, any disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī is ancient). This photo was taken over twenty years ago. Rich brown and rich tan saffron. Devotees smiling, although we know of the under-the-surface tensions.

You can't see the ISKCON devotees in this photo. They are all standing while the Gauḍīya Math *sannyāsīs* sit on the floor. The focus is on the floor.

Prabhupāda is sweet the way he leans over trying to reach his brother to hand him an article of honor. He wants them to participate and bless the event of constructing the ISKCON temple in Māyāpura. Behind the scenes is unpleasantness, charges that Prabhupāda shouldn't have given *brāhmaṇa* initiation and *sannyāsa* to Westerners, shouldn't have allowed women to live in the temples, and shouldn't have allowed us to call him Prabhupāda. But I won't disturb this colorful, smiling scene—a high point in Gauḍīya togetherness.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, you also lean over to each of us, extending your right arm and hand. You want to give us *harer nāma* and Kṛṣṇa consciousness. You have that sweet smile for each of us. Let me extend my own hand and receive it. Let me not be merely a formal token presence at your *yajña*, but a worker on your behalf.

Now I am praying that you will give me some secrets how to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra with attention and devotion. Please keep reaching out to me, please keep giving my beads to me, as you did in 1966. I pray to continue receiving them with the same hope I received them with then.

“Although the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is powerful in itself, a disciple upon initiation receives the mantra from his spiritual master, for when the mantra is chanted by the spiritual master, it becomes more powerful” (*Bhāg.* 4.24.32, purport).



7:08 P.M.

Forty rounds bragging. I am happy about it.

Another week comes to an end. “Surprising” conclusion thus far: I can’t do anything at all on my own! I focus to pay attention to the sounds I make. I can’t claim I will put the emotion or prayer into it, but I am willing to revive my attempts at prayer in this lonely place.

Harer nāma is *cintāmaṇi* (touchstone), but I’m not touching it with attention. So that which I can’t do, I pray for. “Please bring me love of God. Please let

me serve you and be pleasing to you." These prayers are included in the prayer to be faithful to *japa*. *Harer nāma* will teach me everything.

If I can leave this retreat with a little more understanding of how to pay attention in *japa*, then that is something I can take with me beyond the rarefied atmosphere of this farmhouse in Italy. Imagine being wherever you are and being able to focus on the transcendental sound vibration of the holy name. That would be a great gain.



Where are his japa beads?

7:45 P.M.

This is the last entry of the day and the last of the first week. I am typing. Take a deep breath and select your best thought. It comes out in words. With the typewriter, there are long pauses, like holding your breath. I keep my line of thought until the carriage goes all the way to the right and then all the way to the left again.

I hope to be here tomorrow, breathing and living and chanting all day long. It is almost childish how I have to face my pride in accumulating numbers of rounds even while I am so intent on the beginner's

act of trying to hear. "Let the other people in the house be impressed with my loud chanting all day." But I know better. I have to be honest and face the embarrassment. So I am like a child counting up my rounds, but at least I am faithfully chanting. Everything about Kṛṣṇa can be revealed through this process.

Part Three

April 11, 2:10 A.M., Lord Ramacandra's Appearance Day

Dāsī-bhuta—Kṛṣṇa is the servant of Rādhārāṇī. That's how the *mañjarīs* like to see Him.

Finished sixteen rounds. The first seven were "good," but then I suffered from plan-making. Letters I wanted to write came to mind. I tried to make a few notes, brief notes, as the thoughts occurred—"Write editor on production of reprints," "Tell M. to give me a haircut"—then stopped.

Someone once asked me, "Isn't *japa* actually an ideal time to access deeper creative thinking?" *Harer nāma* should not be used like that. There are plenty of other occasions when the creative muse can visit and fill our minds with Great Plans and Great Worries. Anyway, this morning, I made a few token notes on the mind's demands and tried to return my attention to the holy name. The world won't end if I don't remember to look for my lost sock or if my hair doesn't get cut for another day. Just chant.

Hare Kṛṣṇa sound vibrates off the walls of my head. Bring it down into the heart, like the Hesychiasts say. Oh, where is that heart, where is that mind?

I feel like an older boy in a class of fresh-faced eight-year olds. Obviously a left-back. I need remedial education.

“ . . . chanting involves the activities of the upper and lower lips as well as the tongue. All three must be engaged in chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. The words “Hare Kṛṣṇa” should be very distinctly pronounced and heard. Sometimes one mechanically produces a hissing sound instead of chanting with the proper pronunciation with the help of the lips and tongue. Chanting is very simple, but one must practice it seriously” (C.c., Ādi 17.32).

“Kṛṣṇa is so magnanimous that He is present before us by the transcendental vibration of His name, which has all the potencies of Kṛṣṇa Himself, and if we remain in contact with that name we shall get all the benefits of Kṛṣṇa’s benedictions. But still we are not inclined to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra” (*Teachings of Queen Kuntī*, p. 47).

If one prays for one theme song or *mahā-vākya* instruction, it might be this: “From wherever the mind wanders due to its flickering and unsteady nature, one must certainly withdraw it and bring it back under the control of the self” (Bg. 6.26). I realize this is not a *rasika śloka*. Sounds like yoga, meditation. One “should be” thinking of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, impelled by the higher taste. There is also the concern that by vociferous *japa* and the attainment of mental control, one still won’t think of Kṛṣṇa’s *Vraja-līlā*.

Chanting is meant to arouse love. We have to start with faith in the holy name. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura said that the whole panorama of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* will unfold from *harer nāma*. I am aware that the goal of life is to be immersed in Kṛṣṇa—in His qualities, name, form, and pastimes. I am also aware that I am on a low level—I am mad, a victim of mental torpor. But I cannot neglect *harer nāma*. I cannot neglect the main instruction of my spiritual master.

I am also aware that *śravaṇam* has a broader application than just chanting on beads. There is *kīrtana*, reading, hearing lectures, and talking with Vaiṣṇavas. "Hearing of the transcendental activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa is therefore expert treatment for the mad mind, and eating the foodstuff offered to Kṛṣṇa is the appropriate diet for the suffering patient" (*Bg.* 6.35, purport).

This is a three-week crash course (two weeks left) on surrender in *japa*. I won't have such luxury later to only chant. Take advantage and pray for help.

The rain has stopped temporarily—the skies are still dark and gray—and our room is colder than usual. On top of five layers of clothes, I place a heavy *cādar* and go on writing. I am eager to get back to the *japa*. I hoped that those first rounds would set the pace for the day, but I was thinking too much, as usual. I will bathe now, read for twenty minutes the highest nectar in all the worlds, and then come back to this *japa* grind.

Amazing—when I chant I become almost like a nondevotee. When I read, I am a more receptive student. When I write, I let the mind express itself freely, but I always steer to Kṛṣṇa. But *japa* . . .

One devotee joked in earnest, “When I touch my *japa* beads, it’s like holding up a cross before Dracula.” Something else keeps us away from the holy name, “No way I’m gonna submit to that! It’s just some mumbo-jumbo foreign words. If you want my devotion, then make it sweet rice, or maybe a song with harmonium—or even some work I could tackle with my body.” Okay, Dracula, I am going to chase you, and Frankenstein, and all the bats, and Frankenstein’s bride far away! Here comes Stevie with the *mahā-mantra*. Here comes Satsvarūpa dāsa on the order of his spiritual master, holding up those shiny, red beads. Here comes Swamiji and Kṛṣṇa Himself to drive away your devilish pranks and your low, misbegotten doom.

The eighth offense, according to *Harināma-cintāmaṇi*, is to equate the chanting of the holy name with material religion, such as in the *karma-kāṇḍa* section of the *Vedas*. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura speaks of pious activities in religion as *śubha-karma*. This kind of temporary practice is completely different than the pure devotional service of chanting the holy names. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes, “Out of His causeless compassion, the Supreme Lord incarnated as the holy name, making Himself available to the *jīvas*. . . but the *jīvas* misunderstood this to mean that chanting is one of the many

śubha-karmas. This misconception is similar to Lord Viṣṇu being seen as another demigod like Lord Śiva and Lord Brahmā" (HNC, p. 77).

This seems like an offense ISKCON devotees are not likely to commit. We don't equate the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa with the pious activities described in the *Vedas*. We don't chant for altruistic reasons. Or do we? Whenever we pray to God for anything material, then we commit this offense. When we chant Hare Kṛṣṇa with a motive other than pure devotional service, we commit this offense.

We should not chant asking Kṛṣṇa to give us material facility. "O Kṛṣṇa, please don't let it rain today." But we may wonder, is it wrong to pray to God that it not rain on Ratha-yātrā day? Is it wrong to pray to God that we win the court case? In fact, we do say a prayer, "My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, if You desire, please keep all of Your temples open for Your devotees." We also prayed to Kṛṣṇa for Prabhupāda's health, under Prabhupāda's direction. We can see these prayers as motivated by pure devotional service, however. They also have a qualifying phrase in them: "if You desire."

Still, we have to be careful that our prayers in the name of service do not deteriorate to the prayers of a *sukṛtina*—he prays when he experiences distress or when he needs money. The chanting is a pure request, "Please engage me in Your service in any way you like, however you want it to turn out, rain or shine, in sickness or health, in life or death. I just want to engage in Your service. Please engage me in Your service. Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa

Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.”

What about my request begging for the nectar of the holy name? Is that purely motivated? We have to examine it. The purest motive was expressed by Lord Caitanya: “You may make Me broken-hearted by not being present before Me or handle Me roughly in Your embrace, but I still love You unconditionally.” This is how we should chant.

Chanting is by its nature a kind of request. We are not chanting for desirelessness in the absolute sense. It is a request to be accepted as a servant of the Lord. We have impurities within us, and therefore we chant mechanically, out of duty. But there are moments when we break through and come to the level of asking Kṛṣṇa for attention and love—then back to our inattention again. Our thoughts drift here and there in so many different directions that whatever impure desires and prayers we have also have their time. We are almost helpless in the face of this inattention.

At least we can be conscious of this offense and avoid it by never *deliberately* using the chanting for a material purpose. At least we can know the correct theology of the holy name; it is not to be used for material facility. If we find ourselves praying in an impure way while chanting, we have to immediately correct ourselves. It takes vigilance. Especially when there is a particularly urgent or dangerous situation, we have to be careful to always ask Kṛṣṇa for service under any conditions. However events turn out, we only want to serve Kṛṣṇa.

When we think about it, this isn't an offense which is only subject to uneducated Hindus or demigod worshipers. Rather, it can occur to any chanter of Hare Kṛṣṇa whenever he has the tendency to pray to the Lord and to the energy of the Lord, "Please engage me in Your service." We have to strip away all that *śubha-karma* religion and not let it enter into the wonderful practice of chanting for loving service.

When I came back from my walk, I stayed outside in the backyard, pacing and chanting. I was mostly focused on the job of getting through another round, and I was taking in the first signs of a clear sky after several days of rain. The brown hills were thoroughly soaked and I imagined how the farmers were reacting to so much rain. I wondered what it would mean later in the summer if no rain came. Then Mahāvākya opened the shutters outward from his second floor room. He looked out and we greeted each other.

"The rain is finished," I said, and I told him about a big puddle that had made one of the roads impassable. He said he takes another route until it becomes dry. We both fell silent and I walked out of his sight so he could look at nature while chanting.

As I continued chanting *japa* in the driveway, I looked into their outbuilding at their collection of firewood. I imagined MV asking me what it was like for me when I chant. I thought I might admit to him that I don't feel anything. I'm not able to pay attention. But I have plenty to say about *that*. I am

concerned about it. I think about it. I read the *śāstras* on the subject. I listen to the order of my guru regarding the importance of chanting. I imagined myself preaching to MV in a lively way. In fact, I have so many things to say about this topic that I could write a book about it, but if you catch me by surprise while I'm chanting in the driveway, I will admit that I can't even hear what I am chanting.

Another point: Italy is not the same as Vṛndāvana. When you are here, you think Italian countryside thoughts, whereas in Vraja, underneath the Kali-yuga covering lies the heart of the chanting movement. It is here that Kṛṣṇa led the *gopīs* in the *rāsa* dance while they chanted His holy names. It is described in the *Śrī Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, "Kṛṣṇa sang the glories of the autumn moon, the moonshine and the lotus-filled river, while the *gopīs* simply sang His name repeatedly" (quoted in purport to *Bhāg.* 10.29.44).



10:28 A.M.

Like a cat sitting in the sunshine, I sat on the windowsill for over an hour chanting *japa*.

Now what? Report how it was? Yes, don't make fun—it may be helpful.

The rounds were inattentive.

Any redeeming factors?

Yes, of course, because it's the holy name, it's always a good thing to chant. But because it can be

so much more—and because you are playing your own part so poorly—you think you failed. Unremitting, no change in the solid wall. But even the most solid walls (like the Great Wall of China, the Berlin Wall, the Iron Curtain) all come down with time. Śrīla Prabhupāda speaks of a caterpillar who becomes a butterfly simply by thinking about it.

But for now, a wall.



Snapshot

A lane in Vṛndāvana. The first face I see is Gurukṛpā's. He looks glum, thin, young. Śrīla Prabhupāda looks straight at the camera, pleased. He wears that rust-colored sweater, the orange marigolds, all the paraphernalia that somehow delights us when we see him—the reddish socks, those shoes they used to call Hush Puppies, the bamboo cane, beadbag, head held high, walking down a narrow Vṛndāvana lane. The outer walls are crying out for paint as they gradually collapse, exposing old, small-sized bricks . . . the open gutter.

In the rear of Prabhupāda's entourage we see little Sarasvati in her turtleneck sweater and skirt, baby fat cheeks . . . Śyāmasundara dāsa is hurrying to keep the pace and catch Prabhupāda's words with the microphone. Ṛṣi-kumāra walking quickly alongside, wrapped in his dark, plaid blanket.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, you have a spritely stride. Your motley Americans are with you, the few who dared

to come and who were free to join you on this walk. I wish I could be there too. You have caught my eye as I look through the camera eye and see you striding toward me.

Where are you going, Śrīla Prabhupāda?

He is walking through the town. He has a plan for an American house. He knows Vṛndāvana well, both its outer and inner nature. I like the way he walks erect at a brisk pace. It is Vṛndāvana, much as we might see it today, except Śrīla Prabhupāda, bright as orange marigolds, won't suddenly come around a corner like this. Or we might see him—it depends on our purity.

Prabhupāda, the men on your left and right both have their right hands in their beadbags as you taught us. It is hard to chant while out walking in the town, but still, it is *harer nāma* so you approve. I want to chant too, with my own voice, as an offering to you.

What is it you want to say to us as we look into this photo? Shall we walk over to you and offer *daṇḍavats*? Will you ask, "What are you doing here in Vṛndāvana?"

"We came here because we heard you were here."

"Then?" Maybe you think we are making fancy words and our hearts are not so fully surrendered. That's a fact.

"Prabhupāda," we say, "we have been to Vṛndāvana many times on visits and we never met Kṛṣṇa in Loi Bazaar. We chant your holy name and Kṛṣṇa's holy name. We try to serve. We live at Kṛṣṇa-

Balarāma Mandira. Hundreds of your followers from all over the world are always visiting here. May we walk behind you?"

Pick my bushels of apples and leave them on Kṛṣṇa's doorstep. Walk away somewhat heavy-hearted because I couldn't love. Don't know how to break down and cry.

Don't know how to break pride.

Don't have the courage to break in and smash up *anarthas* or perform heavy austerities. Therefore, I compare myself to a cat sunning on the windowsill.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said *bhakti-yoga* is like pedaling a bicycle and then catching onto a truck that's moving at fifty miles an hour. Where is that truck? Am I afraid to catch on?

Kṛṣṇa, I am writing like I chant. Down where the heart is supposed to be. Somewhat stupefied. Not eloquent. Thinking, "If this keeps up, I may start to get a headache." But this is just a phase you have to go through.



Quotes from *Entering the Life of Prayer*

"It is fear of sahajiyāism. Out of that fear we sometimes go to another extreme, of being afraid to have feelings or to think that we can talk with Kṛṣṇa, and even being afraid of Kṛṣṇa" (p. 10).

“The danger is that we withhold our love out of fear and a feeling of unworthiness” (p. 10).

“ . . . The goal is that we just pray to Kṛṣṇa, ‘Please accept me’” (p. 13).

I once heard an explanation about the destination of *rāgānugā-bhaktas* who follow Yaśodā-māyī. There was a description of the various relationships they might have, and then the speaker said that it depends on their devotional service and their greed. According to our *sādhana* and *bhajana*, our destination will be determined. We may aspire to become the maidservants of Śrīmatī Rādhikā, but it is a rare achievement.

I was struck by this at the time, and again now as I remembered it. I like to hear the truth that our destination depends on our *sādhana* and *bhajana*. It makes me think that my remedial practice of *japa* is right. It is the way to go to the topmost stage because I first have to tend to the crucial deficiencies in my foundation. Greed for the name will lead to other spiritual greed.



4:05 P.M.

“ . . . Ajāmila achieved liberation simply by chanting the holy name of the Lord. Therefore, what is to be said of those who are not as sinful as Ajāmila? It is to be concluded that with a strong vow one should chant the holy name of the Lord—

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare, Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare—for thus one will certainly be delivered from the clutches of *māyā* by the grace of Kṛṣṇa” (*Bhāg.* 6.3.23–24, purport).

Statements proving that the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra brings liberation seem not so important. “Oh, liberation,” I think, “we are not interested in *that*. We want *bhakti*. Liberation falls at the feet of *bhakti* and begs to do some service.” Besides, liberation is obtained even by *nāmābhasa* and I assume that I am already doing that. “Even if one chants imperfectly, one becomes free from all sinful reactions by chanting.”

But there is something arrogant in my attitude, something mistaken. Achieving liberation is no small thing. And why am I so sure that I am already liberated? Do I even know what it means? Besides, why assume so certainly that I have graduated from offensive chanting (*nāmāparādha*) to the clearing or shadow stage (*nāmābhasa*)?

It is a fact that we don’t want *mukti* in terms of the so-called merging of the soul into the rays of the impersonal *brahmajyoti*; we want to go back to Kṛṣṇaloka. I am grateful that by the power of the holy name given by Śrīla Prabhupāda, I am free from sinful life and its reactions. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes confidently, “. . . we invite everyone to come with us and simply chant Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare, Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare, because we know that if one simply chants and hears the topics of Kṛṣṇa,

one's life will change; he will see a new light, and his life will be successful" (*Bhāg.* 4.7.44, purport).

This is another aspect of *harer nāma*. The faithful chanter lives to spread the holy name around. He is unhappy that others are suffering. He knows by his own experience that chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa brings relief, that it brings one to pure-hearted, obedient Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He strives to deliver the holy names and makes novel presentations so that nondevotees can take it up and receive relief from *saṁsāra*. Where is *that* prayer in my *japa* retreat? "Please make me strong to spread the holy name."

Consider all these things: since I am still on the lower rungs of *bhakti-yoga*, I am still in danger of sin. I have to be delivered by the holy name. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says, "The odor of sin still clings to you." The holy name is continuing to save me. Pray to come out of yet another dullness and stone-heartedness, forgetting that *harer nāma* is sustaining you from material suffering. Be thankful. Chant and hear. But chant the real name, not the covering.

"As a result of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, one makes such great advancement in spiritual life that simultaneously his material existence terminates and he receives love of Godhead. The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is so powerful that by chanting even one name, one very easily achieves these transcendental riches" (*C.c.*, *Ādi* 8.28, purport).

6:25 P.M.

Devotees cooked a feast today and we broke our fast at 1 P.M. They invited a few friends over, such as the bee-keeper and his wife. Everyone spoke in Italian. I honored good savories, sweet rice, and *halvā* in my room and then went on chanting. Before lunch began, my *japa* was buoyant. M. said that lunch would be late and I was on the verge of remarking, "I have an even better feast in the chanting. Eating only lasts for about fifteen minutes, but I can chant all day." I didn't say it and just as well. It's wishful thinking. After lunch and rest, it's like my heart has fallen out and chanting is empty. But today I will go over the quota of forty. Build yourself up for the *ekādaśī-vrata*, sixty-four.

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April 12, 2:06 A.M.

"Without much bother, if one simply keeps a picture of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu at home and chants Hare Kṛṣṇa, then one will realize God. Anyone can adopt this simple method. There is no expenditure, there is no tax, nor is there any need to build a very big church or temple. Anyone, anywhere, can sit down on the road or beneath a tree and chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and worship God. Therefore it is a great opportunity" (SSR, p. 134).

“Haridāsa Ṭhākura, being the *ācārya* of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, is called Nāmācārya Haridāsa Ṭhākura. From his personal example we can understand that chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and becoming highly elevated in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is very simple. Without difficulty one can sit down anywhere, especially on the bank of the Ganges, Yamunā or any sacred river, devise a sitting place or cottage, plant a *tulasī*, and before the *tulasī* chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* undisturbed” (C.c., *Antya* 3.100, purport).

Is it wrong to philosophize on the benefits I am receiving from *japa*, even though I feel no ecstasy from chanting? No, Śrīla Prabhupāda states that the changes should be manifest in terms of one’s real activities. He quotes Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī that detachment from material life is an important symptom of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*. The display of ecstatic symptoms is not always shown even by a *mahā-bhāgavata*, whereas *prākṛta-sahajiyās* may imitate crying tears and other bodily symptoms.

Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions the symptoms of steady *bhāva* as important indications. The *Nectar of Devotion* mentions pridelessness, intense utilization of time, forbearance, always expecting Kṛṣṇa’s mercy, attraction for chanting, and attachment for living in the holy *dhāma*. Therefore, it is not wrong to believe that benefit is coming when we chant “good” rounds. I don’t want to deride the simple practice of staying alert and correctly pronouncing

the mantra, sitting up straight, chanting at a brisk pace.

There is tremendous work going on in every ISKCON temple during the *japa* hours as long as the attempt is sincerely made—and not only in the temple buildings, but wherever devotees chant their *japa* and strive to utter and hear His holy names. The good accrues not only to devotees but to the society of nondevotees as well. If more people begin to chant, the auspiciousness will increase. Among the benefits that occur to human society just from chanting the holy names, Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions peace, material prosperity, an auspicious political situation, and eradication of crime. Even when we don't notice the development of the good symptoms in a chanter or in society, we should have faith that the holy name is all-powerful and that its influence is growing.

Sinful reactions are vanquished for the person who chants. He will give up illicit sex, intoxication, meat-eating, and gambling. No one can be free of these things without the mercy of the holy name (*harer nāmaiva kevalam . . . kalau nāsty eva gatir anyathā*). And even for those who don't immediately give up bad habits, they are released from past sins. "If one chants the holy name of the Lord, even in a helpless condition or without desiring to do so, all the reactions of his sinful life depart, just as when a lion roars all the small animals flee in fear" (*Garuḍa Purāṇa*, quoted in *Bhāg.* 6.2.7, purport). Provided we don't deliberately commit sins

on the strength of chanting, great benefits are gained when we utter the holy name.

I want to scrupulously observe my own chanting and try to improve, try to avoid offenses, and try to chant with attention and devotion. I want to know that my subjective analysis or my “gut” feelings are not the all in all. The holy name is supreme; I must chant with this faith. “If a person unaware of the effective potency of a certain medicine takes that medicine or is forced to take it, it will act even without his knowledge because its potency does not depend on the patient’s understanding. Similarly, even though one does not know the value of chanting the holy name of the Lord, if he chants knowingly or unknowingly, the chanting will be very effective” (*Bhāg.* 6.2.18, purport).

Therefore, I desire to chant with faith and gratitude. “We had fallen into abominable lives as meat-eaters, drunkards and women-hunters who performed all kinds of sinful activities, but now we have been given the opportunity to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Therefore, we should always appreciate this opportunity” (*Bhāg.* 6.2.34, purport).

It is the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda that I was saved from my suicidal course, but Prabhupāda states that it is the mercy of the holy name which he brought to us on the order of his *guru mahārāja*. As *guru-dakṣiṇa* to Prabhupāda, I will go on chanting and telling others about the chanting. When they ask me how I feel when chanting, I may admit that it is dry due to my offenses, but I will point out that the medicine is working regardless.

My mind is uncontrolled, yet Śrīla Prabhupāda says that chanting is the means to control the mind. Prabhupāda's assertion is not contradicted by my experience. Rather, chanting is the only hope for my wild mind to improve, for the mind is "restless, turbulent, obstinate and very strong, O Kṛṣṇa, and to subdue it is, I think, more difficult than controlling the wind" (Bg. 6.34).

Don't expect easy victory. Acknowledge that you are practicing the best and most flexible way to achieve yogic control, which is necessary for spiritual advancement. One has to be humble about one's progress in controlling the mind.

It is only through transcendental vibration that the mind can be kept in a state of equilibrium. There is no other way.

Let us hear directly Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's statement regarding the *aparādha* of inattention while chanting:

"One may carefully avoid all other *nāmāparādhas* yet still not experience the ecstasy of the pure name. This is an indication of another type of *nām-āpārādha* known as *pramāda*, which restricts the natural growth of pure devotion. . . . Inattentiveness and negligence are synonymous.

" . . . someone chants the holy name, but his mind and attention are far away from his chanting. Even if he chants one *lakh* (one hundred thousand) of holy names on his *mālā*, not a drop of taste for the Lord's name is produced in his heart. This is a

vivid example of inattentive chanting and its result" (*HNC*, pp. 81–2).

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura recommends chanting in a sacred place, in the association of Vaiṣṇavas who have already developed a taste for chanting. Also, constant chanting will help us to develop a taste. He also recommends chanting in the presence of Tulasī-devī. And for those who try all other measures and don't get success, he suggests extreme methods like sitting in a closed room alone, covering the head and face with a cloth, " . . . and concentrat[ing] on the holy name. Slowly, one develops attraction for the holy name."

When Lord Kṛṣṇa sees a devotee sincerely and enthusiastically attempting to chant, He will reciprocate by removing the neophytes mental inertia with the power of His name, and bring him into the association of advanced devotees.

"One must diligently complete the prescribed number of holy names according to his vow, and he must always check that he chants his rounds sincerely. Those who chant distractedly are always eager to somehow complete the fixed number of holy names and be done with it. It is important to concentrate on the quality of the chanting and not on trying to artificially increase the number of holy names. The name of the Lord should be pronounced distinctly. Only by the grace of the Lord can this be achieved.

"The devotee should make it a regular practice to spend a little time alone in a quiet place and concentrate deeply on the holy name" (*HNC*, p. 84).

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura quotes from the *Caitanya-bhāgavata* where the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is specifically recommended by Lord Caitanya. "The Lord said, 'Here is the *mahā-mantra*. Now go and do *japa* meditation and chant the holy names a prescribed number of times (*nirbandha*).'" Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes, "All the previous *ācāryas* and *mahā-janas* have followed this instruction of Lord Caitanya and attained perfection. Even now, anyone can attain perfection by proper chanting" (*HNC*, p. 85).

I sometimes say that *pramāda* is my favorite offense. By that I mean that I am always bumping my head against it. Now that I have been studying the other offenses, I am aware that they are also dangerous and that I am implicated in them. But sometimes it's a little elusive to see the connection between *sādhū-nindā* and this morning's *japa*, although I know there is a connection. But with *pramāda*, it is always staring me in the face. I go to chant and the mind goes off.

I know that I can take different attitudes toward this. I cannot claim that I am free from inattention, but I can be very depressed by it and lose enthusiasm, or I could take a more positive approach. By positive I mean I could just be happy with any little progress. I remember reading a statement about prayer by St. Francis De Salle. He said that even if you spent your whole hour of prayer in constantly putting your mind and heart into prayerfulness only to have it fly away, but then constantly putting it back again—that hour would be well-spent. It

reminds me of Prabhupāda's statement that it is no wonder that people come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and then leave. Prabhupāda said that *māyā* is so strong it is a wonder that anyone stays at all. In paying attention, we could say that any moment where we do achieve attention is a victory. During any *japa* round, at any time that we are even aware that we are inattentive, and thus make an effort to be attentive—that is a brilliant moment.

The optimistic viewpoint is all right, as long as it doesn't lead to slap-happy complacency. Being on the lower level shouldn't be a comfortable place. We have to struggle to get past it. But if at every moment you are inattentive and for the time being, you feel helpless, some optimism is useful.

Just showing interest in my *japa-sādhana*, chanting extra rounds, and reading statements about it has been helpful in combating *pramāda*. Just to become aware of the enormity of the problem seems to be healthy. And also this dawning awareness for me that I have to work at the ABCs, and particularly on inattention, seems to be right. It gives me a purpose in life; it gives me more conviction that at least I know where I am situated and what I have to do next. Pay attention when you chant! Bring the wandering mind back again under the control of the higher self.



6:45 A.M.

I wasn't intending to type this morning, but Madhu put the typewriter out here in the van with paper in it, so here goes.

I walked a little longer than usual down a nice narrow road, but I woke up a watchdog. The dog started howling and a light went on inside the house. What a botheration. It's hard to find a place to walk where you don't disturb dogs or people. Anyway, I managed to keep walking back and forth over one stretch where I wouldn't bother anyone. These spring mornings are stinging cold.

Madhu is slowly getting the van ready. I hope it will be livable when we break camp here in about two weeks. Until then, let me bear down in discovering all I can about the glories of the holy name. We are trying to minimize phone calls and letter exchanges and anything that may take us away from the lotus feet of Nāma Prabhu. The names of Kṛṣṇa will see that I am growing in affection for them, even though I continue to do poor *japa-yajña*. If I display enough determination, I am sure Kṛṣṇa will take me more seriously and a ray of His personal service will enter my heart on the wings of the sound vibration.

I have developed a callous on the palm of my hand from constantly passing the wooden beads over the same spot. I also have a paper cut on my thumb which remains an open wound because it keeps touching the beads. These are the only occupational hazards. Benefits: I say the mantra more

often as a reflex when I am asleep. I feel good about chanting. I wrote a *BTG* essay about chanting. I am more ready to speak about it in the gathering of devotees. And the ultimate benefit is the chanting itself—chanting produces chanting.



10:30 A.M., Snapshot

(I can't do justice to the reality of life. The photo is once removed from the reality, and my description of it is twice removed. But devotion, even one drop of it, can immediately penetrate time, memory, and photo moment poses. I am looking for that drop to spring out of my heart when I look at the photo.)

This was taken in Śrīla Prabhupāda's room (not the present residence) at Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Mandira. He is wearing the rust-colored sweater, and from the devotees gathered there, I can tell it's India, circa 1971–72. Śyāmasundara, Guru-kṛpā, Ṛṣi-kumāra, Revatinandana, Pañca-draviḍa, Mahāṁsa, and one lady, barely visible, in the back, maybe Viśākhā. I see the dictaphone on his desk with the dust cover on it. Sheet-covered bolster pillows. I am curious where this room is, set up for his use with the low desk, but I can't tell.

