

A Litany For The Gone

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Preface to the “Books Among Friends” Series

I am happy to present a new publishing line of small books through “Among Friends.” There are things I wish to say mainly to my disciples and this publishing line provides such a forum for me to say them. I feel courage and joy to think that I can address myself in published form privately to a small audience. Perhaps in a small degree, it’s similar to the joy Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī felt when he expressed his freedom to write about Lord Caitanya’s pastimes without worrying about the blasphemers.

Preface

A *Litany For The Gone* is not meant to represent objective history. It is not the final word or truth on what actually happened during the years I am describing. Like all people, I have a subjective viewpoint about the events in my life, and I also had limited access to the people I have described. How could I know a person's total character? All I can describe is how each of them related to me. Subjective reality is also a kind of reality and has as much right to be expressed as objective truths. In Kṛṣṇa consciousness, devotees relate to Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa to His devotees according to subjective feeling. Subjective feeling means the relationship is based on love.

Much of the poignancy (regret) of the years described in *Litany* comes from the fact that I didn't have such open communication with disciples, and in many cases, whatever communication I did have was filtered through their local authorities. You will understand this better when you read *Litany*.

I am including this disclaimer at the beginning of the book so that readers won't charge me with failing to have grasped the objective truth. I'm only describing how I saw and felt things. I have also remarked that if the readers have their own versions and impressions of the time I am describing, then they can tell their own stories. This is my story.

Introduction

A litany is a prayer reciting a list. Sometimes it's a lament, as in a litany for the dead. I intend to work with a list of names of persons to whom I gave *harināma* initiation into the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. I plan to choose from the list of over seven hundred names, those persons who no longer pursue an active relationship with me. As I go through the list, I may also want to write something about someone who is out of touch with me but who is still active in spiritual life. I do not intend to condemn or criticize anyone in this "litany," even those who have abandoned their vows.

I am working this list because I am a writer and I need something to write about. I know that it is a serious matter to write about other people; it's not something to trifle with. However, I consider writing assignments seriously. They are my life breath. Knowing that individuals are sensitive about whatever is spoken about them by others, I have decided not to publish this writing widely. I am writing it for myself, for my own purification. I hope it will take me into areas worthy of discussion and free my expression.

I plan to use directed free-writing in this work. That is, to see the name and start writing whatever comes to

mind. William Saroyan used this approach in his *Obituaries*. He took the 1976 list of persons whose obituaries appeared in *Variety* and wrote whatever came to mind. I have often envied Saroyan's facility with that list. He wrote a sizable book and had a good time with it too, writing anything and everything sparked by his contemplation of the next name in the list. Saroyan's book has often made me think of doing a similar project based on a list, but I could never find a list that enticed me. Now I have one—that is, if Lord Kṛṣṇa, the indwelling guide, will allow me to say something worthwhile.

I, a tiny and fallen soul named Satsvarūpa dāsa, whose name appears on a list of initiated disciples of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, do here place my head at his lotus feet and ask his permission and blessings to write this litany with a Vaiṣṇava attitude and despite my faults and severe limitations. I want to write as honestly as possible, but that is no excuse to veer from the conclusions of the *paramparā*. If in the name of first thoughts, best thoughts I temporarily veer, I know that your strong and holy *vāṇī*, Śrīla Prabhupāda, will bring me back quickly to the right *siddhānta*. I beg to be eternally enlisted as your disciple, eligible to always receive your inspiring instructions, your personal association, and of course, your correction of my sometimes foolish notions.

All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

—May 1995, Cozille, Italy

1

I would like to start with the first initiations I conducted, in 1978, during the Gaura-Pūrṇimā festival in Māyāpur, India, but first I have to assure myself to keep this writing wide open. Otherwise, it will inevitably come to a halt after a few days. I know my writing habits well enough by now. If I select a topic that's too restricted, if I try to structure it in advance and follow a plan, then when I go to write, I lose the joy of writing. Writing has to come from joy for me to feel free enough to do it. I have to feel free to improvise and play, to turn a thought from serious to delightful, and to sometimes tell, if I feel like it, what's happening in my life at the moment. I don't want to brush aside that reality only because I am writing a list of disciples' names.

Dear reader, please allow me this freedom. I hope it won't make the reading less interesting or less vital, but regardless, it's the only way I can proceed.

*

Already I feel this book scaling down from its original castle-in-the-sky idea—"long, unending." I was going to write about everybody, the whole era, of Śrīla Prabhupāda passing away—and then examine myself. But it's already shrinking.

You see, I can't write about the people who are doing well, just the ones I don't know of, those who are missing in action, you could say. For example, in 1978, I gave *harināma-dīkṣā* to two young Indian men, Hari-bhakti-vilāsa and Murāli-manohara. I also gave second initiation to two of Śrīla Prabhupāda's first initiated disciples, Śamika Ṛṣi dāsa and his wife, Ānarta dāsi. It's obvious that I can't write about the three who are still serving, whom I know and love.

Where is Murāli-manohara and why should I want to write about him? What is it that someone comes into your life, is accepted as a disciple on behalf of the *paramparā*, and then goes away?

Murāli-manohara went away. The last I heard of him was that someone saw him in India in a tree. I don't remember what he was doing in the tree. Maybe he had become an ascetic or a *yogī* of some kind. I heard that he claimed to be his own man and no longer a member of ISKCON, certainly no longer my "spiritual son." Before that last report, he and I had not corresponded for a long time. I would catch up to him occasionally and ask that we reconnect our relationship. I also used to ask Haribhakti-vilāsa about him. Haribhakti never had good news, just that Murāli-manohara was out of sight, drifting away from ISKCON, then going, going, gone.

But once someone leaves, they can come back. Someone may ask all kinds of questions: "Just because some-

one leaves ISKCON, just because someone terminates his relationship with you, does it mean he has no success in life until he returns to you and ISKCON?"

I don't plan to tackle such issues in this book. I'm not even interested in them. I'm struggling to find my way into this litany and to care for it. Someone might also ask, "They are gone, so what's the use in dwelling on them? Do you really care for them now that they are gone?"

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura cried when he heard a man to whom he had given *sannyāsa* returned to his wife. "I could not save that soul," he said, with humble regret. Where is my remorse at my inability to keep in tow all the souls who took initiation from me? I say, "Even Śrīla Prabhupāda initiated many—is it ninety percent?—who later gave up their vows."

My disciples who blooped. That's one group. The other group is perhaps even more of an embarrassment to me: those who rejected me but who continue a semblance of spiritual life. There are shades and varieties of this. Also, a few suicides and natural deaths and a lot of growing up and growing older—growing apart too. Some I won't mention here have grown cold toward me. I have not been able to stop that either.

*

I told the early history candidly and accurately in my diary, *ISKCON In The 1970s*. I admitted there that we made mistakes in ISKCON and that we conducted the guru worship on too big a scale. We advertised the gurus as *mahā-bhāgavata paramahamsas*. We asserted

ourselves like that, and we were ushered down the red carpets by the temple presidents and the cheering congregations of devotees throwing flowers, washing our lotus feet, and snapping photos.

No wonder they left?

Someone recently wrote me, “After I got unfairly kicked out of such and such ISKCON temple, I have become alienated toward ISKCON. Since you represent ISKCON, I have also grown alienated toward you.”

*

Focus him in my mind, that Murāli-manohara dāsa. Dark-skinned, shy, quiet, humble—similar to almost all Indians in his attitude—when he took initiation. His temple president, Lokanātha Mahārāja, recommended him along with Haribhakti-vilāsa. I hardly knew them, but in those days that didn’t matter. I just accepted disciples, “like Prabhupāda did.” A strong recommendation from the temple president was good enough.

We exchanged letters and I spoke with Murāli-manohara (named after Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who enchants all the worlds with His flute) whenever I went to India.

It’s too long ago and my memory fails me. He slipped away bit by bit and was gone to me.

I’m sure he’s not gone to himself. Disciples live on. The bond of initiation is supposed to be an eternal one. Glorious is that disciple who remains faithful to his guru, and glorious is that master who rescues the disciple, grabbing him by the hair, to take him away from the licentious gypsies.

The bond is eternal, but so is the free will by which the *jīva* can reject even his initiation vows. It happens once, twice, thrice, then more often. Disciples leave and eventually you come to expect it.

At least I can indirectly face some of the issues. Am I qualified to be a spiritual master? That one doesn't concern me anymore. At least it's not a burning issue. As of 1993, I decided to stop initiating. I make a few exceptions to that rule nowadays. For those who choose to regard me as their spiritual master, I don't play around and say, "Maybe I'm not." I simply do what I can. There are enough savage critics who say the ISKCON gurus are bogus traitors against Śrīla Prabhupāda, etc. I don't need to add to their harangue. I would rather prove them wrong.

I want to live in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Yes, writing about this may awaken some of those issues: "What am I doing to improve myself as one who claims to be guiding souls back to Godhead?" That's not bad.

Those who are in touch with me know what I can do for them and how I do it. They know I no longer meet with them one on one except rarely. I invite them to correspond with me, attend disciples' meetings, and read my books. We all have to serve Kṛṣṇa through the spiritual master. I have to leave it up to them how they ultimately see our relationship.

Some choose to see it in a traditional way and want to worship the guru as good as God (at least as that is interpreted and fashionable in ISKCON). I don't allow fancy, high-flown worship. Some don't care for that and want more of a friendship. Someone told me once that my disciples seem to fall into three categories: those

who have adopted a version of the *ṛtvik* philosophy (which claims that Śrīla Prabhupāda is the only guru and that they were initiated by him through me); those at the other end of the spectrum who hanker for the early days of pomp and absolutism, when I was Gurupāda; and those in the middle.

Where am I? Where is Murāli-manohara dāsa?

That's it for a first attempt at this litany—some scattered sparks.

2

On November 20, 1977, when devotees in Vṛndāvana were discussing how to carry on in ISKCON after Śrīla Prabhupāda's disappearance, I wrote in my diary, "As for guru, I am in no position for that. As for politics—get thee behind me, Satan." Two days later, while contemplating that I would be expected to initiate disciples, I wrote, "But at present I do not feel I could give a disciple shelter."

November 24, 1977: "I looked it up in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, and he often says it is not difficult to be a guru. Somewhere it said that the guru should be an *uttama-adhikāri*. So we are considering all sides of this guru issue."

By April 5, 1978, returning from the annual GBC meeting in India, I went to Dallas where I was "Received as 'Gurudeva.' . . . Today I sat on an improvised *vyāsāsana*. There are three or four persons who are uninitiated. They are making obeisances when they see me. I read in class the statements explaining the new procedures of initiating gurus. An essay by Bhakti-

siddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura wonderfully explained it.

...

“When a boy makes obeisances and says my name, I am utterly incapable of becoming grave enough. The gravity required is to be immeasurably deep—guru. How can I reach that depth? I have no credit of austerity or purity to do so. I simply wait, cringe—pray, desire to be truly situated. But there is no chance I can do so. My hope is that Kṛṣṇa will come through me to the disciple. It is authorized by Śrīla Prabhupāda. I am his servant, therefore, it is not bogus.”

On May 8, 1978, I performed an initiation ceremony and gave first initiation to Bhakta Sam. He became Saṅkīrtana dāsa. I also initiated Bhaktin Marcia as Mṛṇalīnī dāśī and gave second initiation to Śaśvata-pāvana (who had already received first initiation from Śrīla Prabhupāda).

“For me it is a great thrill, that they will become my disciples—I cannot explain it or ultimately completely understand. But the same faith that compels me to follow Śrīla Prabhupāda is compelling them to follow me. It is in no way different. I am a young man, my recent past not wonderful at all—rather he saved me from hell. I am not a great scholar, or a great preacher in driving the saṅkīrtana movement forward—but it is the same surrender I made to my guru that they make to me. . . .

“This means more important of all, that I have to keep more than ever—unto death—my strict practice of Kṛṣṇa conscious principles and following Śrīla Prabhupāda and preaching in ISKCON. . . .

“So much talking of myself. What about them? I say, ‘Come on, I will lift you up by the spiritual system at his lotus feet. Believe, follow, take shelter in ISKCON and ISKCON gurus. I may not look great, but it is authorized, *he can even make gurus!*’”

*

What happened to Saṅkīrtana dāsa? He was young, a white, Texan boy, innocent and submissive. He was willing to distribute books, which is one reason I gave him that name. Everybody liked him. He was good-looking and seemed competent and dedicated. Eventually he had doubts. While I was out of state, I heard he had left the temple and was living with his parents near Dallas. I was shocked. It was seventeen years ago. I no longer remember what his doubts were. They might have been philosophical, but then he started taking drugs. I think he was also hampered by the desire for illicit sex. (So many fell down to masturbation, although that should not be a reason for anyone to give up their relationship with Kṛṣṇa consciousness.)

Saṅkīrtana dāsa bore me no grudge. We had nice talks together. He was the first American man I initiated, so I tried to carefully explain how I could initiate a disciple despite my obvious limits. From my diary, May 27, 1978: “I just gave Saṅkīrtana dāsa an example that although a family man works away from his family all day and deals with many persons to advance himself at his job and make more money—and it is all done away from home but for the family—so the *śiṣya* does all for his guru.” I remember after saying that to

him how he expressed his faith. Then suddenly he left everything, including Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa. He has sporadically contacted the devotees over the years and expressed interest in returning to his vows. He even visited the temple a few times. But he has always fallen back. I remember he wanted to develop a material career, but he couldn't find happiness "out there" in *karmi*-land.

We may still hear from him. Someone who knows where he is may drop in to see him. I wouldn't be surprised to hear from him. But it has been so long. I could give the name "Saṅkīrtana dāsa" to a new devotee if I wanted to. He has turned it in with his other devotee paraphernalia. A guy named Sam who used to be a devotee.

He can come back . . .

When he left the first time, he found it difficult to express why he left. Maybe it was equally difficult for him to express why he had taken initiation. Either way, life is overwhelming and confusing. He didn't know (doesn't know) what he wants.

I lose touch with them. I cannot be their psychiatrist, employer, their everything. In the early days, we tried to do that—be their gang leader, their priest, their mentor, their stand-in for Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa, the perfect decider of all aspects of their lives. "Come back to the temple. We will take care of all your problems. Just come back. Or else. You know what the *Bhagavad-gītā* says. You will have to cycle through the animal species life after life. You could become a cat or a dog or even a worm in stool."

“No, I think I’ll stay out here. I wasn’t ready to get initiated. I’m sorry about that. I shouldn’t have done it. It’s nothing against you personally.”

*

Writing about this stirs up memories of other relationships with other disciples who are not gone. Their names and lives pop up in my life. While taking a noon shower, I remember, “What about X dāsi? She hasn’t written me in a long time. We’ve lost a vital, practical, service relationship. She maintains a favorable sentiment for me, probably mostly from her memories of the past. When she writes me, she revives it and I try to respond, “Yes, yes.” But maybe it’s fading. We never see each other. We’re going separate ways. But if they read my books and the monthly newsletter . . . Some just gradually fade out entirely. “Old soldiers never die, they just fade away.”

*

Even nowadays, it’s not that I always think of myself as a guru with disciples. Sometimes Madhu comes to me and we read a letter Prabhupāda wrote to me and we discuss those times. Now we are reading letters from Boston 1971, when Śrīla Prabhupāda was in India writing to us. As I remember those letters, I speak as his disciple, one among the others. Thinking of “my disciples” was nowhere in sight then. I was free from that.

Now it’s different, sure, but I can still live as a person, see the sunshine finally come out after a week of

rain, and hang my wet towel on the line, glad it will finally dry.

*

I invite you to be free and talk seriously
 especially in the very early morning
 or at any time you can. Go back
 to the first initiations and your puffed-up,
 sincere self wreathed in flower-and-
 tinsel garlands. Let no one
 defame me who doesn't love me.
 I am the best one to do it,
 I am the one who will write the story
 of the disciples who left.
 Let them not write that I
 left or failed them,
 those apostates.
 I am still here.