I know the layout of his desk. These objects are like exact paraphernalia for a special *yajña*, known in detail only by his intimate servants and secretaries. Eyeglasses case, container for *tilaka*, desk

lamp, stainless steel water cup, a bell to call his servant. Other items are optional—the picture of Kṛṣṇa running to His mother, a small Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa painting in a frame, a picture of his *guru mahārāja*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda is gesturing with his left hand. It is intriguing to see the disciples' faces as they listen intently to their guru. Everyone goes through so much in their minds. Most of the devotees gave up strict practice after some years, but they retained deep impressions of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Prabhupāda, you were always getting things started. Your whole time preaching in this world was digging hard earth, planting—harvesting too—but always working with raw materials, men and women and Indians and *sādhus* and construction crews and cement. I don't know exactly what you are saying in this picture. I don't even see the microphone recording your words. There is a small pack of letters on your desk. I know you are probably preaching, saying something about the general ignorance of Kali-yuga and describing the various misunderstandings you want your disciples to avoid. You usually didn't tell us directly that we were the mistaken ones you referred to. You spoke of *māyāvādīs* and mundane politicians and envious people. We knew the kind of people we had to avoid if we wanted to keep our *bhakti-latā* growing.

Or maybe you are speaking about Kṛṣṇa's activities in Vṛndāvana. Or are you speaking more informally? After all, it's only a small group in your room. You might be talking about the temples you want built in India.

One thing is for sure, there is no doubt in our minds that you are a fit spiritual master and that you can comfort us through our life beset with doubts.

Today I am a little behind, rounds slower. Maybe I should try chanting a few outdoors. When I sat in the sunshine by the windowsill, I dozed. The mantras went past me. I can't grasp what it is I can do right now to chant properly. It is such a subtle art, a science, the process of surrender to *mantra-yoga*. I am no master. Ironical that you can talk about it between rounds . . .

Don't fall behind. Time moves toward Vṛndāvana, toward another year . . . And then all will be done and you can close the book of your life. Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī says that when you close your eyes at death, what good will be your control over others or your pride in education? They are all temporary and they will not be of any value then. So he advises us to run to Vṛndāvana without delay.

"Yes," I say, "I am just now coming."

"I am thinking of Vṛndāvana in my mind," I say. "I am preaching the message of Vṛndāvana-candra around the world, as desired by my spiritual master."

Holy Vṛndāvana, I am just now coming. When I get there, will I be able to chant the holy name with added facility? It doesn't seem so—I take this ache-machine and worry-producer wherever I go, and

the gremlin (the one who keeps talking when I am trying to chant and hear), comes too. But if I can learn surrender in Vṛndāvana, that would be better than anything else anywhere.

“O *sādhū*, if you cannot suddenly renounce this dream-like world, then day and night meditate on Vṛndāvana. Worship Vṛndāvana’s king and queen, always chant Their holy names, and always hear Their glories. With food, clothing, and other gifts, serve the residents of Vṛndāvana.

“He who yearns to attain the sweetness of pure love in Vṛndāvana, but by destiny is forced to live elsewhere, laments and always remembers Vṛndāvana . . .” (*Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta*, Śataka 1, verses 72, 75).

•

4:00 P.M.

This part of the day is always the deepest slough after a heavy lunch of pizza.

Mid-*yajña* cold feet. I advise you to ignore it.

These misgivings are coming from the fact that I just spent almost an hour chanting only four rounds.

There is a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* purport where Prabhupāda states that Kṛṣṇa likes to hear His name called. Prabhupāda says that this is natural; any person likes to hear his name called by a friend. Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Person, is not an exception to this. I

always liked that purport. I took it in the right way, not like an agnostic who challenges, “What?! Is Kṛṣṇa some kind of egotist?” The Lord likes it and He becomes inclined toward us.

Dear Lord, be pleased with my calling Your name. I know it is displeasing when I chant slowly or when I’m spaced out—filled with *nāmāparādhā*. One thinks it might be better not to chant at all. But no, it is better to keep going. I wish I were better, but please accept this much. Please inject my wish with a desire that is deeper, so my chanting can become strong devotional service and real attachment to the holy name.

I am beginning to doubt my purpose here. Maybe I should think of moving on, going traveling, answering my mail. But I can’t stop my *japa* retreat just because I think I won’t look good at the end. Stop worrying about your profile. You want a neat diary and a neat *vrata* where you come out looking modest and intelligent and overall pretty. You reached a nice humble conclusion that you are a left-back and that you didn’t mind doing remedial work; you realized that you can’t jump right into spontaneous Kṛṣṇa consciousness without tending to *japa*. Your main conclusion (which you think will be helpful to others) is that you should bring your mind back from its wandering to pay attention to the sound of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. You want to end it with those conclusions because you are panicking—“I won’t get any further than that.”

But if that's all you learned, then stick it out and keep having it drummed into your head. Besides, you didn't come here to make a neat and tidy diary. Keep going. *Kṛṣṇa is expertly arranging for everything.* Have faith.



7:30 P.M.

I start to chant and feel a weakness of heart. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that Kṛṣṇa wants to appear in our hearts, "but one has to keep his heart as clean as Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu cleaned the Guṇḍicā temple" (C.c., *Madhya* 12.135). Clean the heart by chanting (*ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam*).

Something in me doesn't want to be clean or to work at chanting. I collapse at the prospect of the great task. If the heart is filled with straw, grains of sand, weeds, or dirt, one cannot enthrone the Supreme Personality of Godhead there. The dirty objects are compared to material motives. Do I have an ulterior motive? Perhaps I sense that total surrender is required (*ātmā-nivedanam*). I say, "Too much," and withdraw into inattentive chanting. I have to face the worst with courage. Chanting is not a small matter. I am at the first stage, apparently afraid of what I will have to do. I am not sure of this analysis, but it seems likely.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The only way suffering can be mitigated is by Kṛṣṇa consciousness. When one takes to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and engages

himself in the devotional service of the Lord—beginning with chanting and hearing the glories of the Lord—the cleansing of the heart begins.

“ . . . The Lord was very pleased with those who could cleanse the temple by taking out undesirable things accumulated within. This is called *anartha-nivṛtti*, cleansing the heart of all unwanted things. Thus the cleansing of the Guṇḍicā-*mandira* was conducted by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu to let us know how the heart should be cleansed and soothed to receive Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and to enable Him to sit within the heart without disturbance” (C.c., *Madhya* 12.135, purport).



April 13, 2:15 A.M., Ekādaśī

Nine rounds done averaging 7.30. Notice (when you can) that your mind is dwelling in foolish spaces, consorting with demons and chimeras, going to places not fit for a devotee-*sannyāsī*. Notice and bring the mind back to hearing the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Then bring it back again. And again.

Can I ask for more than this? That would be asking for Kṛṣṇa’s mercy. To be able to feel myself His fallen servant filled with *anarthas*; to be able to feel the mercy of *harer nāma*; realizing everything in the *mahā-mantra*, tears of remorse, tears of joy, the unfolding of Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes . . . the resolution for service . . . the unending attachment to chanting His names and qualities and pastimes.

I plan to chant sixty-four rounds today, *ekādāśi*. I will have to keep chanting as much as possible. "It is important to concentrate on the quality of the chanting and not on trying to artificially increase the number of holy names. The name of the Lord should be pronounced distinctly. Only by the grace of the Lord can this be achieved" (*HNC*, p. 84). I don't want the day to be just one big space-out in counting poor rounds.

Chanting gives one forbearance. That means, among other things, that I have to tolerate my lower state. Yes, I want to reform as soon as possible, but a wife has to wait nine months to bear a child. I am "pregnant" doing the *japa-yajña* on *ekādāśi*. Be patient and keep refocusing your attention on what you are doing. "This practice of forbearance (*trṇād api sunīcena*) is very difficult, but when one actually engages in chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, the quality of forbearance automatically develops" (*C.c.*, *Ādi* 17.27–28, purport).

Chanting the holy name is the foundation of spiritual life. Such a nice simple act for the people of Kali-yuga. Unfortunately, devotees neglect their rounds.

"When you adopt a submissive attitude and chant, realization begins from the tongue."

I am the common man, the one who needs to control his mind and senses, the fallen one, the atheist, the agnostic, the one with no spiritual education. I am the one who should take to the

chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa. I am one who should be the object of mercy for the preachers of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement: "Become a devotee of the Lord by continuously chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*. You don't need to change your position, but give up all endeavors to understand the Absolute Truth by speculative reason." It is I who should learn to become a servant of those who are in knowledge of the Supreme Lord.

Was this written for me? "By minimizing bodily necessities, one can primarily devote his time to the cultivation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness through the chanting of the holy names of God" (*Teachings of Lord Caitanya*, p. 31). Why should I doubt it? I *am* doing the most important thing. Lord Caitanya said to Sanātana Gosvāmī, "Of the nine processes of devotional service, the most important is to always chant the holy name of the Lord. If one does so, avoiding the ten kinds of offenses, one very easily obtains the most valuable love of Godhead" (*C.c., Antya* 4.70–71).

Commenting on this verse, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī writes, "Chanting the holy name is the chief means of attaining love of Godhead." I am neither too advanced for this instruction nor too fallen. Everything is attainable even for one such as me, if I simply chant the holy name of the Lord offenselessly. And the rectification for offensive chanting? To chant without ceasing.

The tenth offense in chanting is to not have complete faith in the holy names and to maintain

material attachments even after receiving so many instructions on this matter. Bhaktivinoda Thākura says this is the worst kind of offense. It means that although you take initiation and begin to chant, you don't change your life. In a very central way, you still maintain your bodily designations—you think of yourself as a member of a certain family, and a member of a certain race, and you make your commitments based on these limited designations. What is the use of all your endeavor to become a devotee and to chant if you don't change in this basic way?

When we think about this offense, we realize that chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa has to become a whole life's endeavor. It is not limited to the two or three hours of fingering our beads. We are meant to change our perspective and our goals and to surrender to the holy name. That is faith in chanting.

Bhaktivinoda Thākura tells us that the only way to rectify ourselves is to completely surrender to the holy name. The tenth offense is the sum total of all *nāmāparādha*. If we are committing it, it means we need a total overhaul. Chanting is not a light activity. It is not meant to be a relaxing meditation. It is not something to be dispensed with quickly so we can get on with our lives. This offense is the final statement on the *aparādhas*; total surrender to the holy name is the final remedy.

Bhaktivinoda Thākura explains that the ten offenses are, in one sense, just a negative way of expressing things. We have to go beyond merely avoiding the ten offenses. He then quickly turns

around each of the ten offenses and expresses them in their true, positive light. We should not only avoid offending Vaiṣṇavas, we should love them and serve them. We should not only theoretically understand that the holy name is the same as Kṛṣṇa and that Kṛṣṇa's name is supreme, we should always chant it with joy and surrender. We should not only avoid disobeying the order of the guru, but he should be our best friend and we should dedicate our lives to him. We should read the Vedic literature with faith in the transcendental word of *śāstra*. We should forever rid ourselves of the whole concept of sin and lead a saintly life. We should never think of the holy name as pious activity, but serve it wholeheartedly. And we should preach the glories of the Lord to the faithful.

In a word, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is telling us to *get serious*. He almost seems to be telling us to give up all material responsibility, take voluntary poverty, and chant from morning to night. If we cannot do that, then we have to work for the essence of it. We have to free our lives from as many material entanglements as possible, depend on Kṛṣṇa, and chant His holy names. This was the life recommended to Mṛgāri by the sage Nārada.

The ten offenses are severe handicaps, so we have to be serious to overcome them. The prescription is surrender. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes, "If one is sufficiently greedy for attaining pure devotion, he will chant free from the ten offenses. He must diligently avoid each of the offenses with feelings of deep repentance for having ever committed

them. He should pray sincerely at the lotus feet of the holy name and chant with determination. Only then will he be blessed with the mercy of the holy name, which will destroy all of his offenses. No other activity or penance can possibly exculpate his offenses.

“Offenses to the holy name of the Lord are dissolved solely through constant chanting. When they are thus destroyed, they can never reappear. Constant chanting means, apart from a minimal time for rest and other bare physical necessities, one should chant throughout all hours of the day with intense contrition. No other penance or ritual is as effective as this. When the offenses are destroyed, the pure holy name blossoms within the heart. The pure holy name of Kṛṣṇa delivers *bhāva* and finally *prema*” (HNC, pp. 91–92).

Of course we thrill to Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura’s statement that we should chant with intense contrition. Perhaps we have the right idea when we are feeling sorry about our inattentive chanting and think that we are not making any progress. Now let’s just go deeper into our feelings of unworthiness. We should not complain about our poor chanting just for the sake of complaining, but with a willingness to get beyond the dryness and the inattention. To go deeper, we have to be willing to plunge into our feelings of inadequacy and approach intense contrition. Then we will be able to chant constantly.



7:00 A.M.

How do we manifest remorse at not being a good devotee or a good chanter? It doesn't have to be an overt display. Better it be no display at all. Just feel an inner mourning and as we fail to chant, go on trying to do better. Take little measures—wash your face to stay awake, walk if you feel tired sitting down. Always be alive to another chance; the beads go endlessly around in circles as long as you have life and breath.

Time passes but is not important. We don't pay attention to food or rest. The body forces us to acknowledge it, but we keep moving on with our *harer nāma* like a fighter claiming back territory from the inattentive mind.

I see little yellow finches picking around. Other birds have arrived for spring. I have a straight-backed chair in the yard today. The neighbors are on all sides, but they are distant. Do they mistake me for a woman walking back and forth in an orange skirt?

Today I am less concerned about what the neighbors think. I have a big quota, sixty-four rounds. There is more at stake—it will be a great waste if all sixty-four rounds are offensive.

The first ten were good, and the ones on the walk were awake at least. The two just now in the van were terrible because sleep caught me in that warm, closed space. I know it sounds external, but that's the first work, staying awake and going at a brisk

pace. Then being alert (like the birds on the ground) and pecking away at inattention. I am trying to empty the ocean drop by drop; then I want to ask why my chanting isn't connected to Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Prayers to Prabhupāda help. These are the progressive stages to work at. I keep coming back to the very beginning needs: wakefulness, clear pronunciation, attentive hearing, looking for purity.

•

10:30 A.M.

I can chant to my heart's content, but my heart doesn't take part yet. Not yet. Soul on ice.

I thought of something . . . why Kṛṣṇa doesn't appear fully in my utterances of His name. I had some idea but I can't remember it. Philosophy doesn't have to be active for me while I chant. MV met me on the stairs and said he had some questions. He asked the hair-splitting question about the limit of free-will as opposed to ordained karma. I frankly don't know and I don't care much. I gave simple, practical replies. The other question was why does a pure devotee sometimes suffer in this world. I got warmed up answering that one, and then he left me alone. I'm back to chanting.

•

Snapshot

(Get ready to look at it. First you hold the photo face down. You know it will be impenetrable, a bright, glossy surface. Prabhupāda and his disciples. What I mean to say is please forgive me for whatever I write that is impertinent. I am trying to give a candid response. I can't see deep into the spiritual realm. I do love my master. I give these responses as a kind of exercise.)

This picture looks like Vṛndāvana at the grand opening. Śrīla Prabhupāda is completely surrounded by his male devotees on one side, and the women on the other. One of the women is his sister, I think. Prabhupāda is like a lotus. He wears light, tan-saffron, a delicate garland, and his head is tilted slightly to one side as he plays *karatālas*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda is satisfied in seeing Kṛṣṇa. He installed the Deities for our benefit. Here he is fulfilling the *Gurv-aṣṭakam* verses, chanting in Mahāprabhu's *kīrtana*, leading the disciples in Deity worship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the gorgeous temple *pūjā*. He is also delivering the rainfall of mercy to put out *saṁsāra*'s fire. He should be worshiped as good as God because he is the confidential servant of Kṛṣṇa. There will be a feast; we honor that *prasādam*.

Prabhupāda worked hard to build and open the temples. Now we continue to serve him by keeping them alive with *śravaṇam-kīrtanam*. Śrīla Prabhupāda looks as quiet and self-sustained as if he were

all alone, even though he is pressed on all sides by hundreds of devotees. Therefore I say lotus.

We cannot know his mind, he has so many levels. On one level, he may see some discrepancies in the temple construction or the *ārati* as it is being performed by his disciples. I cannot even guess at other, deeper levels. All I know is that he is very dear to Kṛṣṇa and can reciprocate with Him in many forms, including the *arcā-vigraha*.

Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda, thank you for bringing me here for this glimpse of you as you receive *darśana* of the Deity. Please engage me as a preacher to serve those who live and visit your temples. In this way, I can purify myself and earn the right to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

•

12:30 P.M.

Something very special is going on when you chant this many rounds. I am aware of it when I hear Madhu on the phone and I consider giving him some messages I would like conveyed. I hesitate to break out of my continuous *japa* and get into business as usual. This day is unusual, something deeper. Reality is different.

•

6:32 P.M.

Just finished sixty-four rounds. You could keep going, beyond evaluation—neither good, bad, nor indifferent. You chant and chant.

A game to play during *japa*: ask yourself, “What is more important than chanting right now?” The diverting thoughts and possible actions fall away. Nothing is more important than chanting right now. Everything else can wait. (This game can wait too.) When you think of it in terms of life-and-death or temporary and permanent, the chanting is most important.

Your muscles and stamina build up to the point where you don’t have to evaluate it anymore. Kṛṣṇa is Kṛṣṇa; Rādhā is Rādhā. I am very far away from Them, and yet I am as near as possible by chanting. *Japa* gives that immediate connection, more so than any other process. Your tongue and ear and His names. No more to say.

Today I noticed a difference between involuntary and deliberate distraction. I was going over in my mind the batting line-up of the Brooklyn Dodgers team of the 1950s. I caught myself doing it, but I continued indulging. I tried remembering how many home runs Gil Hodges used to hit on an average each year, and how many did Roy Campanella hit. It seemed harmless and amusing. But because it was interfering with my ability to hear my *japa*, it was not harmless, so I dropped it.

I remember in 1971, I traveled in a van with a devotee named Karuṇa-moya dāsa. I was a newly appointed GBC and we were on a tour of Southern U.S.A. ISKCON. We drove to Atlanta, Dallas, New Orleans, and Florida. On our return we were going through New York City on the way to Boston. We were amazed at how the last four and a half hours of the trip seemed so short and easy. Previously, New York City to Boston seemed like a big hike, but after traveling such long distances on our southern tour, NY-Bos was a cinch.

Chanting sixty-four rounds does that for you too. To go on chanting an extra one or two isn't hard; you can always add a few more. The problem of drowsiness is forgotten. Hope I can keep up the good effects tomorrow and not fall back into the old rut.



April 14, 2:06 A.M.

I write to help myself conduct this particular *japa* retreat, to see how to improve chanting now and in an ongoing way.

I also write to reach out to others with guidance and to share the teachings of the *ācāryas*. All writing is different ways to package Kṛṣṇa consciousness, to keep readers interested, and to give them nectar and instruction.

I gained a little strength in recognizing incoming (impeding) lines of thought and putting them aside

in favor of *japa* concentration. This morning, serious thoughts invaded my *japa*: "You need to plan the lectures for the seminar on Prabhupāda's life. It is coming up soon." But I assured myself, "Be confident, there will be time to plan. And you don't need as much time as you think. Go and speak lovingly of Prabhupāda memories at 26 Second Avenue. Anyway, now is not the time. This is *japa*. Right now, *japa* is most important." I parted with the plan-making and I'm back to brisk rounds.

I am free-writing. It is similar to *japa*. Both depend on their own processes. Let's explore a comparison of writing to *japa*. In *japa*, you focus on hearing the clearly pronounced name and you look for a break from your confused mind. (The mind is confused by so many currents of thought that it feels like a telephone wire buzzing with hundreds of phone calls at once.) You look for a break wherein you can pray from your actual condition: "Kṛṣṇa, please help me. Please engage me in Your service!"

And free-writing? It is a process to keep moving quickly over thoughts, selecting ones that are charged with emotion and using them to form prayers. Lately, this "mantra" for writing keeps occurring to me: "Help yourself." It's a cue—write something that will help you in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. "Help yourself" starts with your actual state and goes to serving the Lord's associates, making prayers to superiors, being friends with peers, and giving *paramparā* instructions and examples to newcomers and younger devotees. It is communication.

Neither *japa* nor writing can be pursued artificially. I have to concentrate on what I need, what I actually am—the process values honesty. No rituals, no feigned emotions or imagination (*kalpana*).

Pen jumps up to shout, “*Haribol!*” Bows down to make *praṇāmas* at the mere thought of the name, “Gaurāṅga! Lord Caitanya!” Pen does high jinks of *kīrtana* ecstasy. Goes to work with determination like any nine-to-five hard-effort *karmī*. Delights, solaces . . . Holds a key and uses all the keys it can find to try opening the doors—where is greed? Where is greed for greed? When can I find some service to hearing about Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa?

Japa is a continual ride, the ultimate ride, the last word in solace (even for one thrown into prison with no books or for one gone blind—solace for the dying who have no time to write more books and who have no concentration or need for anything else). *Japa* is peace. Like free-writing, *japa* flows with whatever we have, with whatever we are. It doesn’t wait for a perfect stage before beginning. It doesn’t erase what it just did and go back to start again. If a bead or round is defective, then on to the next one and the next. *Japa* and writing take you past the material world.

Japa is my hope. *Japa* is my frustration. It is my embarrassment. It is my distracted performance and my lack of realization. I have been chanting *japa* for thirty years. I’m still a beginner. *Japa* humbles me and fills me with enthusiasm at the challenge. It is

hopelessly beyond me; I cannot master it. I want to learn how to surrender to the name and let the name teach me how to chant. I love it. I appreciate the theistic brilliance of the Lord for introducing *harer nāma* as the *yuga-dharma* for this sinful age. *Sādhū, sādhu. Kalau tad dhari-kīrtanāt.*

Yesterday, Madhu and I shaved up like recruits, new *bhaktas*. Shaved up and chanted sixty-four rounds. Madhu said his sixty-four were a “token.” He meant they were a sincere gesture, a *tapasya*. He wanted to show Kṛṣṇa that he cared, but as far as the performance of the *japa*, it was, he says, austerity all the way.

We discussed our mutual desire to make *some* regular observance of *ekādaśī*. It seems as if those *ekādaśīs* where we stayed up all night and fasted are not possible anymore, but we ought to do something to increase our chanting and hearing about Govinda. We shouldn’t be satisfied with refraining from grains and beans but having an *ekādaśī* feast. Maybe we can regularly do the sixty-four-round *yajña*. For that, we would have to plan in advance not to travel on *ekādaśī* and deliberately drop other duties. I am for it. It can be a lasting outcome of this *japa* retreat.

I put scotch tape on the corners of my valuable paperback books like *Harināma-cintāmaṇi* so they don’t get dog-eared. Some books I cover with paper. These measures are means to achieve longevity. During the temporary existence, why let your books get dog-eared? The message of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhā-

kura is eternal and I am *sanātana* also, a servant of Kṛṣṇa.

“God is eternal, and His instructions and followers are also eternal. . . . The more one glorifies Kṛṣṇa, the more enthusiastic he becomes in glorifying, glorifying, glorifying. . . . this Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* can be chanted twenty-four hours daily, and one will still feel fresh and enthusiastic. . . . It is a spiritual sound that comes from the spiritual world” (*Teachings of Lord Kapila*, p. 208).

Yes, you have millions and trillions of “miles” to go before reaching the goal of direct service in Vraja. Life after life you can increase your greed. Chanting. So why not learn to chant as well as you can right now so that you will do better with it in the next life? It doesn’t get lost from one life to the next. It’s not like your bodily organs that finally break down until the soul has to move out of the body. Chanting can go with you to the next life. Learn how to cry for Kṛṣṇa. You will be needing that ability for the next life.

Just before going out for my walk, I spent a few minutes reading *Entering the Life of Prayer and Japa Reform Notebook*. The particular sections I picked, or maybe the mood I was in, made me think that they were imperfect. I felt sorry about that. Someone once told me that I ought to publish an apology for all the imperfect things I have written, the gropings, the focus on myself. That apology would mean apologizing for being an imperfect, groping person. How can you publish a repudiation or

retraction of your own self? But anyway I do—I declare that I write imperfectly. I say things that later turn out not to be true. This is not the standard of the Vaiṣṇava writers.

But actually I am happy, not happy that I write imperfectly, but happy that despite all my inadequacies, and despite the obstacles in the material world, Kṛṣṇa sent Prabhupāda. *I am allowed to serve Śrīla Prabhupāda*. Prabhupāda is so kind that any small service we attempt—even if there will always be others who don't approve of it—he will accept it in the spirit it was rendered. There are so many different people serving Prabhupāda, and some will find value in what another devotee is doing. We want to work toward perfection, toward improvement of ourselves. Unless we were imperfect, how could we improve?

I am especially grateful for the career Prabhupāda has given me and all the different services he has encouraged me to do in ISKCON from the beginning. He has always given me a variety of adventure and responsibility, and a great sense of working in an important mission, his mission. He has always given me hope. Now he is making the goal clearer to me, more brilliant and sweet. At the same time, he has given me the vision of myself that I am just a beginner, a fumbler, I make so many mistakes. There is no end to the work that has to be done on myself; it doesn't seem so likely that I will finish it all up in this lifetime. He has taught me to pray for faith and he has given me faith right from 1966.

7:00 A.M.

A dentist friend is coming here in a few days. The chairs are soaking in the rain. I am in the van looking out.

The DHL package may arrive today. I have to give a class tonight to MV, his wife, and Madhu, one of my warm-ups for the upcoming seminar. For the most part, the day is spent in chanting. *Ekādaśī* created a midpoint to this retreat, and I don't know where to go but forward. At least, let me not lose the basic momentum. *Māyā* is always ready to trip me up.

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. . . .
"when we chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, we are praying, 'O Lord, O energy of the Lord, please accept me.' We have no prayer other than 'please accept me'" (*Path of Perfection*, p. 144).

"This is the easiest way to please Kṛṣṇa. You don't need much money, much education, nothing of the sort. Simply requires your heart. 'Kṛṣṇa, You are my Lord, You are my master eternally. I am Your servant eternally. Let me be engaged in Your service.' That is Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare. This is the meaning of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra: O Kṛṣṇa, O energy of Kṛṣṇa, I am Your servant, somehow or other I am now fallen in this material condition. Please pick me up and engage me in Your service" (lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda, *Māyāpura* 1977).

Snapshot

This photo is of a *pandal* program in India. I see the *pandal* roof and sides and the colorful canvas patterns. The stage is covered with a rug and sheets. Śrīla Prabhupāda is on a *vyāsāsana* with his book open on a stand. He is way in the back of the photo—I mainly see groups of his disciples holding *kīrtana*, dancing on two different levels of the stage. Lokanātha Swami is leading, head back and mouth wide open. Śrīla Prabhupāda has his glasses on. He looks quiet and centered in himself, as if he is ready to give the lecture as soon as the *kīrtana* is over. You can see only a small part of the first row of the audience, gray-haired men's heads.

Only in India does such preaching take place. Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to these engagements in one of his early books as "platform lectures." Somehow one doesn't expect that the people in the audience will seriously take up the practices of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They are pious and they attend almost any lecture on *sanātana-dharma*. But Śrīla Prabhupāda speaks anyway, delivering the teachings of Lord Caitanya as given to him by his *guru mahārāja*. We should go also. We will be happy when we do programs like this. The results are up to Kṛṣṇa as Supersoul in everyone's hearts, and it is also up to the free will of the living beings who hear the message.

Here are Prabhupāda's dancing white elephants. He has brought them to India, "The young American and European boys and girls." Two devotees are

fanning Prabhupāda with peacock fans. An observer of this scene can see that Prabhupāda's personal contribution to this program will be the *Bhāgavatam* lecture. He is ready. Let us be ready to hear. Don't fall asleep. Don't be distracted by the pains of your body and the heat of India or thoughts on your mind. Take this moment to be with your spiritual master as he preaches to his countrymen. You all sit down quietly and drink in his message coming down from Śukadeva Gosvāmī. It will always be relevant.



1:00 P.M.

Girirāja: There are other things that we are instructed to do, which even though we try to do, we cannot do perfectly yet.

Prabhupāda: How is that? You try to do and cannot do? How is that?

Girirāja: Like chanting attentively. Sometimes we try to but—

Prabhupāda: Well, that is not a fault. Suppose you are trying to do something. Due to your inexperience, if you sometimes fail, that is not a fault. You are trying. There is a verse in the *Bhāgavatam* that if a devotee is trying his best but due to his incapability he sometimes fails, Kṛṣṇa excuses him. . . . But he must repent for that—"I have done this"—and he should try to avoid it as far as possible. . . . But those who are doing something

willingly are not excused. On the strength that I am a devotee, if I think, "Because I am chanting I may therefore commit all this nonsense and it will be nullified, that is the greatest offense (*Perfect Questions, Perfect Answers*, p. 10).

Here is a quote from an initiation lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda in July 1970 in Los Angeles. Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke on each of the ten offenses and then said, "Then, what is next?"

Devotee: To become inattentive while chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda: Yes, when you are chanting, you should hear Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. You should hear at the same time. Then the mind and the senses are compact. That is *samā-dhi*. That is perfection of yoga. This yoga is recommended in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. *Yoginām api sarveṣāṃ mad-gaṭenāntar-ātmanā*. So everyone, by chanting he should hear."



4:15 P.M.

Standing at the van door talking with Madhu, I felt that some of our topics weren't so vital. Our conversation wasn't exactly *prajalpa*, but I felt as if I was breaking a *mauna* vow. I haven't taken a vow of silence, but when you chant a lot of *japa*, more of your usual conversation seems unnecessary. You think, "This time could be spent chanting."

6:25 P.M.

Can you do a few extra rounds now? I mean extra extra? Just for the fun of it, just for the sake of doing it, for Kṛṣṇa, for *bhakti*'s sake. For no other reason. Just do a few extra because it's nice and that's what I came here to do. I've done thirty-five so far, but can I do just two or three more and try to hear them?

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April 15, 2:07 A.M.

If this were a thorough manual on *japa*, I would teach everything from the basics to the most advanced states. In *Harināma-cintāmaṇi*, thirteen chapters are devoted to discussion of the ten offenses to be avoided, then the fourteenth chapter describes other offenses in devotional service. The fifteenth and final chapter gives a *sūtra*-like run-through of the most advanced states of chanting, known as *nāma-rasa*.

After listing the general offenses to be avoided in Deity worship (*sevā-aparādha*), *Harināma-cintāmaṇi* speaks of the stage of *bhāva-sevā*. This begins only after one has surmounted all the other *nām-āparādhas* and *sevā-aparādhas*. It is the mental or inner service (*manasa-sevā*) where one is drawn spontaneously and constantly to worship Kṛṣṇa by chanting His holy names. The *bhāva-sevā* that can be achieved by chanting is so powerful and sweet, that Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura advises that no other

devotional process is necessary except *harer nāma*: "Meditation upon the holy name of the Lord engenders *bhāva-sevā*, or spontaneous loving devotional service. O Lord Caitanya, this is Your grace upon the *jīvas*: all the different limbs of *sādhana-bhakti* or the practice of devotional service finally culminate in *prema*. One must therefore submerge himself in the nectar of chanting the holy name and forget all other processes of elevation" (HNC, p. 97).

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura defines *nāma-rasa* as "the topmost spiritual science of the mellows of the holy name." It is revealed briefly in *Harināma-cintāmaṇi* through the instructions of Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura, who spoke it to Lord Caitanya, being empowered by the Lord to do so. (The topic is covered more elaborately in Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Jaiva Dharma*.) The main point is that chanting is not an impersonal meditation. It culminates in development of personal loving service for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. As Śrīla Prabhupāda used to say, by chanting you can come to know Kṛṣṇa face to face.

The science of *rasa* is discussed throughout the *Nectar of Devotion*, but *rasa* is a particular mellow in which a pure devotee renders eternal devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa in Goloka Vṛndāvana. There are five primary *rasas*, but the followers of Lord Caitanya conclude that *mādhurya-rasa* (conjugal love) is the chief goal. Since *harināma* is the *yuga-dharma* for Kali-yuga, it stands to reason that conditioned souls (*nitya-baddha*) can gain release from bondage and develop love of God simply by

chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes, " . . . This *rasa*, by the grace of Kṛṣṇa, is propagated in the material world in the form of His holy name."

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes elevation by the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, beginning from *śraddhā* and progressing up to *prema*. It is only a rare soul who is attracted to practice pure devotional service under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master coming in *paramparā* from Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. By great fortune and by piety (*sukṛti*) from past lives, a *jīva* meets a bona fide spiritual master and begins to hear from him with faith (*śraddhā*). Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes, "By the grace of the spiritual master, he is initiated into the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*—the holy names of the Divine Couple." It is significant that Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura declares the *mahā-mantra* to be actually a calling out to the names of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Previous *ācāryas* such as Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, Jīva Gosvāmī, and Gopāla-guru Gosvāmī, have given confidential explanations of the *mahā-mantra*, revealing that the holy names refer exclusively to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Their conjugal pastimes. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has also written a prayer explaining the *mahā-mantra*, which includes lines like these:

O Harā (Rādhā)! Please reveal to me Your most cherished pastimes with Your beloved Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

O Rāma! Please reveal to me Your most cherished pastimes with Your beloved Śrī Rādhā.

O Rāma! Please engage me in remembering Your transcendental name, form, qualities, pastimes, etc.

O Rāma! Please make me fit to serve You while remembering Your transcendental name, form, qualities, pastimes, etc.

A summary of the stage of *nāma-rasa* is given as follows in *Harināma-cintāmaṇi* (p. 105):

“The introspective devotee must at first discard all the ten offenses and simply meditate on the holy name, trying to chant constantly. He should distinctly pronounce the holy name and meditate upon the transcendental sound vibration. When his chanting is clear, steady and blissful, he should try to meditate on the Śyāmasundara form of the Lord. With chanting beads in hand, his chanting and meditation should seek out the transcendental form of the holy name. He will indeed see with spiritual vision the real meaning the name represents.

“Another method he may employ to see this form is to sit in front of the Deities, drink the beautiful form of the Lord with his eyes and meditate upon the holy name. Even after reaching the stage where the holy name and the form of the Lord become one, he must try to remember the transcendental qualities of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The holy name and qualities of Kṛṣṇa must merge through constant chanting” (p. 105).

Nāma-rasa develops further into realization of one’s own eternal *rasa* with Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and continual meditation on service to Them in the

daily Vraja pastimes. A serious practitioner of *harer nāma* may consult the authorized books of Bhakti-vinoda Ṭhākura, Viśvanātha Cakravartī, and other authorities to learn about it. These topics can be appreciated only when one is personally guided by the authorized spiritual master who knows and practices the science. It cannot be “mastered” by the usual process of knowledge associated with academic studies. It is revealed in the heart of a sincere devotee who wholeheartedly follows the order of his spiritual master to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and to render devotional service free of *aparādhās* and *anarthās*.

What am I doing to connect my chanting with the *rasika* pastimes? I am simply reading about Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana. Their pastimes, as given in the *rasa-śāstras*, are so potent that they may rub off on me and gradually become part of my “normal” thinking. I cannot artificially impress these *līlās* into my *japa*, but I pray that they may kindly appear. And thus I am begging for the nectar of the holy names as I chant.

My main practice during these twenty-one days and for a long time after, will be to return the mind from its errant wanderings and fix it on the sound of the holy names. I do this because I have faith in the order of my spiritual master. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that everything would come by attentive chanting, so I am striving to become attentive. But I cannot personally relate through my diary of experience, the *nāma-rasa*, the nature of entrance into

kṛṣṇa-līlā in *svarūpa-siddha*, or any of these stages. I can only tell something of the struggles and rewards of the fallen *jīva* who has become fortunate enough to meet a pure devotee of the holy name. I cannot tell a higher truth than I know (except theoretically), but neither can I remain silent.

Having touched on the advanced stages of *nāma-rasa*, I must now return to my actual state, but now we know the ultimate goal of life.

“O my tongue who is overwhelmed with the desire for material enjoyment, please hear my instructions. Always remain deeply absorbed in drinking the nectarean loving mellows of the divine and beautiful names of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

“With great care, you should eagerly mix and blend this ambrosial name of Rādhikā in the wonderful sweet condensed milk of the name of Kṛṣṇa.

“Now add into that mixture the sweet fragrance of love and affection, which is both cool and delightful. With great joy and ecstasy drink this nectar both day and night.

“No longer will there remain on the tongue a thirst for mundane enjoyment, for these wonderful transcendental mellows will fulfill all of your desires” (*Gītāvalī*, “*Parīṣiṣṭa*,” verses 1, 3–5, p. 131–32).

The process of *nāma-bhajana* is clear. Even though we remain at the beginning stages, it is helpful to know that *nāma-bhajana* can become progressively more advanced until it reaches the stage of *nāma-rasa*. Therefore, I should not lose my

enthusiasm in my fight with the inattentive mind. I don't have to be frustrated in my attempts. We are working toward something so great and so nectarean that all struggle is worthwhile to achieve it.

I cannot be satisfied to "return to earth" and face the reality of my struggle. What is it that is dragging my mind away from the holy name? The Brooklyn Dodgers? Something else? But this part of earth is where I have to start. It is my garden to plant and grow and weed and hoe. I am poor—my garden is not lush and green—but a poor man cannot be embarrassed by his poverty. He simply has to continue living and work toward improvement. I think gentle devotees will understand exactly what I am talking about.



6:45 A.M.

It is a pleasure to walk on these roads and chant on my beads alone in the early morning. When I wake up the house dogs and they start barking, I remember to be forbearing. In a secluded section out of the dogs' range, I stop and pick some yellow wildflowers. Think about the plant kingdom, how it is suffering and how it appears beautiful to man. But mainly I walk and chant, walk and chant. This is real wealth. There is nothing more important to do. Italy is not Vṛndāvana and I am not Haridāsa Ṭhākura, but the name is pure and some *abhasa*

rays filter down to dispel my inner darkness. As the electric power is humming through that steel, electrical tower, so I am buzzing and crackling with spiritual electricity.

The more I chant, the more things change around me. This morning while I was walking, I suddenly imagined that someone was running to catch up to me from behind. I remember over thirty years ago how some tough guys did that to me. I was leaving a building at Staten Island Community College and they surrounded me and my friend, John Young. They claimed that we had made fun of them while they were singing a rock 'n' roll ballad together outside our school. Afraid of a fight, John and I denied the truth. Today I recalled it. The past runs up from behind and catches you again and again. Will you be cowardly again and deny the truth? Will you make fun of others and catch karma? I thought, "No, I am in a deeper reality. If someone runs up from behind, I will take it not only in the sense of who they are and what they want, but I will remain rooted in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and see them as agents of karma. I will not forget *aham brahmāsmi*."

Such a mixed line of thought takes place in less than a moment, followed by another and another. But don't mind it so much, go on chanting as you walk.

Now in the van, looking out at sparrows pecking the earth.

Snapshot

(Approach the spiritual master with *daṇḍavats*. As many times as you see him during the day, that many times you bow down. Do it with meaning and surrender. You serve Kṛṣṇa through guru. Gather your faith together, beyond mind and senses, *jaya* Prabhupāda.)

Here is a photo close-up of Prabhupāda taking a morning walk on the roof in Māyāpura. It is during the annual festival, and he is surrounded by Western-born *sannyāsī* disciples. Śrīla Prabhupāda is looking straight ahead. There is a glint of gold from his mouth. He is speaking (or about to speak). He wears a plain gray *cādar* around his shoulders, a saffron beadbag—he sets the style and we all follow. Over the wall of the roof, you can see the plain of Māyāpura—out there somewhere is the Yoga-piṭha. A microphone in a disciple's hand is poised to catch the words.

Something heavy always happens when he is present. He reprimands the *mūḍhās*, scientists, *māyāvādīs*, and so on, but somehow that fire of his words gets directed back to us. It is done in an indirect way, but nonetheless . . .

Sometimes a disciple like Pañca-draviḍa Swami will playfully take the role of one of the arch-enemies and there is laughter as Prabhupāda responds. We all take that role occasionally, for fun, to play with our lion-like *guru mahārāja*, to learn how to preach. And we do it because there is an arch-enemy lurking within us.

Aside from that, being with Śrīla Prabhupāda is heavy because he is indirectly asking us to surrender to Kṛṣṇa. To totally surrender. That means to surrender much more than we are willing to do at the present moment. He doesn't bear down on any one of us, he doesn't force us (although he has proven that he can do that too). But the pressure is spread evenly and heavily over all of us. Are you going to serve Prabhupāda or *māyā*? Are you playing surrendered now but later not? What is that far-off look in your eye? What if you have to surrender, even as much as you are willing to right now, but continue it for your whole life—are you ready? Which of you believes in Kṛṣṇa without any doubt? Who won't run away?

The heaviness I see is in Śrīla Prabhupāda's demeanor. You cannot see it exactly in the dark bronze hue of his face reflecting the morning sunlight. You can't quite see it in his eyes which appear almost shut. It is in his overall appearance, in the silences between his words, in his walking back and forth over the roof, surrounded by the leaders of his movement, by the renounced young men who will carry his words to the others. Guru is heavy.



10:50 A.M.

The *japa* from 9:00–10:30, what is your estimation? It was better than it has been; I kept them going at a steady clip of 8.30 minutes. Didn't get up to change my position and didn't fall asleep. That is an

accomplishment in itself. I was frequently aware that I should be hearing the names, but it seems each time I try, I get quickly thrown off. It's like wrestling with a giant—one of those *asuras* that Bhīma used to take on. The two of them would fight every day for weeks, but Bhīma could not tire out the demon.

I am not Bhīma, but I am armed with the *mahā-mantra*. Sometimes I surrender a bit—put a good wrestling hold on the demon of my mind—but then he flexes his shoulders and throws off my full-nelson. Again. Anyway, I am willing to fight. I refuse to be defeated.

Kṛṣṇa, dear Lord, I cannot win You over in this way. If only I could get past all those thoughts—so many useless memories, and so many concerns for the present—if only I could get past them and surrender.

•

4:00 P.M.

We should pray to avoid phoniness.

Someone brought some grape juice up for me while I was out of the room. I met the house cat on the second floor. Time is running out in more ways than I am aware.

•

7:00 P.M.

The DHL package didn't come today. It is a real Italian comedy. They were supposed to deliver a package from America on Monday. They phoned Tuesday to say that they couldn't come out that day, but that they would be out Wednesday. This is the same DHL, the international courier service, who has a huge billboard in Brussels with a picture of the earth globe and the motto, "When you positively, absolutely must have it by tomorrow." All day we looked for their van. You can see cars coming from quite a distance from my window. When something approached resembling a commercial van, I thought, "Now they are coming." It occupied our thoughts. There is really nothing urgent in that package, but the delay is putting it on our minds. By 5:00 P.M. it looked unlikely, so MV phoned their office. They said, "We have a problem. The package is still here." MV complained to them and they said, "All right, we will be out with it tomorrow morning." And so it goes into the *japa* retreat diary.

At least you can know what I think of when I think of my beads. I can understand that this is not more important than hearing the holy names. Almost nothing is more important. Yet I think of these lesser things one after another. Dwelling on the names is hard because it is such a stark, simple thing, while at the same time, it is such a deep ocean. The name is Kṛṣṇa and all of His pastimes. Whether I take it as a simple act of hearing or as a

profound act of meditation on *līlās*, either way I seem unable. I count, I finger beads, I chant.

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April 16, 2:06 A.M.

“ . . . one can chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* all day and night and never feel tired. As chanting is increased, it will come out new and fresh” (*Bhāg.* 4.30.20, purport).

The quotes from *śāstra* and from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purports are helpful. Everyone is helping—guru, *śāstra*, and *sādhū*. The nondevotees in the material world do not help my chanting, “they only wish to do us harm.” But I consort with my nondevotee mind. No sense complaining. I have nothing new to say. I have the work to do.

“Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura quotes this verse from the Padma Purāṇa: *nāmāparādha-yuktānām nāmāny eva haranty agham aviśrānti-prayuktāni tāny evārtha-karāṇi ca*. Even if in the beginning one chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra with offenses, one will become free from such offenses by chanting again and again. *Pāpa kṣayaś ca bhavati smaratām tam ahar-niśam*: one becomes free from all sinful reactions if one chants day and night, following the recommendation of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu” (*Bhāg.* 6.3.24, purport).

This is a very encouraging statement regarding increased chanting. “Constant” chanting may be

taken literally to mean the dropping of all other duties and only chanting. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura alludes to the increase: "Therefore, in the beginning, a little time should be spent in seclusion daily for full concentration upon the holy name. Gradually, as chanting increases, a more profound relationship with the holy name develops, and the material impediments fall away" (HNC, p. 104).

In this sense, my retreat has been successful. I have broken through the complacency of a mere sixteen hopelessly inattentive rounds. I have gone beyond it, at least for now. It can easily happen to full-time ISKCON devotees that the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra gets relegated to a quite neglected place in their daily *sādhana*. We work for the movement, but we don't put time and effort into chanting. Śrīla Prabhupāda has given us a challenge because he expects so much of us in preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness within the complicated material world. He assures us that the preacher will be protected by Kṛṣṇa. He strongly criticizes a follower who gives up the work of preaching and who then sits down full-time in a secluded place for *bhajana*. But the same Śrīla Prabhupāda has written extensively about the glories of the holy name and the need for devotees to chant nicely and seriously.

For Śrīla Prabhupāda, chanting means not only with beads, but lecturing, and of course, *kīrtana*, singing in congregation. "The members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement should perform *saṅkīrtana-yajñas* one after another, so much so that all the people of the world will either jokingly or

seriously chant Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare, and thus they will derive the benefit of cleansing the heart" (*Bhāg.* 4.24.10, purport).

Book distribution is the "big *mṛdaṅga*" for spreading the chanting even further than can be done by the musical parties. And so the word *saṅkīrtana* has become synonymous with book distribution.

It seems that constant chanting on beads is not encouraged by Śrīla Prabhupāda, although he did expect us to be constantly focused on Kṛṣṇa's names and in Kṛṣṇa's service. Śrīla Prabhupāda expected sixteen rounds to be enough because he thought the Westerners wouldn't be able to chant more. That sixteen could never be given up. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that one who cannot complete his assigned number of rounds is in a diseased condition of life. Lord Caitanya's order is to preach and to become a spiritual master, but in order to do so, one must follow the regulative principles and chant at least sixteen rounds daily. Then, even though preaching in the modern world is very demanding, the preacher will not become contaminated by *māyā*.

In our preaching work, we deal with so much property and money and so many books bought and sold, but because these dealings all pertain to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, they should never be considered material. That one is absorbed in thoughts of such management does not mean that he is outside of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If one rigidly observes the regulative principle of chanting sixteen rounds of the *mahā-mantra* every day, his

dealings with the material world for the sake of spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement are not different from the spiritual cultivation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

—*Bhāg.* 5.16.3, purport

My point is that the *japa* may be done mechanically, almost thoughtlessly, while thinking of other problems for Kṛṣṇa's service—what I have to do today. This leads to other non-preaching, nondevotional thoughts invading the *japa* time. And the result is that *japa*, which is the most important of all my daily tasks for the spiritual master, and which will protect me and enable me to perform the other tasks—becomes a “weak sister,” dries up, withers, and effectually dies.

The primary place of *japa* in a Prabhupāda disciple's life is clear. “Of all the regulative principles, the spiritual master's order to chant at least sixteen rounds is most essential” (*C.c., Madhya* 22.113, purport). In another place, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “The first regulative principle is that one must chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* loudly enough so that he can hear himself, and one must vow to chant a fixed number of rounds” (*C.c., Antya* 11.24, purport).

Śrīla Prabhupāda was aware that some of his disciples failed to chant this minimum quota and he didn't take it lightly. “The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is based upon this instruction of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu that one must chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* regularly and according to the prescribed principles. We simply ask our

Western students to chant at least sixteen rounds a day, but sometimes we find that they fail to chant even these sixteen rounds . . . Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's cult is based upon the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. . . . We, the members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, must strictly follow this advice of Caitanya Mahāprabhu" (C.c., Ādi 16.15, purport).

This order stands not only for beginning students, but for everyone, even a *paramahansa*. "Haridāsa Ṭhākura and the Gosvāmīs were all engaged in chanting a fixed number of rounds; therefore chanting on beads is very important for everyone . . ." (C.c., *Madhya* 4.125, purport).

I am doing extra rounds for now, but I don't expect to keep it up after these three weeks (nine days left). Maybe I will keep the *ekādaśī* increase. But I have other duties to do, so I have to be content with my quota of sixteen. Maybe in the future, Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda will indicate to me that my other duties are not as important and I should spend more time chanting. Haridāsa Ṭhākura spent all his time chanting, as did Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, and toward the end of his life, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura. As I write this, I am not trying to advocate that I or other devotees should chant more than sixteen rounds at all times. What I *am* trying to advocate is that those sixteen rounds should be done better. That is the reason we increase our quota—to break the bad habits and overcome the offenses. Increased numerical strength is the remedy for offensive chanting. *Pāpa kṣayaś ca bhavati smara-*

tārī tam ahar-niśam: “One becomes free from all sinful reactions if one chants day and night, following the recommendation of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu” (*Bhāg.* 6.3.24, purport).



6:30 A.M.

You want to be a part of the spiritual world, of Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes in Vraja. It is beginning to happen. But so far, it is not *that* real to you. You have only been hearing it for a few years, and it has only been a few months since you gained the focus that this should be the goal of your life. For many years and lifetimes, a file has accumulated, filled with so many real and imagined adventures (they are all actually māyic misadventures). So you cannot be part of any world right now. You cannot sink roots into this earth and neither can you fly to Goloka. You cannot entirely give up your sense of self in this world, and you are tired of playing the center of existence. The condition of your *japa* reflects this confused state of being.

I am not confused, but between worlds is a more accurate word. Arjuna also felt this and expressed it to Śrī Kṛṣṇa: “But for Yourself, there is no one who can remove this doubt.” Arjuna thought that if he followed Kṛṣṇa’s instructions for self-realization, then he would have to give up his hopes for happiness in this world. But what if he failed to attain the transcendental goal? Then he would be neither

here nor there, but be like a small cloud torn apart from a big cloud and floating loose in the big sky. Lord Kṛṣṇa assured his friend that one who does good never meets with evil. Even if Arjuna could not completely succeed on the path of *bhakti*, there would be no loss. Whatever gains he had made would be continued in the next life. As a result of his spiritual efforts in this life, he would be born in the family of *yogīs* or devotees, or pious, wealthy people. From there he would be automatically attracted to spiritual life again, and as soon as possible, complete the course for going back to Godhead.

Therefore, if we cannot chant with attention right now, chant anyway and chant more. Make efforts to control the mind. Discuss the *aparādhās* in chanting and be alert to when you may be about to commit them. Be glad if you don't feel part of this world. Go on hearing the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Associate with devotees and avoid those who would destroy your faith and enthusiasm. Your devotional activities are all gains. They often seem comical because of the awkward place you are in, so there is no harm in having a laugh at yourself. At least you won't become proud that you are an accomplished taster of *rasa*.

And by the way, where did you get those wooden *japa* beads? They are not *tulasī*, are they? Don't you know Vaiṣṇavas are supposed to chant only on *tulasī* beads? And how come you don't know more Sanskrit or Hindi or Bangla? That puts you at a considerable disadvantage, you know. Why haven't

you memorized the standard Vaiṣṇava songs? I also notice you have difficulty mastering the basic concepts of Vaiṣṇava *siddhānta*. Do you know what *alambana* is? Do you know *svārsiki*? Do you even know *saṅkhyā*, *Vedānta*? All right, I don't want to embarrass you, but you should at least learn to tie your *śikhā* in a knot and put the *tilaka* on the twelve parts of your body. Where is your *Bhagavad-gītā*? What temple do you belong to? Who is your GBC man? What is your service? Do you know how to properly pronounce your own spiritual name? Oh, very good. And let me ask you a simple question of philosophy. Tell me the meaning of the word *bhāva*.



10:20 A.M.

A very small DHL van drove right past the house without stopping. M. ran onto the road and waved to him. He came back and delivered our package. I told them not to send me letters during the *japa* retreat, so this package contains only a copy of *Caitanya-bhāgavatā*, some used tapes—plus a few letters. Even those few letters are enough to distract me. Now I can see the difference between the first row of distraction and the second row. By coming to the *japa* retreat, I have, after a week, mostly removed or reduced the first line of distraction. That is, the daily concerns of my work, my personal relationships, and so on. I have been chanting better even though I cannot get free of the second line of

māyā's attack—the old memories. I appreciate now that this mail package has arrived how much the distractions have lessened.

Chanting with the distraction of my day to day life makes me want to *get my rounds done*. There is business to take care of and people to deal with. This is an offensive attitude toward the holy name; it prevents me from loving Kṛṣṇa in His *nāma-rūpa*.

Did you ever have the impression that someone was hurrying you and trying to get rid of you? I think of a clerk at the information desk of the passport office in Manhattan. Her function is merely to decide who should go where as they try to apply for their passports. If you try to settle your affairs with her or ask her a more detailed question, she gets rid of you with a rude, "Who's next?" Do we deal with *harer nāma* like that? What to do?

I wrote a note to Madhu asking him for suggestions how I can best use the remainder of my *japa* retreat. The thing that struck me the most about his reply was his comment, "You want to be fervent—the best goal is not achieved by mediocre practice—practice can lead to contempt/familiarity and destroy fervor." He mentioned that I might read Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's *Manaḥ-śikṣā*.

For all its faults, *Entering the Life of Prayer* is fervent. I am *not* so fervent now. I am almost urbane about my inability to pay attention to the holy name. The dictionary defines fervent as "ardent:

passionate. Very hot.” How do you become like that? You can’t just turn it on.

Nothing should be imitated. That’s why I so much value the quality of honesty. What if I am honestly not fervent?

Pure fervent prayer is desirable. Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī prayed:

“O my uncomprehending inner self, my dear brother mind, I humbly prostrate myself before you. Taking hold of your feet, I beseech you, please give up all pride and surrender fully to Śrī Guru, to the spiritual abode of Vraja-*dhāma*, to the residents of Vraja, to all the Vaiṣṇava devotees of the Lord, to the *sattvika-brāhmaṇas*, to the holy name of the Supreme Lord, and to the ever-fresh and youthful divine couple of blossoming beauty, Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and in this way quickly develop sublime attachment to Them” (*Manaḥ-śikṣā*, Verse 1).

Fervor—feeling regret, feeling helpless that you are a fallen, conditioned soul. Fervor—intense greed, praying to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, praying that Their pastimes will descend into your *japa*, crying to Them.

Without pure fervor and desire, then even the increase to forty rounds, fifty rounds, sixty, seventy, will be not so wonderful. I should want more than just control of the mind. What essence will I carry past these three weeks of increased chanting? Where is that fervor? Where is Kṛṣṇa’s grace?

“Revival of the dormant affection or love of Godhead does not depend on the mechanical sys-

tem of hearing and chanting, but it solely and wholly depends on the causeless mercy of the Lord. When the Lord is fully satisfied with the sincere efforts of the devotee, He may endow him with His loving transcendental service" (*Bhāg.* 1.7.6, purport).

Just had a flurry of excitement. The devotee-dentist just visited and said I had a serious problem. He says it will take one and a half months to fix it. At first it seemed like I would have to leave here immediately and start the dental work at his place in the north. I thought, "Okay, that's the end of the *japa* retreat," but now he has decided I can go ahead with my schedule and he will see me afterwards. At a moment, with or without prior notice, our plans can be disrupted. Plan with *that* in mind. Somehow, chant better.

Śrīla Prabhupāda says Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not difficult. "You don't have to do anything. Just *man-manā bhava mad-bhakto*, always think of Kṛṣṇa." But that requires love. The fervor you speak of is also love.



4:30 P.M.

I recently wrote a letter to Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja in Mathurā. In the package which just arrived, I got a reply. I specifically asked how I could improve my

chanting of the holy name, because I did not see how I could go further into understanding Vṛndāvana *rasa* of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa unless I was able to better serve *harer nāma*. Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja replied by quoting Verse 8 of *Upadeśāmṛta* (*tan-nāma-rūpa-caritādi-sukirtanānu*).

He said that Rūpa Gosvāmī prescribes that chanting can be done with the tongue and the mind. The mind is the source of all evil, but if the tongue can be controlled, it can also control the mind. Control of the tongue is achieved by always chanting the holy name.

Rūpa Gosvāmī says we should not only chant the *nāma* but also the *rūpa*, the qualities, and the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. This should definitely be done if one wants to progress toward *kṛṣṇa-prema*. He should “chant” what he hears from *rasika* books. If we speak about Kṛṣṇa according to what our *guru-deva* has taught, then chanting and devotional service will be easy.

Mahārāja went on to say that the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa will automatically appear in our *japa*; we do not have to think of them separately when we chant. But he also said that they will not appear for everyone. If one has worldly desires, then even if one tries to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, those material desires will come to mind during the chanting.

Mahārāja then described some of Kṛṣṇa’s *rasika* names like Rādhānātha, Rādhā-kānta, Rasabihārī, and so on. He said that actually, all these *rasika* names of Kṛṣṇa are there within the Hare Kṛṣṇa

mantra. Ordinary people take the word “Hare” to mean only the Lord, but *rasika* devotees know that Hare means Rādhikā attracts Kṛṣṇa and brings Him to Her favorite pastime places. He is stolen by Rādhā. He also takes Her to places like Rādhā-kuṇḍa. So we should always chant the names of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra with awareness of all these *rasika* meanings, and then the *mahā-mantra* becomes a *rasa* ocean. Chant and remember all the *līlās*.

Rūpa Gosvāmī’s verse also advises us to be in Vṛndāvana when we chant, not in any other place. And if we cannot be there physically, then in our mind we must be there, because outside Vṛndāvana, the spontaneous remembrance of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes may not come. If we are actually in Vṛndāvana, then the trees and creepers of places like Sevā-kuñja, Ter Kadamba, Vaṁśivaṭa, Rādhā-kuṇḍa—they will all remind us of Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes.

Mahārāja said that when water is in its liquid state, anything we put into it will easily become wet. But when water becomes ice, it is very hard to enter. Similarly, he said that our concentration should be so thick that material desires cannot act. Unless it is very thick, *kṛṣṇa-prema* will not come.

Rūpa Gosvāmī’s verse further states that when we chant Hare Kṛṣṇa thinking of Kṛṣṇa’s *rasika* form and pastimes in Vṛndāvana, we should do it under the guidance of a *vrajavāsī rasika* Vaiṣṇava. Without such guidance from the *rasika* spiritual master, we are like animals. If one follows all these

instructions, then he has grasped the *upadeśa-sāram*, the essence of all teachings.

Mahārāja suggested reading *rasika* books between rounds to stimulate and help remembrance. By reading and chanting such *śloka*s, our hearts will melt. And if our heart sometimes melts and is sometimes dry? "Then drink water from the mouths of Vaiṣṇavas."

Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to Śivānanda December 4, 1968: "Regarding your first question, 'Is it offensive to think of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes while chanting?' I think you should know that it is not offensive but rather it is required. One must try for the point when he simply hears Kṛṣṇa and immediately all of Kṛṣṇa, His pastimes, His form, His qualities, are in his thoughts. So to be always immersed in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa, this is our process. When we are full in Kṛṣṇa then where can there be any chance for *māyā* in us? So this is our duty, to remember Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. One who cannot remember Kṛṣṇa, let him always hear Hare Kṛṣṇa and then when he has perfected this art, then always he will remember Kṛṣṇa, His activities, His qualities, etc."

Then to me on April 10, 1969 Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, "Regarding [your] question, hearing the vibration of Hare Kṛṣṇa automatically reminds one of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. So both of them arise simultaneously in the mind when one is sincerely chanting. So you cannot make any distinction between listening to the sound and thinking of the pastimes. But the process is to hear, and then Kṛṣṇa's pas-

times, form, qualities, etc., will automatically come to mind.”

My impression from hearing from Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja about how to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, is that I have not been trying hard enough to chant in a *rasika* way. I am aware of that process, but somehow I thought that I had to first work very basically on the mechanics of hearing the holy name with my outer ear. I may not be wrong to have been thinking like this because I have been so negligent. And although I have been reading the Tenth Canto and books like *Prema-bhakti-candrikā*, I have not been deliberately trying to mix that reading with my chanting.

Also, I have not been cultivating a desire to reside in Vṛndāvana when I chant. I need to get out of the material locality and meditate on Vṛndāvana. I want to chant in Vṛndāvana.

I don’t want to increase my quota without awareness of what I am seeking. I am not seeking liberation or worship of the Lord in Vaikuṇṭha, and I am not seeking just a general cleansing of the mind. There are many helpful suggestions in these words that arrived here today by mail, and I should take them seriously. The contents of Rūpa Gosvāmi’s verse contain the following points:

1. Chant with the tongue and mind.
2. As you chant, also remember the name, form, and qualities of Kṛṣṇa. This can be done by regularly hearing *rasika* literatures.

3. You will be able to enter the spirit of the names of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā in Vṛndāvana.

4. While chanting, reside in Vṛndāvana, either physically or mentally.

5. By this process as you chant, material desires will not be able to enter. And thus Rūpa Gosvāmī's previous verse, about the jaundice of *avidyā*, will no longer touch you.

6. Do all this under the affectionate guidance of the *rasika* spiritual master.



7:30 P.M., Snapshot

It's never too late to look at a photo of your spiritual master and pay homage to him. In the *Kṛṣṇa* book chapter containing the story of the forest fire, the trapped *gopas* looked to Kṛṣṇa the way a man who is about to die looks at a picture of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. I want to look at Prabhupāda like that.