I invite you to be kind to your guru
 and to your disciples also. You can't remember
 a Saṅkīrtana dāsa from a Saṅkīrtana dāśī?
 You can't make utterly a "Confessions
 Of An American Guru" as Ramdass did
 because you didn't do the nonsense he did?
 But you thought about it sometimes?
 Well, isn't that just as bad?
 Then why won't you write
 your confession of the worst?

Because I'm still in the business.
 I've got three hundred active chilluns.
 Why tell them the worst? I already did
 write in a published book
 that one night I peed into a container
 that was being used for bathing
 the Deity of Nṛsimhadeva.
 That completely disgusted my brother.

I'm no crook, as Nixon said.
 I'm not hiding marijuana
 like I used to in the Navy, brushing the
 smoke away, hiding the magazines
 before the Lieutenant-Commander entered and
 said, "What's that odor? Smells like
 burnt tangerines."
 Not grossly breaking the four rules.
 I don't fail to chant sixteen measly rounds,
 the last beads grasped to the end of
 the circle. And I stand bare-chested and apply
 the *tilaka* wet in twelve places like
 you're supposed to. I read his books.

If you write me, I'll write back.
 What you see is what you get.
 But I like to write poems
 and stay alone.
 Is that a crime? The Swami says
 you can use it all in Kṛṣṇa's
 service and we shouldn't be afraid of that.
 Come, I am your servant
 in the form of the initiating guru.

3

I am coming to this page after reading *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. It is good to immerse ourselves in scripture, which is *brahmākṣara-samudbhavam*, directly spoken by Lord Kṛṣṇa. What, then, is the value of my reminiscing and reflecting on my checkered career as an ISKCON guru? It's for self-purification. See the past mistakes. See also the deep responsibility of the service of guiding others. Don't continue blindly. It is not a service one can artificially renounce once we have begun it.

Kṣatriyas don't run from battle. Once the guru accepts disciples, he must stay with them and remain qualified. Therefore, it is valuable to reflect on the importance and responsibility of such a life-long duty. The reflection may include examining the history of one's personal relationship with specific, individual disciples and what to do for them now.

*

I held a second initiation ceremony in America on May 21, 1978. This time, there were twenty devotees taking initiation, mostly young people from the Northeast United States. The system then was that only the eleven designated gurus could initiate. They were invited to do so on a zonal basis by the GBCs and temple presidents of the various ISKCON zones. In order that the pure devotee *ācāryas* not cut in on other zones and steal manpower from other areas through initiating, and so that zonal integrity could be maintained, a guru could initiate *only* in the zone where he was the GBC or where he had been invited by the “non-initiating” GBC man.

I was invited to initiate in New York and Hawaii. When Ādi-keśava Prabhu invited me to be *the only* guru of New York City, I guessed that eventually I would either be replaced or joined in that capacity. It didn't seem right to me at the time to be invited under one understanding but then later relativized. We had such grand conceptions of ourselves, which were enforced by this early, erroneous system. Here I was, only a few months ago a whimpering disciple, stunned and numbed by my spiritual master's disappearance from the world, now accepting a post where I would be the only spiritual master for the millions of potential devotees in New York City. That was the system.

I remember a small voice inside telling me not to walk into the trap. I knew I was being set up on a big seat, but that the seat had wheels on the bottom. I knew I could be—and would be—rolled out of New York City in a few years.

Certainly, a part of me liked the idea of taking disciples, of being supreme. It seemed right, after all. In other words, I was not extremely humble.

Yet another part of me responded to the call of being a company man. I was an impressionable member of the GBC and I wanted to shoulder my share of the worldwide duties “for Prabhupāda.”

(How many times have I and others seen ourselves as less power-hungry than other leaders, but as easily-influenced, weak-willed members of the top power club? I moved in those circles, fully implicated. Of course, we each have our own hearts and individual karma, but there is something like group karma too. ISKCON was rolling like a juggernaut in one direction: *vartman-ācārya ki jaya*.)

The May 21 initiation was in the Washington-Baltimore zone where I had been invited to be initiating guru by Rūpānuga Prabhu. (When I sometimes make sardonic asides in this writing, I do not mean to cast aspersions on my relationships with the devotees whom I initiated then. Even if there was some fault, the guru-disciple relationship is part of the Vaiṣṇava system of maintaining the *paramparā*. I may describe myself and other leaders as having mixed motives and as operating within a faulty system, but the devotees and I who joined in that guru-disciple link may also take our relationship as permanent and eternal and arranged by the Supreme Controller. As for the faulty system, in brief, it was two-fold: (1) that only one devotee should be allowed to initiate in a zone; and (2) that he should be raised up as worshipable over the Godbrothers who were

not allowed to perform the function of initiating spiritual master.)

*

As I write, I am trying to avoid killing ants, but so many of them are crawling around the desk onto this page, and over my body. I remove them automatically. It's a creepy, repulsive sight when there are so many of them. It seems unclean. I try to blow them away or pick them up on a small piece of paper to remove them, but some get crippled on the way or, I'm afraid, killed. You kill inadvertently, you writer of guru topics, you person who has accepted seven hundred disciples, you person who sings a prayer for the gone. What is on your head? You need purification and forgiveness.

*

From my diary, 1978:

"May 22, Gītā-nāgarī. Separation from my disciples. Wonderful ceremony yesterday—twenty initiated."

Then on May 27: "Someone might ask, 'Are all the new gurus lesser than Śrīla Prabhupāda?' For myself, I answer instantly: 'Lesser, lesser, not fit to touch his lotus feet. Always I am his servant and student, his foolish servant. But therefore I am qualified to act as guru for those who would approach Kṛṣṇa to learn Kṛṣṇa consciousness according to Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings. This is the humbling nature of *paramparā*. The true servant is empowered by the master. I insist you bow down to me because I am his servant, not because I am his equal or master. I am his qualified repre-

sentative. Representative means I am his servant. And he (Prabhupāda) is the servant of *his* guru. He is the great servant of Kṛṣṇa, but for himself, he thinks of himself as the servant of his guru. Why all these questions of whether the disciples are lesser than the guru?"

The new life—new relationship—with *disciples* was ecstatic. The newness of it all produced a sense of wonder in me. I had never been treated like that, had never considered love in that way. It's easy to make fun of it now and say, "Tcch, tcch, you loved them and accepted their love so freely, happily, and innocently. Therefore, it was corrupt."

Now I'm more aware of the austerity of the guru-disciple relationship. For example, I have had to face the fact that many disciples later break their vows. I am burnt out and afraid to enter it with wholehearted loving dealings, but it was not wrong to do so, not then.

May 27, 1978: "My disciples' expression of faith in me pushes me to a new place. I have to be careful. It's almost dizzying. I want to pray to Kṛṣṇa and to Śrīla Prabhupāda for their welfare. In the heart of the sincere disciple, there automatically comes a relationship of love. It demands reciprocation. False motives start in me. I check them. I have a real motive—I want to be their guru. This is real love and faith, not skin love, not the bogus love false yogis and swamis always speak of in their impersonalism or their mundane cheating and sex exploitation! Money exploitation! No, I am genuine. I can carry the love of Śrīla Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa. It demands so much of me. It is special, very special. There

is nothing like it in the three worlds. It is full of duty. It demands the highest integrity. . . .

“Yet there is no harm in the disciple’s love and expression of love for the guru. When a disciple surrenders sincerely, then the purity of the guru is tested: ‘This soul is yours. Now what will you do?’ If there is any pinch of dirty desire, *now* it will come forward. It is a test.”

My diary admits the particular dangers of accepting an intimate spiritual relationship with women disciples. As a young *sannyāsī*, I did not even look women in the face, what to speak of meet them alone. Now, however, I was to become the young father of so many raw, sincere, but rambunctious and/or troubled girls. Not girls, spirit souls in girls’ bodies. Who entirely had that soul-vision?

May 27, 1978: “Nasty things do come into my mind. Is it not a fact? Shall I say now that I am guru, ‘No, a bad thought never enters my mind?’ Why did Lord Caitanya say that He became agitated when He merely saw the wooden form of a woman? But if I say it, it is not the same as Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Yet admitting this, I have to deal with it in terms of the growing numbers of disciples who are worshipping me as Gurudeva, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

“This admittance makes me grave, but I am not allowing thinking to go over into feeling and willing. I am not doing anything sinful. Some thoughts come. It makes me very humble. I am receiving worship, and yet sometimes thoughts come. Gravity, control. Dismissing the bad thought and going on with the real business of

Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It seems with words I can explain everything away. . . .

“Too many people are depending on me for a good spiritual example. I can’t let them down. I can’t let down Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda.”

*

Now the list. Twenty disciples on that day entered onto the eternal path, made sacred by their solemn vows witnessed by the Supreme Lord in the temple, the fire, and the assembled devotees. About fifty percent of those initiates are no longer following their vows.

I remember a disciple of Prabhupāda who gave up his vows and later excused himself for it. He remarked to me, “I was only nineteen when I promised.” Devotees promise that for their whole life, they will strictly refrain from illicit sex, intoxication, meat-eating, and gambling, and that they will chant at least sixteen rounds a day of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Śrīla Prabhupāda expected us to follow our vows, “or else why did you promise?” We promised. A gentleman or a lady will keep a promise. It is perjury not to do so. So he reasoned and so we repeat and follow. We don’t think Śrīla Prabhupāda was wrong to give this opportunity and solemn obligation to a nineteen-year-old kid who just recently kicked his drug habit and gave up eating meat. Śrīla Prabhupāda (and any subsequent spiritual master in *paramparā*) offers initiation with the awareness that the disciple may later fall down. There is always that risk.

Then the spiritual master has to take some karma. What about that? I’m telling it.

Jayadeva Gosvāmī dāsa was from Maine. There were other devotees who came from Maine and who also left—who joined the gone list. Of course, there is Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciple, James Greene (Jagannātha dāsa). Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa dāsa visited Mr. Greene in 1979 to interview him for the biography. He was shy and good-natured. He said it was just too much for him to keep up his practices for his whole life. I also remember an older couple who came from Maine. They lived for awhile at Gītā-nāgarī with their several children. They never took initiation—which is good, because they weren't ready. He argued with me, "Why should I accept a guru if I have God in my heart?" Then they went back to the desert of Maine.

Jayadeva Gosvāmī dāsa. Was he blond? Was he chubby, or do I confuse him with another New Englander, a man who joined the Boston temple in the early 1970s, but who left after hoodlums attacked us? Was he slim? Was he inclined to be a *kṣatriya*? Was he one of those devotees who used to guard the Potomac temple? I confuse their names and faces. This batch who were offered in May 1978 were all dear to Rūpānuga Prabhu. He raised them carefully and gave them shelter in the happy, hope-filled acres of Potomac ISKCON.

I dimly recall receiving a letter from Jayadeva. Yes, he had a Maine address. He wanted me to know that he is still favorable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It was an upbeat letter that came about fifteen years after he had "blooped." He didn't state any intention to start up his practices again, but he just wanted me to know that he had gone through a critical-toward-ISKCON period

and was now feeling differently. And he was remembering his youthful days in the movement.

Even after they leave, they sometimes send in reports from faraway places, a brief word every fifteen years or so.

I can sympathize with devotees who break the vows they made in their youth. Then why do I write about them? Am I trying to make them feel guilty? No. Maybe they will read this and want to come back.

4

When Bob Cohen was about to leave Śrīla Prabhupāda's presence and the association of the devotees in Māyāpur, Prabhupāda said to him, "Don't l-e-a-v-e, but l-i-v-e." Why does a devotee leave? When I asked Śrīla Prabhupāda why Rāyarāma left, he said, "He was not serious." We can *become* serious at any point of our life, when *māyā* kicks us extra hard or we suddenly remember that we were better off when we were remembering Kṛṣṇa.

Walking, exulting, talking to myself and
the trees and the see-through blue scarf
that covers the town in the valley.

"I'm writing a good book." I don't
mean I'm good at it, but it's good
to me, it's good to feel, to speak,
it's a good list to work.

But I have to be careful.

Don't exult too much.

Don't be in a hurry.

Stop with each name of a gone.

Think that he or she may come back,
 may have had a good reason to leave,
 should be forgiven. The *Bhāgavatam* says
 even if a devotee leaves he is
 never the same as a *karmī*
 because once having tasted the nectar
 he cannot escape from Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

But who has tasted the nectar?
 Did Ekala-īśvara dāsa taste it
 before he went back to upstate New York?
 Jayadeva Gosvāmī dāsa? Sam
 Saṅkīrtana dāsa must not have tasted
 the nectar or why would he be so totally
 confused and speak eccentric philosophies?
 He who has tasted the nectar
 can never go back to *karmī* life.
 It's like drinking hot molasses—
 Kṛṣṇa consciousness—
 too hot to drink and too sweet
 to stop drinking.

You may discourse on this awhile,
 you young man with your first disciples.
 You can dangle them from your waist like scalps,
 like balls to play with,
 like gold coins in a bag
 or a weight that will sink you to death.

You can look at your list.

Ekala-iśvara dāsa. He went fast. People inquired about him in his hometown, but he had disappeared. Did he become a Christian as they say? I don't want to talk about someone only on the basis of rumor, but I am not researching into the truth of where a number of Hare Kṛṣṇa people went after they left the movement. Someone else can write that book. This book is intended to bring out my memories or my lack of them, and for prayer and musing.

Ekala-iśvara went back to live in Bent Fork. That's all I know. Then I should talk about someone else so as not to disturb the "one-god" dāsa. He has long since discarded that name. "Who? Swami Bhaktivedanta? Yes, I remember the name, but I don't remember the spiritual name they gave me. We used to sit on the lawn and eat lunch together like we were having a big picnic. At night, men in the dorm would drink a cup of milk and read from a book how Kṛṣṇa kills the demons. I regard it as myth now, the stories of Kṛṣṇa."

You have become a myth too, the myth of a disciple who came and went.

Bent Fork, Utah, last seen pumping gas. The apostate grins, "Devotees like to say that when a person leaves the movement, he winds up pumping gas. Well, that's not true. There are many, many opportunities in the world. The devotees think the world is demonic, but contrary to the cult's view of the outside world, it is filled with many nice, God conscious and loving people. It's no different than the movement. In the movement, you'll find demonic people and nice people. The world is full of—"

Full of shit. I speak as one inside the Kṛṣṇa conscious seclusion, but it is not airtight. Osmosis and air holes and rivers run in from the material world and we are not exclusive. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the transcendental world. We can go to the spiritual world in this age by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. That's what the *sāstra* says and Śrīla Prabhupāda upholds that truth. I follow their conclusion. I don't care to know, therefore, in detail, what a "one-god" dāsa is doing now that he has left ISKCON.

Is it unrealistic to pray that he comes back? Prabhupāda prayed for his disciples, but even more than that, he continued to practice and preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness without flinching from the truth for even a moment.

Young people come into the movement and leave it through the big revolving door. In and out. A pure devotee goes on preaching and worshipping regardless. If someone comes in, then revolves out, then comes in again, great. But why does he come back, to disturb us? To bring new ideas into the society of devotees? He must surrender to guru and Kṛṣṇa to live with us. Otherwise, he should go and live his life as he thinks best.

Ekale iṣvara kṛṣṇa, āra saba bhṛtya.

*

Some are borderline cases. We used to call them fringies which was a derogatory word. Maybe I'm a fringie now according to someone's estimation. Who is in and who is out? He who is furthest in by appearance might actually be out, or eventually be out. You know

the story of the respectable *brāhmaṇa* and the prostitute. The *brāhmaṇa* used to publicly denounce the prostitute. Every time she had a customer, he would note it by adding a stone to a pile. Eventually, he built a wall as evidence of her sinfulness. At the time of death, the *brāhmaṇa* thought of the prostitute's sins, so he wasn't liberated. The prostitute died feeling remorse for her sins and was purified and liberated by her contrition.