He is walking outside the temple, starting a morning walk, surrounded by his *sannyāsi* disciples and their upraised *daṇḍas*. They are so youthful. Some are smiling. They jostle for a place. Me too. Śrīla Prabhupāda's hands are filled with flowers and other items, probably gifts handed to him by his spiritual daughters and their children. The morning is always bright in Māyāpura at this time of year. Just outside the temple hangs the wooden sign, "Śrī Māyāpura Candrodāyā." Śrīla Prabhupāda

is accompanied by one of his Godbrothers or a Bengali *sannyāsī*.

Listening to the man beside him, Prabhupāda's head is turned to hear him. He is compassionate and intent on what he has to do as spiritual father for thousands. And such heavy personalities among his young leaders! Śrīla Prabhupāda wants a worldwide movement. He already has it, but he wants much more. Political heads and mass population ignore the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. Prabhupāda knows this isn't right. People cannot be happy without Kṛṣṇa. He worked for this when he was unknown and he works for it now as founder-*ācārya* of ISKCON, on behalf of his *guru mahārāja*.

Taking a morning walk, directing affairs, taking the burden. The glory of Lord Caitanya's movement and Westerners coming to India to worship and serve. Prabhupāda has to defend them from critics and from their own minds and fratricidal quarrels.

Just the colors—what is it like in the cool morning in pleasant Māyāpura? What is it like to walk with him, your *daṇḍa* in the air?

"What is it you are saying?" Śrīla Prabhupāda seems to say as he hears the *sādhū* beside him. But at the same time, Prabhupāda is looking beyond. He took on so much for Lord Caitanya's movement. He was empowered tremendously. Strong-minded young men and women became his dear disciples and traveled anywhere on his order. His power was and is very great.

I offer my obeisances to him tonight as I hold this photo. I cannot say anything eloquent. And I have

to admit that I feel some ambivalence when I look at the men surrounding him. It is glorious that he has harnessed all their energy and still has a moment to hear the words of the *sādhū* as he starts his morning walk.

I beg to be placed as an atom of dust at his feet. All glories to our *gurudeva*, Śrīla Prabhupāda. May I learn to serve him better.



April 17, 2:15 A.M.

During *japa* this morning, I stopped between rounds and read a verse of *Manaḥ-śikṣā* and then later, tried a verse from *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta*. I was afraid that this would take too long and delay me in making the quota, but it needn't turn into a long reading session. It requires prayerful reading, that technique of reading a small amount and concentrating on it in prayer.

So I beseech the mind to cooperate as an aspiring devotee, and then I will sprinkle it with drops of *Vraja-bhāva*, direct from those who are drowning in it. Here mind, hear this:

"Within the boundary of Vṛndāvana forest, O friend, please worship this dark ocean of transcendental nectar which has many playful, glistening waves of eternally expanding amorous pastimes, that is the home of the splendid transcendental fish of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī's heart and mind, that rises with the rising of the moon that is Rādhārāṇī's face,

that is churned by the wonderful Mandara Mountain of transcendental passion for Rādhārāṇī, and that brings nectar to the eyes of all the *gopīs*" (*Śrī Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta*, Śataka 2, text 2).

Also, yesterday I was impressed when I read a stanza of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's poem, "*Śikṣāṣṭakam*," which is based on Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's *Śikṣāṣṭakam*. Writing on the *ṭṛṇād api* theme, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura elaborates on the virtues of feeling unworthy, and on being forgiving and nonviolent toward all creatures. By his grace, I was able to see more clearly Lord Caitanya's request to chant in a humble state of mind. Lord Caitanya meant that our whole approach to life and our dedication to singing the glories of the Lord has to be framed by this verse: *ṭṛṇād api sunīcena taror api sahiṣṇunā amāninā mānadena kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ*.

"In the course of your life, you should never give anxiety to others, but rather do good to them and forget about your own happiness.

"Always knowing that Lord Kṛṣṇa resides within all living creatures, one should, with great respect, show honor to all living beings at all times.

"Weeping, Bhaktivinoda submits his prayer at the lotus feet of the Lord: 'O Lord, when will you give me possession of such qualities as these?'" (*Gītāvalī*, "*Śikṣāṣṭakam*," Song 3, verses 4, 6, and 8, p. 135).

In this last week of my retreat, I am planning to make better use of the early morning walk. The dogs will bark, but my caravan will pass. I will be

rapt in thoughts, prayers, addressing myself to guru and Kṛṣṇa, and to my own mind, as I did in the days of *Entering the Life of Prayer*. I can still learn from that stick-figure praying man.

"It's night time and I am about to take rest. I want to add a positive note that several times today I prostrated myself down in that posture and prayed, once in the shack, several times in my room. I just gave to Kṛṣṇa some thought that was on my mind. Previously I would very rarely do such a thing, although I would consider it to be good. So it is a gain that I can do it several times. Now let us try to increase it. You may feel lazy and you don't want to walk over and bow down, but do it and continue to do it more and more. Hare Kṛṣṇa" (*Entering the Life of Prayer*, pp. 24–5).



Śrīla Prabhupāda translates Rūpa Gosvāmī's *upadeśa-sāram* as follows:

"The essence of all advice is that one should utilize one's full time—twenty-four hours a day—in nicely chanting and remembering the Lord's divine name, transcendental form, qualities and eternal pastimes, thereby gradually engaging one's tongue and mind. In this way, one should reside in Vraja [Goloka Vṛndāvana-*dhāma*] and serve Kṛṣṇa under the guidance of devotees. One should follow in the footsteps of the Lord's beloved devotees, who are deeply attached to His devotional service" (*Nectar of Instruction*, text 8).

Everything depends on controlling the mind. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The mind contains hundreds and thousands of impressions, not only of this life but also of many, many lives in the past. These impressions sometimes come in contact with one another and produce contradictory pictures. In this way the mind's function can become dangerous for a conditioned soul" (*Nectar of Instruction*, text 8, purport).

Śrīla Prabhupāda goes on to say that if at the time of death we think of something not very congenial, we will have to take a corresponding birth in the next life. "On the other hand, if one can think of Kṛṣṇa at the time of death, he can be transferred to the spiritual world." In other purports, Śrīla Prabhupāda has stated that the tongue's utterance of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra can forcibly capture the mind. As powerful as the mind is, the tongue and ear can capture it and fix it on Kṛṣṇa—provided the mind is disposed in a friendly way. And why not? It's for the mind's own good. It's nectar.

I propose that my mind take a friendly attitude toward *nāma*-speaking and *nāma*-hearing. Let us do some transcendental work together. "One interested in spiritual life should always engage his mind in the service of the Lord so that the enemies of the mind, who always accompany the mind, will be subdued. If the mind is not engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness at every moment, there is a chance that it will give way to its enemies. In this way we become victims of the mind. Chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra engages the mind at the lotus feet of

Kṛṣṇa constantly; thus the mind's enemies do not have a chance to strike" (C.c., *Madhya* 11.10, purport).

In the first verse of *Manaḥ-śikṣā*, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī bows down and pleads with his mind in a friendly way. He asks his mind to please develop intense love for those things that are really lovable: the spiritual master, the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, the devotees of Vṛndāvana, and service to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. He does not declare war right away, but appeals to the mind's higher nature. I want to pray like that.

In his purport to this verse, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura tells us that we have to give up all the pride based on our different designations. We should be anxious about this point and not think that these designations will just fall away from us by luck. He tells us to strive to lose these limited designations by serving our initiating and instructing spiritual masters. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says the highest type of devotee worships Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana in the Vraja spirit.

It is my fortune to be at least aware of the goal of life. I mentioned that *Entering the Life of Prayer* was a more fervent time for me. It was a time of discovery and of turning to Kṛṣṇa in prayer. But the one thing I lacked when I wrote that book was the clear focus on the goal of Vraja-*dhāma*, of direct service to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. At that time, I didn't *dare* think that I could ever approach Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in *mādhurya-rasa*. I was still so afraid that any read-

ing into Their *līlā* would be tainted by (or obscured by) my own past experiences in mundane sex life. I thought Prabhupāda was forbidding us to go forward. I have overcome those problems.

Prabhupāda does want us to go forward, but carefully and with the right guidance. This is the way to become free of lust. This realization is the great advantage I have now over the time when I wrote *Entering the Life of Prayer*. Therefore, let me pray to my mind in the mood of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmi and just desire to be a tiny follower of his followers. That is now my goal.

On earlier days of this retreat, I have complained about the mind's commotion. It can be amusing at times, but also very frustrating. I have been banging my head against the brick wall of inattention. Swarms of past memories and current concerns drive me away from actually contemplating the holy names. Like bees, they sting me and buzz around me until I become distracted by them.

I have almost concluded that I will not make any advancement in chanting on this retreat, and probably not in the foreseeable future. I was just trying to adjust to that fact and make the best use of my time.

I haven't really revised that opinion much, but that recent letter reminded me that I have to concentrate on the holy names in their *rasika* implications. Vṛndāvana-*dhāma* is so far away, but I must attempt to be in Vṛndāvana when I chant.

This is not separate from my down-to-earth work of making the vibration of the mantra clear, hearing it with the ear, and staying awake. I still

have to wrestle with those very basic problems. But I am convinced that I shouldn't wait ten million years before even attempting to approach Vṛndāvana. I should struggle for Vṛndāvana consciousness. I should beg for the mercy of Vraja-*dhāma* and the devotees. They can free me from my distractions and offenses. I belong there with them.

As soon as I realized this more yesterday, I began to see what kind of things would be more favorable for my meditation. It occurred to me that walking back and forth in the backyard where I could see all the hills and sunshine was not so good. It was giving me more a mood of the pleasantness of the Italian countryside, whereas in my room, there is more concentration. I have pictures of Vṛndāvana in my room, and I tend to think more about the holy *dhāma* when I see the photographs.

Rūpa Gosvāmī also says that *tan-nāma-caritādi-sukīrtanānu*: we should think of the name, quality, form, and pastimes when we chant. There is no duality between getting down to the basics in chanting and hearing and connecting Kṛṣṇa's pastimes to our chanting. It is not to be done in imitation of advanced souls, and neither is it a false imposition on the mind. What am I waiting for? We are supposed to be doing this now.

We sometimes ask this question in some rhetorical way, like a poet asking, "When will the day come?" But we have to realize that now is the time to start answering that question. Beg: "Let that day be now, please now." We won't be able to make that day come, but we will be able to beg the Lord for His

mercy. Nothing will happen without our request; nothing will happen by chance. These two things are connected—the overcoming of distraction and the desire to meditate on Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana. We belong in the dust of Vraja.

What about fervor? Fervor isn't something we can just create, like inducing a fever. It can't be artificial. Fervor comes from having a specific request and praying for it intensely. Rūpa Gosvāmī tells us what to beg for from our spiritual master. "Please, Śrīla Prabhupāda, make your approval of my direction clear to me. Please help me and assure me, because I know I cannot make advancement if you are not pleased. I am never independent. Therefore, let me read your books with understanding, and then let me go with confidence to the guides you direct me to, Rūpa Gosvāmī, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, all the *ācāryas*. I pray to also get their mercy.

"Let me never forget, however, that everything is coming by your direct blessing. Let me refine my love for you; let me distill it until it becomes pure. Let me strive for that goal."



10:30 A.M.

Darkening sky, looks like rain. Reading between *japa* rounds, a few verses of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's "Appeals for Residence at Govardhana Hill." The thought crosses my mind that I wouldn't want to live at Govardhana Hill nowadays. When I

walked through its secluded parts, I noticed no *bhajana-kuṭirs* there and asked why. I was told that it is dangerous because of *guṇḍas*. But there are other places at Govardhana Hill where groups of *sādhus* live. Those places are safer.

But the real point is that if I actually understood how Govardhana can grant me closeness to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa pastimes in its caves and lakes and under its trees . . . its dust . . . *Chant in Vṛndāvana, that is the point.*

Śrīla Prabhupāda answered an American devotee who asked, "Is this Vṛndāvana the same as Goloka Vṛndāvana?"

"Yes," Prabhupāda replied, "but your mind is in America."

It is helpful between rounds to hear the words of the *mahā-bhāgavata*.

"O Govardhana, O king of mountains, O hill whose nectar name 'the best of Lord Hari's servants' flows from the moon of Śrī Rādhā's mouth, O hill that the *Vedas* declare to be the *tilaka* marking of Vraja, please grant to me residence near you.

"Although I am a cheater and a criminal, unlimitedly merciful Lord Śacīnandana, who is very dear to you, has given me to you. O Govardhana, please do not consider whether I am acceptable or not, but simply grant me residence near you" (*Śrī Stavāvali*, Volume 1, "*Śrī Govardhana-vāsa-prārthanā-daśaka*," by Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, verses 8–10).

Push on, now that you have declared that it should be *rasika*. It's pitiful. Like a parrot I repeat the

word “Rādhā,” then “Kṛṣṇa,” then repeat the descriptions of Their pastimes. I have no realization.

Stay honest, but don't give into that bludgeoning cynicism which assassinates. Fight off degradation. Honesty does not mean saying, “After all, I'm a pig, so let me eat and live like one.” I am not a pig. I am the eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa, as revealed to me by the mercy of my spiritual master. Don't drown in degradation or hopelessness. Know that the midday slough is temporary. Know that Kṛṣṇa is my protector. I will pass through all difficulties by His grace. Know that I know nothing and therefore depend on guru, *śāstra*, and *sādhū*. That is the honesty I want.

Last page in this note pad, last day of the week.

“If we always chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, we will always remember Kṛṣṇa, and immediately the form of Kṛṣṇa will be awakened within our hearts” (*Teachings of Lord Kapila*, p. 190).

“By constantly chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and remembering the transcendental pastimes of Kṛṣṇa, one can be fully in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and thus make his life sublime and fruitful” (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 1, p. 235).

“A devotee always thinks of the Lord continuously. While chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, the

words Kṛṣṇa and Hare immediately remind him of all the Lord's activities" (*Bhāg.* 5.1.6, purport).

Śrīla Prabhupāda and the *śāstras* state that by chanting, one associates with Kṛṣṇa directly. Since this is the result of the proper chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa, we should strive to bring it about. Granted, you cannot force Kṛṣṇa to appear, but neither should we be indifferent to Him or chant in an impersonal way. If we can call out to Him, "Please appear in Your holy names, I want to see You in this way"—then what is the harm? Kṛṣṇa may not appear—it is His prerogative—but if we go on calling Him, it is not wrong. "You may make Me broken-hearted by not being present before me, but still You are My Lord unconditionally." I want to chant like this.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Some people complain that when they pray to God, they do not feel His presence. We should know this is due to our incapacities, not God's. . . . We can touch Kṛṣṇa immediately by sound vibration . . . " (*Elevation to Kṛṣṇa Consciousness*, pp. 57–58).



4:00 P.M.

I keep finding statements by Śrīla Prabhupāda confirming that the chanting must be linked to the personal presence of Kṛṣṇa. "He is therefore worshiped by sound representation via the tran-

scendental method of chanting. . . . This experience is not a vague impersonal experience. It is actually an experience of the transcendental Personality of Godhead . . . The transcendental form of eternal bliss and knowledge can be experienced by our original spiritual senses, which can be revived by chanting the holy mantras, or transcendental sound representations" (*Bhāg.* 1.5.38).

Similarly, we chant in a personal way under the guidance of our own spiritual master. We are chanting the *sva-mantra*, or "one's original and principle mantra" as received directly from the spiritual master. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes, "In order to ensure spiritual success, it should be chanted diligently. . . . One should take shelter of the principal names of the Lord, particularly the *mahā-mantra*:

"Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare."

—*Manah-śikṣā*, verse 1, p. 3

How will it take place that the ordinary, struggling *japa* will evolve into awareness of Kṛṣṇa's presence in His form, qualities, and *līlās*? What does Śrīla Prabhupāda say? He says it will happen. There is no doubt about it. Kṛṣṇa will reveal Himself; Kṛṣṇa will teach us if we follow the guru's order with full faith.

Śrīla Prabhupāda should be confidently accepted as a great authority for faith and realization of the holy name. He did what no one else dared, and

what many Vaiṣṇavas hardly dreamed of—brought the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra to *mlecchas* and *yavanas* who had never even heard of Kṛṣṇa before. And Śrīla Prabhupāda convinced us to chant with love, to enjoy *kīrtana*, and to join and work with him in founding the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. No one could spread the chanting of the holy name so widely and deeply unless he was empowered by Kṛṣṇa (*kṛṣṇa-śakti vinā nahe tāra pravartana*).

So let me chant because he told me to. Never doubt. And wait for the day to come when Kṛṣṇa will appear and say, “I am like this.”

“The same thing is confirmed in the *Ādi Purāṇa* by Kṛṣṇa. While addressing Arjuna He says, ‘Anyone who is engaged in chanting My transcendental name must be considered to be always associating with Me. And I may tell you frankly that for such a devotee, I become easily purchased’ (*Nectar of Devotion*, p. 107).



Snapshot

(These photos help us remember Śrīla Prabhupāda in the holy *dhāma*. Thus we fulfill two requirements of Rūpa Gosvāmī’s “essence of all instructions”: live in Vraja and chant under the guidance of the *rasika* spiritual master.)

Here is Śrīla Prabhupāda sitting deep in the red cushions of the grand *vyāsāsana* at Māyāpura Candrodayā Mandira. He represents Vyāsadeva—

thus this red and gold grandeur. He is garlanded with fresh, large marigolds, and there are petals strewn around his feet. He looks inward as he plays *karatālas*. Above him is a portrait of white-bearded Gaura-kiśora dāsa Bābāji. The young disciples are fanning Śrīla Prabhupāda and clearing flies with the *cāmaras* and a peacock fan.

The book *Bhāgavata* rests on a bolster next to the folded wooden bookstand and his eye glasses in a case. These will be called for after the *guru-pūjā kīrtana*.

Dear spiritual master, please continue to speak the *Bhāgavata* message to us. Let us always acknowledge the loving debt we have to you for your charitable acts done on our behalf in the past, at present, and in the future. I know you are strong and demanding and your intelligence is always sharper than mine. If I minimize you for even a moment, I invite my own spiritual doom. Therefore, I am afraid of you—afraid that I may make many mistakes in my relationship with you as I live in this world after your departure fifteen years ago. I beg forgiveness and wish to be righted. I want to be submissive and creative and bold on your behalf. This is what you want from me.

This picture is worshipable, one devotees would keep on an altar. I have been hankering to see a photo of only Śrīla Prabhupāda—no disciples' faces surrounding him. Here I see only Prabhupāda and the moving *cāmara* whisks and fan. At the center of the photo I see his inward gaze as he listens to the *kīrtana* of three hundred disciples. Śrīla Prabhupāda,

you hear your dearest friend, Lord Kṛṣṇa, Lord Caitanya, telling you what to do and expressing His pleasure at your activities. To such a spiritual master, I offer my humble obeisances and dedicate all my works.

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7:00 P.M.

Fourteen days down, seven to go. It would be nice if I could finish strong with additional realization. At least the quality *is* improving. I still can't bring together those two seemingly disparate elements—the *lilā* of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and the service to Them by Their dearest associates, and those eight minutes or so that I spend chanting a round.

It is a cold, rainy night. In these last few days I have not been writing much about happenings in the house and the outward form of my life. It doesn't seem important.

Tonight I gave a warm-up lecture on Prabhupāda in 1966. I told the devotees it was my favorite time. Raindrops spattered on the windowpane as I spoke. I thought, "I never want to abuse Prabhupāda's authority. Wherever he is, he is always concerned for his Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Make this chanting reform your contribution. Tell everyone you meet to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa as you are doing yourself. That way you will be like Prabhupāda, a *harer nāma* preacher, and he will be pleased."

Part Four

April 18, 2:05 A.M.

Whispering my *japa*.

This morning, I could not get deeply into the reading medium. I was chanting in dim light, which was conducive for *japa* but not for book-reading. Still, I need something to dunk me into the *rasa* ocean. Between rounds I stopped and read Śrīla Prabhupāda's assurance that the names of the Lord put us into direct association with Him. And I read a verse by Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī describing the services the *gopīs* perform in Vṛndāvana forest for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

I am disappointed in my inability to be more affected by the readings and the *japa*, but I accept them gratefully. Everything proves to me that there is no substitute for devotion in your own heart. Even reading and chanting will not melt the steel-framed heart in which offenses dwell.

Śrīla Prabhupāda describes the state of feeling unqualified and yet desiring Kṛṣṇa's association. In *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*, he quotes Sanātana Gosvāmī: *na prema śravaṇādi bhaktir*, " . . . I have no asset for hearing . . . " Yet he maintains hopes of achieving Kṛṣṇa, the darling of the damsels of Vraja, "and these hopes are always disturbing me." Śrīla Prabhupāda comments, "Such a devotee, be-

ing touched deeply by such strong desires, always chants Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare" (*Teachings of Lord Caitanya*, p. 139).

String a garland of statements praising the holy name. Wear a garland of the *trṇād api* verse and go on chanting. "I firmly believe in these words of My spiritual master, and therefore I always chant the holy name of the Lord, alone and in the association of devotees" (*C.c.*, *Ādi* 7.95).

"Seeing my attempts in that lonely place, the Personality of Godhead, who is transcendental to all mundane description, spoke to me with gravity and pleasing words just to mitigate my grief" (*Bhāg.* 1.6.20).

It is important for me to make my own testimony. I try to make it honest, admitting lack of taste and other inabilities. It is not enough for me to read the testimonies of Rūpa Gosvāmī. Why is that? Rūpa Gosvāmī writes, ". . . when the holy name dances in the courtyard of the heart, it conquers the activities of the mind, and therefore all the senses become inert" (*Vidaghda-mādhava*, quoted in *C.c.*, *Antya* 1.99). I treasure that statement.

Sanātana Gosvāmī writes, "The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is the highest nectar. It is my very life and my only treasure" (*Bṛhad-Bhāgavatāmṛta*). Hearing it from him, the *bhakti* rubs off on us. We want to also take to the chanting of the holy names.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes of the powerful effect of an enthusiastic chanter upon the life of a poor chanter, "One must make an effort to associate with such rare devotees and follow their example, thus ridding oneself of laziness. . . . One will ask himself how he can also become like these devotees, immersed in meditation upon the holy name? How, from this very day, can he gradually increase his chanting until he can actually chant three *lakhs* of holy names with inspiration and eagerness?" (HNC, p. 83). Kṛṣṇa sees the enthusiasm we have imbibed from association with pure devotees and He reciprocates, removing our mental inertia with the power of His name and bringing us into more association with advanced devotees.

I shall go on reading the valuable texts of the Vaiṣṇavas, and although our own experience is almost the opposite of theirs, we should take heart from their words. As Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja said, "If you feel dry, then drink water from the mouths of the Vaiṣṇavas."

"I do not know how much nectar the two syllables 'Kṛṣ-ṇa' have produced. When the holy name of Kṛṣṇa is chanted, it appears to dance within the mouth. We then desire many, many mouths. When the name enters the holes of the ears, we desire many millions of ears" (*Vidagdha-mādhava*, quoted in C.c., *Antya* 1.99).

In the second verse of *Manaḥ-śikṣā*, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī advises his mind to give up the pious and impious directions in the scriptures and

to accept the ultimate conclusion as service to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana. He also asks his mind to worship Lord Caitanya as nondifferent than Kṛṣṇa and worship his spiritual master as the intimate representative of Lord Mukunda.

In his commentary to this verse, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says that these propositions pose some problems. An ordinary religionist wants to know how he can possibly give up both pious and impious activities. The answer is that there are other activities, the transcendental activities of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The other problem is, "If we worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa exclusively, then how are we going to worship Lord Caitanya? And how should we see the spiritual master?" Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura informs us that we cannot worship Lord Caitanya separately from Kṛṣṇa. Neither can we approach Lord Kṛṣṇa and Rādhārāṇī unless we do so through the intimate worship of Lord Caitanya. (This reminds me that in my efforts to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa in the *rasika* mood, I should never forget the path of Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Lord Nityānanda. They are the givers of mercy by which we can chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.)

Prabhupāda has given us the Pañca-tattva mantra. I say this mantra at the end of each round while offering obeisances. He also gave us the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, which is full of *rasa*. Lord Caitanya is actually the source of all *rasa*. He is nondifferent from Kṛṣṇa—except that He is even more than Kṛṣṇa: He is Kṛṣṇa in the mood of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.

So as Lord Caitanya chanted and tasted mellows, I may worship Him and enrich my own chanting.

For me, it is the same problem of connecting the dutiful and sometimes frustrating business of chanting *japa* on beads to the pleasing, sweet pastimes which I hear about in the *śāstras*. Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī has reminded me never to neglect Lord Caitanya's *līlā* in my approach to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*, and if I follow that instruction, I will have more facility to see the connection between chanting and *līlā*. Lord Caitanya came to teach the holy name and many of His activities and instructions involved the potency of the holy name, as in His *Śikṣāṣṭakam* and His regular activities in Navadvīpa and Jagannātha Purī.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes, "Without first remembering and worshiping the spiritual master and Lord Gaurāṅga, one cannot render pure loving devotional service to the Divine Couple Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Deviation from this process will curb all spiritual advancement. If one attempts to worship Lord Caitanya separately and independently, one is unable to understand how He is non-different from Lord Kṛṣṇa. When knowledge of the Lord's fundamental oneness becomes firm, however, remembrance of Lord Caitanya is inseparably interwoven into the texture of worship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa" (*Manaḥ-śikṣā*, Verse 2, p. 9).

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura also writes, "... the spiritual master is a loving confidante and maidservant of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī" (*Manaḥ-śikṣā*, p. 9). This is Śrīla Prabhupāda's identity also. Therefore, I may

think of Prabhupāda in the 1966 *kīrtanas*, or leading us on *harināma* at Tompkins Square Park, or leading us every morning to “chant one round” on beads—handing us our red wooden beads with the blessings to chant at least sixteen rounds a day. I may think of Śrīla Prabhupāda like this, but now Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is telling me that I have to understand more about Prabhupāda’s inner identity.

What can I know? I simply hear with reverence and with faith, and I aspire to understand everything about my beloved spiritual master. All glories to the esoteric teachings of the kind Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* who are always leading us on to further and further understandings of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. How foolish I have been to think that any mysticism or pleasure was lacking in this process so that I thought I had to grope elsewhere or supplement it. I simply hope it’s not too late, and that I have time to learn how to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa with full contemplation on its esoteric meanings. But even in my present sorry condition, the compassionate *ācāryas* know my mind and state, and they have also spoken about it as if they too experience the beginner’s condition. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings, “O Lord Hari, as a result of my offenses, my heart has become as hard as a thunderbolt and feels no change at the chanting of Your holy name. O Lord, feeling hopeless, I loudly sing Your name and in great distress and unhappiness I call out to You again and again” (*Gītāvalī*, “*Śikṣāṣṭakam*,” Song 6, verse 1, p. 138).

How can we be transformed? According to *Manaḥ-śikṣā*, we have to convince our own minds to take up Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The mind is now absorbed in nonsense, but it is capable of being spiritualized and of understanding these confidential conclusions. It is not beyond our grasp, provided we become purified. Here also is a way for me to connect the perfect statements of *śāstra* with my own experience. I should train my mind to experience things through the eyes of the scriptures.

In my desire to be honest, I often have to say that I don't live according to what the scriptures describe. I live more according to my body and senses, with my doubts and little mental comedies, and so on. But if my mind would live in a more elevated way, then my actual experience could be closer to what the sages and *śāstras* describe. Then in honesty, I could write in a more elevated way. If I actually lost interest in and attachment to my own physical being, then neither would I be inclined to describe it in terms of how hot or cold I feel, whether I have indigestion or constipation, and so on. These states would be insignificant physical changes that would have no bearing on my reality. The more I can associate with Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī and the other *ācāryas*, the better it will be for me. Now let me chant.



7:10 A.M.

I taped some pictures of Vṛndāvana and the *ācāryas* to the inside wall of our van. At first I felt like I was wasting time or being idle, looking for the best places to tape them, cutting the scotch tape, and so on. But these pictures of Prabhupāda, Rūpa Gosvāmī, Lord Caitanya, Govardhana Hill, Varṁśivaṭa, Bhāṇḍiravana as they look today—these are the visions I wish to line the inner walls of my mind with. In the coming months, we plan to spend a lot of time in the van, so the pictures are important. Just to see them pacifies my heart. Who knows how much spiritual energy is radiating from these pictures? I have yet to choose a picture of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. And one of Lord Nṛsiṁha, to protect us in our flimsy van from a world of accidents and robbers. I see Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and then glance out at the attractive grass hills. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura seems to say, “Get back to work.” He says it kindly because he knows my heart’s desire is to be back with him and my spiritual master and the Six Gosvāmīs.

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10:38 A.M.

There is a strong wind today. I hear its pipe and organ and flute sounds reverberating down the metal chimney and against the windows and huffing against this stone house. MV and his wife have

gone out for the day. Madhu came in and said if I like, I can wander around the house, no one is home except the cat. But I am not inclined. It is better for *japa* to stay in one small room. If I chant in the large kitchen and dining room where it's warmer and brighter, I will start looking at labels on spice jars and books on the shelf. I've got this little room cased out, no where to go except surrender to chanting and writing.

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I am not qualified to hear Their pastimes, but They are the goal. Their pastimes take place in Vṛndāvana, and that is why Vraja is the best place in all the universes. That is why Rūpa Gosvāmī tells us to chant the holy name in Vraja.

Knowing this spoils all other knowledge. How can I roam around the house now?

I can't "talk" to God as I used to. As personal as that attempt was, it is now too vague for me. I want to pray to my spiritual masters and to Rūpa Gosvāmī and the other intimate devotees of Lord Caitanya, "Please teach me how to serve and how to hear the *nāma*, *rūpa*, *guṇa* of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā." Still, I have uncertainty, but I chant, then press the "play" button to start the Prabhupāda *japa* tape, then start another round. Again I bring my mind back to the mantra. After a round, I read a verse, although I cannot connect it easily to my chanting. I make this futile endeavor again and again because I know it is not actually futile. "Even a little endeavor on this path can save one from the greatest fear at death."

Snapshot

(Prepare yourself for a *darśana* with His Divine Grace. You are never ready, never pure enough. Strange things in your heart and mind . . . embarrassment about your service record . . .)

This is a beautiful, long-range view of Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Temple taken from the opposite end of the hall facing Śrīla Prabhupāda on his *vyāsāsana*. Magnificent view of the arches over his head and the ornate architecture, elephants, chandelier, lions on either side of the *vyāsāsana*. Good shot of the audience seen from the back, all facing Śrīla Prabhupāda. We can only just see the small figure which is Śrīla Prabhupāda—the image is unclear. We can just make out the two bright-colored garlands, his spectacles, the microphone at an angle before his face . . .