Therefore, who has left and how am I to judge? Should I complacently praise myself and those on the list who are still active? I cannot make a judgment on devotees or Kṛṣṇa will judge me. Do I want Him to forgive me? Then I had better forgive others.

Śrī Gopāla dāsa was, I think, a black-bodied man who was initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda. I gave him second initiation. "No, no," someone may say on reading this. They'll be surprised that I can't even remember Śrī Gopāla dāsa, that I confuse him for another. On that day in 1978, as they sat before me in rows and came up one by one to receive their beads, I knew them. There were quite a few who were already initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda and who were approaching me for brahminical initiation. Śrī Gopāla dāsa—Steve Harding. May he rest or work in peace. I mean no harm. Even if he "came back" and wanted to see me, I'd feel pressured, "Oh no, do I have to see him right now?"

"Yes, you must. You gave me second initiation and then you wrote in 1995 that you forget who I am. I want to see you. Here's a letter from my lawyer and one from my psychiatrist. You represented the whole movement to us. I worked for you and for the movement. I want the money I collected back. And I left a rubber ball in the

temple attic. I want that back too. And I want my youth and idealism back. I want *everything* back."

"What about the *bhakti*?"

"*Bhakti*? What's that? I forget all those Indian words. Just give me back my stuff. Don't claim that I received anything worthwhile. Don't try to make me feel guilty."

Some say when they left, they turned their back on ISKCON and never gave it another thought. Others say it haunted them, affected all their impressions of the world they sought to enter, the fabled material world. "I couldn't even enjoy a hamburger without thinking of cow-killing," complained one ex-devotee teenager.

I could phone someone and ask, "Do you remember Śrī Gopāla dāsa, initiated in 1978?"

"Oh! Now I remember."

Does anyone remember S.T. Guarino? No, no one. Or they say, "That good-for-nothing, a twerp, a louse, a sponger. Our own son, but we don't even consider him alive on the earth anymore. If someone mentions his name, we become silent. Forget him. A bad dream."

Of course, there is a Gopāla from Texas, who married Śaśvata-pāvana. Him, I know well. I can tell anecdotes about him. He did book distribution for a long time. But this Śrī Gopāla of 1978 is a different person. The Gopāla from Texas left and came back a number of times. One time, devotees drove out to his house and found him sitting on a swing in his backyard. As soon as he saw them, he said, "I was wondering when you would come and bring me back. I have been waiting and waiting." That led us to conclude that everyone who leaves wants

to be contacted and asked to return, asked if there's some way we can improve our treatment of them so that we can regain their association. When they hear that, they return at once.

But it's not *always* like that. One initiated man left the Puerto Rico temple. He avoided devotees whenever he saw them on the street. One devotee approached him. He drew back his fist, threatening to punch, "Get out of my way!" he warned. "I don't want anything to do with you."

We'll have to watch as this roll call goes on, and if there is no other Śrī Gopāla dāsa, then we will say that this is the Gopāla who is Prabhupāda's disciple by first initiation, offer obeisances to him, ask forgiveness, and offer a handshake. Don't assume that he must be pumping gas, that he has become a ne'er-do-well, or that he is in *māyā*. Say, "How are ya doin'?" and mean it. Do you think that just because someone took initiation from you and later dropped out of *your* sight, that he has dropped out of the universe, out of God's sight? Don't think like that. But I am entitled to my litany, I guess. It's a free country. I can remember if I want to. And if I like, I can wish them to return to the specific shelter of Kṛṣṇa and the Swami's movement, the life of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and following the four rules.

*

Laulyam dāsa. He's too heavy a case to describe. He used to say that before he joined the ISKCON, he was a "beer-drinkin' Joe." He gave that up. He was a wonderful *kṣatriya*. He once met a gang single-handedly in

front of the temple and beat them off with a club. He was affectionate, hard-working, but finally—from our point of view—incapable of controlling his senses. You might say it would have been better if he had not accepted the strict vows so that he would not be compelled later to break them. But he came forward. He wanted the whole thing. He thought he would get sufficient mercy to carry it out and be satisfied in his marriage. He worked hard in the kitchen, was a loyal man, cheerful, a strong *mṛdaṅga* player.

For the other side of the story, you would have to hear from the wife he left, she who considered her hold on guru and Kṛṣṇa something too precious to give up, no matter what.

I heard he once said about me, “He seems unhappy.” Well, I have been unhappy. I complain. I’m happy too. I live according to the rules and am obedient to my master. When I heard he said that, I responded, “He doesn’t know my unhappiness or happiness. My unhappiness is spiritual; I’m sorry I don’t chant well, don’t feel pure love of God, can’t preach more boldly, can’t surrender.”

To that he might reply, “Unhappiness is unhappiness.” He wants immediate happiness (*preyas*). You can only get that by contacting the senses with their objects and to hell with restrictions on that. He couldn’t wait or restrain from immediate gratification in the name of the ultimate goal (*śreyas*). I doubt he’s found happiness. If his attempt is based on the bodily concept of life, then whatever gusto he has grabbed, it will all wither and fade with old age. By staying with the Kṛṣṇa conscious practices, we gamble, as Pascal said, that we will be

proven right at death. It's a good bet. We advise whomever we meet to stay in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but they are always free to leave.

"Yes, free, but you tried to convince me to be Kṛṣṇa conscious. You made me feel bad to leave."

"What can I do? I thought you spoke true when you promised to always follow. I thought we became a family and would always stay together in this life, that we would make all progress for going back to Godhead. In fact, I still think that way about you. I still think you may come back. I think Nārada's verse in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* applies to you: 'My dear Vyāsa, even though a devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa sometimes falls down somehow or other, he certainly does not undergo material existence like others (fruitive workers, etc.) because a person who has once relished the taste of the lotus feet of the Lord can do nothing but remember that ecstasy again and again.'" (*Bhāg.* 1.5.19)

*

Divya-jñāna dāsa was a young man when he joined the Baltimore temple. He still lives in Baltimore, but he's no longer young or married to the wife I knew, and perhaps I have no right or reason to speak of him here. Why put his name in a book, implying that he is on the wrong list, that he's somehow dishonored?

After I published *Journal & Poems*, a Godbrother said to me, "You have immortalized Dr. Sarma." I was taken aback. "I didn't give him unmitigated praise," I said. I thought my brother was criticizing me for writing at

all of the Dr. Sarma whom we both knew in real life. I reminded him that I hadn't eulogized the man.

"I know," he said, smiling. "But you have made him immortal in your book."

I guess (only guess because I didn't dare pursue talking about my writing for more than a minute) that my brother thought a devotee should not write a book in which he even mentions ordinary people with typically checkered careers. Just quote Vyāsadeva and maybe mention a Sanskrit authority such as Kālī dāsa (even though he may not be a pure Vaiṣṇava). Otherwise, discuss only full-fledged *mahājanas* (or demons who were part of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*), and the reader should always know at every moment whether you are discussing karma or *jñāna* or yoga or *bhakti*, and which stage of *bhakti*. Everything should be orderly and proper. Don't give personal asides about doctors or the young men and women you initiated who came and went away from ISKCON, who still linger and try to cope in the material world. Give them their privacy and give the reader the best company.

A reasonable argument. But I don't want to forget them, the people I knew.

There's a saying that one should be neutral in his attitude toward the world and its people. Don't unnecessarily praise and don't criticize. Of these two injunctions, it is more important not to criticize. The infamous Rāmacandra Purī followed the first injunction but neglected the second.

I like to praise and I don't like to blame. Mostly I like to live with a certain freedom of speech, speech without constraint. I have faith that if I just *be*, it will turn out

all right. I can spread some Kṛṣṇa conscious blessings around because they are abundant. Perhaps I will be able to remind people who have left the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement as well as those who have not left—and even those who have not yet joined—that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is human. We are fallible. But it elevates us and offers us a straight path to eternal life.

I am confident, therefore, that good will come of this writing if the censors and critics leave me alone. I am not blaming anyone when I say who left. Divya-jñāna dāsa left.

Divya-jñāna was the temple president for awhile. His wife, Hlādinī-śakti dāsī, was also my disciple. I remember them as a young couple. They spoke with Baltimore accents (technically known as “Chesapeake Bay dialect”). Their language was characterized by dropping the “ing” whenever it occurred, but they dropped it in a special way that let me know immediately they were from the Chesapeake Bay area. I liked to hear them speak.

I went over to their apartment at least once and honored lunch *prasādam*. In those days, almost all the devotees lived in the temple, but Divya-jñāna and Hlādinī-śakti (formerly Don and Hope) were a “real” married couple—they had their own place. When Divya-jñāna asked if it was all right to live outside the temple, I replied, “Of course. It doesn’t matter whether you live inside the temple or out, as long as you engage fully in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.”

Divya-jñāna and Hlādinī-śakti weren’t blazing stars in ISKCON, but then neither was I. We were functioning at the same speed, and both he and I were mild

people. I was the guru for the Chesapeake Bay area, and Divya-jñāna, along with his old friend Laulyam dāsa (formerly Larry), formed the hometown core of the Baltimore temple. They gave the temple an authentic, indigenous atmosphere. A temple in Baltimore which has, say, mostly devotees from Russia or Punjab, is certainly international, but it may frighten away the Baltimorians who finally get up their courage to knock on the door. Yes, Divya-jñāna reminds me of my early days of “guruship.”

Here, I better pull in the reigns and not immortalize my youth as a high-riding, initiating guru. The next thing you know, I’ll be telling you about Mahākrama and Nārāyaṇa-kavaca and the time they picked me up at the Baltimore airport in a new ’98 Olds and said, “It’s yours.” Or how little Rādhā-Kālachandjī lived in that house in Catonsville for a short while before They moved to Gītā-nāgarī. What a blessing it was when the high school next door finally closed down. I remember the shotgun attack and the days of candle-selling success, the low overhead . . . I never knew the reality of it because I only visited from time to time. I had better shut my mouth.

When I was in Baltimore last winter, I gave a *Bhāgavatam* lecture in the evening at someone’s house. A hundred people attended. Divya-jñāna was there too. He sat near me, up front. He had hair down to his shoulders. He had a sad air; he has seen troubles and this world beats *anyone* ragged around the edges. What to speak of what *I* must look like to them, so wizened and weak and squeaky with my fake smile. Divya-jñāna is

part of me, part of ISKCON. You just don't chuck these relationships out the window as if they never existed.

The name Divya-jñāna comes from the “*Śrī Guru-vandanā*” prayers. *Divya-jñān hṛde prokāśito*. It is a prayer to hear divine knowledge from the lotus mouth of the spiritual master.

His wife? She was simple, unpolished, enthusiastic, and she came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness by the grace of its all-attractive influence. She and her husband took it up in earnest, as I told you. She was happy. For the first time in her life, she was truly happy in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Then it all unwound. To this day, I don't know what happened to them. Even if it were explained to me, I don't know if I could completely understand it. Probably something to do with mistreatment by others or the attraction of the conditioned soul for the modes of nature, as we describe it so philosophically. Somehow, they no longer had the drive it takes to control their mind and senses. *Vāco vegam manasaḥ krodha-vegam*. The pushing agents took over.

Could I have done more to save them? Was I driving around to too many places in my Olds, too stressed and thinly spread out over several continents and too dependent on the opinions of the local leaders? Anyway, even if I had no other disciples but she and Divya-jñāna and Laulyam and Devahūti, what could I do?

We passed the buck. “It was *māyā* who did it. It was the modes. It was Kṛṣṇa who made them leave.” Or, they might say, “It was me. It was my karma. It was my guru's shortcoming, a leak in the line. Something in my guts burst.”

Maybe they'll come back. Yeah, maybe they'll come back.

*

Brahma-sampradāya dāsi is the last one I'll mention from that May 21, 1978 initiation. She was pretty, had a big smile, and sometimes accepted the subjective mind as reality. She would sometimes take that to extremes. (By writing about her, I sense I am sealing the fate of this book. I could never publish it. Better it be honest, though, than something toned down for the congregation. What good is a pabulum treatment of such a dear and troublesome subject as the one I've chosen? Or has it chosen me, this list of the gone?)

Brahma-sampradāya would flip out if she saw her name on this list because she's not gone. She is only gone to me. In her case—as I've heard it from others, never directly from her—she embraces the *ṛtvik* philosophy. Seeing everything that was happening in ISKCON (or seeing “what was going down,” as we used to say), Brahma decided I was not a link in the disciplic succession. I wasn't needed, was in fact a bogus occurrence. With encouragement from those who propound this theory, she decided that she was Śrīla Prabhupāda's direct disciple. As far as I know, she plans to go on practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness as she has been doing since before 1978, but now with no one standing between her and Śrīla Prabhupāda.

She qualifies with extra poignancy to go on a list of souls gone to me. I know what to do in this case. The Vaiṣṇavas have advised me: wish her well. The most important thing is that a person should continue to

practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If they do it with my help, fine. If they decide they don't need me, fine. I shouldn't mumble a curse or be attached to their loyalties. I should simply wish everyone well in their attempt to practice *bhakti*, especially those who follow Śrīla Prabhupāda. *Adhiṣṭam yat tat punar janma jayaya*.

5

From my diary, June 10, 1978: "Plane en route to Hawaii. I'm to be initiating guru there. Farflung parts of the world. No speech rehearsals needed. Do the needful. Words will come. I can say what I have come to do."

The temple president, Satyadeva dāsa, recommended seven devotees for initiation. He also encouraged me in my duty. Since I thought I should get to know each initiate, I met with each of them individually, in some cases, for two hours each. Śrīla Prabhupāda had been affectionate with me and drawn me toward him. Since that personal bond was so important for my fidelity in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, I wanted to be affectionate with my disciples.

I imitated Prabhupāda and tried to be friendly and loving. It was an innocent imitation, but naive. I met with each woman alone in the room of the small cabin they gave me for my use, although my *brahmacārī* assistant sat unseen just outside the door. I inquired into each devotee's background and invited them to speak freely about themselves. Each of them opened up to me,

appreciating the exchange and the prospect of a personal, spiritual relationship I was offering. I felt Kṛṣṇa would empower me with the energy I needed to absorb these new lives into my own, and to guide and nourish their Kṛṣṇa conscious aspirations.

June 11: “. . . the ISKCON gurus are completely dependent on Prabhupāda. He’s not just a *param-guru*; he is everyone’s founder-*ācārya*, *jagat-guru*.”

June 12: “Now it is 1 A.M., the morning of first initiation of four and second initiation of three, into the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. I have a feeling how I am acting on behalf of my *ācārya*, Prabhupāda, to solidify ISKCON. Initiations mean going back to Godhead for the individuals. It is affirming that for them and for others, showing that they *can* be initiated. Showing that Prabhupāda empowered gurus to do this after his disappearance. And it is *showing* ISKCON as an ongoing spiritual force. My order to these disciples is to work in ISKCON. In Hawaii especially there are different philosophies as well as a more persuasive, all-pervasive call of *māyā*. But it is all cheap and illusory, whereas the back to Godhead path is real and eternal. So let us conduct it in full faith, in *paramparā*.”

My health was good in those days, my mind cheerful. Everything was going to be all right. I would still be able to travel widely and accept and guide disciples in various ISKCON temples. Yes, I wanted to travel far and wide like Śrīla Prabhupāda did. (I began to sign my letters to my disciples as he signed his letters to his disciples: “Your ever well-wisher.”)

The one hitch I saw was that giving initiations would become a distraction from my work on Śrīla

Prabhupāda's biography, which I was just beginning. I knew, though, that initiating was equally, or even more, important. Somehow I had to do it all.