We can almost hear his strong words, his own “chopping technique.” He did not speak artificially to create orator’s effects, but he smashed the atheists, *mūḍhās*, rascals, and impersonalists with conviction. Prabhupāda had the power to call anyone bogus because of his purity and depth of surrender. “All these other religions and philosophies, they are all bogus. There is only one religion, Kṛṣṇa consciousness.”

He is a hundred percent Kṛṣṇa’s devotee, a hundred percent the faithful servant of his spiritual master. He is a hundred percent convinced of *Bhagavad-gītā*. But he knows most people aren’t even interested. He asks his own disciples to try to

become one hundred percent surrendered. "What is the difficulty?"

They are all listening and watching him. Most of them are scattered now. Those are the survival statistics—most went away. But some remain and new ones have come. The *paramparā* continues. Śrīla Prabhupāda still sits on the *vyāsāsana* at Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Mandira and things are done as he requested. I am still there too. I beg for his mercy—to hear his Vṛndāvana lectures and other lectures (he is always in Vṛndāvana) and to always serve his order in this life and the next.



4:00 P.M.

I have to face the big world. Yes, soon enough. But now, keep the sanctity of this little room. Wait until the last day and then break down the door?

Oh, I know, the door is already open. So many things are flying in and out via the mind.

In the "*japa* diary" I kept in 1982 (contained in *Japa Reform Notebook*), I increased my *japa* quota to twenty-five rounds a day for three months. In those days, I had more managerial duties (and more physical energy) than I do now. Gradually, the duties started to impinge on my increased quota. I was able to keep it up in the "peaceful, idyllic, controlled setting" of Gītā-nāgarī, but not when I had to travel to the cities. In one sentence I stated,

"The gains realized by chanting in a peaceful place—conviction that the name will protect me unto death, conviction that the name is Kṛṣṇa as He is to be realized at the end when all other work has to be wound up, conviction that a chanting 'workshop' improves this important method of devotional service—all these gains would have to be realized also in a non-peaceful atmosphere in order for them to take on their full worth" (*Japa Reform Notebook*, p. 116).

The same holds true now. All I can say is the deeper in I can go, the longer it will last, even when I'm back to the normal routine. Maybe some conviction will carry over that *nāma-bhajana* is at least among the top three most important daily activities and should not be neglected. I am trying to sell myself on this idea. Give your "*japa man*" a break. He is the one who will be expected to carry you through at the end when there are no more lectures or book-writing.

In the *Japa Reform Notebook* diary, I dutifully accepted the non-peaceful atmosphere which I had to enter in order to preach. I did not want to be accused of being a *bhajanānandī*. "I don't think I am doing that," I wrote. "But here in this notebook I am encouraging an irrepressible yearning that has increased in me in the last year—to chant and realize Kṛṣṇa in His name, to go to the name as shelter" (*Japa Reform Notebook*, p. 117).

When that yearning comes, nurture it.

The whole life needs to be lived in love and dedication. Śrīla Prabhupāda has given us a life of engagement for all the senses and the mind—Deity worship, *prasādam*, *kīrtana*, and the services we render in this movement. Within that total life of devotion, our chanting is one of the main activities. *Japa* is not the only devotional activity in a life which is otherwise devoid of *bhakti*.

It is also true that if the chanting is dry and loveless, it may mean we need to be more loving in *all* ways. Can we show more love toward the devotees we live with and toward the innocent nondevotees, toward all living beings?

But the chanting is the most accessible and direct way to express love and obedience. Lord Caitanya and Śrīla Prabhupāda give special attention to chanting. *Harer nāma, harer nāma, harer nāmaiva kevalam*, there is no other way to attain love of God (the goal of life) except the chanting of the holy name, the chanting, the chanting.



Snapshot

This picture is at an unusual angle looking up toward Prabhupāda over people's shoulders and heads. It is Śrīla Prabhupāda at the grand opening of Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Mandira in March 1975. He has just performed the first *ārati*. Now he is within the altar area, facing the crowd which is packed in tight to the rail. Śrīla Prabhupāda wears two long gar-

lands of pink roses. He stands before a microphone and at this instant, his eyes appear almost shut. He looks "soulful," serious, yet moved by the occasion. He is making an opening address.

I remember that speech. He said that this temple is not sectarian. It is for all people. Everyone is welcome. He stands erect. He is handsome in his saffron. Everyone looks to him with respect. He is the one who made this temple happen. Or, as he explains in the last chapter of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that he compiled at the end of his life, "In Vṛndāvana there is a place where there was no temple, but a devotee desired, 'Let there be a temple and *sevā*, devotional service.' Therefore, what was once an empty corner has now become a place of pilgrimage. Such are the desires of a devotee" (*Bhāg.* 10.13.50, purport).



April 19, 2:02 A.M.

I am writing for the devotees. This is a sacred task. We say *japa* is for one's own benefit and *kīrtana* is to benefit others as well. Writing is a kind of *kīrtana*. My writing celebrates *japa*.

I praise the chanting of the holy name on beads. Thank you, Śrīla Prabhupāda, for introducing the *japa-mālā* to America and to me. I love my red beads. Touching the beads I touch your kindness and wisdom. How courageous and surrendered you were to come here to give us beads. How pleasing

this was to your *guru mahārāja*. How pleasing this was to your *parama-gurudeva*, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura. These *ācāryas* wanted Kṛṣṇa consciousness spread to the Westerners because they knew it was the desire of Rūpa Gosvāmī and Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

We speak of instructions to the mind, and sometimes we say “prayers to the mind.” But the mind is not a deity. Kṛṣṇa is the Deity. The guru is the worshipable representative of the Deity. Instructing the mind is a good practice. I wonder sometimes, however, “When Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī beseeches and prays to his mind, is this only a literary device so that he can preach to us?” Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes in *Śrī Bhajana-darpana*, his commentary on *Manaḥ-śikṣā*, that the twelve verses of *Manaḥ-śikṣā* are “the source of life and inspiration to the entire Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community, for by instructing his own mind, Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī teaches all Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas” (*Manaḥ-śikṣā*, p. 1).

We shouldn’t disbelieve the intentions of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. If Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī says that he prostrates himself before his “dear brother mind,” we should take it as a sincere statement. His humility and sense of unworthiness are real. In his “Ten Appeals for Residence at Govardhana Hill,” Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī declares that he is a cheater and a criminal. We shall always worship the Six Gosvāmīs and their followers as

pure, exalted souls, but we must also honor their individual moods.

I would also like to instruct my mind. Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī has given me the idea that I may also pray to my mind. The mind is either a valuable friend in our service to Kṛṣṇa—we are meant to perform *manasa-sevā*, worship in the mind—or our worst enemy. The uncontrolled mind can destroy us. As described in the song of the Avanti *brāhmaṇa*:

All the senses have been under the control of the mind since time immemorial, and the mind himself never comes under the sway of any other. He is stronger than the strongest, and his godlike power is fearsome. Therefore, anyone who can bring the mind under control becomes a master of all the senses.

Failing to conquer this irrepressible enemy, the mind, whose urges are intolerable and who torments the heart, many people are completely bewildered and create useless quarrel with others. Thus they conclude that other people are either their friends, their enemies or parties indifferent to them.

—*Bhāg.* 11.23.47–48

Unfortunately, my mind robs me of much of my *japa* time by dwelling on useless memories and imaginative trails. For example, this morning while saying the holy names, I was imagining what life may have been like onboard the U.S.S. Saratoga in the war against Iraq a year and a half ago. That prolonged thought eventually led to something else and something else, all outside the range of

devotional service. In such cases, prayer may be too gentle a means. We have to grab the mind back to hearing the sound of *harer nāma*.

For a pure devotee—or rather, for an ideal disciple—chanting the name of Kṛṣṇa sparks off a chain reaction of meditation on the many aspects of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, all amid the internal energy. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “As soon as there is the chanting vibration, Hare Kṛṣṇa, immediately Kṛṣṇa’s paraphernalia, Kṛṣṇa’s name, Kṛṣṇa’s fame, Kṛṣṇa’s abode, Kṛṣṇa’s associates—everything—all of a sudden become manifest within because He is present. . . . To remember by reference to a context means that as soon as one hears a code word, one at once remembers all the information behind that code. Similarly, when our minds are attracted to Kṛṣṇa and then everything about Kṛṣṇa simply by hearing a little glorification of His qualities, that is the beginning of pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness” (SSR, pp. 287–88).

When will the day come when we can chant like that, with the “code word” Kṛṣṇa setting off explosions of blissful remembrance? My dear mind, I beg you to cooperate. Only if you agree can this come about. I hope, dear mind, you will be overwhelmed with happiness in chanting so that you will admit it is not your own doing, but Kṛṣṇa Himself and His internal energy who are appearing on our tongue. But let us cooperate to invite Kṛṣṇa to appear. He won’t agree to appear if all we offer Him is a place of stale, material memories and fantasies. Let us worship Kṛṣṇa so that He will be inclined to appear.

Kṛṣṇa says: "I am not in the Himalayas where *yogīs* meditate or in *Vaikuṇṭha*, but, my dear *Nārada*, I am there wherever My devotees chant My names."

Write confidently and as much as you can. These last days I am becoming more aware—or more willing to admit it—that I write for others. In that sense, writing is a most important service for me. Writing about chanting can be valuable preaching. It's a way to serve the holy name and the spiritual master.

Śrīla Prabhupāda says that the desire to render devotional service is a test whether one is chanting properly. Service should be the result of intense *harer nāma*. By repeating the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, we are actually praying, "Dear energy of the Lord, Rādhā, dear Kṛṣṇa, please give me Your service." Therefore, we shouldn't avoid service. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "If one is purified by following Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's orders—that is, by chanting the holy name of Kṛṣṇa—one must certainly be eager to render service to the Lord. This is the test. When one engages enthusiastically in the Lord's service, it is to be understood that he is reaping the results of chanting the names of Kṛṣṇa and Hari" (C.c., *Madhya* 16.188–89).

"My dear mind, if you are eager to reside in *Vraja-dhāma* and execute devotional service on the platform of *rāgātmikā-bhakti*, as well as to yearn for direct service to Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, then simply desire to remember and worship birth after

birth the lotus feet of Śrī Svarūpa Dāmodara, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī and all the other associates of Śrī Caitanya, who are the recipients of His mercy" (*Manah-śikṣā*, verse 3, p. 11).

In this verse of *Manah-śikṣā*, the author expects his mind to be eager for desiring *rāgānugā-bhakti*. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has said that these are lessons for all Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavas. In his *Śrī Bhajana-darpaṇa* commentary to verse three, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura states that the path of *rāgānugā-bhakti* is traversed by practicing *vaidhī-bhakti*, especially chanting and hearing under the direction of the spiritual master. At no stage does one jump over the basic activities of chanting and hearing in order to become more advanced. But with the advanced or spontaneous stage, the chanting and hearing change from duty to love. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura quotes from Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, "In order to become eligible for *rāgānugā-bhakti* one must develop intense greed (*lobha*) to follow in the footsteps of an eternal associate of the Supreme Lord who is a permanent resident of Vraja-dhāma, and who is one hundred percent steeped in the mood of *rāgātmikā-bhakti*" (p. 12).

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura states that this verse refers to *mādhurya-rasa* in Vraja-dhāma, which is "the very essence of all spiritual mellows, and if this spiritual current is at all present in other spiritual stages, it is there only in restricted degrees." It is also very rare that one can expect to attain to devotional service. It can be achieved quickly if one receives the mercy of *rasika* Vaiṣṇavas. Bhakti-

vinoda Tḥākura states, “Lord Caitanya’s advice is, therefore, to accept great devotees like Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī and other unalloyed devotees, who are the recipients of the Lord’s special mercy, as one’s very own instructing spiritual masters, or *śikṣa-gurus*” (p. 14).

And so, my dear mind, are you going to take this advice? I would like to speak to you about it.

First of all, I want to be sure that I have grasped who you are and where you are situated. The *Bhagavad-gītā* tells us that the mind is the function that rejects and accepts sense gratification. Armed with this definition, I can identify you as you work. You are always at work. Sometimes people misidentify you with their very self because you are all they can see, you are so dominant.

When the mind is in tune with spiritual reality, it is close to the self; otherwise, it works against the self. I sometimes call you the gremlin because you have so often been a negative, down-pulling function for me. But you have potential to be immersed in spirituality.

You are always distracting me with useless thoughts. Why won’t you pay attention to the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra? Why won’t you allow yourself to be captured by the chanting tongue and the hearing ear? Should I be blaming you for all the offenses I commit against the holy name? (It gets quite complicated and I’m not a *saṅkhya-yoga* expert to delineate the relationship of the false ego with the mode of passion and where the mind fits into that—how it all works.)

Anyway, rather than blame you, I plead with you to please hear the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. It will be good for both of us. I am going to try to give up these *aparādhas*, but in one sense, you are the only hope, dear mind.

I say this, but I know that the greatest hope is from the Vaiṣṇavas who bathe us in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and free our minds and senses from material meditation. Still, in terms of the group of sub-persons who equal this one *jīva* with all his functions, our hope is that you, dear mind, will be humble and try your best. That's all I'm asking. I know by nature you are fickle—that's a scriptural statement. You are *cañcalā*. You are difficult to control. I can only beg you. Part of begging for the nectar of the holy name is to beg my own mind to please cooperate.

I want to be aware that I have the capability to participate in my own spiritual life. I am not completely helpless. Although the mind has millions and millions of times gone away from paying attention to the holy name and has brought up all these foolish memories and fantasies and lines of thought, I have the innate capability to do something about it. I just have to be hopeful.

I want to have a more spiritual relationship and friendship with my mind. The mind is not just a subject for psychoanalysis, although I may use that technique sometimes. Another technique I may use is *argumentum ad bacculum*, the broom and the stick.

Ultimately, though, I hope to get the mind's voluntary cooperation.

Dear mind, do you like these propositions that are given to us by Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī? Would you like to practice *rāgānugā-sādhana-bhakti* in this lifetime? Would you like to accept Svarūpa Dāmodara, Rūpa Gosvāmī, Sanātana Gosvāmī, and other great devotees as your *śikṣa-gurus*? You can become their disciple. In fact, the mind's place is very important in *bhāva-sevā*. Therefore, our devotional service is sometimes called *manasa-sevā*. All these sweet practices and attainments can be ours—if you will kindly worship and work as I am advising, following the words of *Manaḥ-śikṣā*.



6:45 A.M.

Śrīla Prabhupāda exposes my mentality when he says some people object to Kṛṣṇa's order, "Surrender to Me." They think, "Who is Kṛṣṇa that I have to surrender to Him? I am as good as Kṛṣṇa." You feel selfish and tired and don't want to serve Him. Better wake up, spirit soul. The stakes are high. If out of laziness and false ego you don't want to serve Kṛṣṇa, do you know what the alternatives are? The way to serve is by prayerfully saying His names. Don't do it looking for your own bliss and thereby thinking, "The chanting is not working" when you don't feel "something." If all you want is to feel something, you can take a shot of whiskey. When

you chant, be aware that you are serving Kṛṣṇa, serving *nāma*, and that you want to do it. I truly want to serve with *bhāva*, but because I cannot serve Him in that way right now, still I will serve with whatever I have.

This day has been given to you. It is given to the sparrows and worms and trees and flowers also. But the gift of a day in human life is a rare chance. Don't think all you need to do is eat two meals and rest and fill up the other hours in a routine way. It may be possible today to make a serious improvement in *japa*. Even if it is a small step forward, you may be able to do it. Speak to your mind. Tell him the benefits of staying fixed on *harer nāma*. And then stay fixed.

I have picked yellow and white wildflowers for the vase. The dogs didn't bark. It's cold but clear-skied. I tell you, it's a great opportunity. To prove it, why don't you chant a round now and really pay attention to the mantras from tongue to ear to mind to heart to soul?



10:40 A.M.

Some slight improvement in late morning *japa*, which is usually a poor time. Involuntarily, I imagined that I was trapped inside a transparent covering. I wanted to be cut free from this. I called for help and the *mahā-mantra* was the means to cut me out from the covered trap. I also recalled writing to

a Godbrother years ago and asking him his suggestions for poor *japa*. He replied that he found good results from chanting *śloka*s before beginning the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. I thought, "Yes, and also one can chant verses which specifically ask forgiveness for offenses to the holy name, as recommended in Śrīla Prabhupāda's purports." And the willingness, despite repeated failures in the past—willingness to say these prayers rather than think it is useless—this is a sign of hope. To give up asking for forgiveness is like committing sins on the strength of chanting.

I also found myself praying, "O God, O God, it is for You that I am praying when I say the mantras." We may repeat these instructions again and again, but there is no way to turn them from theory into practice until a person does it for him or herself. No one can force you or do it for you. Even the most expert spiritual master cannot make it happen for you if you don't take up his instructions. Even Lord Kṛṣṇa who is coming to us in His most accessible form will not enter your heart, although He desires to do so, unless you call, "O God, please come. Please come into my heart and into my hearing of Your names."



Snapshot

This is a famous photo in a series of Prabhupāda doing the first *ārati* to Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma at the installation ceremony in 1975. He is turning toward the audience and offering the incense. Śrīla Prabhupāda is wearing two long, pink, rose garlands. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are leaning toward each other. Balarāma's crooked, curvy, silver cowherd's stick, the ornate *mukut* crowns, peacock feathers, *jāri*-trimmed clothing, flowers at Their feet. On the floor before the altar, the five-wick ghee lamp has been lit by the assistant *pūjārī* and is awaiting Śrīla Prabhupāda's hand. All the paraphernalia is sparkling new silver. The feast is offered too, on mats on the floor.

Śrīla Prabhupāda is somber, his mouth turned down in a natural way, but you can see he is pleased. Even this relatively poor snapshot shows us that his eyes are happy and he is feeling the satisfaction of a servant who has fulfilled his mission on behalf of the Lord. It is a momentous occasion. Śrīla Prabhupāda wears a long, silk *kūrta*; his silk *dhotī* bottom reaches the floor, but we can see his toes like flower buds peeking out. There are garlands over each of the pictures of the *paramparā* gurus.

This first *ārati* is being continued almost twenty years later, six times a day, by his followers. The temple is open. The guesthouse is almost always filled to capacity. ISKCON devotees from all over the world know where to go when they feel desperately in need of rejuvenation.

From a 1975 snapshot, you can meditate on Śrīla Prabhupāda's presence at any time of his life. Śrīla Prabhupāda is himself. Let us worship him and follow his instructions. He says we should not go to Kṛṣṇa asking for *our* comforts, but to serve Him. He says the ordinary religionist asks Kṛṣṇa for bread, comforts, happiness, but Mother Yaśodā calls to Kṛṣṇa, "Come on, eat what I cook for You or You will grow lean and thin." These words, Śrīla Prabhupāda, wake me up from selfish devotional "service." I don't want to do it all wrong; I want to do it with the love you have as you offer the *ārati* to Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma. I want to serve you. When I chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, if I increase my numerical quota, or make an effort to control the mind—it's not so that I can become a more competent *yogī*. I do these things to please you and serve you. Please teach me that love which you know so well, O spiritual master of the universe, O spiritual master of this fallen soul.



4:05 P.M.

In the fourth verse of *Manaḥ-śikṣā*, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī speaks more sternly to his mind. He asks his mind to reject "frivolous and mundane talk." Surely this includes the mental talk that goes on during *japa*. Just ask the mind, "Shhh. Stop. Listen to Hare Kṛṣṇa." Śrīla Prabhupāda says that a real chanter recites the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra with

respect and veneration; he has full faith that Kṛṣṇa is absolute and therefore present as His name, His full form, *līlā*, and qualities. Therefore, “talking nonsense” while chanting is offensive.

(Take heed, my mind, since you and I have pledged to cooperate. At least I have resolved to convert you as best I can, for your own happiness, into a Vaiṣṇava of *manasa-sevā*.)

What is mundane talk? It covers a whole range from obscenity snarled among *guṇḍas* to the aesthetic talk of intellectuals in literature. I really have to renounce it if I want to be eligible for pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I have to decide once and for all that mundane poetry and literature—or any non-transcendental, non-Vraja topic—isn’t going to help me. I have to decide that I want Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and that I have no need for other supports or interests. We know, dear mind, *how* to do this exclusive *bhajana*, now let’s do it. Let’s try with every round of beads, every time we think, every time we meet.

Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī tells his mind to give up all inclinations for impersonal merging into Brahman and even devotion for Lord Nārāyaṇa in Vaikuṇṭha. That would also include serious contemplation in Buddhist meditation and Christian prayer. Be friendly to any sincere practitioner you meet, and admit that they may be more saintly and surrendered than you. Who am I? Just a rascal. But don’t budge from Prabhupāda’s path. I have to be responsible now for all the implications and consequences of becoming a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda. No more mundane talk or worship of Nārā-

yaṇa, the all-mighty God and His effulgence of *brahmajyoti*. That means be very careful not to get personally involved with nondevotees. I know we can learn things from them, but be very careful.

Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī tells his mind, “I simply and humbly request that you live in Vraja and worship Śrī Rādhā and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, for They bless Their devotees with engagement in Their devotional service” (*Manaḥ-sikṣā*, p. 15).

Does this go against my material heritage, born of a European immigrant stock into the U.S.A.? *I am not this body*. No one is asking me to change my bodily designation. No is asking me to become a Hindu.

I know it is also difficult to give up the materialistic version of romantic sex life. It is deeply imprinted into my false ego and material body. *I am not this body*. Mundane lust disqualifies me from wholeheartedly taking up service to Rādhārāṇī’s assistants.

Fortunately I am not this body. Again, dear mind, you have a crucial role to play. We have to be more austere. We have to give up what still seems tasty, chewing the chewed. But when we renounce mundane *kāma*, instantly we feel relief—and the way to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa becomes open again. Therefore, don’t make bad judgements in league with the mind’s academic Indologists or poetry instructors or vague mystics or tough guys or soft girls—but *bhaja govinda bhaja govinda bhaja govinda mudha-mate*.

Forgive me for sounding too optimistic in turning a heavy tide of material conditioning. I am trying to “jump-start” my sorry self by connection to Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī’s *Manaḥ-śikṣā*. Why not?

Writer-self, please help spirit-soul to train the mind and give him good lessons. Undeceive yourself. Cut yourself out of the covered trap by deeply taking in your Hare Kṛṣṇa rounds.

“Unless one has come to the platform of spontaneous love of God, he must follow the regulative principles. . . . The Gosvāmīs, especially Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, strictly followed all the regulative principles. The first regulative principle is that one must chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* loudly enough so that he can hear himself, and one must vow to chant a fixed number of rounds” (C.c., *Antya* 11.24, purport).

“It does no good to absentmindedly chant the name of Kṛṣṇa while your thoughts are elsewhere. Chanting will bring our uncontrolled mind under control” (Lecture, Śrīla Prabhupāda, 1966, from *Back to Godhead*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 1966).



Snapshot

Śrīla Prabhupāda is climbing up an embankment with disciples behind him. Big chunks of rocks and earth. He is first. A disciple holds an umbrella

against the sunshine. It appears to be Māyāpura and they are coming to the bank of the Ganges. Śrīla Prabhupāda is energetically moving forward. It reminds me of the painting of Lord Caitanya and His friends playing that they are Rāmacandra's army climbing a hill to fight Rāvaṇa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda wears very light-colored saffron cloth, almost whitish, and a light tan *cādar*. The tones in the pictures are pleasing—the gray-tan rocks and earth, Śrīla Prabhupāda's hue, his clothes—and the movement forward and up to the right. Śrīla Prabhupāda leading his disciples in a climb. Everyone has their beadbag on this adventure with their spiritual master.

One wants to ask, "Where are they going?" He is leading us. He kindly spent so much time with young Western disciples. He thought that we could do something to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. At the end of his life, Prabhupāda assured us that he was not leaving because he felt disgusted with his disciples. He said he liked being with us, but that he had to leave on Kṛṣṇa's order. Yet we were hardly fit association for him, especially in his confidential moods.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was such a fighter for Kṛṣṇa that he stayed with his ground troops and gave us the courage to keep on fighting. Preaching isn't easy, he said. You have to tolerate so much opposition, like Lord Nityānanda who was injured by Jagāi and Mādhāi. Be prepared for that. We stayed on the battlefield because he—just as in this photo—led the charge up the rocky hill.

In your absence, Śrīla Prabhupāda (your apparent absence), many have fled the battlefield. We make other arrangements and serve you in our own way. You are still with us, but let us also admit the truth—that only you in your personal form could keep the whole quarrelsome army moving together for the cause. We remember you and pledge ourselves to follow you. Only then may we earn the right to walk with you again in the holy *dhāma* while chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa.



April 20, 2:05 A.M.

Japa is service by the tongue. Prabhupāda says it will seem odd when we say that *bhakti-yoga* begins with the tongue. The tongue is usually the number one agent for sense gratification, even in the name of honoring *prasādam*. And remember those “*japa* walks” where you talk—about what?

But when you agree to serve the holy name with the tongue, “. . . one is understood to be an eternal servant of the Supreme Personality of Godhead if he considers himself an eternal servant of the holy name and in this spirit distributes the holy name to the world” (*C.c., Ādi* 8.16, purport). In this spirit, chanting without offenses, we will come to know that *harer nāma* and Kṛṣṇa are identical. O code word, please open all the doors to understanding.

Only five days left. Then what? Burst out of here and tell everyone what I have been doing? But then it will be a past glory, "what I did." What will you continue to do? What will you always do? Will you be like those businessmen who lead a life of poor health and indulgence and after two years, when they are on the verge of a breakdown, go to a health clinic for a month and fast on fruit juice? And what is the result? They re-enter the life of poor health and indulgence.

My diary no longer reflects a nagging lament of inability, why is that? Is it a good sign? Or have I unconsciously switched, to give the readers and myself more pleasant reading fare?

But if it were true, you should complain bitterly until your last breath, "O Dinadayārdra! O Master of Mathurā! When shall I see You again? Because of my not seeing You, my agitated heart has become unsteady." Better a bitter lament. Better a fight to get out of the covered trap.

Writing is to get at actual experience, and then to help us to improve it. Writing has an important duty and burden to carry. Just as aesthetic writers dread selling out their talent by becoming hack journalists, so I should dread using writing to show off a pose or to ornament material consciousness. Writing should serve truth in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Breeze outdoors, sitting on a chair yesterday afternoon, chanting rounds thirty-seven, thirty-eight, while Madhu pattered in the van. "*Ayī dīna!*"

Ayī dīna! I could not attain the master of Mathurā, the boy of Vṛndāvana." He so kindly allows us to chant in any condition.

What a treasure the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is. We don't even realize what riches we have and how easily available it is. Just dig a little on the eastern side of your house and you will quickly uncover the hidden well bequeathed to you by your father.

You are wrapping up. Wrapping it up in the canon. I don't claim it's been a jolly, complete success. Yes, I have given up the intense nagging. No agony except of a quiet kind. I couldn't squeeze out a single tear; no sleepless nights; no great remorse.

I'm chugging along. I say I have no time for histrionics. If shaky emotions *are* to seize me, it won't be because I have been practicing for them. Practice *japa*, fingering beads until they wear holes in your gloves, holes in your beadbag, and give you cuts on your fingers. No, I don't chant Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra in my dreams and yes, I am sorry for that.

There are two eternally playful oceans of transcendental bliss, a teenage boy and a teenage girl enjoying pastimes of joking and laughter in Vṛndāvana. "Please find your happiness there in Vṛndāvana." A little bit rubs off! The dirt is rubbed off too.

Failure here is still a brilliant success.

Chanting is the life of all that lives, Kṛṣṇa. It is the top of the bottle of milk, cream. I say this in madness, out of realization. I am a no-good chanter,

but I have sold my time for this practice. Don't even think how some may criticize you (that's the least of your worries). I wish I could be criticized for forgetting all other duties and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa constantly.

In the fifth verse of *Manaḥ-śikṣā*, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī warns his mind that he is being attacked by the highway robbers of lust. "Cry out piteously!" he says. Cry out to the pure devotees of the Lord and they will protect you.

This crying out is very important. I don't do it. I don't want to make false displays of emotion. Prabhupāda even talks somewhere about showy fervor, how the sincere service performed by women who attend temples and churches all over the world is better than showy fervor. And of course, there are so many *sahajiyā* displays which we condemn. That might include piteous crying done in imitation. But here Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī tells his mind, "You had better cry out." His mind is so dull that he doesn't even notice he is being waylaid by robbers who are going to kill him.

We cannot imitate a piteous cry when we don't sense the danger. We have no genuine emotion. Similarly, if we don't feel the *bhāva* of love in separation from Kṛṣṇa, then it would be pretentious to make a show of it. But here is the difference: when you are in danger, then you should not be too embarrassed to save yourself. You have to get beyond the social etiquette of politeness and civility and respond with the heart. You cannot wait for the right

opportunity to save yourself from lust, deceit, envy, and so on.

I have to stop falling prey to sleepiness in *japa*. I have all sympathy, dear mind, for the fact that I do rise very early. Therefore, it is natural that after a few hours I am bound to be drowsy. But I don't have to indulge in it. I have to find ways to stay awake. These ways may also be taken as expressions of crying out. Go into action. Splash water on your face. Take sufficient rest. Call out piteously, "O Kṛṣṇa, enemy of Baka! O pure devotees of Kṛṣṇa! Please help me!"

In addition to crying to my protectors, I have to first push the emergency buzzer to notify my friend, the mind. He will have to cooperate in calling my protectors. Therefore, the practice of interjected prayer—short devotional statements made during the *japa* like "Kṛṣṇa, please help me"—is helpful. Interjected prayers can wake me up, make me conscious and vigilant against the attacks of the highway robbers of lust. Interjected prayers can penetrate the fog of drowsiness and take me down to the realm of the more subtle, deeper problems: mental inattention and laziness.

Gently, like a cowherd boy, prod the cows and calves in the right direction. Hit one on the bony haunch as you walk behind her. Walk in the dust raised from their hooves. Is my *japa* like that, a simple walk behind errantly uttered *mahā-mantras*? It's just a crude analogy. The main thing is not the

waywardness of my practice, but the mantras themselves.

Walking down the hill, I saw four or five snails. The creatures with antennae on their heads, were sticking out from their shells and moving very slowly. I recall that once Śrīla Prabhupāda saw a snail when he was in a backyard with Govinda dāśī. He told her to “chant to the poor thing.” So I leaned down close to their handsome brown swirled shells and chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa toward their feelers. There was no obvious response, unlike the time I chanted to a bull in Ireland and he wiggled his ears.

There are higher stages in *nāma-rasa*, but this may be all I can do for now (and it is no small thing): Stamp Out *Pramāda*.

“That is first-class *yogī*. So he was thinking of Kṛṣṇa by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa because the more we practice, immediately with your chanting the name, the form, the qualities, the pastimes, everything will be revealed. As we go on cleansing our dirty hearts by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and as we chant, faultless, offenseless *harināma*, Kṛṣṇa reveals” (Lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda on *Bhāg.* 1.2.16, “The Way to Go Back to Godhead”).