Even in the beginning of those days, when I was offered frangipani garlands and I offered them back to the devotees, when I took morning walks by the ocean in that tropical paradise, I knew that each disciple, as well as myself, would be tested by *māyā*. I didn't anticipate, however, how much they would struggle and that most of them would eventually give up their vows and relationship with me.

June 12, 1978: "As servant, I am taking on responsibility of guru. A disciple simultaneously saves himself and works to save others. . . . As I am committing these disciples on the promise of their vow before Kṛṣṇa, so for myself also.

"Be true to the great personality who brought pure love of God. Be true to yourself who desires pure life and freedom in love of Kṛṣṇa. Be true to this highest mission for the world's welfare. In other words, I realize I cannot force them and they have to withstand *māyā* on their own, but if they will only follow these instructions, they will be safe. Otherwise, all is danger, implication; caught in the web of action-reaction."

*

So much for setting the scene. Now I will work the list of those seven who are gone, but I have cold feet. Should I simply bite the bullet and expose how little I knew of them and tell things that will embarrass both

me and them? I'll do so because it's important for my Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This isn't gossip.

Some of these memories are painful, and I can't help but feel I'm compromising their confidentiality. It was nice to remember taking lunch at Divya-jñāna's apartment in Baltimore and that his wife was enthusiastic, nice to praise Laulyam dāsa for his courage, but what can I say about the fact that they left Kṛṣṇa consciousness?

The first name on the Hawaii list is Ajita dāsī. I don't know where she is now, but she has long been out of touch with me. She was already faded and distressed in 1978. Astrologers would probably say that she had a lot of difficulty to go through, but she seemed to attract difficulty. She had poor health, a difficult marriage, and other problems. I don't want to trifle with a human life. I came riding in on my white horse and said, "I'll take your karma and be your guide." They took vows they couldn't follow later. I don't want to be cavalier about it.

A brief mention of a human life can be devastatingly improper simply because it is brief. After all, someone like Ajita dāsī went through so much. What can my awareness of it be? How can I understand her whole history before coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, her inner life, how she felt? Then how can I presume to say *anything*?

I'm sorry her initiation didn't enable her to stay fixed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Or maybe it did. She has drifted so far out of touch with me that I don't even know whether she's following or not. She married a man named Smara-hari dāsa. I used to see her once in a

while or she would write to me—always full of troubles—but then she dropped out. Am I supposed to track her down?

It won't be enough to state a disclaimer, "Dear devotees, you may read your name on this list and not be pleased at how I described you. The details may not even be accurate. You see, I used your name as a springboard. . . . My aim is not to research deeply into your past and present activity and to give an objective report. I'm writing because I need to write and this is an important theme. Please excuse me. By the way, how are you?"

Damn the sensitive nature of this writing. Will I have to pay if I write about these devotees?

I am already paying. I initiated them and hundreds have left. If, for the sake of argument, we say that it's not my fault that they left, am I accountable? Is it all right just to forget them, to write "gone" next to their names and forget about it?

I have to give my main attention to those who are still here. Therefore, I write my books and extend myself as much as possible and practical for me (not like I thought I could during the jet-set 1978 days: "I'll fly to Hawaii every few months to see them").

Besides that, I have to be humble and sincerely ask forgiveness from each devotee whose name appears on this list. What is the use of an insolent, holier-than-thou attitude: "Here's another one who left, but I'm still here in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, by guru's grace"? Instead, let me take the opportunity to repeat each one's name, to bow down before each one in writing, and to ask forgiveness for what I could not do. Since they are mostly all alive, I pray that each name on the "gone"

list may again take up the auspicious path of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Whether they write to me or depend on me is not the main point. I pray that they take up Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

I can't preach to them in person. I don't know their addresses (or hearts and minds). Not long ago, I tried to write to some who I thought were defunct. I asked them, "Okay, where are you at? Why don't we terminate this relationship properly? At least let me know how you are feeling." I got a few saucy letters back. My attempt didn't seem to help.

These disciples' names are on the record Kṛṣṇa keeps on me. Therefore, I need to go before Him and Śrīla Prabhupāda and speak my mind. Prabhupāda initiated thousands of disciples, many of whom have left. Am I doing anything to help *them* come back?

Ajita dāśī had a sweet face. She was sincere. Her son went to the *gurukula*. She wanted him to have a chance at Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Life is hard, but she was fortunate to contact Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That makes her most intelligent among human beings.

Ajita, named after the unconquerable one, I know you tried your best to honor the Kṛṣṇa conscious life. You came to ISKCON because of Śrīla Prabhupāda's presentation. I came to you as his disciple. I know I was unqualified in so many ways, but I tried to help you anyway. I offered you a link to Prabhupāda and you promised before the Deities to honor it. Your initiation was not a travesty. We performed it together in the presence of God in the Hawaii temple. I wish you well.

A couple of names of those who stayed stand out from that same initiation, but if I name one and not the others, it won't be fair. Those devotees already know who they are. They received the mercy and were able to stay with their vows. I'm grateful to them and I must do what I can to help them. Some of the successful ones don't have much to do with me anymore; that has been their own choice. I'm always willing to keep in touch, for whatever it's worth, and I publish books and "Among Friends" and circulate my lecture tapes. At designated times, I go somewhere in the world where my disciples and I can meet as a group. To the successful ones, active and firm in vows, I offer my obeisances.

*

From Śrīla Prabhupāda's lecture, November 1966:

"He should accept the students as his spiritual master. This is the reciprocation. *Prabhu*. Everyone would address the other as "*prabhu*." Officially one may be a spiritual master, but in spiritual platform there is no such difference. Officially, custom is that spiritual master is considered in the place of Supreme Lord, and therefore he is given such respect. The spiritual master, bona fide spiritual master, he thinks that "I am your disciple. I am your disciple." And practical example I have seen: our Guru Mahārāja, when we offered obeisances, he used to return me, *daso 'smi*: "I am your servant." He used to return me this way, "I am your servant."

*

Even a little devotional service never goes in vain. Rather, it can save one at the time of death. Arjuna doubted, "What if I give up my material career for spiritual life, but in the end, due to worldly-mindedness, I cannot continue the yoga path? Won't I lose out both in material and spiritual life?"

Lord Kṛṣṇa replied, "One who does good, My friend, never meets with evil." If you are a hundred percent successful in spiritual life, you go back to Godhead. If you fall down or fail to complete the spiritual path, then in your next life you will be born in a family of devotees or *brāhmaṇas*, or in a rich, pious family. From there, you will continue to make progress; you will be attracted to devotional service automatically in that next life and continue to practice until you finally complete the course and enter the spiritual world of eternity, bliss, and knowledge with Lord Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda compared it to medical education in India. If someone goes to medical school for four years but fails the final exams, the government still allows him to practice, but without the full credentials.

Besides, the race isn't over yet. Whatever these disciples did is good. They can have a reawakening on any day.

*

Brahma-sampradāya dāsa is living in the Boston area and making a serious attempt to bring his material and spiritual life into order. Some devotees meet with internal resistance. They don't become encouraged by their association with the devotees in the temple. They

can't fit in. I write to them with suggestions and encouragement. I intimate that they should gradually try to build up a quota of rounds. Some of them need a tremendous amount of care, and even that often isn't enough. What should I do, go live in their neighborhoods and phone them every morning to get them up for *brahma-muhūrta*? I don't mean this sarcastically, but it makes me realize that we each have to fly our own planes. I sometimes have to apply the medic's policy of tending to the wounded persons who are most likely to recover.

Brahma-sampradāya dāsa wouldn't want me to talk about him. He's likely to see it as idle on my part, a few strokes of the pen mentioning him, ink staining his life but leaving him unaided. I'm saying I can't help and I'm sorry. If a little normal attention from me could help, if he could take shelter in my books, wouldn't it be conceivable that he could protect his own chastity, even if it meant living a hermit life in the city? Despite his feeling unwelcome in the temple, he could still go and see the Deity. He could try again. He could create a temple atmosphere at home. He could have an altar, rise early, chant soft *japa*, offer his food to Kṛṣṇa as if he was the only person left on the planet. He could read Prabhupāda's books.

I wish my books could help him, wish he would write to me. But when the case is severe and the hands reach out to me in desperation, and when they are in need of a material expertise I don't have, then either I have to back away or I lack the strength to pull him up.

We live in hard times. The Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra can absolve all wrongs. Those who presume to guide others

should be tolerant and always ready to fan a spark of devotion into a flame. If I see a flame, then I try to stay with it and give encouragement. As Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to me regarding a visit I'd made in my then-GBC zone of the south U.S.A., "As for the devotees in your zone, encourage them more and more."

Please write me, Brian, Bill, Brahmā. Or please let me write to you. It's my duty. But I'm afraid of being pulled down the hole with you. Give me a little hope by showing me a sign of hope from you. Don't despair. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "In the beginning of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, one may not fully discharge the injunctions of the Lord, but because one is not resentful of this principle and works sincerely *without consideration of defeat and hopelessness*, he will surely be promoted to the stage of pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness. (Bg. 3.31, purport, emphasis added)

Please forgive me for not doing more. Can we try again?

*

Dhruva Mahārāja dāsa had a long, productive career in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He painted some of the best pictures existing in ISKCON. His portraits of Śrīla Prabhupāda get reproduced and printed all over the movement. His BTG covers were charming and expert. I especially remember the one where young Kṛṣṇa stood amidst a bevy of wildflowers. He looked so innocent, the most beautiful person, more beautiful than any of the flowers.

Dhruva Mahārāja painted and lived at the BTG house. He said he wanted to get married, but didn't pur-

sue it in a passionate way. Neither did ISKCON produce a wife, presto! Years went by and he began to get gray-haired. He did get married, but somehow it broke up. I don't know the details of that, but I think in the aftermath, he and his wife went separate ways, both leaving their vows.

Dhruva Mahārāja dāsa was first initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda. He and I had some nice talks about art. Did I tell him how much I liked what he was doing? I remember he had a studio in the attic. I said, "This is a very nice place. Please thrive here, drawing and painting to your heart's content. Take time to read and chant." Sometimes I fantasize or imagine in a creative way how my disciples can succeed by being satisfied with a simple life—minimum material needs, no illicit sex or drugs, and little socializing. I picture them as monks in their cells. "Sure," I say, "you can do it, can't you? Won't it be nice?" It turns out I paint unrealistic pictures. All right, then do whatever it is you want or need. But can't that be done in Kṛṣṇa consciousness?

I don't know what Dhruva Mahārāja is doing now. Maybe he is still on the path, but his whereabouts are unknown to me. I wish him well. He was also an excellent cartoonist. We featured his artwork every month in the "Vedic Observer" column in BTG. His drawings brought the columns to life. He told me he liked to do the cartoons as a supplement to his fine art. After he left the society of devotees, he had to struggle to make a living with his art. We asked him to continue drawing for BTG. He was willing to do it for a fee. BTG paid for awhile, but eventually found volunteers who considered

it an honor to perform this service. That was the last link we had with him. Now I don't know where he is.

He was always a gentleman with me, quiet, but always with some trouble in mind, some basic dissatisfaction or unrest in his life. I make it sound so mysterious. How could they leave? But if you ask devotees who have left what went wrong, they often read you the Riot Act—how ISKCON mistreated them, misled them, abused them economically and in other ways, and that's why they lived under a cloud of discontent.

Here I am, "Hmm. I haven't heard from so-and-so in a long time. I wonder why?" Well, often so-and-so sees me as a hopeless part of ISKCON, a consistent representative of the movement no matter what. What's the use in writing me. They know I don't want to hear the worst about ISKCON, or that I can't see it and won't admit it, perhaps because I live in a privileged situation and don't get the shaft as it's delivered to rank and file devotees.

It's true that I can't take such a heavy barrage. I'm willing to admit we have blundered, me and the temples and the devotees, but I draw the line there. I still think that the four rules are good, that we're not practicing sexual oppression. I still say no to drugs. I still don't want to hear the holy name blasphemed or Prabhupāda criticized. I block my ears if anyone blasphemes the *Vedas*. I can't be the friend of anyone in the *asura-bhāva* mood. Maybe that's why some disciples don't bother to contact me. They know I don't want to hear what they have to say. My offer to help is still from within the cult. I offer to help them come back, if only gradually, to the four rules and sixteen rounds. "Forget it. I left that

behind. I left you too. The whole guru-disciple trip is over for me.”

Aside from that, I lack an expansive heart. The six Gosvāmīs were dear to the meek and to the rough. I can’t reach out like they could.

Dhruva Mahārāja, may you prosper. May you continue to work at the art which God gave you. May you realize that your art talent is not your power, but that it is given to you as a gift from Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, I hope you will use it fully. May you dovetail your paintings in the service of a higher cause—in the best cause—and educate others in the values of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Maybe someday we will meet and chat as we used to in your attic studio. I would like to see your latest pictures, whatever they are. I’d love to hear that you are still Prabhupāda’s admirer and that you are leading a sane, constructive life in this age of quarrel. I hope you don’t hold a grudge against me and I ask you to forgive me. If from within the terms that I operate I can help you, please let me know. I am obliged to you by the one act we performed together, your second initiation.

*

Gurur na sa syāt . . . No one should become a spiritual master (or a father, husband, etc.) unless he can free his subordinates from death. Have I done enough to fulfill that? We all know that even if we do our best, a disciple may still fall away. Many of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disciples fell away. But we can’t blame him for that. He offered all of us the path which leads beyond death. If a spiritual master doesn’t offer that path, he

drowns in an ocean of recrimination for his unlawful act of claiming to be guru.

This is hovering over my life. I recite the names of the gone with uneasiness. Did I fail? What more was I supposed to do? Am I perfect on my own, even if I wasn't a more active and expert counselor? I'm imperfect on all sides, but did I do the minimum? I seem to assume "yes." I don't think I'm living a lie because I tell people, "Follow Śrīla Prabhupāda's orders. Take up the basic practices of one who receives initiation. Do this for your whole life. Then even if you can't go back to Godhead in this life, you will get a good birth for completing it in the future. Many great devotees in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* make such a prayer: 'Just let me be born in the association of Vaiṣṇavas; I want only to be able to chant and hear Kṛṣṇa's names and pastimes and to serve the devotees life after life.'"

Prahlāda Mahārāja prayed, "If I cannot go back to Godhead at the end of this life, I pray that in my next life I may have compassion for all living entities, and unflinching devotion to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa."

*

I recite the rules, regulations, and aspirations of devotional service to them. I still do that. I try to follow them myself.

And yet I feel guilty. Am I trying to dissolve it by this private game where I write their names in the ease of my study and imagine that I am face to face with them? "I'm sorry I couldn't help you more. If you are

ever interested in coming back to your vows, please drop me a line, okay?" Yes. All right, who's next?

*

Kṛṣṇa-laulyam-devī dāśī received first initiation from Śrīla Prabhupāda. She responded with intensity when I entered her life. I remember her and another young *mātāji* disciple of mine walking close behind me as I left their temple for the L.A. airport. Both of them were wheeling baby carriages and both came without their husbands. I sat with them for a few moments before the plane left. Others had formally bid me good-bye at the temple, but these two stayed until I was out of sight. I said, "If you were *brahmacārīs*, I could be more friendly with you." Kṛṣṇa-laulyam cried when I said that. She used to write me that when she thought of me, she sometimes cried and when would I visit her temple again? She wanted to live in my zone.

Finally, she and her family moved to Gītā-nāgarī, my home base. It turned out to be a disaster for her. People misunderstood her. They wrongly accused her of being a trouble-maker and uncooperative. She felt stigmatized by their opinions. I told her I was on her side, but she felt damaged. She moved to Philadelphia where I also frequented, but it was the same story there. She thought that I shared the authorities' bad opinion of her. I told her I didn't, that I was on her side, but I was implicated. After all, it's all ISKCON. Here I was, telling her that living in ISKCON is the best life, and yet here she was suffering because of the people who were supposed to love her. I can't even remember why the

authorities were down on her. I know she had several young children to take care of and maybe the authorities failed to understand her difficulties and expected her to be a temple workhorse. But I don't remember.