10:35 A.M.

My free-writing wants to allow thoughts to flow in order to right the mind of a person applying himself to the Kṛṣṇa conscious process. It is better for me right now to write like this than to write like I am “supposed to”—repeating Kṛṣṇa conscious doctrine without personally taking part. We often see that such writers hide themselves. They hold back. They write what they think is expected of them, deliver the *siddhānta*, but we never see them and their own feelings of surrender. Do they *want* to praise Kṛṣṇa? Do they want to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa? If not, why not? What do they want to do instead? Why aren’t they doing what they want to do? These are important questions worth exploring, and they will emerge out of our free expressions. I find this approach helpful to my *sādhana*.

Today is some kind of big, national holiday. It is quiet out here in the country—everyone has gone to the city. But I hear more gunshots. Hunters? And a person on horseback, the horse walking at a slow gait. The sky is a clear white haze with sunshine blazing through. It’s not as cold. Maybe the unseasonal cold weather is over and we will have spring.

I read again in *Nāmāmṛta* what Śrīla Prabhupāda said against neophyte devotees who go alone to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. I don’t think the condemnation applies to me. The extended *japa-vrata* has proven to me that I cannot *only* chant all the time for my

whole life, but there is a stage of maturity and advancement when, like Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu or Haridāsa Ṭhākura, we ask our friends, "Please give that room to Me, for I have need for it. Indeed, I shall remember the lotus feet of the Lord sitting in that solitary place" (C.c., *Madhya* 11.176).

In the purport Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "The senses are very strong, and if a neophyte devotee imitates Haridāsa Ṭhākura, his enemies (*kāma*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, and *mātsarya*), will disturb and fatigue him. Instead of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, the neophyte will simply sleep soundly."

But one should never give up regular chanting in the context of other activities: "If you stop pouring water on a plant, it will dry up; it will not produce any fruit. Similarly, even if you are highly elevated in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, you cannot stop this process of hearing and chanting because *māyā* is so strong, so powerful, that as soon as she sees, 'Ah, here is an opportunity,' at once you will dry up. . . . If you continue this chanting and hearing process, you will grow and grow and actually reach Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet and there relish His association" (*Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, The Topmost Yoga System*, pp. 105–6).



Snapshot

Śrīla Prabhupāda striding. Is it Vṛndāvana? The young men are also taking big strides to keep up with him. He looks like he is doing more walking

than talking right now. Out in the open lands. Two black bullocks with yoke and a farmer behind them. Low buildings on the horizon. It looks like the dirt on the *parikrama* trail in Vṛndāvana. No use my commenting on inter-Godbrother relations as they were then. Let me get over my own petty considerations as to who looks thin or fat and how they all look so young. *Of course* we were all younger twenty years ago. *Of course* some devotees who were practicing then have since given it up. But many are still serving Prabhupāda in different ways, due to time's influence.

When we look at a picture of a pure devotee, we should see more than that. He is leading them. They say you shouldn't see a *sādhū* but hear from him, but seeing him is also not ordinary. Keep looking into the photo image, your spiritual master with his cane, saffron cloth, garland, arms swinging gracefully. Your fear of him, fear he will catch you doing wrong or smash your pride—fear it will hurt. The whole empire you have built up with hopes for fulfilling responsible service to him—rejected in a moment, and the very persons in this picture will laugh as you lie in the Vṛndāvana dust at Prabhupāda's feet.

I asked someone to send me photos of Śrīla Prabhupāda in Vṛndāvana. I meant pictures of him walking the earth. My spiritual master's eternal identity is concealed, yet he is walking fast and they are hurrying to keep up. He is silent—not talking of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, but grave and demanding. We all want to please him. Pleasing him means Kṛṣṇa

is pleased. It takes courage to claim to be his follower and to ask him to order you to go anywhere and do anything, but even that courage is external. He wants a whole lifetime—every lifetime—in the deepest, loving surrender to Kṛṣṇa. You can attain that in many ways, by various services, but not without Śrīla Prabhupāda's blessings.



3:50 P.M.

Be in Vṛndāvana—it's an important point. Remove yourself from dogs and gunshots and holiday Mondays in Italy. Can you do it? This sunshine is Kṛṣṇa's eye. Everywhere in the world there are quiet, solitary moments to think of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana.

I plan to go to Vṛndāvana in four months. It will not be so windy there, and no pasta. But there will be plenty of mundane distractions. They say it is all Vṛndāvana; no matter what happens there, it is touched by the *dhāma*'s influence. Anyway, the eternal Vraja is described with inner vision by the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

Prabhupāda doesn't spell out in detail what will happen or when, yet he clearly says *nāma* will lead to the awareness of *rūpa*, *līlā*, and *guṇa*. He has great faith that the chanting will work and that Kṛṣṇa will reveal Himself.

My restlessness seems to be only that "it" isn't happening yet. No tears, no remorse, no *līlā-rūpa*-

guṇa . . . I can tolerate it. At least it shouldn't *confuse* me, this state I am in. It is part of a larger process. In the early stages one is hampered by *aparādhās*. He cannot realize that Kṛṣṇa and His name are identical. Such a person should go on chanting and the name will cleanse the mirror of his heart.

Prabhupāda assures us that the day will come when Kṛṣṇa will reveal Himself and say, "I am like this." A simple, strong promise. He says it may not happen in a million years, yet it could happen in a moment—it is dependent on our own surrender. And how to surrender to Kṛṣṇa? By serving his representative.

And I ask myself, will I be able or willing—today—to do anything about my present, unrealized state?

In verse six of *Manaḥ-śikṣā*, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī implores his mind to give up hypocrisy and take to the loving service of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The mind is on a suicidal course, about to plunge both himself and the tiny spirit soul into burning flames. Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī says, "Stop this suicidal course! Dive into the immortal ocean of sublime ambrosia that awaits you in loving devotional service to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa."

So the mind must go from a low mentality into the *rasika* mentality. That is what I have been discussing here, and wondering how this can apply to someone as unqualified as I am.

Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī seems to say that unless we take to the higher taste, we cannot save ourselves. He has already ruled out attaining material happiness in the heavenly planets, or merging into Brahman, or going to Vaikuṇṭha as a servitor of Nārāyaṇa. That leaves either pure service in Vraja, or fall down into lust, anger, or hypocrisy.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura outlines the deceit of a renunciate: he thinks he is better than others, he collects donations and uses them for sense gratification far in excess of the needs of a *sannyāsī*, he associates with women in the name of preaching, he is overly attached to dress and position “and thus neglects the main purpose of spiritual life, which is to develop attachment for Kṛṣṇa” (*Manaḥ-śikṣā*, p. 26). These bad habits are compared to bathing in donkey urine. The mind is thus polluting both himself and the spirit soul.

I have no alternative. I must be a decent *sannyāsī*. But I cannot do it unless I take the recommendation given here. Why do I hesitate? Do I still harbor doubts? But it’s getting too late for that. It’s all procrastination and timidity.

It’s easy enough in writing to bash oneself as to why we are not lovers of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. It supplies an immediate satisfaction that we have traced out the cause of all ills—our “minds” or our “uncontrolled senses.” But sometimes the bashing may be inaccurate and just thoughtless or foolish. One wants to take the blame, and of course not blame Kṛṣṇa or guru, but things have to be

analyzed more carefully before we write our ills off so easily and often glibly. Thoughtless self-denigration may be another trick of the lower self to leave us unenthusiastic to work toward the improvement we are actually capable of.

We can see this caution being exercised by the *ācāryas*. They don't spend so much time tearing us down as guiding us step by step. We should also learn to guide ourselves by encouragement as well as self-criticism. Often, when we criticize ourselves so much, we don't really believe it anyway. It becomes a literary flourish, a show of humility, a quick escape from the point. My above statement about "procrastination and timidity" seems to be an example of this sloppy self-berating.



Snapshot

Walking down Chhatikara Road (now called Bhaktivedanta Swami Mārg) in Vṛndāvana. Śrīla Prabhupāda's GBC men are with him. Big *sannyāsa* poles. Who gets to be near Śrīla Prabhupāda? Is he the best man? I look at everyone's shoes . . . the usual trivial preoccupations when I first look at a photo. I always have to get used to the lighting.

This one was taken in bright sunshine. Śrīla Prabhupāda is looking up as if at the tops of the trees. Women carrying bundles on their heads walk past him. What will Śrīla Prabhupāda talk about today? It's heavy for me to see some of the faces of

the disciples who are with him. Who could have seen the future?

Prabhupāda, these photos are sometimes more confusing than solacing. Still, I see you in your own world in this photo. At this instant, no one is looking to you—they are all looking in different directions. Although surrounded by men who await your orders, you are looking up to something. Your left hand is raised, wrapped under the *cādar*. Your right hand holding your cane is also under the *cādar*. In the morning chill, you wear a wool swami cap.

I recognize you and you recognize each of us. We will meet again, although not exactly as in this world.

See the trees on Bhaktivedanta Swami Mārg? They are cut back for fuel, but the people allow them to live. A little green is flourishing, but not much. Externally, it is a poor land, but mysterious, the king of *tirthas*. You brought us there and only very gradually revealed it to us. We are still trying to understand. Soon we will all be gone.

The dirt shows clearly in the sunlight. I can almost feel it, smell it, this Vraja dust. Śrīla Prabhupāda's feet on the road, I hear him walking, I hear him preaching perfectly, leading us, assigning us more work than we can complete in this one lifetime.

No one but the devotees can know what we see in these photos, even though we ourselves can't express it and even though we have been over-

whelmed by the changes that have taken place since these photos were taken.

We cling to life duration and health, but we know we have to leave. You left, Śrīla Prabhupāda, and we belong in your entourage. What does that mean? It means we too will leave, no doubt.

But we won't be in the perfect state at death, will we? Why did some of your leading disciples leave? What is happening? I just read in your purport, "Although we may be engaged in the Lord's devotional service in the temple, material conditions are so tough and inevitable that we may forget the Lord at the time of death due to a diseased condition or mental derangement. Therefore we should pray to the Lord . . ." (*Bhāg.* 5.3.12, purport). Śrīla Prabhupāda, you left this world in an exemplary way in Vṛndāvana. Everyone remembers you.

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April 21, 2:05 A.M.

Writing is praying for all the good things, like humility. Write it down quickly before it goes away or becomes spoiled by too much thought.

Those quickly uttered, whispered first rounds of the morning . . .

Writing means repeating what you have heard from guru, *śāstra*, and *sādhū*. Simply repeat like a parrot. But Śukadeva is called a parrot not merely for repetition but for adding sweetness as a parrot

does when it cuts the fruit with its beak. The main point is not to be mundane but to be transcendental. The writing method which advocates “first thoughts/best thoughts” and the desire to tap “original mind,” are theories that contain useful inspiration for a Kṛṣṇa conscious writer. Śrīla Prabhupāda says we don’t believe in the motto, “The universe is false.” We say material consciousness is false. But if we can use something material in Kṛṣṇa’s service, it should be done. It can be dynamic, but it requires care and direction.

Rūpa Gosvāmī under the Ter Kadamba tree writing the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa—this is the ultimate in creative art. Rūpa Gosvāmī’s Sanskrit penmanship was beautiful art (like a row of pearls) and his use of grammar and metaphor was artful. The pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana (arranged by Vṛndā-devī, who makes the trees blossom) is also the topmost creative act, filled with dance and song and decoration in the arts of love. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is all creative arts, even joking.

Simple, childlike. A boy playing in the sand with his toy cars. He creates a world and then it vanishes in a moment. He is constantly creating without demanding anything from his work. Neither does he demand that the world notice what he is doing.

Fascination with craft, like writing or chanting—if we could only have that childlike simplicity and absorption and detachment.

Kṛṣṇa, I am wasting time in separation from You. Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī's every moment is filled with thoughts of pleasing You. Whatever She does, whatever She dreams, is all for Your pleasure. She is so full of appreciation and love for You.

I am filled with so many thoughts that are outside of the Vraja pastimes. I can use my energy and knowledge of the world in Kṛṣṇa's service. Śrīla Prabhupāda is our staunchest savior in this regard. He likes it when we bring our talents into Kṛṣṇa's service. Śrīla Prabhupāda has a broad concept of what can be included in pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness. *Mṛdaṅgas* can be played in Germany and Africa. We don't have to change our dress or language. Therefore, in our worldwide Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement there are many hybrids. The local culture combines with Vedic expression and becomes entirely dovetailed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This was Śrīla Prabhupāda's plan. And by Prabhupāda's mercy, we can read the pure Sanskrit poetry of Rūpa Gosvāmī. We can chant the holy name. We can hear about residence in Vraja-*dhāma*, study Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* in the *rasika* books, appreciate the potency of bathing in the Yamunā . . . Gradually the whole world will become Kṛṣṇa conscious; people will be able to recognize Vraja-*dhāma* and Navadvīpa as the topmost cultural centers, and new Navadvīpas and Vraja-*maṇḍalas* can be created in other parts of the world.

And you can write and contribute.

In verse seven of *Manaḥ-śikṣā*, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī says, “My dear brother mind, the despicable desire for material honor and distinction is compared to a shameless and lowborn prostitute who eats dog meat—yet she is flagrantly dancing in my heart. How, then, can the pristine love of pure devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa ever find a place in my heart?”

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura comments in *Śrī Bhajana-darpaṇa*, “All other unwanted desires may be eradicated, but the hankering for honor and distinction is extremely difficult to uproot.”

If one cannot rid his heart of this kind of hypocrisy, then there is no question of a devotee ever attaining pure love of Kṛṣṇa. And yet that is exactly what Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī desires, as he expresses in verse eight of *Manaḥ-śikṣā*. He pleads with his mind, “Please reside in Vraja and earnestly worship Lord Kṛṣṇa, the lifter of Govardhana Hill, fervently praying to Him with utter humility to please Him.”

The key for release from the desire for honor and all the other deceits is to make humble prayers. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura states, “A humble plea indicates a mood of sincere surrender and devotion, particularly when the devotee feels that he is the most wretched person without any shelter to protect him.”

The Ṭhākura further states, “. . . if that same unfortunate soul realizes that his true position is to feel himself humbler than even the straw in the street, and therefore develops the intelligence to

respect others according to their positions, simultaneously taking complete shelter of the holy names of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, then surely he will receive the mercy of Lord Kṛṣṇa and concomitantly the grace of all the saintly personalities" (*Manaḥ-śikṣā*, p. 35).

We will probably always battle with the desire for honor. Out here in our retreat house, we think we are relatively free of it. But then I hear that one of my "admirers" wants me to come and visit their city. I think how when I am finished chanting here, I can impress people at seminars with my realizations on the holy name. I can speak about truthfulness and the inner life of the preacher and the struggle to become sincere. It seems like a vicious trap. One wants to share the results of solitude and chanting so as not to become too introverted, but then when one goes out to preach, immediately the desire for honor and distinction appears. We have to learn how to work around this desire without giving up our preaching.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura indicates in many places that one should adopt the mood of feeling oneself the lowest. This doesn't always refer to someone who is a criminal or behaving in a grossly insincere way. In fact, a devotee may be relatively free of sinful life and be practicing sincere Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He may want the perfection of service to the most pure, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. When such a person sees in his heart things like desire for honor and distinction, he feels fallen. A person aspiring for the highest who sees dirty things in his own heart, can

become more regretful and humble than any criminal who has not understood the purpose of life. He who has set out to dedicate a life of purity and has actually put in many years of devotional service, finds himself still gripped by at least some passing thought of the lowest lust and the lowest desires for fame, anger, envy and so on—therefore he considers himself the lowest.

Such a devotee has to cry out and pray for the mercy of the devotees. He has to live in a way which actually reflects his humble attitude. He should extend himself to others and preach. He should concentrate on his own internal development without compromise. He should be simple and honest in his dealings. He has to separate out the glories of the holy name and the advanced Vaiṣṇavas from his own mental self-glorification. He has to remember that he is *dāsa*, not Lord Dāmodara. *Dāsānudāsa-anudāsa*.

It is also encouraging to read in Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's commentary that constant chanting of the holy name is a way to attain the necessary humility. I don't know what this means on deeper levels, but I can take heart that even the agreement to chant an increased quota, and pushing on with it even when there is no bliss or sweetness, can constitute a beginning of humility. Chanting produces humility. You are humbled by your poor chanting habits. You want to be a real chanter and serve the holy name in humility. You read all the previous *ācāryas* who speak of living in Vraja in the mind and heart, and you want to be there with

them, if only for brief moments. So again you become humbled, seeing that you are a product of Western world karma, with all kinds of filthy madness in your mind. Chant and be humble. Be humbled by chanting.

Suddenly on my morning walk, memories of two women I used to know came up. Neither of these women were serious infatuations, and I was only in my early twenties when I knew them, but I hadn't thought of either of them in decades. I like to think that their appearance this morning is a signal of my letting go of any unconscious desire for romantic enjoyment, and that one by one I can say farewell to all my past karmas.

Yesterday, M. and I were reading how Kṛṣṇa is the center of the *rāsa* dance. That also occurred to me this morning—that I used to try to take Kṛṣṇa's place and enjoy young women. Now I want to renounce that and serve Him by serving His lovers. I want to be that pure and affectionate. But how can I build strong desires in that way without running into the other strong desires from my past? Hence these two girls. I had to smile at my foolishness, then and now. Farewell to them and any others past or present. I want to be a *dāsī* of the *sakhīs*. I want to follow my spiritual master and Rūpa Gosvāmī, *anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam*.

Chanting went better this morning. The stopwatch helped. Sleepiness usually comes before you are aware of it. Then you become slightly aware of

it, but it pulls you down and you don't act. So the stopwatch gives you an early warning. If I see that a full ten minutes have gone by and the summit bead is not in sight, then I know I must be spacing out. This is strictly beginner's stuff, but I won't pretend I'm above it. Also, I'm eager to get one of those bottles that emits a fine spray of water to use when I feel drowsy. Sleepiness can actually be beaten by devices like this. The use of devices indicates a will for reform, so they are important tools. Later they won't be needed. This morning, I also strictly avoided sitting down for that stretch between 4–5:30 A.M. Gradually one can learn many of the tricks of the mind and ways to uproot bad habits.



10:30 A.M.

We are creatures of mood. What are those surges, dips, blips, that come and go during the day? Chanting from 9–10:30 A.M. is liable to be drowsy and pessimistic, "I can't, I don't actually believe . . ." But I stick it out; I make the best of it, like living through an inauspicious time according to your horoscope. Then at 10:30 A.M. I start wiping dust off the altar and singing. Suddenly my "spirits" lift. I feel optimistic about everything. What next? The morning usually peaks right before lunch. So many animalistic considerations—the state of digestion, bodily cycles, solar cycles, how much fresh air is in the room, whether it is sunny outside . . . This is

not *dhīra*. The steady factor for a *vaidhī-bhakta* is his duty; "One must tolerate them without being disturbed." And in the higher realm of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, it is the constant vision of Kṛṣṇa that pulls the devotee onward: "By experiencing a higher taste, he is fixed in consciousness."

A too-cool breeze coming in the open window. It has been a good time. When you meet prominent Godbrothers, you won't tell them you just spent three weeks chanting. It sounds extravagant. But if they pry it out of you, you will admit it. If someone asks you point blank, "What are you writing?" you could reply, "The latest thing is a sequel to *Japa Reform Notebook*." Add quickly, "It's based on *Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi*," then change the subject.

Brother, we walk uphill and downhill repeatedly because there ain't no level ground around—and dogs are always ready to bark.

Count, count, use the calendar. Three days left after today. Then to India in four months. All the counting up, counting down. The *brāhmaṇa* and the cobbler both asked Nārada, "How many births until we are liberated?" They too were counting. And Khaṭvāṅga Mahārāja: "How long will I live?" Mahārāja Parikṣit didn't ask but was told: only seven more days. When you get the answer, how will you live with it?



Snapshot

("It's time to go see Śrīla Prabhupāda." You were hanging around in your room, doodling, and Prabhupāda's servant came in, "Śrīla Prabhupāda wants to see you." Pick up the photo face down, and turn it up suddenly. I know pictures don't show much, and these photos are mainly of morning walks with the big leaders . . . and I am just a nonsense . . . but that's just mental static. This is a chance for a loving meditation.)

Ah, this is a sweet, intimate picture. Where? A roof in the sunlight. Since this series is all *dhāma* photos, it's probably Vṛndāvana. Śrīla Prabhupāda wearing only his *gamchā* sits on a straw mat. He braces himself with his hands. His leg is extended. His servant is massaging. His servant's body is young and trim, serviceable. A can of mustard oil sits on the floor nearby. (I can feel what the servant feels, the bunching up of skin into wrinkles around the kneecap, the hot sun, the oily coating on my hands.) Śrīla Prabhupāda's veins are prominent on his temples. His mouth is slightly open, as it is in his large *mūrti* in the Vṛndāvana *samādhi*. The sole of his left foot is visible to us as he sits in a quarter lotus position.

(So you wanted a picture other than a walk with the general and his troops. You can't get more quiet and homey than this. No *dhotī*, no cane, no shoes, no *kirtana*, no group of followers. Just Śrīla Prabhupāda basking in the sun, shining with perspiration and mustard oil, and looking at ease. He said these

massages as well as the daily walks helped keep him alive in old age.) It was while receiving a massage that he said one day, "I don't have aspirations for going back to Godhead. I just want to expose these rascals."

Prabhupāda, so many of us want to crowd in on your time. It's nice to see you alone for a moment doing your own duty. You are keeping fit to serve all humanity on behalf of Kṛṣṇa. You tend to the faithless masses; you have gathered many hundreds of devotees who now accept *Bhagavad-gītā* as the Absolute Truth. (This is such a confidential photo. I am protecting it from any one who might barge in and see it. Don't want someone to see me looking at you right now. Don't want them to break into the privacy of this picture.)

This is a time to approach you in a quiet way, not filled with business transactions or big, philosophical questions. Neither can we just sit eyeing you like a cat. You will ask, "What do you want?"

"I've come to ask a question, about something you asked to hear about." (I'm coming into his presence on his account, not mine. Maybe something about one of his recently published books that has just arrived, or about a letter he has been waiting for. Or, someone has a question about Śrīla Prabhupāda's proposed lecture at their home this evening. Or, the cook wants to know something—yes, that's a good one—I am here on behalf of the cook. It's a question Śrīla Prabhupāda doesn't find impertinent—thus also blaming me for interrupting him with foolishness. He tells me what he wants for

lunch. Then, with my errand as an excuse, I sit a few moments. Maybe I can say something else. Or, maybe Śrīla Prabhupāda directs a remark to me. All this is possible. Be a simple servant.)

Imagine that Śrīla Prabhupāda is saying, "So you are completing your *japa-yajña*? How many rounds?"

I tell him.

And then you will go and preach?

Yes, Śrīla Prabhupāda, I have a seminar on "The Life and Teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda" and then I will visit some temples in Italy and give *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class . . .

He lets me go. I am unimportant. I don't want to leave the nice atmosphere of this photo.

Dark, shiny gold . . . sunshine reflecting on his smooth shoulder. *Brāhmaṇa* thread up on his shoulder. Braced by his hand and arms . . . the eternal, quiet moment of a pure devotee.



3:30 P.M.

This is writing time. In the backyard, I hold the note pad down with two hands against the buffeting wind. Speaking of moods and hourly rhythms, I am feeling a bit dull. The goal is far away. I feel fragile right now, maybe a headache is coming. I have to give a class tonight at 5:00 P.M., the last of the warm-ups for next week's seminar.

I have been largely undisturbed here, able to push my counter beads day after day, but I can see what the *sāstras* mean when they say that one can go on chanting without attaining the goal for many lives. If one has even a smell of worldly desires while chanting, then *kṛṣṇa-prema* cannot enter. One chants Hare Kṛṣṇa in the pure state and enters the ocean of remembrance of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa pastimes. "Hare," "Kṛṣṇa," and "Rāma" remind one of how Kṛṣṇa steals Rādhikā's heart by His beauty and qualities and flute-playing—and takes Her to Govinda-sṭhāla or Sevā-kuñja or Vamśivāṭa. And when a pure devotee chants "Harā," he thinks how Kṛṣṇa, although the Supreme controller, is captivated by Rādhārāṇī's beauty, Her pure devotion, youthful grace, and contrariness—and She steals Kṛṣṇa's mind, taking Him to Rādhā-kuṇḍa.

Don't keep saying, "Here's the sweet thing and I can't have it because I'm a wretch." It may be depressing. One temple leader refused to recite the ten offenses in the morning because he said, "It sounds too negative. Don't do this, don't do that." So we want positive hope. But we can't bluff or cheat our way into *śuddha-nāma*.

I didn't reach the first, profound stage of deep regret. I see my complaints as too negative; I'm like a New Age psychologist who doesn't want "bad vibes." "Don't be so down on yourself, man." I say I'm willing to go down the road of remorse, yet it's not open to me.

It seems too late now—with three more days—to break open my *japa* into some new stage. The grace

has to descend from the authorized devotees down to me. That includes an experience of genuine regret—the kind expressed by Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, that I have wasted my life because I have not worshiped Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and do not serve Their devotees. I am hard-hearted and selfish.

Writing these lines amid the grass and yellow wildflowers, sitting on an uncomfortable wooden chair. To chant, Rūpa Gosvāmī says, “be in Vṛndāvana.” But here I am in Italy where a lamb is bleating and the brown hills are starting to show long lines of tiny green crops coming through. There are flies here, just as in India, and they alight on the page. The same one sun, eye of God, shines bright in a southern European clime. I am here for “preaching.” Even in India I will be outside the holy *dhāma*.

Kṛṣṇa’s places are hidden to all except His unalloyed devotees. Their names are sacred. In the morning, I take two drops of Rādhā-kuṇḍa on my forehead and lips. I say, “Govardhana, Yamunā, Nandagram, Saṅket, I offer my obeisances to you.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda left Vṛndāvana because he had a message from his spiritual master to give to the people of the West; he was duty-bound. Therefore, despite all the inconveniences and risks, in his old age he traveled to and lived in New York City. He told Dr. Mishra’s yoga students, “If I stayed in Vṛndāvana, I would be perfectly comfortable. No

anxiety, nothing of the sort." And he said, "I am in New York City, the greatest city in the world, but my heart hankers after that Vṛndāvana. I am not happy here. I wish to be in Vṛndāvana."

I heard that a lady devotee living in the Washington, D.C. area decorated her apartment so it was "just like Vṛndāvana." She worships Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Deities there. I have a few pictures of Vṛndāvana.

I don't want self-pity. But it's a pity we don't chant like lovers of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. That's rare, and even to talk so much about it as I do is perhaps not so good. People may get the idea I am indirectly showing off—as if I am a special *bhakta*, whereas actually I'm a dope. (Sorry.) So better to be silent and even if you have a stirring (like a spring bud, tight) of inclination toward Vraja—which I doubt you have, because with you it's mostly just talk—but in any case better to be silent. But I talk. And that's shadow greed.

How can a pen-man be silent? It's his nature to talk his head off. Remember Śrīla Prabhupāda joking how he asked a young man, "Where were you?"

He said, "I went to see a *yogī* and it was very profound."

Śrīla Prabhupāda asked, "What did he speak?"

"Oh, he spoke for three hours on nothing."

Śrīla Prabhupāda joked, "He spent his three hours just to hear zero?" So how can I write zero, nothing? Give me a break. I have to say something, even if it's slightly lawless whisperings of what I

am not eligible yet to know. I have to maintain some hope.

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6:45 P.M.

The topic of my warm-up class tonight was “Your Prabhupāda.” I wanted to convey that each one of us has a unique relationship with Prabhupāda. I offered many examples of different ways to approach Prabhupāda, but something was lacking. Since this class was just a rehearsal, I stopped in mid-sentence and said, “What I want to say here is that there is something wonderful and alive for all of us in a relationship with Prabhupāda. We should all take advantage of it and reach forward to claim it.” Madhu replied, “Why don’t you say *that*? Say it just like that.”

It then occurred to me that my own presentation of Prabhupāda is not so alive because of my personal lackings. I have to pray to Prabhupāda before I give such classes. This is also connected to my lackings in chanting. So many things in my *sādhana* need over-hauling, not only *japa*. One of the most important things of all is to have an enthusiastic, non-deadened relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda.

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7:40 P.M., Snapshot

This is Bombay, Juhu Beach. Śrīla Prabhupāda said he went to three places for purification: Vṛndāvana, Māyāpura, and Juhu Beach. He looks wonderful here, taking a long stride, his bamboo cane poking into the beach sand at every step. His right hand is in his beadbag, index finger extended, as if he is chanting while he walks. No *kūrta*, just the *sannyāsa* top piece. Amused, jolly, enjoying the morning sunshine and surf coming in, the walk . . .

Disciples are with him. Girirāja dāsa *brahmacārī* looks thoughtful, lips pursed, surrendered to whatever Prabhupāda wants him to do on the battlefield of Hare Kṛṣṇa Land. So this is not a *dhāma* per se, but because Śrīla Prabhupāda is here, it is holy. Washing sea and sand, his footprints. Even today if you go to that beach during that hour when Prabhupāda used to take his walk, you will feel impressions and remember Śrīla Prabhupāda. It has become holy because he is holy.

And I do love him. Even at my mental-worst in Juhu '74, I loved those walks with Prabhupāda. His philosophical talks, full of life, challenging those who are opposed to Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda's fighting spirit.

Yes, I am working myself into an enthusiastic state. It's not artificial. I need it. I was on that beach and I won't let you crowd me out or push me out of the picture, you demons of doubt. I am going there to be with Prabhupāda. I like this striding, *pada-yātrā* picture of my spiritual master. I am going to

read his books, going to serve him and step on the head of death. He will accept me even though I am a fool, as long as I go before him humbly and admit my wrongs. He accepts my sincerity. He knows I am his servant. So he can correct the wrongs and bring me in line for receiving Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the best way.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, please keep walking like this. You are laughing and pleased to speak Kṛṣṇa consciousness and point out the deficiencies of the nondevotees. You want us also to play and become able sportsmen, preachers, and teachers. We can do all this by walking the beach with you and hearing your words. And when we get back to Hare Kṛṣṇa Land, Juhu, or wherever we serve you, we will recall what you said and work on your behalf.

Let me chant on your behalf, O giver of the holy name. I am doing it to become a better servitor in your Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. I'm giving all I can to serve you and your interests. They will see that I am jolly like my spiritual master who walked on Juhu Beach. I am his follower and do what he desires and he is pleased with me for that.



April 22, 2:05 A.M.

We don't notice the airplane taking off until we have gained altitude. That is Prabhupāda's analogy. I want to be able to remind myself when I am back into the routine of only sixteen rounds a day that I

did reach a more attentive stage, at least during the first six rounds in the morning, where I could pay attention to the mantras themselves, or to thoughts allied to *japa*, or to Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, or verses about the holy names. And when I deliberately landed in a patch of thinking about something else, I noticed it. The distraction stood out. "What's this?"—I went back to hearing the names.