We became estranged. I felt that estrangement from others too. In Kṛṣṇa-lauḍyam's case, I'm still unclear exactly what happened. I don't believe I thought ill of her, and yet I was bewildered by the consistency of her authorities' pronouncements against her. (In other cases, it is clearer that I did get influenced to think ill of a disciple based on his or her authority's judgment. When news reached them that I had judged them second- or third-hand, based on reports I had received from their temple president, their faith in me broke. It shattered like a porcelain cup and could not be patched together again.)

Kṛṣṇa-lauḍyam, you later moved to Australia, wrote to me less, and when you did write, you raised doubts. This was around the time when ISKCON gurus were falling down, one after another. You looked at me askance and then faded from my life. I think you didn't see me as spiritually potent. You thought I wasn't worth worshipping and certainly I was irrelevant and unable to help you in your most pressing daily concerns. Maybe we could exchange again. It would be good if we could at least express ourselves clearly on what we think happened. I hope you are in a protected situation and practicing your vows of first initiation to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

6

June 21, 1978: “. . . I have to keep my own unique relationship with [Prabhupāda] very carefully, and there is danger that I will be so absorbed in being guru that I will abuse my position as disciple. Isn't it the best preaching to the new devotees also, to show them and tell them that I am simply the disciple of my guru? Work at it, think it, write it, pray it, keep it. If I lose it, then I am lost.”

On July 7, 1978, I held another initiation, this time in Boston. Out of five, three are gone, and one was gone for about twelve years and then came back. That last category shows that it is possible to return after a long time without guilt and to be well-received by the devotees with not much, “Where have you been?”

Dāmodara Gosvāmī dāsa, formerly Dave. I can't remember anything about him right now. I know Dāmodara dāsa and Jīva Gosvāmī dāsa and others, but not Dāmodara Gosvāmī dāsa.

I remember the scene: the devotees in one temple or another would say, “Your disciple, X dāsa, has left.” I

was always surprised and disappointed. What could we do to bring him back? Once they're out there in the material world, they're impossible to keep track of, especially if they don't want to be contacted. Devotees may meet them from time to time, but gradually, the manpower in the temple changes and eventually no one knows them anymore. They might visit on a Janmāṣ-ṭamī or a Sunday feast, incognito, wearing a beard and an old sweater (although if they play the *mṛdaṅga* well or can keep the one-two-three beat on the *karatālas*, that usually gives them away). But no one can pry them out if they want to stay undercover. Sometimes devotees see "ex-devotees" in the city by chance. Sometimes they point them out to me, "See that person over there? He's your disciple, X dāsa." Sometimes I have to strain to remember them.

It's like remembering *ślokas*. *Bhāg.* 7.5.32 says, "Unless they smear upon their bodies the dust of the lotus feet . . ." I grope in my memory. "How does it begin?" I ask.

Naiṣāṁ matis . . .

"Oh yeah!" I cry, and then it comes automatically: *naiṣāṁ matis tāvad urukramāṅghriṁ, spṛṣaty anarthā-pagamo yad-arthaḥ/ mahiyasāṁ pāda-rajo-'bhiṣekaṁ, niṣ-kiñcanānāṁ na vṛṇita yāvat*

I'm sure Dāmodara Gosvāmī dāsa would be like that too. He's in there somewhere, covered in cobwebs and under piles of more recent bio-data from the hundreds of people we meet in a lifetime. Those to whom I gave initiation deserve my attention. However, if they no longer think our relationship is important and if they shed it from their lives, then I have nothing to hold on

to until they take it up again, perhaps even in another lifetime. I have to be ready for that, someone suddenly approaching me and saying, "You may not remember me, but I was initiated by you. My name was X dāsa and now I want to talk again."

I'll probably blink and say, "Okay, sit down." As he talks, it will all come back and regardless of the neglect, we will both see that a fresh opportunity awaits us as long as he remains in the human form of life.

*

Palayita dāsa, Fernando Gomez, first initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda. Sure, I remember him. He was a fiery, intelligent South American. He worked in the kitchen. Where is he now? I could ask Muktavandya or some other old-timer from Boston. Palayita. He wasn't easy for the leaders to manage. So many letters went back and forth between us, all intelligent exchanges. I tried to explain. Sometimes he wrote long letters. I could look them up if I had an archives. What was the gripe or problem that led to his going away?

Better yet, what can I do about it now? Some devotees close the file on our relationship and don't want to re-open it. As one once-intimate disciple said to me, "No way!" and he held up his two hands, both facing me, as if to stop my advance. No way he wanted to have a close relationship again. Burnt out. Someone misled him and I stood by or lent support.

Palayita. I can use that name for a new disciple now. When it's a good name like Śyāmasundara, I am inclined to reuse it. An early Ravindra-svarūpa dāsa left

Śrīla Prabhupāda and Prabhupāda awarded the name to a more worthy recipient. I always hesitate to do that. When great baseball players retire, the team takes their number out of action. If you are out there, disciple of mine, and you hear someone else has your name, that's an indication that it has been a long time with no sign of your return. Still, you can come back. You can show up and say, "I am the *original* Śyāmasundara dāsa." "I'm the original Sāṅkirtana dāsa. I was the first disciple in America." You will be honored at once, like the prodigal son returned, "He's our older brother."

Another name from the first Boston initiation is Gaura dāśī, also first initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda. She was a white girl serving in Africa. I think she was married to a black-bodied devotee. Maybe they moved to Texas for awhile and she wrote me occasionally. Then our relationship was no longer important to her, or she got "lost," at least to me and my little world of contacts. I recall her as a quiet, and of course, sincere devotee. Africa? Texas? How do you even start looking for these people? What would I say if I found her? It's especially presumptuous to go looking for those who received first initiation from Śrīla Prabhupāda. ISKCON exaggerated the importance of guruship over those who were first initiated by Prabhupāda but second initiated by someone else, and for that reason alone, some of them later created distance between us ("I'm not really his disciple"). Some of them claimed it had been false from the beginning. For those devotees, it's no big thing to be "gone" to me.

May a quiet girl named Gaura dāśī do well, following firm vows to Śrīla Prabhupāda wherever she goes. I hope I did not mislead her, and if I did, I beg her forgiveness.

*

In New York City, at the 55th Street skyscraper temple, under the auspices of the GBC man, Ādi-keśava Mahārāja, I initiated twenty-six people. It was July 13, 1978. Eight of them were already first initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda. Half of them are now gone, but among those who stayed, some of them have become leaders in ISKCON.

Adhokṣaja dāsa left ISKCON, renounced his initiation by me, and got reinitiated by Śrīla Śrīdhara Mahārāja of Navadvīpa. Seven years later, he wrote me and wanted to clear up any bad feelings about it. I told him I wished him well in his *bhajana*.

Mahājana dāsa worked for years in the New Vrindaban printing department. I think he later moved to Upstate New York and may well be printing, associating with those devotees who work in that trade up there. "Out of sight, out of mind." It never seemed important to him to consult with me or to keep in contact.

What do I want and expect? Who am I to demand these things? It's like saying, "I am a spiritually potent person and it would be good for you to be guided at least by my suggestions for your specific welfare. In general, my books are capable of nourishing you, opening you up, delighting you, etc."

In the early years, starting with 1978, I would have stated forcefully that a disciple *must* be guided directly

by me or else he would come to no good. I wanted to protect the mass of those who took initiation from me by not allowing exceptions to go without a reprimand. You cannot steer a boat without a rudder. Similarly, a person who thinks he doesn't need a spiritual master is rudderless. I quoted these statements from Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Ādi 1.

But *Ādi-līlā*, chapter 1 also speaks of *śikṣā-gurus*. I avoided *that* topic like the plague. I am the lord, thy god, and thou shalt not have false gods before me.

Well, what about Śrīla Prabhupāda. Isn't he everyone's *śikṣā-guru*? Yes, of course. And what about Rūpa Gosvāmī? Yes, of course. And what about your Godbrother, so-and-so Mahārāja or Prabhu, who gives me so much inspiration and practical guidance? At the mention of a Godbrother's name as a *śikṣā-guru* for my disciple, I would cringe inside. "Well, if you actually regard him as *śikṣā-guru*, there is no harm," I might say, but I didn't like it. I would sometimes quote a letter Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to his disciple, Śrī Galim dāsa, saying that it was all right to accept a *śikṣā-guru*, but he must confirm the teachings of your spiritual master. Śrīla Prabhupāda was referring to his disciples turning to their older Godbrothers and seeing them as gurus. Prabhupāda said it was okay, provided they didn't teach anything different.

But what Godbrother of mine is willing to teach exactly what I teach? And if he is individually different in his emphasis and conclusions, and yet at the same time he is still in line with Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings, then why should I cringe if one of "my" disciples considers him his *śikṣā-guru*? It has taken years to figure

this out, to absorb and overcome petty feelings of possession over disciples.

Possession! Who owns who?

Another *anartha*: a leader imposing himself on subordinates and saying, "I am your *śikṣā-guru*." It has to come from the heart and from a voluntary and deliberate surrender by the disciple. Such things do happen and can't be checked by territorial claims or *dikṣā* laws. If you try to check these forces, you had better be aware of the depth and nature of the individual relationships in spiritual life. Somebody is *śikṣā-guru* to someone else, not by force or decree. When it happens in a pure way, why should I, in the name of exclusive, *dikṣā-guru* rights, try to squelch it?

It pinched my heart in those early years. ISKCON as a whole also had the opinion that taking a *śikṣā-guru* was unchaste and unloyal. I think we have grown up since then. If I still feel pinched, I tolerate it and see it as coming from my narrow-mindedness.

Ah, what do I want? A few followers at least to print my books, a few to take care of me in my old age? Should anyone want even a single follower? Yes, it's okay, provided you have such service capacity that you can engage them in Kṛṣṇa's service and provided they want to be engaged by you. A pure devotee is able to accept service from another devotee, but not in the spirit of sense gratification. He becomes a parent and cares for his spiritual child. Such a pure devotee is heavy (heavier, much heavier) than the disciple, and therefore the disciple is drawn to him for shelter.

I sometimes feel a conflict between the desire within myself to see myself as a fool before my spiritual master

and the duty to discharge the spiritual master's role in disciplic succession.

*

Janmadyasya dāsa. He came and went. I recall someone telling me happily, "That's your disciple, Janmadyasya. He has come back to Kṛṣṇa consciousness." Good news. But where is he now? Would I even recognize him if I saw him? He doesn't need me, I guess. Or should I assert, "He *does* need me. I *must* claim my rights. Hey you, spirit soul, I gave you initiation. What are you doing, going through life with no connection with your initiating spiritual master? Do you think that's right?"

Whatever he says, it's the action that counts. We each have free will. He may "follow" me or not, "relate to" me or not, read my writings or not.

Once a person I initiated wrote to me and said, "I cannot see you any longer in the traditional role of spiritual master. I have too many scars from my dealings with ISKCON and you are connected to that. You didn't treat me properly. I would be willing to go over it with you, but I know it would be painful for you. If you like, you can come to my place, but it would have to be as friends, not as guru and disciple."

I am not willing to accept an offer of equal friendship with a person I initiated. To this particular devotee I replied that I am already taxed trying to relate to the hundreds of persons who want a guru-disciple relationship with me. Frankly, I'm not against hashing it out with him and trying to achieve some healing, but I lack the capacity to do it. I'm too stressed. As for friends, I choose them, just as anyone else does. No one can tell

me I have to be their intimate friend. I begged off his offer in that way. I'm not so hardy that I can voluntarily subject myself to a searing examination of ISKCON's wrongs—the zonal guru system, supervision of disciples by proxy, etc. The past is the past. Let's live in the present. If I can still help you, then let me. If in the past I mistreated you, I'm sorry. Let's go our ways and be positive.

I still have a lot to learn.

*

I can't remember Vyāsa-pūjā dāsa at all. I don't think he ever received second initiation. If you're out there and hear this, Vyāsa-pūjā dāsa, I'm sorry I couldn't help you stay fixed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Can I help you now? Please read Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and try chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa again.

Vyāsa-pūjā dāsa, Jim McCaffe, I just read something this morning in *Bhagavad-gītā* I would like to repeat to you. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in a purport that it's lust that causes the *jīvas* to fall down. We have an original love for Kṛṣṇa, but because we misuse our free will, that love becomes lust and then anger. We are led into all sorts of suffering, life after life, by surrendering to this cycle. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that when a person gets bewildered by prolonged lustful activity, he may inquire again into the nature of the Supreme and his own position. You did make that inquiry when you joined Prabhupāda's movement. Remember? Maybe you will come around again after prolonged suffering and inquire into the spiritual nature, which is the source of

all relief. I advise you to do it. You are not an ordinary person.

The same goes for Janmadyasya dāsa and everyone who received initiation that day in New York City, July, 1978, or anytime.

*

Jaya Prabhupāda dāsa was a young man who wanted to be a rock singer. He produced a tape of his own Kṛṣṇa conscious lyrics with a synthesized background, complete with voice echoes, and sent it to me. He was pretty good at it, with his clear, British-like enunciation. He later left ISKCON—from the Vancouver temple—to seek a career as a professional musician. He said he would become famous and then help the movement.

I remember one occasion when I was being honored with a Vyāsa-pūjā ceremony in the New York temple in 1979. Each disciple read a homage to me. Something about Jaya Prabhupāda dāsa's homage brought tears to my eyes. His was the only offering that did that. Where is he now? I would have to ask the Vancouver devotees. Does he ever come around? Do they see him in the restaurant? At Ratha-yātrā? Is he favorable? *Haribol*, Jaya Prabhupāda dāsa, wherever you are. May you be blessed with Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

*

Rādhā-Madana-mohana-devī dāśī, formerly Madhavi Dudak. Sounds like a Guyanese name. I can't recall her now. Sometimes Guyanese devotees are so humble that they don't write to me. They don't demand anything.

They just get married and serve their husband and children. It's hard to say whether there's anything wrong with that. I don't know what they think of me or what they are doing, but they're probably simply following their *svadharma*. Therefore, they make gradual progress. That's better than pretending to be transcendental to the modes.

I just don't know them. Once I even forgot that a certain person was my disciple. I visited a temple in the Caribbean and she cooked for me. I wrote her a note, "Thank you for cooking. Even though you are not my disciple, you did it with so much care." She wrote back, "I *am* your disciple. You initiated me in 1980."

I forgot. I want to be reminded. But how can we exchange now? Maybe Rādhā-Madana-mohana-devī dāśī (Madhavi Dudak) thought that the *dikṣā* ceremony was complete. Now she simply has to follow her *pati-guru*. No more recognition of her *dikṣā-guru* is required. Some husbands teach like that, and there is evidence that it is Vedic. Ladies don't get initiated, some say, and certainly they don't receive second initiation.

Maybe Rādhā-Madana-mohana dāśī has fallen away. I don't know. Guyana is a vast place of Hindu people. Someone should initiate there and accept the karma of all those willing souls. I did it for a handful of persons and I try to keep up a relationship with them when I visit and correspond. I heard recently that those I initiated in Trinidad are holding meetings once a month among themselves. I'm happy about that. They started to hold them in Guyana too. I prefer to know them, serve them, and love them rather than not know them and allow the relationship to become dormant or dead.

The guru-disciple relationship can always be revived. I'm ready for a revival if you are, dear disciples who are gone, but please take me as I am, just as I will have to accept you as you are. Things have changed a lot since 1978, haven't they? But the vows you took should be honored throughout your lives. For my part, by Prabhupāda's grace, I will still repeat to you what he says in his books.

*

One of the criticisms we hear of ISKCON gurus is that they initiate disciples and then don't take care of them. The critics say the gurus simply want followers to increase their money, manpower, and prestige.

Even if we initiate out of duty, we have to care for the disciples. "No one should become a guru unless he can deliver his disciples from death." How does he deliver them? He gives them instruction, guidance, inspiration, encouragement, and a good example to follow. The rest is up to the disciple. Each pilot flies alone.

Jahnavī-devī dāsī was a black devotee (you know what I mean) from Trinidad. She was a tough cookie—the authorities found her hard to handle—not the meek, submissive type according to idealized conceptions of Sunday school primness. She was lively, earnest, and eager to surrender. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is transcendental and Jahnavī got on the ISKCON wagon. (Or should I say she got into the skyscraper—55th Street, Manhattan? That place, with its basement restaurant and theater troupe had Big Apple potency. It could bring in, maintain, and fully engage people who would

not have made it in the usual suburban ISKCON temple. What a place!)

Jahnavī got married in the movement and moved to Washington, D.C. Her husband couldn't handle her, so he renounced her. She threatened to cut him up with a knife. I asked her, "Please don't." I asked him to consider taking her back. He said, "No way, she's too . . ."

She went back to Trinidad after that. Most of the Trinidadian devotees have never heard of her and no one I have asked knows her whereabouts.

It's hard to stay a devotee for life. When life hands you a rough deal, you are likely to blame ISKCON, the devotees, even Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa. You spin back out into the material world.

(True anecdote: a disciple was about to leave the 55th Street temple and rejoin *māyā*. The temple president stopped him in the lobby and tried to convince him to stay.

"No, I'm going. I can't follow the rules."

The temple president then held up a picture of me, his initiating guru, and said, "Are you going to choose *māyā* or your spiritual master? Are you going to reject him?" With only a moment's hesitation, the devotee said, "I choose *māyā*," and he went out the revolving door.

Hold up my picture? A weak ploy. What does that face offer that *māyā* can't give you in better, more handsome forms?)

Jahnavī, Jahnavī,
where you been so long? If you ever hit the bottom
and you want to come up
Kṛṣṇa is waiting

and I won't forget
your name is Jahnavī dāsi.

*

Divya-lilā dāsa died of AIDS in a Long Island hospital. He finished up strong in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, begging forgiveness from the devotees and cared for by a few compassionate friends who chanted the holy names for him. He is not “gone” in the sense of defunct. None of us ever becomes permanently defunct. We each go on to a next life for a better chance to complete our Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Divya-lilā was hampered by an addiction to homosexuality. We Westerners have such heavy karma. It's difficult to switch to a pure life. Śrīla Prabhupāda once said that we shouldn't be astonished when devotees leave, we should be amazed that they stay. Māyā is strong.

It is wonderful
to stay at the lotus feet
of the Lord
following the regulative principles
of freedom.

Divya-lilā did it at the end,
crying that this body and
the world is no good
for enjoyment.
It's only good for service to Kṛṣṇa.
Please give me that service
life after life.

I don't initiate people until they are at least eighteen years old or unless I fully trust that they know what they are doing and what they want. They have to be prepared to take lifelong vows. Initiation is different than the babyhood or childhood *samskāras*. Those early *samskāras* are meant to purify us and put us on track, but the initiation is the consummation.

I was baptized Catholic when I was still an infant. I received my First Holy Communion at eight and Confirmation as a young teenager. I still remember wearing gowns with bows and having to recite prayers.

ISKCON initiates are usually young adults. The initiating guru is not just a ceremonial priest. (Who was that priest who dipped me into the baptismal font? Who was it who gave me my first Eucharist wafer? Which bishop slapped my cheek at Confirmation to signify that I was now a soldier for Christ and should stand up for the Catholic Church? Nameless. No one recalls.)

Everyone remembers the name of their initiating guru. What about from my side? Who are my disciples? What are their names? Do I know where each of them is now? When they offer *praṇāmas* or their food to God through me, am I aware of it? Do I get a signal inside me, "Oh, so-and-so in Hawaii is praying to me"? Huh?

Then why am I listing these names and counting the gone?

I am writing this outdoors in Italy. I have to write because it's my *dharma*. Each of my disciples, whether gone or present, could say, "Listen, I too could write a book about everything that has happened to me up to and since my initiation." I bet they could. They should

if they think it will help. This is *my* book on the subject. I have a right to say what I have to say.

It occurred to me that it would be interesting to look at a memoir written by a U.S. president after he has left office. They all write one, so there are plenty to choose from. I thought particularly of Jimmy Carter's. I won't do it, but the thought crossed my mind because it will give me an example of what *not* to do in this book. Those guys tell their side of the story and defend their presidencies. They can't break out of the mold of seeing themselves as worthy historical figures. They want to give *their* version of what happened and they hope it will make its way into the history books. Fat chance of that in this age of mud-slinging and partisan views. They try anyway. I don't want to write in that mood. Don't say, "I was a good guru. I tried my best. The Congress was against me. Was it my fault that the country went into an economic slump as soon as I took office? Was I to blame for what the other guys did? Believe me, I did good, much better than I got rated for by the press. Here are a few anecdotes to prove it."

Humph. Let's see what I can do. Can I pull less punches, at least, than a former U.S. president? Can I say something sincere? Can I love, even belatedly, those idealistic men and women who came to me, recommended by their temple presidents, for initiation into eternal life? Can I help them? That's why I'm singing this song.

7

The next name on the list is Jivadhara. He was a good carpenter. He made me a low, inlaid table with a glass cover. (I later gave that table to Mathureśa Prabhū because he gave such outstanding donations to keep *Gītā-nāgarī* afloat).

Jivadhara was not a child. He was first initiated by Prabhupāda, a working class kind of man, not an intellectual. He was a man who could do things; he was not afraid of labor. He broke the stereotype of the young Hare Kṛṣṇa cult member with starry eyes. He looked more like an army veteran or a man you might meet in a neighborhood bar. Was he my age?

Did he understand the philosophy? They must have worked him hard in the 55th Street temple, but maybe he had back trouble or something. He wasn't one to write me. Even in the beginning, he wanted to emphasize that he was Prabhupāda's disciple. I didn't get in the way of that—or at least that's how I half-remember and half-fantasize our relationship now.

Jivadhara: what does that name mean? We are given spiritual names and they become the name we're known by. When they say our names, they rarely think of the meanings, of the Lord's qualities they describe or the our position in *bhakti*. They simply think of their God-brothers or Godsisters and remember our good qualities and our human foibles. Sometimes they call out our names with sarcasm or abbreviate them.

Jivadhara. What does that name evoke in me?

*

Pūrṇānanda dāsa was also first initiated by Prabhupāda. He was fiery, feisty, and abrasive. He worked in the treasury and he used to become disturbed when he saw how ISKCON neglected the niceties of the law. Of course, he was right to insist that we be entirely legal and moral in our financial dealings, but he was irascible about it. A lovable, intelligent family member.

I remember on one visit to the Philadelphia temple, I began a disciples' meeting by saying that instead of giving my usual "issue-oriented" talk, I would read from the draft of the *Lilāmṛta*. Pūrṇānanda's face lit up and he made a sound of assent. Yes, let's not always be preaching, "I'm the guru—I'm bona fide even though I'm not Prabhupāda. Since you all are disciples, we have to relate together. You have to obey and I have to get you to obey. Do you understand?" Pūrṇānanda was relieved to get a break from that and eager to hear me speak about Prabhupāda.

He drifted away from his accountability to me gradually. That could be a way of saying he grew up. You

can't expect a younger brother to remain always a child. All disciples grow up and change. Therefore, when I say "gone" or "litany for the gone," I don't mean that unless everyone sits on my knee, they can't go back to Godhead. No, "gone" is a lament for those who have given up their vows. Keeping the vow is for the disciples' good (and for my good too). The vows prevent us from falling down. The regulative principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness are essential for every conditioned soul.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "When love of God deteriorates into lust, it is very difficult to return to the normal condition. Nonetheless, Kṛṣṇa consciousness is so powerful that even a late beginner can become a lover of God by following the regulative principles of devotional service." (Bg. 3.41, purport)

Pūrṇānanda, please forgive me for intruding into your relationship with Prabhupāda. Please forgive the devotees for their sloppy, cheating ways. May you be mellow, wise, and strong in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, wherever you are.

*

Lilā Puruṣottama dāsa, first initiated by Prabhupāda. He was the opposite of Pūrṇānanda—quiet and retired. What happened to him? I see him in my mind's eye—his face—but perhaps I am confusing what happened to him with someone else. *Someone* became a Christian (and later wrote me a few letters insisting I save my soul by leaving Kṛṣṇa consciousness before it was too late). I may even be associating Lilā Puruṣottama with Prabhupāda's early disciple, Puruṣottama

dāsa, who did become a Christian and who had his own evangelical radio show.

How they have spread out into the world. When they go, I often wonder whether they hide from their new acquaintances and friends the fact that they were once devotees of Kṛṣṇa. Do they hide it from themselves? It is to Lilā Puruṣottama's eternal benefit that he served Prabhupāda. Even Puruṣottama dāsa acknowledged that Śrīla Prabhupāda taught him of the existence of God.

Lilā Puruṣottama, I see you in a group of devotees with your white complexion and your mild manner. May you prosper.

*

As I write, I'm aware that just because I have not heard of a devotee's whereabouts and activities doesn't mean he or she is not actively engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. When ISKCON was small, I knew everyone in it. Now it's huge. One of these American devotees could be living in Malaysia or Bangkok or in an Indian jungle or even deep in the American mid-west. They could be living in an isolated mountain home with a wife and five children, reading Prabhupāda's books. Therefore, I say to you who are practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness alone yet who are on this list, please excuse me. My speech is full of errors, cobwebs, and old wounds. I confess that I was overtaxed. Still, I must speak my recollections, limited as they are. They are true within those limits. When I say I don't know the whereabouts of Lilā-Puruṣottama, and yet I have a spiritual connection with him, that's not incorrect. If the shoe I bring out does not fit you, then don't accept it, but allow me

to speak because it's good for my heart. You may correct me and certainly Kṛṣṇa will correct me.

I'm not making any of this up. I lived through those times and I gave the initiations. These people also lived through them and considered themselves my disciples. Now some of those relationships are broken. I cannot claim that the break was wrong in every case. I cannot expect that my disciples be preserved in a frozen tableau of life in the Manhattan temple in 1978. I want them to grow up. Some of them grew up, spread apart, and disappeared into the ten directions. Therefore, this is a litany for the gone.

*

I'll mention one more name from that New York City initiation: Abhilāṣa dāsa. He too was first initiated by Prabhupāda. He was of African descent from a Caribbean country and he had a strong body. He was a temple *kṣatriya*. No one messed with Abhilāṣa.

I remember him wearing a bright purple shirt and how it shone against his gleaming black complexion. He was young and virile, a powerful servant of the servant of the Lord. He had a lot of energy and sensual strength to control and it was hard for him to follow the regulative principles.

We had an affectionate relationship. I was proud of his manliness in the way a father is proud of his manly son. We mixed it up in the *kirtanas*, broke all the racial barriers, and felt the flow of souls praising Kṛṣṇa. He left Kṛṣṇa consciousness early and then came back. It was a happy return. I think he came and left several times before he was finally gone for good.

Abhilāṣa, please come back. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is waiting for you. All the promises of your youth are still here. Kṛṣṇa did not cheat you and Prabhupāda holds a place for you in Kṛṣṇa's kingdom. What good will you derive from roaming throughout the material world? You know better. You hit on reality when you discovered the devotees in Manhattan. Please take that jewel out from your past, dust it off, and hold it up to the light. It is the rarest gem, that Kṛṣṇa consciousness you discovered when you were young. See? It's still yours for the keeping.

"So, from any stage of life, or from the time of understanding its urgency, one can begin regulating the senses in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, devotional service of the Lord, and turn the lust into love of Godhead—the highest perfectional stage of human life." (Bg. 3.41, purport)

*

On July 23, 1978, I held an initiation in the Philadelphia temple for seven people. At that time, Philadelphia was also part of Ādi-keśava Mahārāja's GBC zone and Ravindra-svarūpa Prabhu was the temple president.

Rādhikaika-devī dāsī was a test case. I'm not going to intrude on her life just by acknowledging my own. Usually we hear of underlings who stifle their natural feelings. They think it's offensive to feel or say anything that reflects less than perfect obedience to and worship of their superiors and the system. Later, they become resentful. It happens. I have been bottled up too. A leader also has the right to cry, "I was hurt, I was

wronged,” even though it might be he himself who is the source of his own problem. Actually, it’s true for all of us—we’re the source of our own problems.

I hesitate to speak of Rādhikaika because I doubt she would want to be counted in the “gone” category. It’s too negative. Someone might leave ISKCON, but does that mean they are condemned? Leaving may have been more conducive to their growth. But I can’t say that leaving the rules and regulations of *bhakti* is more conducive to anyone’s growth. Maybe such devotees feel driven away by the intolerable conditions under which they had to live. Therefore, for an “insider” to brand someone else as “gone” can be another form of insularism; it’s a black and white simplification, typical of cultists and fundamentalists, who speak of “us and them,” the “devotees” and the “demons.” Devotees are in and alive and affectionate; demons are dead, gone.

I don’t use the term “gone” in that context. I have already said that this litany consists of those devotees who are gone to *me*, and, as far as I know, gone to their vows. No one should give up their vows. Vows are important in human life. Therefore, I pray for those disciples who have left me, and I hope they will return to the vows they made before Kṛṣṇa. This litany is not meant to be vindictive. Neither is it meant to reflect the state of ISKCON simply because it comes from an ISKCON “insider.” I can’t take responsibility for everything that has happened in this institution. After all, all that stuff has happened to me too and I survived. Besides, I’m speaking of the essence. I can’t focus on all the nitty-gritty horrible things that have happened to any of my disciples. That’s not to say that they didn’t hap-

pen, but it's not my story to tell. I can't presume to even know about it all. If it's their story, they should tell it. If and when they do tell it, they will see what I'm up against—trying to select from experience what was true, what happened and was important to my life, and what stays with me now. I want to say something that will bring us all some relief and at least a small sense of resolution.

Aside from these obvious and overwhelming reasons why I hesitate to speak about other devotees' lives—that is, that I don't want to invade their privacy and that I can't assume to understand those lives from the perspective of those who had to live them—another reason just came to mind. Maybe all this isn't important to me because it happened to others. It sounds weird, but I want to admit it.

Lately, I have been trying to avoid the kind of collisions I went through with such intensity when I used to socialize and interact as guru and GBC man. In so many cases, I was unable to satisfy people. Now I have withdrawn from that kind of contact. I don't mean withdrawn from *people*, but withdrawn from confrontations. Perhaps I have gone to the other extreme. I shouldn't categorize all human dealings as typically unsatisfactory, as if they are all the same *māyā* one finds in family life, "the forest of material enjoyment." It's so hard to heal past experiences because we not only have to make peace with ourselves, but we have to go to each other and make peace. Each devotee has so many gripes that it becomes complicated. We don't seem to make progress. Then we're left with the essential work of trying to heal ourselves by at least looking at the

relationships we had with others. Ultimately, though, we are stuck with our own perspective—what those relationships meant to us, what they “did” to us, and where we stand now.

It seems easier to put such relationships in an unfathomable, murky file and close the lid. They represent a Pandora’s box of human relationships and histories. That era in ISKCON is a Pandora’s box. As I said, ultimately we are left with our own perspective.