I could even say it was sweet. The practice is sweet to be up early and chanting. Also, *chanting produces chanting*. For me to be willing to chant extra *japa*, I need to accept that chanting doesn't have to have a further result. That result may come, and it is expected to come gradually. I should be gaining altitude, although I may not notice it now. The captain says, "Sit back and enjoy the flight." So we chant on our beads while the captain handles the flight, where we go, how high, etc. Our job is simply to chant and chant.

This can be limiting, but we have to accept that limit if we want to chant. We have to wait for mercy because ultimately, we cannot attain Kṛṣṇa on our own. We can only endeavor humbly. Lord Caitanya said we should wear *trṇād api sunīcena* like a garland around our necks. I am tiny, I cannot think so much of the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I know I should; I know *japa* should be *rasika*, or else we could go on for years without reaching the goal of *kṛṣṇa-prema*. But what can I do now to attain that goal? I can only chant and chant and chant. It seems like that's the best I can do. Śrīla Prabhupāda agrees.

And I always find myself back at Prabhupāda's first instructions on *japa*: "Just hear. What is the question of 'controlling' the mind?" The chanting will control the mind. That's a solid, foundational instruction—hear the mantras. I am hoping that sixteen will now seem like I haven't done enough.

"Always chanting My glories, endeavoring with great determination, bowing down before Me, these great souls worship Me with devotion" (Bg. 9.14). Śrīla Prabhupāda comments on this verse, "That glorification is this process of *bhakti-yoga*, the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa" (*Rāja-vidyā*, pp. 36–7).

Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "The process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness should be very vigorously propagated all over the world. . . . (*Teachings of Queen Kuntī*, pp. 136–37). "Contributing or distributing the holy name of the Lord is a sublime example of contributing or giving charity (the *dadāti* principle)" (*Nectar of Instruction*, text 4, purport). Tell everyone to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

I write for preaching, both to those who haven't begun to chant and for those who are already chanting. I write to encourage everyone. Don't think there can be no improvement. Don't think beginner's steps are useless because you are now approaching old age or because you have been chanting for years. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "One may even think, 'I foolishly chanted 'Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa' for two hours.' But that is also *smaraṇa*" (*Teachings of Queen Kuntī*, pp. 136–7). Even our wrestling with

the mind and letting it go is *smaraṇam*. Yes, only the beginner's stage. But how will you ever advance unless you put in your full time as a beginner?

All praises to the guru of the holy name, Śrīla Prabhupāda. I am thankful for his constant, strong emphasis on *harer nāma*, which gives us conviction that this simple process is most important. All glories to the Vedic scriptures which tell us that Kali-yuga is so unfortunate as to be a "sea of vices," and yet there is one great quality (*mahā-guṇa*) in this age—the chanting of the names of Kṛṣṇa. That great quality makes the age of hypocrisy auspicious. "My dear King, although Kali-yuga is full of faults, there is still one good quality about this age. It is that simply by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, one can become free from material bondage and be promoted to the transcendental kingdom" (*Bhāg.* 12.3.51, cited *C.c.*, *Madhya* 20.344).

"'Just always chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.' Never mind whether you are in a factory or in hell, in a shack or in a skyscraper—it doesn't matter. Just go on chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. There is no expense, there is no impediment, there is no caste, there is no creed, there is no color—anyone can do it. Just chant and hear" (*On the Way to Kṛṣṇa*, p. 69).

In verses nine and ten of *Manaḥ-śikṣā*, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī pours out nectar to his mind. He orders his brother mind to always remain ab-

sorbed in Lord Kṛṣṇa, “the most beloved of my worshipable mistress, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.” He orders his mind to absorb himself in Śrīmatī Lalitā-devī, Śrīmatī Viśākhā-devī, Rādhā-kuṇḍa, and Govardhana Hill. He further orders his mind to worship Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī who has “cast a spell on Lord Kṛṣṇa and brought Him under Her control . . . She is the most beloved of the Lord’s girlfriends.”

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura’s purports to these verses consist almost entirely of *śloka*s from Rūpa Gosvāmī, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, and others, glorifying Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, the Yamunā, and so on. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura advises a greedy disciple to approach a guru on the *rāgānugā* platform to find out his eternal relationship with the Lord. “All this is possible, to begin with, only if one possesses guileless humility, intense greed and undeviating resolve for executing devotional service” (*Manaḥ-śikṣā*, p. 50).

I have been making a few comments on the verses of *Manaḥ-śikṣā* as part of my meditation on *japa* so that I could instruct my own mind. But in these later verses, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī has gone far beyond my capabilities. Can I, in good conscience, advise my mind to plunge into meditation on Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and Her entourage? But if I don’t do this, then what will I meditate on?

I have thought about this many times already. I always come up either with a theoretical resolution or no conclusion. The theoretical resolution is that I should try to link attentive chanting with meditation on the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Even at

my stage I can do this by reading *rasika* material between rounds and by deliberately thinking about Their pastimes. I am following this proposal, although it remains theoretical. My only problem is that my mind is still filled with other thoughts. This is my misfortune, the result of my misspent youth and of many misspent lifetimes.

Śrīla Prabhupāda initiated me and thus freed me from all sinful life. But the subtle mind still clings to the past. I am not puzzled by what I have to do. I have already discussed how I have to bring the mind out of distraction and refocus it again and again on the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Even if that hearing doesn't appear to take me into the further stages of spontaneously thinking of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, it will save me. That hearing is the work at hand—stay awake, don't think of the past, avoid all mental and visual distractions, just chant, and stay hopeful.

We have always heard that the goal is *kṛṣṇa-prema*, but now I am more aware of what that means. Even in our morning routine prayer recitation in the temple we say, "If one is infested with the ten offenses in the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, despite his endeavor to chant the holy name for many births, he will not get the love of Godhead which is the ultimate goal of this chanting" (C.c., Ādi 8.16). Immediately after reciting that prayer, we then go on to recite, "Now let us offer our respectful obeisances unto all the Vaiṣṇava devotees of the Lord who are just like desire trees, who can fulfill the desires of everyone, and who are full of compassion for the fallen souls."

Earlier, we worship *tulasī* and sing this song: "My desire is that you will also grant me a residence in the pleasure groves of Śrī Vṛndāvana-*dhāma*. Thus, within my vision I will always behold the beautiful pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I beg you to make me a follower of the cowherd damsels of Vraja." This is startling evidence that the goal of our *vaidhī-bhakti-sādhana* is service to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the pleasure groves of Vṛndāvana.

These prayers indicate both that *kṛṣṇa-prema* is the goal, and that it will only descend by the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas—all the Vaiṣṇavas, even the ones we work with now in ISKCON—but especially the liberated souls. Therefore, I have no other recourse but to keep endeavoring, to keep chanting. Although at present, I have to give my main attention to hearing the syllables of the *mahā-mantra*, I know that the *mahā-mantra* is an ocean of *rasa*. If I can just continue to stand on the beach of that ocean with faith, I too will one day enter the waters. By doing this basic work of trying to improve one's attentiveness in chanting, Kṛṣṇa will be pleased to award us more. Prabhupāda will be pleased. He used to quote his spiritual master: "Don't try to see Kṛṣṇa, but act in such a way that Kṛṣṇa sees you."

And so, my dear mind, even if you cannot immediately pick up the spirit of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's instructions in the later verses of *Manaḥ-śikṣā*, at least you should understand the goal. You and I have been together for many, many lifetimes and we will continue to travel together until we are completely spiritualized. Let us be in-

spired by hearing the instructions of a real devotee to his mind, and I pray that you will get the idea soon.

All these hopeful statements that I will personally attain *kṛṣṇa-prema* are confirmed by the *śāstras*. Pure devotional service is a continuous path from *bhāva-bhakti* to *rāgānugā* to *prema*. Even in the beginning stage, when we work under the guidance of the pure devotee, because we possess the seeds of *kṛṣṇa-prema*, the watering process of chanting and hearing will eventually result in ripened fruit.

There is no real duality or disparity between my hard work in chanting and the ability to remember Kṛṣṇa during *japa*. It is just a matter of perseverance and mercy. We cannot prematurely bring the two aspects of *japa* together, but neither should we be bewildered as to why we are not yet at a more advanced stage or think that that later stage is forever unattainable.

All glories to Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī whose picture is before me, chanting *japa* under a blossoming *kadamba* tree. That tree is blooming in response to Rūpa Gosvāmī's ecstasies. Rūpa Gosvāmī is happy to see Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa unite and unhappy when Rādhārāṇī suffers in separation from Kṛṣṇa.

And here is the photo of Prabhupāda on the wall of the van. It is the one where he is sitting on an old-fashioned wooden chair. There is a calendar from the "Calcutta Trading Company" up on the wall behind him. Śrīla Prabhupāda is serene, his arms are thin, the corners of his mouth are down-

turned. And he too, like Rūpa Gosvāmī, has his right hand in a white *japa-mālā* bag. They are my preceptors.

The sun is up now and I have chanted sixteen rounds. If this were my normal routine, I would be finished chanting for the day. I would prefer to do something else in Kṛṣṇa's service. Or I might want to chant, but there wouldn't be time. It doesn't seem right, however, to get the rounds done and out of the way before breakfast and then not return to it for another twenty-four hours.

I still cannot hear, although I am continually trying. I stood for awhile amid a group of small trees and gazed at the branches arching over the road. I was thinking of something or other, but then I thought that that time could have just as easily been spent chanting and hearing the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Just catch yourself doing something else and say, "Excuse me please, but is this more important than chanting?" Or, "Excuse me, but I am going to use this moment to actually hear the holy names."



10:30 A.M.

Sat on bed, kept awake one and a half hours by open window, very pleasant air outside. Long rounds, nine minutes, but I didn't try to rush them or judge them just on that account.

I could see before me the two areas of mental choice—distraction or attentiveness. I decided to

keep trying to hear. The involuntary distractions were more or less constant, but when I found myself in some protracted train of thought, I had sufficient mental awareness to regard my reverie as bizarre—after all, I am supposed to be chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, not reminiscing! So I went back to hearing. That moment of admittance and discovery of deliberate distraction is often a good time to switch to better attention than usual. And attention has come to mean thinking of Kṛṣṇa, whose name I chant.

I also followed propositions like, “It’s supposed to be service, service to the names themselves, by saying them.” Just considered it.

I was not facing my altar with pictures of gurus, Pañca-tattva, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Vṛndāvana. I was facing a wall. On the floor right in front of me was an empty container marked “San Benedetto” and the paraphernalia in my untidy *sucī* kit. I was aware that my mind was dwelling on whatever my eyes took in. The words “San Benedetto” led to one train of thought, and the sight of my shaving cream led to another. “This isn’t good, sitting in this direction; the altar is better,” I thought. But I was so well set up by the window—awake and prepared for a long haul in this posture—that I stayed put and mostly closed or half-closed my eyes.

Now a tractor is nearby in the fields and it is not as peaceful.

I think of others looking at this diary. It’s a testament, so I am responsible for setting down my

beliefs and discoveries. A diarist just writes what happens, and I have done that. But . . .

For example, I want to be clear about my lack of remorse. It is a spiritual poverty not to feel lowly and fallen. I didn't learn that on this retreat. But something happened here, I just don't know what. At a certain point, I detected that my admission of poor chanting becomes unproductive. Am I whining or nagging myself? So I also try to see the good and cheer this fellow up.

Anyway, I am trying to achieve a permanent, surrendered position. I am not looking for psychological balance or blissful sensations. I am looking for simplicity and humility, sorrow that I am still waiting for Kṛṣṇa to overpower me.

"My Vedic sacrifices . . . mantra-chanting and meditation are all useless and illusory. In my heart I know that without devotional service these things are a joke, like placing valuable ornaments on a naked body.

"Although again and again I heard the *śruti* and *smṛti* scriptures' declaration that one should take shelter of Lord Hari's lotus feet in order to become fearless, I did not chant Lord Kṛṣṇa's name, and I did not meditate on His transcendental form.

"I will now concentrate my mind on the lotus feet of Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and all my material desires will flee far away. Narottama dāsa says: now that I have fixed my mind on Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, I am no longer afraid of my future" (*Śrī Prārthanā*, Song 8, texts 2, 4-5).

Snapshot

This photo was taken on the roof in Bombay. I can see the palm trees behind. Only Śrīla Prabhupāda is present in this photo. You could call it a “grandness” photo. He is smiling kindly. Beautiful color of his *sannyāsa* cloth, soft tan-saffron, and his own color, his yellow *tilaka*. He holds a small *japa-mālā* in his right hand and leans forward on the chair. The chair is covered with a sheet and there is a white bolster against the wall. He sits at the edge of the chair, maybe preparing to stand up. He is beautiful. Beauty is not only possessed by young girls. *Paramahansa-sādhus* have a spiritual beauty that reminds us of their kindness.

Prabhupāda, I like this picture and I want to worship you. I know it is serious business and not for sentimentalists—the serving of the guru by the disciple. I am a little sentimental, and weak-hearted too. Weak-heartedness means *māyā*, but I want to get out. I don’t want to be considered an outsider. You have always allowed me entrance.

Bring me back to you. Give me an order as you used to. I am one of your boys from America. We didn’t all hold up so well under the pressure over the years, but we liked you in our sentimental way. And more than that—we desired to be fixed in your spirit of determination.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, you are here and I want to tell others about you. Please begin to speak, informally or in a lecture, so I can hear. And when you give

practical instructions for spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness, please include me.

It is not so hard, what you asked. You don't ask us to be perfect. You ask (demand) that we at least follow the minimum requirements and that we use our capacities to serve Kṛṣṇa in His movement. You are willing to accept us in a way that we can handle, and then from that strong and secure position, we muster up our energy—ourselves chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and distributing the chanting to others. You say, "Our movement is based on this principle of chanting the holy name of God . . . Chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra at every moment, as much as possible." Surely I can fit within that order and help carry it out. Then the smile you give us in this picture can be for me too.



3:45 P.M.

Thirty-five rounds done. Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa . . . mouthing the syllables, but not in the mind, not in the heart. Left to my not fully-occupied-by-chanting day, but as soon as there is a thread of interruption, I sense the urgency of my *japa-vrata*.

I sat on the chair and it collapsed. As I sat on the ground, MV came out with another chair. I have been wanting to thank his wife for her cooking—I don't want to seem ungrateful—but I haven't said it yet. Things I need to do slide by. Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare

Kṛṣṇa . . . I could go on like this, indifferent, irresponsible. Or could I?

Gaura-kiśora dāsa Bābājī was in another world calling, "Where are You, Gaura? Where are You, Rādhikā?" My problem is that I am completely in this world, but Hare Kṛṣṇa is *golokera prema-dhana hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana*. Tractor noise; cool, strong breeze tugs up this notebook. Any news by phone?

Two days left.

Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura told the prostitute, "I have been initiated into a vow to perform a great sacrifice by chanting the holy names a certain number of times every day. As long as the vow to chant is unfulfilled, I do not desire anything else. When I finish my chanting, then I have an opportunity to do anything" (C.c., *Antya* 3.240–41).

This *vrata* will soon end for me. I am meeting with MV tomorrow night, and then another meeting and *prasādam* on Friday night—that is our last chanting day. Then a busy day on Saturday, and Sunday we leave. No trace of what I did here except this writing? No, it has made it's mark on me.

Green grow the grasses
and the chill air persists.
I've got my private room
here where I munch
the syllables for everyone,
the great mantra for deliverance.
Chanted on by great souls
and little ones.

Five more rounds will make forty. Ever watch a man who makes baskets? Other laborers get paid by the hour, but basket-makers get paid according to how many baskets they finish. They learn to do it quickly, by the clock, with their deft fingers. But they have no life or intelligence or devotion for what they are doing, except of a very simple sort. Anyway, even if I were to compare myself to such a person, I would have to admit that making Hare Kṛṣṇa mantras instead of donuts or shoes or baskets makes a great difference. Even an imperfectly formed *mahā-mantra* can save me from the fear of death.

Sitting by the hour,
mahā-mantra, please be my friend,
teach me the art,
I can't do it on my own
but I want to chant You always.
Therefore my request—
please engage me nicely
in Your service.

Yesterday I had more coherence when I wrote at this time. Today I feel a bit scattered. I am still intent on my *japa*, but my attitude toward my writing is more like, "I don't owe you nothin'."

Oh, Madhu just returned. He is here with the van. A subtle interruption as he waits nearby for me to get in. Everyone here allows me my space. I go on chanting. I don't owe you nothin'.

“ . . . those who are interested in advancing in spiritual life must be silent. Silence means talking only of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. . . . We should also take this opportunity in life to become as good as a great saint simply by not talking unnecessarily with unwanted persons. We should either talk of Kṛṣṇa or chant Hare Kṛṣṇa undeviatingly. This is called *muni-vrata*” (*Bhāg.* 4.24.71).



6:30 P.M.

I am trying to complete this book. I can't sum up and conclude because my *japa* is still a work-in-progress. Put a sign up like you see in some stores: "Pardon our appearance. Renovation is underway to provide you better service. Construction is expected to be completed on ____."

Things I can't sum up:

1. Why I don't feel remorse at my lack of devotion in chanting.

2. Why I don't have attraction and relish for the holy names and what to do about it.

3. Why, when I chant, I cannot connect the mantras to Kṛṣṇa's *līlā-smaraṇam*—and what to do about it.

4. Why I cannot serve Śrīla Prabhupāda better and thus receive his blessings.

5. Which of the *nāmāparādhās* is holding me back and what to do about it.

6. What about the fact that after this *vrata*, my chanting is likely to slip down again to a neglected status?

*bhakativinoda prabhu-carāṇe pariyā
sei hari-nāma-mantra loilo māgiyā*

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says: I fall at the Lord's feet of Lord Gaurāṅga, and after begging for the holy name, he received that *mahā-mantra*.

—“*Arunodaya-kīrtana*,” Part 2, verse 5



Snapshot

Śrīla Prabhupāda is returning from a walk in Māyāpura. This was before the front gate was built, or the gardens, or the lotus fountain, and of course, the *samādhi*. You can see the thatched hut where Śrīla Prabhupāda used to live. He has stopped on the unpaved road to talk to Jaya Patāka Swami, who has some hair on his face. Maybe he is observing *cāturmāsya*. Śrīla Prabhupāda smiles and jokes, and two *sannyāsī* disciples reflect his smile. Maybe Śrīla Prabhupāda is joking with Jaya Patāka Swami about *cāturmāsya*. There is also a black and white dog in the picture, standing with the devotees as if he belonged there. It is a pleasant, light moment.

Surrendered servants of the guru can share such moments with their spiritual master. Rice or some other crop is growing where there is now a garden and housing for pilgrims. Māyāpura is undevelop-

ed at this stage, but Śrīla Prabhupāda is pleased to see his plans gradually unfolding. He knows it is the desire of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. He sees himself as his instrument.

In the evening he will talk in his room after the electricity goes out and lanterns are brought in. He will reminisce about his childhood in Calcutta or talk of Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Person or as a small cowherd boy. He will capture our imaginations and our love for Kṛṣṇa. He will tell more jokes. He will give us a vision of what we can become if we persist in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He will let us know that it will take hard work to develop Māyāpura into something wonderful (as his devotees are doing now and will continue to do). That dog is lucky.

We attain perfection by practice. The technical explanations of how to attain the spiritual body can be memorized, but that will not make us perfect. Like a child asking her mother, "How does the baby come out of you?" The mother answers, "When you grow up, you will know and I won't have to explain. And even if I explain now, you aren't going to understand." We have to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We have to take the association of the *rasika* Vaiṣṇavas, live in Vṛndāvana, and render devotional service with all our senses.

Let me practice just as now I am practicing the rudiments of *japa*. The day will come when Kṛṣṇa will reveal Himself. But this is the place to work from, begging for the holy name: "Please tell me, when will that day be mine—when my offenses

will end and a taste for the pure holy name will be infused within my heart by the power of divine grace? . . . I shall buy and plunder the mellows of the name of Hari, and becoming thoroughly intoxicated . . . I will be constantly immersed in the sweet nectar of the holy name" (*Kabe Ha'be Bolo*, verses 1, 7).

And you cannot attain this only by staying in your room and chanting: "When will there be an awakening of compassion for all fallen souls, and when will this Bhaktivinoda, forgetting his own happiness, with a meek heart set out to propagate by humble entreaty the sacred order of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu?" (*"Kabe Ha'be Bolo*, verse 8).



April 23, 2:05 A.M.

I woke a little late, said prayers, and started *japa* a little late, so I rushed the first six rounds. The sixth one was 6:25. Rushing is all right, but of course I am supposed to be praying and savoring and worshipping the holy name. I don't have anything to say about that. I am always dissatisfied and always eager to do more. Maybe I will overcome the worst and improve, but even when I do better, I realize that it still isn't much.

One devotee I know who doubted the potency of the holy name (and who later gave up chanting) said he could not tell for certain whether his

spiritual life was due to chanting or to something else, such as reading or God's grace. But we cannot refuse the main recommendation and Śrīla Prabhupāda's specific quota of a mere sixteen rounds.

One gain from this *japa-vrata* of three weeks is that I realize the insignificance of sixteen rounds. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Sixteen rounds is nothing. My spiritual master used to say that unless one chants at least sixty-four rounds of *japa*, he is considered fallen (*patita*).” So Śrīla Prabhupāda has leniently reduced this to an unavoidable number. "According to his calculation, practically every one of us is fallen, but because we are trying to serve the Supreme Lord with all seriousness and without duplicity, we can expect the mercy of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, who is famous as *patita-pāvana*, the deliverer of the fallen" (*Nectar of Instruction*, p. 54). And: "Such chanting must be offenseless in order to be of high quality. Mechanical chanting is not as powerful as chanting the holy name without offenses" (*C.c., Ādi 10.43*, purport).

My chanting is not very powerful. I say I am begging. I am begging the Lord to allow me to hear with devotion, that is my *bhakti*. But *begging* sincerely, please, I must have this devotional service unto You. Please don't deny me. This nectar is eluding me up to now and I can't capture it by chasing after it or doubling my quota. Only by your mercy. "O deliverer of the fallen, please give this treasure to me, for I have no one to turn to except for You" (*Prārthanā*, p. 26, Song 9, verse 3).

Gathering the quotes as evidence for your case. But you cannot convince Kṛṣṇa in that way. He likes to hear the scriptures and the words of His pure devotees, but they must be presented by a sincere servitor in order to please Him.

I don't like to think that Kṛṣṇa rates the devotees in a hierarchy, but it's true that some please Him more than others. He gives everyone what they want. "As they surrender, I reward them accordingly." But I want to please Him. Please let me take my actual place, Lord, although it may seem insignificant on the scale of devotees, and let me serve You without envy of my betters.

Yet what is my place? This distracted chanting is not my *svārūpa-siddha*. I am covered by *māyā*. She won't let me go because I have not indicated to her that I want to be free. That means all my protestations and praises of Kṛṣṇa are not taken so seriously as yet. "O merciful one, if You will not give Your great mercy to suffering me, what is the use of all these words?" (*Vilāpa-kusumāñjali*, Verse 103).

On the track of sincerity . . . You have to suffer because you haven't derived the nectar of intimate service. Lord Caitanya demonstrated this by saying that if He actually loved Kṛṣṇa, then how could He live in separation from Him? I have not attained the mercy of the nectar of *harer nāma*. I say I am begging for it. But when I do not receive it, I am not pained. As long as I sleep and eat I am satisfied. I will keep trying, but I must have my comforts. My

lack of love for Kṛṣṇa doesn't make me uncomfortable.

Therefore, that big first step is remorse. I cannot attain You, and this is making me unhappy. If I have no unhappiness at my lacking . . . it indicates I don't desire it strongly.

In the absence of meeting there is separation, but for a pure devotee, both these states are filled with love for Kṛṣṇa. In the absence of love for Kṛṣṇa, you have nothing. Sensing this "nothing" state of your so-called devotional activities, if still you don't feel regret, then you are worse than nothing. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, I cannot cite your words as if they are my words, but you are a friend to all fallen souls, so I recite your songs. I see you as my friend. You express the pain and the dark night of the soul that one must pass through: "O Lord Hari, everything I do is inauspicious. I have uselessly wasted my life, and I have no love for You. It is as if my heart were pierced by a sharp javelin" (*Prārthanā*, Song 8, text 1, p. 22).

"If, grasping his hair, You mercifully pull this person from illusion's well and place him in the abode of Vraja, he will see that as his great good fortune. Otherwise, his life will end. Poor and fallen Narottama dāsa sings this song" (*Prārthanā*, Song 6, text 4).

Śrīla Prabhupāda liked to sing "*Hari Hari Bifale*," which captures this mood. "The treasure of love of God has descended from the spiritual world of

Goloka Vṛndāvana, appearing in this world as the *saṅkīrtana* movement and the chanting of Lord Hari's holy names. Why was I not attracted to it? Day and night I burned in the poison of material existence, but still I refused to take the antidote" (*Prārthanā*, Song 4, text 2).

Fortunately, Lord Caitanya appeared as the son of Śacidevī and Lord Balarāma appeared as Lord Nityānanda. They lifted the most fallen souls by the chanting of the holy names. The story of Jagāi and Mādhāi testifies to the truth of this. Śrīla Prabhupāda came to save thousands of Jagāis and Mādhāis. Why not me too?

Śrīla Prabhupāda, by your singing of this song, you invite your followers to sing it and to enter its meaning. You don't want us to be excluded. You teach the specific method of pleasing Kṛṣṇa by serving the *saṅkīrtana* movement. I wish to serve in your movement, but I am sometimes confused. Even when you and your devotees show me the path that I must take, I feel weak and devious. I am not fit to repeat Narottama's words or to embrace them as my own, although sometimes I do. Having failed in various ways, still you keep me. Please don't kick me away. Now that I am chanting, I beg that a drop of *bhakti* may enter my heart so I will be able to act in the proper way. I know you want to see deeds rather than cheap words.

Here is Verse 11 of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's *Manah-śikṣā*:

O dear mind, in order to receive the direct service of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and Giridhārī Kṛṣṇa, who are intoxicated with and attracted to amorous pastimes with each other, and of their confidential and eternal associates, simply take shelter of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, following his instructions of relishing the five types of ambrosial service to Lord Kṛṣṇa according to proper standards, namely: worshiping, glorification, meditation, hearing, and offering obeisances (*arcanam, kīrtanam, dhyāna, śravaṇam, and praṇāma*). And simultaneously serve Govardhana Hill.

In the *Śrī Bhajana-darpaṇa* commentary, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura unequivocally says that the other *rasas* with Kṛṣṇa are “less attractive” in comparison to the amorous pastimes of the conjugal mellow. He then describes the meaning of direct service: “Devotional service rendered on the stage of *sādhana-bhakti* is more like going through the motions; it is not direct service to the Lord. In these early stages of perfection, one serves the Lord from a distance” (p. 51).

Direct service is possible only when one attains his original spiritual body. At that time, “the devotee’s heart cannot be touched by any sadness or sorrow because now his sole concern is to serve his beloved object without the slightest desire for self-aggrandizement.” Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura explains that *vipralambha*, or separation from Kṛṣṇa which is seemingly painful, is actually another type of ecstasy and can never be compared to material sadness.

I am struck by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's plain statement that *sādhana-bhakti* is only going through the motions. I need to hear this. We all need to hear this. It removes any false conception we may have that we are more advanced than we are, but it does not leave us discouraged. It encourages us to understand what the *goal* of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is. If we thought the goal is just to get a little more attentive and to chant some extra rounds—how could we actually live for that? Our inner self wouldn't be satisfied with such a goal.

We are not just trying to convince ourselves that Kṛṣṇa exists when He doesn't. We should not lose sight of the goal as we practice *sādhana*. There is something beyond *sādhana*. We are meant to serve Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Their conjugal pastimes. This goal is not the same as the distant service that we have rendered through *sādhana-bhakti*.

Also, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is explicit and enlightening in his definition of direct service. Direct service means residence in Goloka Vṛndāvana and handing betel nuts to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Anything before that is part of our approach; it is indirect. Again, this dispels any complacent idea we had that we are already serving Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa directly.

It reminds me of Śrīla Prabhupāda's first essay, written as an homage to his spiritual master. At the end of the essay he said, "I do not expect to do direct service for many crores of lifetimes." We may have wondered why he wrote that. Of course, we recognize the humility in that statement, but now we can also see what he meant by "direct service."

The tiny conditioned soul, if he is a sincere *bhakta*, won't become defeated (although he may become deflated) when he hears that the goal is something very wonderful and that at present, it is far away from him. There is the example of Mukunda dāsa who heard that he would not attain the direct association of Lord Caitanya for millions of births. He danced in ecstasy when he heard that it was at least possible.

How does our own attainment in the future become fixed? How will we attain it? It is in our hands. It will become fixed by our own desire for it: "This is *my* goal. It is not only the goal of the scriptures, but it has become my goal. I will not accept anything else as my goal. Now I know what my life is meant for. Now let me work toward it without becoming distracted."

This is the real misfortune of distractions in chanting. A distraction is anything that draws attention away from pursuing my goal of a hundred percent service to Kṛṣṇa. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes it so nicely that when one actually enters that loving state of wanting Kṛṣṇa's and Rādhā's happiness and nothing else, then automatically one doesn't have any sadness or tribulation. It makes sense that all the things that might happen to us in life upset us because they upset our plans for sense gratification. But nothing is going to interrupt our desire to serve Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa except our own unwillingness and lack of devotion.

It is crucial, urgent, that I develop faith and that I keep my *sādhana* foundation. Hearing about these

higher *rasas* does not make me less conscientious about basic *sādhana-bhakti*, but rather, more aware that I have to build from a solid foundation of attentive chanting and hearing.

Sometimes I imagine people asking me what I get out of the chanting. I think I would answer that question differently according to the inquirer. If I was being challenged by a nondevotee, I would have to answer in a calculated way, telling them how on the psychological level, I get satisfaction from working seriously at my spiritual vocation. I would also say something about chanting helping my awareness of the reality of God's existence. There is also satisfaction in serving my spiritual master in this way.

But if the question were asked more sympathetically, I would say I get out of it whatever I put into it. In other words, devotion to chanting fills my life with devotion. By feeling reciprocation from the holy name, then I would be more satisfied and not need to demand more reciprocation.

Dryness and inattention is due to my lack of devotion. Everyone knows what it means to be devoted. People are devoted to their families or to their jobs. Their consciousnesses are actually absorbed in those pursuits. We usually see good results from people's devotion. Therefore, if I can be devoted to my *japa*, I will be able to continue chanting because devotion is self-rewarding. Kṛṣṇa even told the *gopīs* that it was their devotion to Him that captured Him and that there was no way He could repay

their devotion. He asked them to be satisfied with their own good deeds.