When we talk about other people, we may be accused of falsifying the history. People will contact me and say they were “devastated” or “terribly disappointed” or “enraged” at my version of what happened. But I have to go forward anyway, even while I leave this trail of disclaimers. My version is not objective. It may represent only a pitiful fragment of the truth. But it’s what I remember, how I see it, and what is permitted to me to speak. By allowing myself to speak, I’m discovering that *people are important to me.*

*

Back to Rādhikaika, named Emily at birth. She is the daughter of Ravindra-svarūpa and Saudamaṇi Prabhū. Ravindra-svarūpa Prabhū wrote about his daughter in an essay. He said he did not know how to prepare her for the world except by passing on to her the code-vision of people in his own generation: “Be cool.” Then he discovered Kṛṣṇa consciousness and wanted to give it to her as the best possible vision. On Prabhupāda’s request, he sent his young daughter to the Dallas *guru-kula*. She was so young and it was such a shock to be left

alone with strangers in the big, empty-seeming buildings in Dallas, that I'm not sure how she survived it. I was the headmaster of that establishment at the time.

Bhaktin Emily went through her own ordeals and, I hope, pleasures, of being a schoolgirl in Dallas. She remained a devotee and grew up to be a lovely young girl, fully engaged alongside her parents in the Philadelphia temple. All I really knew about her was that she was my Godbrother's daughter. I assumed that because she had had an auspicious birth, a good upbringing, and was beautiful and fresh, she was an angel. On her parents' recommendation, I granted her initiation, and in deference to Ravindra-svarūpa Prabhu, I tried to choose a special name for her. I remember searching through the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* until I found something full of nectar, something uncommon: Rādhikaika. It means "only Rādhā." Kṛṣṇa loves many devotees, but only Rādhā is His dearmost. Rādhā alone. Rādhikaika.

Everyone seemed pleased by her name. Things continued all right as far as I knew until it was time to arrange her marriage. I wasn't involved, but of course her father had his feelings and Rādhikaika gave her opinion. Although there were some doubts about her choice, everyone went ahead anyway. Again, in deference to Ravindra-svarūpa Prabhu, I did something I don't usually do and officiated over her marriage ceremony. It was a disaster in the end. Her husband became unfaithful and was gone to me and to her.

Rādhikaika has since struggled to raise two sons. I don't think of her as gone, really. Her father describes her as a "high energy" person and she has become successful in a material career, despite the burden of rais-

ing two children without their father. It's a sad story, for sure. She has every reason to feel mixed emotions about her *gurukula* and marriage experiences, to see them as arranged by her elders without her consent. Unfortunately, I have never had a good talk or letter exchange with her about all of this. I know she talks about it in depth with her parents, or at least I assume she does, but somehow I have been cut out of their relationship. Or maybe I have allowed myself to be. It all seems so sensitive and I feel I have no choice but to stay at a distance, where it seems one is expected to stay. I don't want to cause any further intrusion or make any further demands. She has enough demands on her life and doesn't need the voice of the old ISKCON initiating guru asking, "Are you chanting your rounds? Are you following the four rules?"

I hope she will be introspective enough to remember her Kṛṣṇa consciousness experiences, despite the problems, and discover that she still holds a priceless gift. If she can discover that during this lifetime—or rediscover it—then she will be extremely fortunate.

As for me, I'm following the policy that sometimes the best thing to do is to do nothing. Regardless, I have to go on with my own spiritual life. In that way, I won't break the promise I made to Rādhikaika. It's the least I can do for her.

*

If I could go back to 1978, would I do anything differently if I had the choice? Sometimes I daydream about this. I imagine deciding that I'm not ready to initiate. Although I'm one of the eleven chosen gurus, I

say, "Not yet." I don't object to the others going ahead. When I am invited to initiate all those who come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness in New York, New England, and Pennsylvania, I say, "No thank you." People think I'm odd at first, but gradually they see the wisdom of my decision as the ISKCON gurus start to fall down. When the groundswell rises in the early 1980s, many devotees ask me to be part of the reform movement to overthrow the GBC guru clique. I don't get too involved in the debate; I just go on writing Prabhupāda's biography and working at *Back To Godhead*, chanting, hearing, and traveling around the world. I might or might not resign from the GBC (depends on whether I get headaches), and by 1990, with a faultless record, I might begrudgingly begin initiating one or two disciples. No one thinks I have been left behind. Rather, they think I have set the best possible example and was actually ahead all along.

Of course, I can't relive my life. What happened has already become the truth. I have to live with it now and make the best of it. It's futile to look back and say it was wrong to initiate, because to this day, I have relationships with devotees whom I initiated in 1978. Why should I claim our coming together was wrong? Even if my motivation had flaws, I cannot reject the responsibility. Realistically, it's best that I work to purify and improve my checkered career.

*

Patita-pāvana got onboard July 23, 1978. He was still a teenager. He was also one of the few people to join

Kṛṣṇa consciousness by coming directly to Gitā-nāgarī. He didn't get along with his authorities, but I can't imagine what it's like to join and execute Kṛṣṇa conscious austerities as a teenager, especially under such strong-willed older men. It must be a heavy test if you don't really know what you want to do with your life.

Teenagers who have been in Kṛṣṇa consciousness all their lives speak of a tremendous curiosity for "outside" life. They feel they have missed out on the "real" world and they panic. Maybe the "insular cult" doesn't have the last word.

It must be extremely difficult to deal with these doubts if you have strong material desires. Sometimes I see pure-looking teenagers who have been raised closely and affectionately by their parents in ISKCON. Some of them (a few) make it all the way through, get initiated, and grow up as full-time devotees. I joined when I was twenty-six, primarily lassoed in by Śrīla Prabhupāda, who tightened the noose of love. In the ensuing years—1966, '67, '68, '69, '70, '71, '72, '73, '74—he gave me constant opportunities to serve him closely and constantly sent encouraging letters telling me I was doing well and could do better to serve Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, I can't be judgmental of a young, rambunctious fellow like P.P.

He was wild and crude and raw. Eventually, he learned of New Vrindaban and became a sold-out follower of its guru leader. I wasn't so big-hearted about it at the time, but I accepted it silently. P.P. would sit listening to my lectures while glancing at a framed photo he kept on the floor in front of him of New Vrindaban's guru.

"Why don't you go live there, Patita?"

"Yes, that's a good idea."

He lived there and his wildness was controlled and channeled for awhile as he worked with some of the senior artisans, sculptors, workman, NV gang, followers of their leader. Gradually I began to think it was best for him, but a strain developed in figuring out what my relationship with him was. How much responsibility did I have for him?

He occasionally visited Gitā-nāgarī. Once he even tried to kidnap one of the young girls, who decided she didn't want to be carried away by him. He would confront me—I would almost say "bully" me—during those visits. He told me that his NV guru was more "macho" than I was, and more loving too.

One morning, early, around 3 A.M., I came out of the cabin and went to the outhouse in a shroud of solitude. On my way back to the cabin, I suddenly saw P.P. standing in front of the door, blocking my way. He had just arrived from NV or somewhere. He materialized in front of me without warning. I still remember that moment.

"What does he want?" I wondered. Well, he said he wanted to talk. He came into the cabin and rambled on and on about his young life. I couldn't get a handle on it.

He stayed at NV for a long time, but as devotees started to leave, disillusioned, he finally broke away, went to L.A., and I didn't hear from him anymore. I saw him twice on separate visits to L.A. Both times he glared at me or stood out from a group of other young devotees in much the same way he did that morning in front of the cabin at Gitā-nāgarī.

What can I do for you, Patita-pāvana? You never write to me or want to follow my direction, and when I cross your path, you behave as if I am obliged to you in some way. Do you want me to fix your life? To hear of what you are doing—your brash assertion that you don't follow the rules? Do you want me to listen to *that*? You are fed up with the strict institutional life, yet you are not happy with what you are doing. What can I do?

Will we continue to cross each other's paths? How did we ever come together in such a profoundly intended relationship as guru and disciple? Is there any future for us? I don't know.

Śrīla Prabhupāda initiated some and they didn't work out. He didn't cry about it. (Correction: he cried for some when they went away; he said he did.)

I'm sorry I wasn't more what you wanted. Still, I have to say to myself, "I'm no spiritual Hercules. I didn't have the enormous strength it would have taken to hoist this boy up or keep him with me with his loud and frivolous manners. How could I find his original heart and soul and set him right? I'm an institutional initiator and a quiet fellow. If I can help you by my non-macho, indirect indications, then I'm happy and grateful. I'll try to go the extra mile, but I'm less able to do that nowadays, especially in outward ways. The disciples have to come to me, to my books and my meetings, my seminars and the places I frequent. I don't begrudge Patita-pāvana his ways. I wish him well in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He came at such a young age. He was fortunate to have worshipped Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and to have heard so much nectar about Prabhupāda.

Patita, I think I would still recognize you if you crossed my path or suddenly stood in front of me with that jaunty, jocular, menacing air. I would ask, "How are you?" I wouldn't want to feel the guilt that you try to project on me—the guilt that I didn't do something more for you. You needn't feel guilty about your obligation to me. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a matter of free will. We serve with love or not at all.

See you later. I wish you well. I'm going to write more books (and be with those who love me).

*

Why write about these ordinary souls and their ordinary pip-squeak, castor-tree-sized guru? Because it's who we are. We want to come to Kṛṣṇa. It's a tragedy that these souls evolved so far that they took up Kṛṣṇa consciousness seriously in this lifetime, but have since given it up.

Why write? To save us. I have a responsibility and I could have discharged it better. "Oh, they went away, but it wasn't my fault"—that's complacent. Here I am beating the drum and singing, "*Jīṁ jāgo, jīṁ jāgo*," awake souls, dear initiated ones. Please rise and chant the names of Gaura-Nitāi and Hare Kṛṣṇa. How long will you sleep on the lap of the witch called Māyā? Let us get away from her. Let us absorb ourselves in the names and pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa and render Him service.

*

Buddhi-yoga dāsa, formerly Larry, I can't remember. I gave out the name Buddhi-yoga a second time, to a socially respectable man in Potomac. He also went away. Finally I gave out the name a third and fourth time and it stuck. We all need Buddhi-yoga.

My amnesia. I can't recall him. Ask him, "Whoever and wherever you are, Buddhi-yoga dāsa (formerly Larry), please come back." I'm praying to Kṛṣṇa, "Please allow all lost souls come back."

Once a disciple asked Śrīla Prabhupāda if she could pray for all living entities. Śrīla Prabhupāda challenged, "Do you *know* all living entities?"

I know that Prahlāda Mahārāja prayed like that: may all demons be subdued and may everyone be peaceful and happy in *bhakti-yoga*. I don't know all *jīvas*, but I was given charge of a batch of them. I brashly rushed in, volunteered to become the sole initiating guru for vast geographical areas. A few hundred took *dikṣā* from me. How can I wash my hands of my responsibility to them? Yet I can't even recall some of them. Still, I see the name on a list and I accept that I initiated him or her. Therefore, I pray to Lord Kṛṣṇa as is my duty.

Buddhi-yoga, did you leave so quickly that there's no longer any trace of you? Do you consider your disappearing act a success? You left no clues, no footprints, no way to find you. Have you also forgotten us? But sometimes you recall in a favorable way, I'm sure, your early connection to the *sac-cid-ānanda* path. You probably still can't dismiss it as mumbo-jumbo. If a co-worker says, "Hare Kṛṣṇa is bosh," you know better. You cannot sink into material pleasures forever. You know that. Therefore, sometimes ex-devotees (a fatalistic term) resent

their Kṛṣṇa conscious memories and see them as restricting their enjoyment. In deeper moments, however, especially if death comes near or misery strikes repeated blows, they are likely to remember (as did the serpent Kāliya when repeatedly kicked by the light, yet mighty feet of the cowherd boy) that there must be a God.

In the material world, there is a tomb for the unknown soldier and people go there to pray. Here is a prayer for the unknown disciple, those I have temporarily forgotten. May they find their way back to Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet. May I help as many of them as possible. This is one motive for my writing and it's not one to be ashamed of: I don't want to have a bad record of so many initiated devotees gone to me. I cannot so easily shrug them off. I initiated them and they went away. Where is that first Buddhi-yoga dāsa, missing in action, prisoner of war, hostage to the terrorist Māyā-devī? Can we get him back? Does he want to come back? If he doesn't want to, can we change his mind?

8

In July, 1978, I went to Vancouver for the first time in my capacity as initiating guru. I was invited to become *the* zonal guru of Vancouver by Bahūdak Prabhu. I think out of all the places where I have initiated, I experienced the highest percentage of lost disciples in Vancouver. Whose fault is that? What is the accurate history? It's the history of ISKCON in the mid-1980s when the very foundation of *guru-niṣṭhā* got smashed with a sledge hammer.

When I first went to Vancouver, they gave me the red carpet treatment, literally. Bahūdak sang beautiful *bhajan*s, accompanied by harmonium, idealistic young men and women threw flowers and then asked for initiation.

I don't want to think about Vancouver, but when ISKCON devotees began to discover that the eleven gurus were not infallible *mahā-bhāgavatas* and that our worship of them was overdone, a reform movement began. For a few years, the ISKCON GBC resisted this grassroots reform. They (me too) said, "All right, some

gurus have fallen. That was their problem. It's not the system itself that is faulty."

Finally, after more falldowns, the reform movement grew stronger and we might even say, the reformers began to taste blood. They wanted to smash the GBC's complacency. At that time, the GBC insisted on allowing only a few initiating gurus for the world and even regarded those gurus as above their Godbrothers. (In some cases, initiating gurus claimed that their Godbrothers and Godsisters should see them as guru because "guru is one." It sounds outrageous now, but some gurus used to say it with gravity from the *vyāsāsana*.)

Guru reform was taken up with vengeance in Vancouver. It reached the extremes of bashing the very nature of a valid guru-disciple relationship, at least any relationship aside from that of Prabhupāda and his initiated disciples. Some devotees to whom I gave initiation fled to other zones, saying that it was the only way they could keep their faith in me. Then the reformers began to fall down (perhaps as a reaction to too much bashing). Faith in any ISKCON authority collapsed. It has revived slowly in that post-war city.

Let's go back to 1978 and—pretend? No, let's look at the list and do our duty. Remind them that whatever has happened since their initiation doesn't change the fact that they took vows before Kṛṣṇa in His sacred temple. The truth is that through their vows, the initiates received the opportunity to free themselves from *māyā*'s shackles and become free of *samsāra*. If they have given up their vows for whatever reason, they can still take them up again. I still remember those disciples and hope to invoke my love. Let me not trivialize or be sar-

castic or try to absolve myself of wrongs. Rather, I want to admit my wrongs and be free of them. (Isn't that what we all want?)

*

On July 30, 1978, I initiated six devotees in Vancouver. On August 2, I initiated another seven. Out of those thirteen, eight or nine are gone. That's another point about Vancouver: there are more devotees there who are gone to me but still active in their Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Govinda-nandini-devī dāsī was raised in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Her childhood name was Candrakānti. She received first initiation at twelve. She suffered through an arranged marriage with a passionate man and had to raise their child without his help. The very taxing nature of such a burden makes it difficult to go on chanting sixteen rounds and living a peaceful, chaste life according to Kṛṣṇa conscious principles. It's a severe test and we must be forgiving if someone fails to carry it off.

Govinda-nandini was put forward for initiation by her parents and temple authorities. I don't think she had much personal conviction about it or ever developed personal feelings for me. There was a strong wave of social influence in Vancouver in those days—you just got initiated because it was the thing to do. You want to go back to Godhead, right? You have to get initiated. Here's the guru, Satsvarūpa. Here, Sats, here's your disciple. And Sats was all too willing to collect them. Sure, he thought, sure. I can do it.

Maybe Govinda-nandini, now sadder but wiser, still practices Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If I wanted to write an accurate book, I would have to make phone calls. "What is so-and-so doing? Does she come to the temple? Do you know anything about her?" Or I would send out a questionnaire the way university scholars do. Got to be scientific, you know, or your statements won't be accepted as true.