I am desiring devotion to *bhakti*'s topmost, merciful activity, the chanting of the holy names. It may be that I have to wait crores of births before attaining direct service to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, but as soon as possible, even now, I can put devotion into my *sādhana-bhakti*. If I do that, then it will be more than just going through the motions. And although I will remain distant because I am still imperfect, yet I can hear about the direct service which Raghunātha Gosvāmī renders in his form as Rati-mañjarī to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, I can hear about Rūpa Gosvāmī's service as Rūpa-mañjarī, and I can hear about Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. In this way I can pass my days profitably in this lifetime.



6:45 A.M.

I hope to take such time for intensive work on my *sādhana* again. This *japa* retreat has taught me that it is possible to put aside all other pursuits and just work on chanting or reading. I would like to work on reading the next time I get a chance. I am looking for a fresh approach to Srīla Prabhupāda's books. My reading and enjoyment of his books has dwindled somewhat, and I know I can correct it. It is always possible to make at least some progress. Even a little progress is encouraging.

The benefit of chanting more each day on beads: you know there will always be another chance. What you did so far this morning may not have been very good, but there will be another opportunity. And even if none of your sessions are particularly good, they will add up. You are bound to have a few good moments out of so much chanting. But if you finish after sixteen, then there is no more chance, and tomorrow you will also probably chant poorly . . . so it goes with no room for improvement.

Don't slight the names. You do that when you deliberately think or do other things while you are fingering the beads and chanting. You don't like being neglected, so don't neglect the holy names. O Holy Names, please notice at least that I am often attempting to chant Your names in ecstatic devotion. I cannot accomplish this on my own. I need Your help. One of these days my offenses will clear—please make it so.



10:30 A.M.

*nāmāparādha-yuktānām
nāmāny eva haranty agham
aviśrānti-prayuktāni
tāny evārtha-karāṇi ca*

The chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa is recommended for persons who commit offenses, because if they continue chanting they will gradually chant offenselessly. Even if in the beginning one chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra with offenses, one will become free from such offenses by chanting again.

—Padma Purāṇa

But there are other things to do also, and they are worth repeating. One has to lead a pure life. One has to read only *śāstra*, including the books of the Six Gosvāmīs. (But I cannot tell you, “Don’t talk to anyone, don’t read mail, don’t travel.” I am aware this *vrata* is almost over, and already new schemes are entering my thoughts during *japa*—what I will do in a few days, where we will park our van at Villa Vṛndāvana, who we will meet there, what we will say, what it will be like, some nondevotee books I may order to help my writing form . . . This doesn’t help. It was better when I was deep in the midst of this *vrata* time and wrestling with only immediate distractions. And yet they too could not be overcome.)

I pin my hope on chanting itself and the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas.

They say sinful life has ended. Liberation is achieved by once chanting the name of the Lord. “As a result of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, one makes such great advancement in spiritual life that simultaneously his material existence terminates and he receives love of Godhead. The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is so powerful that by chanting even one name, one very easily achieves these transcendental riches” (C.c., Ādi 8.28, purport).



Snapshot

(Coming to you, Śrīla Prabhupāda, by looking at your picture, this next to last day of a *japa* retreat. And I have plans to speak of you in many lectures and to spend the best time of my mornings in your books. I will go on hearing your tapes at breakfast and lunch, whenever I can. I want to come close to you despite my lacks.)

Śrīla Prabhupāda on a walk in Māyāpura. The sun is just rising. Those who walk with him are closing in, finding their places. Hari-śauri is about to execute the delicate maneuver of adjusting your *cādar* so it doesn't slip off your shoulder while he walks. Śrīla Prabhupāda, you are not paying him any attention but walking straight ahead. You carry a cane from the later years, silver-handled. Your *guru mahārāja* on a button pinned to your beadbag. You are aged, although always sublime and transcendental. You are not speaking at the moment. The *sannyāsī* with the tape recorder has the microphone held back. This is on the grounds of ISKCON Māyāpura.

One cannot see the spiritual master; one has to hear with devotion. Śrīla Prabhupāda says you cannot become enlightened by challenging the guru in a public meeting. It takes submission. Walking over this holy ground with your men. Soon you will speak something. Now we hear the sounds of many steps and the morning sounds of Māyāpura.

When you speak we must listen well. I will not be envious or political with my Godbrothers. "Since

a devotee is kind to everyone, he does not act in such a way as to put others into anxiety. At the same time, if others try to put a devotee into anxiety, he is not disturbed" (Bg. 12.15, purport).

You give ample instructions. Let me follow, walking beside you in silence, hearing.

•

12:50 A.M., A next-to-last-day joke

MV has invited a professor to lunch. He asked Madhu if I would like to meet with him, but Madhu deferred, reminding MV that I had come here for a special purpose. So I thought of telling MV this:

"Don't you know that I am in a deep, inner mood? I don't want to break it yet. I may meet with you or others on occasions and you may think that I am relating in a casual way, but actually I am absorbed in *japa-vrata*."

That's the joke.

But it's true that I am clinging to my special space. I feel it is about to be taken away so I notice it. When you chant within the protection of undisturbed *bhajana*, it is simply different than pacing the floor between meetings, hurriedly "finishing your rounds" with a mind blazing full of schemes and agitations.

•

4:00 P.M.

Dear fellow chanters, you know better than I what you have to do. Just accept me as your friend, fellow sufferer and fellow rejoicer in the gift of *harer nāma*.

I don't know exactly what to do myself to cross over hurdles like *pramāda* and lovelessness, so how can I presume to teach you? I have quoted many nectarean passages from Prabhupāda and Vaiṣṇava scriptures. The gurus and *śāstras* are our guides.

I write this having just chanted for another hour and a half. It was empty, but not void. I was chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, but with the outer covering. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says that when we chant with this outer covering, we are not actually chanting the name. I regret my inability. I regret that I don't break down and cry, "I don't want this! I want real chanting, please!"

It was an hour and a half well-spent in terms of what else I could have done. Forty rounds a day is time well-spent, and three weeks at that rate is no waste. The more I see that I don't chant well, the better it is that I keep on trying.

You can't lose in chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. Even a miss is a gain. Even though I am only going through the motions and *śāstra* tells us that such mechanical chanting doesn't attract Kṛṣṇa, yet it is the best I can do right now. I offer it to Him with a sincere apology, and I continue making my offering.

Browsed through *Entering the Life of Prayer*. Sometimes I like it better than at other times. This time I read it and thought it was teaching me. Something was there.

When I wrote that book, I was *agitated, moved* in some deep part of myself, stirred and spurred to commit myself to "constant prayer." I wanted to admit wrongs and live for the inner life of honesty. I wanted to devotedly and regularly offer myself to Kṛṣṇa.

Here is an excerpt from that book, from that period of my life:

Turn away from absorption in exterior things, even though they may be service to the Lord, and just address yourself to Him in a nonhurried way.

—p. 90

I haven't rejected that book. I expressed things a little differently than I would today. Now I am less discursive about "prayer." In a certain sense, I also lack the intensity that pervades *Entering the Life of Prayer*. So I read it, almost as if it was written by a different person, but a person I can learn from and appreciate:

I may decide to always live in one of the existing temples and travel sometimes away from it, or to always travel, or to select a base and create a new temple there. These are details of how to live. My inner man should be more concerned with the decision he has already made, which is irrevocable. And that is, to go forward and talk with Kṛṣṇa more and more and don't give that up.

One way of life may be more conducive to it than another. But I want to pursue it even when it is dry and when you seem to forget it completely. God is in your heart and you can pray to Him—that is important.

—p. 53

So getting alone and trying to enter one's relationship with Kṛṣṇa is not just for sweetness, but for the real surrender and feeling unworthy, step by step. Without artificiality, we try to understand this according to the timing and the indications from the Lord.

—p. 52

I was also aware back then that chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is the real life of prayer.

This should be the first attention for prayer improvement. What I want to reach is not a new mystic connection with the Lord as much as just to enter attentive chanting as a servant and to be able to say, "Good, you are doing better. You are paying attention to the sound of the Lord's names Hare, Kṛṣṇa, and Rāma." Just be very simple and hear and chant and ask the Lord to let you hear and chant. Please engage me in Your service, starting with chanting.

—p. 69



7:00 P.M.

Prabhupāda, please save me from Mr. Lust.

Dear mind, don't lust after women who all belong to Kṛṣṇa.

May I quiet down this madness of any useless things which pass through the mind, and think instead of Kṛṣṇa. I am tired of not being able to do it. But it's clear that I cannot do it on my own. I have nothing to say but "Please help me."

Now I have started talking with people—I'm coming out of my *bhajana-kuṭīr*.

There is a water pump that works often in this house. There have been other noises too, but on the whole, it has been a good place to chant. We don't have to go to the desert or forest, but we can find a room alone—and be left alone. At least for the intensive care program, I needed to be alone, and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura recommends this: "The devotee should make it a practice to spend a little time alone in a quiet place and concentrate deeply on the holy name" (*HNC*, p. 84). In an earlier section he states: "Another effective method to remove apathy toward the holy name is to sit alone in a closed room and meditate on the name as did the previous sages" (*HNC*, p. 82).

Goodbye to this small, cold room overlooking farmlands. Mahāvākya says he is moving soon to a new house in a more secluded spot. He will open a

preaching center called “Govinda Bhavan.” He invited me to come there next year. Maybe I will take him up on it, if not for three weeks, then at least three days would be helpful.



Snapshot

(Close the day with an image of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Close the life with a picture of him. Start a new life, maintain a life . . . Prabhupāda walking into your dreams, into your life.)

So many morning walk photos. This looks like Māyāpura again. Śrīla Prabhupāda is shorter than the others, but he is in the lead. I seem less able to respond in words. His face isn’t clear in this photo. I am there too. Rūpānuga as a *sannyāsī*. Young Jaya Śacinandana dāsa *brahmacārī* . . . I just can’t write anything, Prabhupāda. It would come out too literary. You are with me (with us) anyway. Let me close this day by leaving this page and squeezing out a last extra-extra round. This is my primary service to you with which we begin and end our spiritual life.

“Forget the past that sleeps and ne’er the future dream at all . . . ” But now, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

—He told you to do it,
he asked you,
he charmed you to,
he gave you the red beads,

he promised wonderful things would come
if you would just be patient,
a revolution, Lord Caitanya's mercy.
Finger them, think of him,
hear—
then it will come.

•

April 24, 2:10 A.M.

Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa. Chanting too fast? No, speed is okay, yet sometimes you think, "How can I recall and savor that Kṛṣṇa attracts Rādhā and that Rādhā attracts Kṛṣṇa, and They meet in various rendezvous in Vraja, if I'm saying Their names so fast?" But if I slow down, it doesn't actually enhance *līlā* meditation. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "One who cannot remember Kṛṣṇa, let him always hear Hare Kṛṣṇa, and then when he has perfected this art, then always he will remember Kṛṣṇa, His activities, His qualities, etc." (Letter to Śivānanda, December 4, 1968).

One Godbrother said about his devotional service in general: "We used to be so enthusiastic. Now the ecstasy has been replaced by a sobriety." One has responsibilities in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, heavy duties. But where is the joy in service and in remembering what Kṛṣṇa likes to do with His dearest?

Yet Śrīla Prabhupāda assures us, this *saṅkīrtana* movement is very dear to Kṛṣṇa. Work for spread-

ing the holy name and Kṛṣṇa will be pleased with us.

Three weeks are gone. I must say goodbye to the increased *vrata*. The calendar days are all checked off. It now seems like just a brief effort.

Just as a sincere host and good friend says, “Come back again soon, and next time stay longer”—so my *japa* needs are telling me, “We’d love to have you again. Please come back. Next time will be even nicer.”

This is the “yea-saying” to devotional life. Yes, I will chant. Yes, I do chant. I am a Hare Kṛṣṇa person, I like to chant all day whenever I can. I am not like Dracula when you show him the cross. For me, the offer to chant on my beads is always welcome. The retreat gave a refreshed sense of proof that this is so.

“While the body is fit, therefore, why should we not chant the holy name of the Lord loudly and distinctly? . . . one who chants the holy name of the Lord constantly is guaranteed to return home, back to Godhead without a doubt” (*Bhāg.* 6.2.49, purport).

The twelfth and final verse of *Manaḥ-śikṣā* is a *śruti-phala*, a benediction to the readers of the poem. The *śruti-phala* says that if one reads the eleven excellent verses of *Manaḥ-śikṣā*, instructions to the mind, while situated as a follower of Rūpa Gosvāmī and the *rūpānugas*, then he will get the fruit,

which is direct service to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. It is a priceless jewel. It is a very clear and explicit goal.

I feel helpless to respond to this benediction. In the face of this tremendous, pure perfection of Raghunātha Gosvāmī, what can I say? I have no realization. But here I am on my last morning. It is my last chance to add something.

I have no *śruti-phala* for my readers. This is a beggar's book, and as such, it may be helpful to others who are begging. That may be my *śruti-phala*. Please take the benedictions that Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī is offering. He is competent to bless us all. It is proper that a book for Vaiṣṇavas should close with a benediction, so please accept this benediction.

Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī is speaking to his own mind and teaching us how to speak to ours. He tells us that if we make ourselves followers of Rūpa Gosvāmī (and Śrīla Prabhupāda), we too can attain the priceless jewel of *kṛṣṇa-prema*. (I think I know why I was reluctant to comment on this verse—because it is a *śruti-phala*. All I have to do is receive it, but how could I offer some response other than my willing reception?)

A *śruti-phala* is a gift in one of the six exchanges between Vaiṣṇavas. Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī is giving and we have to receive. To receive the blessings of the previous *ācāryas* is not easy because we have to be qualified. When I have actually received this blessing, I will be able to give to others.

I want to really understand how important it is to beseech the mind to cooperate with our attempts to chant *japa*. In a sense, the mind is responsible for our *japa*. When the mind is under control, we can actually hear the holy names without being attentive to other “noises.” It requires the cooperation of the mind.

Of course, we also know that it is not just the “badness” of our minds, but the material world is filled with distraction. However, the mind has become so implicated in past activities and impressions that he has become part of the problem.

Kṛṣṇa’s power and attraction is greater than *māyā*’s, so although it is not easy for the mind, we have to coax him, sometimes sternly, and preach to him about the wonderful effects that will come from hearing the holy name in faith. So *manaḥ-śikṣā*, to instruct and pray to the mind is a central part of *japa*.

One way to practice *manaḥ-śikṣā* is to talk to the mind during *japa* (or at other times) and ask his full cooperation. We also have to ensure that the mind does not become absorbed in other things, either during the *japa* hour or during the day. We have to protect our minds from mundane engagement. Then, if we become enough of a friend of our mind, we can become aware of our mental activity. We can become conscious. The mind will begin to signal to us: “Now I am thinking nonsense, now I am chewing the chewed. What are you going to do about it?” When the mind gives that signal, then we can immediately preach to our minds: “Wake

up! Hear the holy names!" Therefore, dear friends, let's follow the previous *ācāryas* and instruct our minds in a friendly way, always conscious of the goal we want to attain—attentive, devotional chanting.

Before leaving this place, I will give a *Bhāgavatam* class at the preaching center. I have picked some First Canto verses where Vyāsadeva expresses his dissatisfaction after having compiled the *Vedas*. The author who compiled all the scriptures for the welfare of humankind was still not satisfied in his mind. "This may be because I did not specifically point out the devotional service of the Lord, which is dear both to perfect beings and to the infallible Lord" (*Bhāg.* 1.4.31). Just as Vyāsa thought this, his guru, Nārada, arrived.

That is the story of my *japa* retreat.



10:35 A.M.

A late morning slough, with a couple of rounds taking twelve minutes each. He shouldn't have served us that pudding for breakfast, but then I didn't have to eat it; I could have pushed it aside in favor of late morning alertness.

Embarrassing because one wanted to make a sterling, last-day performance. No such luck. Anyway, who am I trying to convince? This isn't an audition for a Broadway show. And this is not the

last day. Slowly, I may learn by my mistakes. But who has enough time to waste a few mornings in a mental bog?

The themes I thought of during *japa*—they could make a wild, surreal movie. I wouldn't even be able to remember them if I tried.

Here is a statement on *japa* from a letter by Prabhupāda to Satsvarūpa dāsa, March 8, 1969. Satsvarūpa had written to Prabhupāda saying that he had heard from a Godbrother that Prabhupāda was chanting *japa* and a disciple was present who was also chanting. Supposedly, Prabhupāda told the disciple, "*Japa* should be chanted very softly." Satsvarūpa asked Prabhupāda if this was true. Here is the reply:

"Regarding your question, there is no such requirement that *japa* should be silently and chanting should be done differently. Loudly or silently, everything is all right. There is no such restriction. Only thing is that we should chant very attentively, hearing the vibration very distinctly."

That last sentence has been a motto for me for the last few days. I keep going back to it, telling myself, "Chant very attentively, Prabhupāda says, and hear the vibration distinctly." That is what he wants us to do.

This is my writing time on the last day. That slow, drowsy stuff leaves me feeling a bit angry. I am going to go back now and hit it hard, some better *japa*, you'll see.

•

11:40 A.M.

Overcast day. Tractor noisy in the fields. It's warmer. This is not the last day. Chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa will continue.

Tiny bugs with twin antennae land on my saffron cotton lap. I chant to them. Tiny bluebell wildflowers, I chant to you. This is better chanting.

•

Snapshot

This is a picture of Prabhupāda chanting *gāyatrī* on the bank of the Yamunā. Scattered saffron garments indicate his *brahmacārī* and *sannyāsa* disciples are bathing in the Yamunā. Śrīla Prabhupāda's left hand covers his right hand—we cannot actually see his *brāhmaṇa* thread—but it is obvious what he is doing. He sits erect, concentrated. The sunlight makes us unable to see if his eyes are closed, but it seems so. There is a little slope of sandy land behind him and Śrīla Prabhupāda's head and shoulders are outlined by the sky. It is an unusual and

meditative picture. Sunshine on the left side of his face, the other side in darkness.

His ancient demeanor, a sage—more than a sage—a dearest devotee of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. He sits on the bank of the Yamunā in his eternal mood. Yet before his eyes, his rowdy Western disciples are playing in the water. He has brought them here to this topmost *tīrtha*, even though they cannot fully enter the *rasa*. Śrīla Prabhupāda has personally brought us all, taken us by the hand, and allowed us to enter Vṛndāvana, although we are lowborn.

He kept his *rasa* with Kṛṣṇa private. We were not qualified to understand it. It is said that if a pure devotee doesn't give even a scent of his inner *rasa*, of his *bhajana* with Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, then that is a sign that his *bhakti* is genuine and deep. Śrīla Prabhupāda was grave. Even in Vṛndāvana he didn't tell many stories of Kṛṣṇa's pranks in the Yamunā. Here he sits silently chanting *gāyatrī*, but it is not the *gāyatrī* of an ordinary *brāhmaṇa* or even of a sage who worships Nārāyaṇa. He is Kṛṣṇa's pure devotee, Lord Caitanya's empowered preacher . . .

The sunlight glows on his bare knee and warms up his body. Śrīla Prabhupāda will sit like that for only five minutes or so, then he will open his eyes and see the dancing white elephants, his dependent, spiritual children. They will come to him and ask him what to think and how to behave. Śrīla Prabhupāda guides us still, and this photo reminds us that he is the eternal guide for Vṛndāvana-*bhajana*. He is a resident of Vṛndāvana.

3:30 P.M.

Never doubt the importance of chanting your sixteen rounds. A "*mahā-vākya*" instruction from Śrīla Prabhupāda is as follows: "Of all the regulative principles, the spiritual master's order to chant at least sixteen rounds is most essential" (C.c., *Madhya* 22.113, purport). And there are many other statements to indicate that chanting sixteen rounds is a must for sincere followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda. "It is essential, however, that everyone fulfill a specific vow to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Therefore, we have prescribed in our society that all our students must chant at least sixteen rounds daily" (C.c., *Ādi* 10.43, purport).

If it must be done, then obviously it needs to be done well. One of the ways to counteract offenses in chanting is to increase the vow beyond the bare minimum. It is also important to study the ten offenses as in authorized books like *Harināma-cintāmaṇi*, and to study oneself in order to extirpate the *aparādhas*. And practice, practice, practice fixing the mind with attention on each bead of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.

There is no conflict in principle between intensive *japa* meditation and the concentration needed to do outward preaching. They are parts of the one whole—a devotee should preach and behave well, like Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura. Chant and hear, chant and preach.



4:00 P.M., Snapshot

Here comes Śrīla Prabhupāda walking toward us on the part of the *parikrama* trail where it looks bare and devastated. He looks very gentlemanly, holding his *cādar* with one hand and the cane under the *cādar*, the *sannyāsa* robes flowing as he walks. Surprisingly, he is only with two “unimportant” devotees and a Western-dressed Indian man. He is walking in Vṛndāvana. It’s a distant shot.

Prabhupāda, we fulfill Rūpa Gosvāmī’s *upadeśa* for ideal chanting by following you. Rūpa Gosvāmī says, “One should reside in Vraja and serve Kṛṣṇa under the guidance of devotees.” One should follow in the footsteps of the Lord’s beloved devotees who are *anurāga*, *rūpānuga*. If the eyes can only see a rubble-strewn Yamunā bank and deteriorating temple buildings, then those eyes do not see with inner vision.

This photo is a bit of a mystery to me. But then you did so many things I am not able to understand. You are not my pet that I should be able to see into you; you are *jagad-guru* who can expand into many *svarūpas*, appear with many persons, and help conditioned souls by giving them your association. We see you walking and we bow down, touching all eight parts of our bodies on the sacred earth.

“Jaya!”

“Jaya Śrīla Prabhupāda!”

“Now is your *japa-yajña* finished?”

"It will never be finished, Śrīla Prabhupāda. I realize better that I will always chant Hare Kṛṣṇa under your shelter. Please let me come with you or send me wherever you think I should go to help preach in your movement."

"Very good. Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa."

Just a dream? But he actually came here. He is still here and he will be back.

In this photo, everyone is chanting *japa*. Śrīla Prabhupāda hardly went anywhere without his *japa* beads...



6:40 P.M.

In a rush at the end of day. Had my meeting. My last-try five rounds. Spacy. Thoughts on the mind not conducive to *japa*. I see myself coming out of a meditative period. It was a good time, desirable and introspective.

The water pump in the house. The peaceful sunset time. Houses far apart here. Waiting for evening milk. Already feeling frustrated.

Some are frustrated by reading books like *Harināma-cintāmaṇi* and *Manaḥ-śikṣā* and by considering, "Why can't I attain *nāma-rasa*?" Some are frustrated that they don't make more money or don't have a bigger house.

There are so many traps laid by *māyā*, even for the sincere devotee. Raghunātha Gosvāmī has

warned that the desire for fame is like a shameless prostitute whom we allow to dance in our hearts.

"I don't want to be famous," he said, as he finished his book on chanting.

Pray—I pray to you, dear mind and self, please pray in the morning like you didn't do tonight, with tongue and mind in Vraja, recalling Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa—His name again and again.

Loading books and papers into the van, selecting a verse for tomorrow night's *Gītā* class.

Kṛṣṇa, it's You who are lovable and who we want to hear from, not from a lousy chanter in this world. You play with Balarāma tossing balls and playing flutes. You play with Rādhikā in private caves at Govardhana, attended by the *mañjarīs*. You play by expanding yourself into hundreds of Kṛṣṇas to be beside each *gopī*. Your day-long play ends and You come home at night with the dust from the cows' hooves powdered on Your body. You are received and protected by Nanda and Yaśodā. Please let me drink in these narrations. Please give me *harer nāma*, the nectar drink for a starved and dry soul.

Here is a last statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraging us all to go on chanting (*Bhāg.* 4.20.26):

Those who are not animals but actually intelligent, advanced, human, civilized men cannot give up this practice of continually chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

Glossary

A

- ācārya*—spiritual master who teaches by example
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda—founder-
 ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Con-
 sciousness
anartha—unwanted habits or thoughts
aparādha—offense
ārati—a ceremony for worshiping the Lord with incense,
 ghee lamps, flowers, fans, and other paraphernalia
āroha-panṭha—the ascending method of attaining know-
 ledge
āśrama—the four spiritual orders of life: celibate stu-
 dent, householder, retired life, and renounced life; a
 dwelling place for spiritual shelter
avaroha-panṭha—the descending method of attaining
 knowledge

B

- bābājī*—one who retires from society to practice solitary
 prayer and meditation
Bhagavad-gītā—literally, “Song of God”; a discourse be-
 tween Lord Kṛṣṇa and His devotee Arjuna in which
 Kṛṣṇa explains devotional service to the Supreme
 Lord as the ultimate goal of life
bhakta—devotee of God
bhakti—devotion to God
Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura—spiritual master
 of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and
 founder of the Gauḍīya Maṭha
Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura—the father of Bhakti-
 siddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and a great *ācārya* in
 disciplic succession from Lord Caitanya. He authored
 many books on the philosophy and teachings of Lord
 Caitanya as well as devotional songs collected into
 books like *Śaraṇāgati*, *Gītāvalī*, etc.

- bhakti-yoga*—linking with the Supreme Lord through devotional service
bhajana—worship or practice of prayer and internal meditation
bhāva—the stage of love of God preceding *prema*
bhaya—fear
brahmacārī—celibate student; member of the first order of Vedic society
 Brahman—the Absolute Truth; especially the impersonal aspect of the Absolute
brāhmaṇa—a member of the priestly order learned in the *Vedas*; one who can guide society

C

- cādar*—shawl
Caitanya-caritāmṛta—a biography of Lord Caitanya composed by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī
 Caitanya Mahāprabhu—the incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa who appeared in West Bengal during the 15th Century to teach love of God by chanting His holy names, the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra

D

- dhāma*—spiritual abode; the place of the Lord's pastimes
 Deity—an authorized form of the Lord made for accepting worship according to regulations in bona fide scripture

E

- Ekādaśī—a special fast day for increased remembrance of Lord Kṛṣṇa, observed twice a month on the eleventh day of the waxing and the waning moon

G

- gosvāmī (goswami)—master of the senses
 guru—spiritual master

H

Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra—Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare

harer nāma (harināma)—the holy name of the Lord

Hari—a name for Kṛṣṇa that means “one who takes away all inauspicious things”

haribol—chant the name of Hari

Haridāsa Ṭhākura—great devotee of Lord Caitanya known as “Nāmācārya” or chief instructor on chanting the holy names

hari-kathā—talks about Kṛṣṇa and His pastimes

Harināma-cintāmaṇi—a book written by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura to give instruction on chanting the holy name. It is written as a conversation between Haridāsa Ṭhākura and Lord Caitanya.

I

ISKCON—the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

J

japa—chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra individually on beads

japa-mālā—chanting beads

K

Kārttika—a holy month in the Vaiṣṇava calendar corresponding to October-November

kīrtana—singing the holy names

Kṛṣṇa—the Supreme Personality of Godhead

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī—the author of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and other Vaiṣṇava writings, in disciplic succession from the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana

L

līlā—pastimes

M

mādhurya-rasa—the sweetest mellow in service to

Kṛṣṇa, referring to serving Kṛṣṇa in the conjugal mood

mahā-mantra—the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra

Manah-śikṣā—twelve prayers instructing the mind,

written by Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, one of the Six Gosvāmīs in Vṛndāvana

mantra—a sound vibration that frees the mind from material thoughts

māyā—literally, “that which is not,” illusion

māyāvādī—a person who thinks that the name and form of the Supreme Lord are composed of material energy. Therefore, they desire to merge into the impersonal Brahman effulgence of the Lord.

N

nāma—the pure, holy name of the Lord

nāmābhasa—the shadow of the holy name; stage when the chanting is still infested with offenses but the shadow of the name appears

nāmāparādha—offense to the holy name

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura—a great *ācārya* in disciplic succession from Lord Caitanya. He authored many devotional songs which have been collected in two books, *Prema-bhakti-candrikā* and *Prārthanā*.

Nectar of Instruction—known as *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*, written by Rūpa Gosvāmī, one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana. He also wrote *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (*Nectar of Devotion*).

P

Pañca-tattva—Lord Caitanya and His associates:

Nityānanda Prabhu, Advaita Ācārya, Śrī Gadādhara Paṇḍita, and Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura

pramāda—literally, “madness”; inattention in chanting the holy name

prasādam—literally, “mercy”; usually referring to sanctified foodstuffs that have been offered to the Lord or other remnants such as flower garlands, etc.

prema—the highest stage of love of God

pūjā—worship, usually in the form of making offerings to the Deity

R

Rādhā[*rāṇī*]*—*Lord Kṛṣṇa’s personified pleasure energy; She is the female equivalent of Kṛṣṇa

rāgānugā—spontaneous, loving devotion to the Lord

Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana who was especially known for his performance of great austerity; author of *Śrī Manaḥ-śikṣā* and many collections of prayers

rasa—spiritual mellow or taste in relationship with Kṛṣṇa

rasika—a person or topic which is filled with spiritual taste in love for Kṛṣṇa

rati—spontaneous attraction for the Lord

rūpānuga—a follower of Rūpa Gosvāmī

Rūpa Gosvāmī—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana, a direct disciple of Lord Caitanya, who was ordered by the Lord to write many books illuminating the path of devotion. He wrote many books, among them *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta* (*Nectar of Instruction*) and *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (*Nectar of Devotion*).

S

sādhaka—one who practices *sādhana*

sādhana—systematic practices of chanting and hearing about Kṛṣṇa aimed at spiritual perfection

sādhū—a saintly person or devotee of God

sādhū-nindā—offense to a saintly person or devotee

śāstra—revealed scripture

Śikṣāṣṭakam—eight prayers of instructions taught by Lord Caitanya, the only written instructions He gave Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana—Rūpa Gosvāmī, Jīva Gosvāmī, Sanātana Gosvāmī, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, and Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, all direct followers of Lord Caitanya who rediscovered the holy places of Vṛndāvana and taught the highest love of God by writing many scriptures

smaraṇam—remembrance

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam—also known as *Bhagavata Purāṇa*, it is the principle scripture of the followers of Lord Caitanya

śubha-karma—auspicious, material activities performed in the name of religion

śuddha-nāma—the pure holy name of the Lord, uncontaminated by any offense

T

tilaka—the markings of sacred clay on the body, indicating that the body is a temple of God

Tulasī-devī—a bush often found growing wild in Vṛndāvana whose leaves are offered to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa and who is worshiped by the Vaiṣṇavas

V

vaidhī-bhakti—the path of devotional service performed strictly under regulative principles

Vaiṣṇava—a devotee of Kṛṣṇa

varṇa—occupation

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura—a great *ācārya* in disciplic succession from Lord Caitanya who wrote many books delineating the path of *bhakti-yoga*

vraja-vāsī—a resident of Vṛndāvana

vrata—vow

Vṛndāvana [Vraja]—the place where Kṛṣṇa performed His childhood pastimes; the eternal spiritual abode is known as Goloka Vṛndāvana

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