I can't wait for such information before I let this out. I don't want to make a scientific report. I don't want my feelings to cool down. I want to admit my raw ignorance, face it and the neglect, the amnesia, the ache of atrophied bones and spirits, wake up the dead maybe by a croaked cry. In that spirit, I say she is gone.

I remember meeting my Godbrother, Hayagrīva dāsa, after long years of being out of touch with him. He smiled and said, "I'm Hayagrīva! Remember me? Or should I say, '*Do you know me?*'"

"Do you know me" is a different question than "Do you remember me." We may claim to put up a good front that we remember all the names of the persons we have initiated. ("He has a remarkable memory for names." Yes, I learned it by studying a book on how to remember people. You take their name and you attach it in your mind to some outstanding physical feature of the person you are trying to remember: Mr. Hawkins, the fat-headed hawk, etc.) But did I ever know them? Ever care deeply? It really takes time to get to know somebody and I don't know if I did it.

But knowing them wasn't what was expected. Anyway, there were too many of them. How could I

possibly know them all well? I just initiated them when they were recommended.

And she may also say to me
leave me alone, it's dead in
the past. It's part of my childhood
that I want to forget, what ISKCON
did to me.

"All right, all right," I back away
like a timid encyclopedia salesman,
taking his foot out of the door.

Geez, why did I get into this
in the first place? Walk away now
but pray, "May this soul
return to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
May I be open to help whenever
they will accept it."

Don't write anybody off.

Nobody is defunct.

*

Bhakti-rasa dāsa. He wore thick eye glasses, was well-built, young, and could really dance. And they did whoop it up with Bahūdak in the lead. They danced—or rather, ran like a football team up and down the temple hall. Then Bhakti-rasa would get pushed into the center and twirled around. Sometimes they gripped each other's hands and arms and spun each other in a centrifugal force that threatened to burst apart like shrapnel. (The *kirtana* dancing was almost a kind of no-touch football scrimmage, men only, but the women were encouraged to do it too in a second ring which the

men were not supposed to watch since they were engaged in their own rock dance sport.)

Bhakti-rasa played the guitar. His wife was supposed to be the better devotee of the two. I seem to remember her complaining that he couldn't follow, he would get depressed, and that he sometimes didn't want to be a devotee.

What did he want to be? I can't remember. At least I can remember what he looked like and the fact that his problems in Kṛṣṇa consciousness were pronounced even in the beginning. Yet he would try and his wife would help carry him because she was enthusiastic and determined, and dedicated to him and their marriage. He was cast as a person struggling but sincere, swimming, going under, but coming up again. The four rules weren't easy.

What did he want to become instead and did he finally become it? Husbands and wives and me getting letters from everyone. The ladies often cooked sweets as part of my lunch, and even my Godbrothers and God-sisters were encouraged to look up to me and not to envy the pageant of my entrances and exits. I was a figure-head for this big bunch of devotees who were whipped into a painting sales force to support the temple, pay the bills, construct a new temple, and buy a big piece of land in the country.

Almost everyone had to go out and travel widely, knocking on doors with a roll of Korean paintings under their arm: "These are original paintings by Canadian artists. See the signatures, 'Guy Woods, Bill Davenport'?" They would charge ten times what the paintings were worth. Did I know that? Uh . . . well, I did know

that they were Korean . . . I didn't know, not at first anyway, that they tried to get ten times the price. I didn't know they were lying about it. I knew that I was supposed to encourage them in their surrender to Kṛṣṇa. The temple president would meet with me several times during a visit and go over the devotee list. The favorite devotees and the most surrendered were the ones who collected the most money—Navadvipa, Mahāmantra, Rādhikā—and those who did not collect so much but cooperated fully were also categorized as “good devotees.” But woe to any who didn't toe the line. They wouldn't get recommended for initiation or be called good souls.

What did I know or do except what I was told? I was a company guru, an endorsing priest. And, I'll tell it all now quickly. When after years of this the disciples began to understand that I didn't know them except as they had been described by the temple president, it caused a crack in their faith. It's like the crack in the Liberty Bell. As you know, the Liberty Bell is good for nothing now except for displaying its crack. It don't ring.

Bhakti-rasa, lineman for the Vancouver football team, could dance, throw, run, but I don't think he could collect money. He was married and that was enough for him. That's all I know after all these years.

His marriage broke up. Ironically, he lasted longer than his wife and surprised us all. He might have remarried in ISKCON and maybe he still practices Kṛṣṇa consciousness, although I don't think so. He is certainly gone to me.

I'm sorry. I apologize to him and all the Vancouver devotees. Some of my disciples, those still active and those who like me, would say, "You don't have to apologize. It was the system we *all* followed. We were *all* in it." Still, I don't think they'll mind if I apologize. It's good to admit I was wrong.

But am I sorry? Yeah, sure, I feel I was duped. I don't know how I got into it. Once I said, "Yes, I'll initiate," it was already all over for me. Initiating in Vancouver meant supporting the temple president and his estimation of what was best for all the souls serving there. He was sincere in his own way, just as the temple presidents at Gitā-nāgarī and in Trinidad were sincere in their own ways. It was the same story there. They came to me with their list "to talk about your disciples." The list was always divided into good and bad. I didn't and couldn't question it. They would say, "Tell so-and-so to stop being a smart aleck. Tell them to obey authority."

"Yeah." I nodded and received my cues.

"Put this into your *Bhagavad-gītā* lecture tonight."

Sometimes I spoke with a friendly GBC Godbrother who was also initiating. He would tell me to preach to the disciples the way Kṛṣṇa taught Arjuna. The *Bhagavad-gītā* was perfect for this, as if it were spoken originally for this purpose, to motivate reluctant ISKCON devotees.

"I don't think any devotee in your temple is being asked to do anything as difficult as Arjuna was asked," a Godbrother once told me. "Arjuna didn't want to surrender, but Kṛṣṇa said he must. The entire *Bhagavad-gītā* was spoken to make Arjuna give up His cowardice

and fight. Just look at the purport, ‘If there is any reluctance in this . . . one must fight as in military discipline . . . any reluctance to follow this stern order should be given up . . . the false bodily morality of Arjuna should be given up’ and yes, you can tell lies for Kṛṣṇa.”

With my cues and that advice, I could preach.

This is a one-sided, satirical expose. There is another side to it. The young men and women were surrendering to Kṛṣṇa as best they could. They performed devotional service by turning over all the money they collected to Kṛṣṇa, through the temple president. Therefore, it has been credited to their eternal *bhakti* accounts. That is also true.

Why didn’t I stick up for the truth in those days?

What truth? I didn’t see it any other way. I tried to serve as part of a team. How could I have a different opinion than everyone else?

*

To write this litany, I have to dwell on the past, on my mistakes and failed efforts. It’s too heavy. After I read *Bhagavad-gītā* and then come to write, my subject seems unworthy. But it’s not. How can I forget them or reject them as if they represent the wreckage of a ship, its cargo floating out to sea?

Tridaṇḍi dāsa committed suicide. He was married to Liṅgini-devī dāsi, a young girl who was also initiated on this day. She jilted him and he couldn’t take it. He had a history of depression. He was otherwise, to my knowledge, a likable person, physically capable, and wasn’t

easily defeated. He wrote a free verse suicide poem in the brief minutes before he died. It was a shock to all of us.

How blind and foolish, I want to say, but anything I say here proves inadequate. How can any of us estimate an entire human life? It's not something to be thrown away on petty pretexts. According to the law of transmigration, the soul who was Tridaṇḍi dāsa is not dead or gone, but has returned. The karmically negative act of suicide is offset by his devotional service. I don't know where he is, but I know, "In this endeavor, there is no loss or diminution, and a little advancement on this path can protect one from the most dangerous type of fear."

Śrīla Prabhupāda says in his purport to that verse that "work in Kṛṣṇa consciousness carries a person again to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, even after the loss of the body. At least one is sure to have a chance in the next life . . ." Suicide is an abominable act, deep in *tamo-guṇa*, but if one is fixed in a basic conviction that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Lord, he may still be accepted as a devotee.

Some disciples are distant, cold, even unfriendly and disinterested in a relationship. Others are angry, morose, and dealing with them is unpleasant. Tridaṇḍi dāsa was not like either of those. He was pleasant and friendly.

The details of his history are fuzzy, though. I guess I'm not responsible for keeping a perpetual image of the details of each person. I am responsible for keeping myself decent and fixed in devotional rules and regulations

and keeping my shop open for any customers interested in pure devotional service.

I don't forget you, Tridaṇḍi. I wish you well. You are an eternal individual soul whom I met in this lifetime and with whom I rendered devotional service in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. Our meeting was not just the chance collision of flotsam and jetsam in a sea of neuroscience.

*

Toṭa-Gopīnātha dāsa knew martial arts. He always seemed about to explode. I liked him and I think he liked me. Sometimes when I visited Vancouver, he volunteered to be my personal servant in the apartment where I stayed. The temple president liked him.

Once I asked Toṭa-Gopīnātha for something and he countered my request with a different opinion. It didn't upset me, but later he came back in tears, apologizing and horrified that he had been aggressive with me, the person to whom he was trying to surrender. He said, "I tried to overpower you." He was acutely aware of his passionate nature and how it was inappropriate in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The devotees tried to dovetail his energies. I remember how wildly he would dance, shaking all over and flailing his arms around as if striking down opponents. He left Kṛṣṇa consciousness a few times due to his attraction to sex and drugs. Then he would return and try again. The devotees liked him. He was married to Govinda-nandini, but he couldn't keep within the religious codes. His past was turbulent, even criminal, and it called him back to his unfinished business. I

think he stopped communication with me because he saw it as hypocritical and incompatible to write his spiritual master while rejecting his vows. I suppose he's right in that.

I'm not interested in friendships outside of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I can't say, "It doesn't matter if you don't accept Kṛṣṇa or practice devotional service." Those things are the basis of my relationship with all these people. We are devotees, or at least aspiring to be.

I don't know where Tom Lloyd (Toṭa-Gopinātha) is now. It's possible he could have a reawakening. Even a great soul like Valmiki had to be reawakened. He was absorbed in a life of crime before he met Nārada. If *māyā* smashes a conditioned soul, he may come to his senses once and for all. People like Toṭa-Gopinātha get a good dose of devotional service, then go back to material life. Maybe Kṛṣṇa thinks they are not yet qualified, not sincere or serious enough (Śrīla Prabhupāda used those words to describe why initiated devotees later leave their practices). It's also said that *māyā* tests us to see if an apparent devotee really wants to serve Kṛṣṇa or has actually come to disturb Him. If she decides the person is too much of a disturbance, she lures him out through sense desire.

Toṭa-Gopinātha will have to go through a change of heart. You can't just keep coming into the devotional camp for a little release and then going out again into Māyā's kingdom. Sooner or later you have to decide—or else *māyā* will decide for you.

An ex-devotee probably knows, under the bizarre coverings and filth he has accumulated, that he can come back to Kṛṣṇa somehow or other. He has to cry out for

Kṛṣṇa's mercy and then do the needful. Whoever comes back is fortunate. Devotees should always keep a light on in the window in case someone may be out there reconsidering their life.

*

Śraddhā-devī dāsī: I thought she was especially nice. She and her sister had long, pointy noses and were pretty. Of course, that's not why I liked her. She was enthusiastic and affectionate in her spiritual relationship with me. She worshipped a little Nṛsimhadeva Deity—kept it somewhat like a doll—but in a happy sort of play. Not only Śraddhā dāsī, but all these devotees were so young and joyful in those days. Now when I look back, it seems that maybe it was just infatuation and not something they could sustain.

This review of disciples who have left impresses on me that the long haul in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is quite a different thing from the early bursts that come to us, but which are not enough to sustain us. Kṛṣṇa seems to allow a lot of people to come in the door for a while. Then He screens them. We don't know this in the beginning. We don't know what qualities it will take to endure in devotional service. As we learn what it's going to take, what the price is, some of us leave.

Of course, externally we explain their leaving away. We say they were mistreated. That's how they see it and rationalize it. In other words, they thought Kṛṣṇa consciousness was something wonderful and later they decide it isn't. They move on. That's their explanation.

I can't see it that way. If I agreed entirely with that conclusion, I too would have to leave. But I haven't

become so covered by delusion. Any delusions I have are with temporary phenomena, the external forms of the institution, the disappointments with other people, the disappointments with myself. Still, those delusions don't add up to a reason to leave Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I thank Kṛṣṇa and especially Prabhupāda for granting me this confidence that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the best and only way.

Śraddhā dāśī was a pleasant, smiling person, not only toward me, but with whomever she met. I suppose she is still that way if it's her psychophysical nature. It worked well when applied to a guru-disciple relationship. There she was, always ready for a nice exchange, interested in hearing from her spiritual master, celebrating his presence, doing little personal services for him along with her Godsisters. I wanted to give her an especially nice name and chose Śraddhā because it was so appealing to me. "Śraddhā" means faith and faith is the basis of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I wanted to give her that name as a gift or a blessing, a name which when meditated on could keep one safe in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Here someone could raise a doubt: "If you are supposed to be a spiritual master, a wise person, how come you were moved by what were actually superficial signs of affection?" Maybe I was duped. But I could counter, "What was I supposed to do?" We respond to love and we can't always brush it off as insincere. That's the whole thing about being a devotee, about being a spiritual master also—we have to become vulnerable. We can't be cynical. When yet another dirty-looking person comes forward and says he wants to be a devotee, we have to be ready to find them sincere. We have to look for the

spark of spirit. A person may come to any religion, any church, with an intention to steal from the priests, but the priests can't simply be on guard all the time, giving all their attention to discovering whether a person is a crook or not. They have to be open and vulnerable.

It's also true, however, that as we accumulate experience, we start to size people up and we don't get carried away by their infatuation. It makes us a little heavier, a little more grave, maybe not so jolly and light-hearted. It also helps us to appreciate more the long-term, loyal relationships.

I am still happy when I see someone expressing their enthusiasm, even in a beginning way. I may see it now with a little amusement and a little more awareness of how these things can be short-lived, but I welcome the enthusiasm.

When Vancouver's faith in guru got smashed, Śraddhā left. Years went by, but I never heard from her. Not so many years ago, I wrote to her as well as to a number of other devotees from Vancouver who no longer communicated with me. I wrote her that it's good to terminate relationships with understanding on both sides of what happened. Otherwise, that part of life will be incomplete, we may deny it, and so on.

She wrote back, willing to explain where she was at and what had happened. She told me she had remarried someone outside Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but she still had spiritual stars in her horoscope. She was now part of a *sat-saṅga* connected to some impersonalist guru. Her husband was into that too. The painful point was when she said she had lost faith in me when she understood that I really didn't know what she was going through.

She was sent out on a mission to travel around Canada and collect money by selling paintings. She used to write to me of her difficulties. I can't remember everything I used to say to her in response, but she pointed out that there were at least some specific instances where she saw I was accepting the temple president's version of her as reality and was not able to hear from her. In other words, I was politically implicated in the system and not available to her as a real person who could receive her grievances and try to rectify them. I was powerless to rectify some of the basic things she was suffering from, especially the fact that selling paintings was not spiritually good for her. I couldn't tell her to retire from the party and I couldn't tell her there was anything wrong with the sales program.

I may be confusing some of the details now, but I think that was the basic point. It's valid—my not knowing my disciples and not being able to respond to their cries for help because of being a figurehead in that system. In fact, I was manipulated by the other leaders. When she saw this, she gave up her early conceptions of me as Kṛṣṇa's representative or as an empowered person, as a person to whom she could render all sorts of service and love with her heart as her dearest well-wisher. She saw me as an ordinary person and resented me, perhaps, as a cheater.

I am not writing this book to defend my position. I suppose it's inevitable, however, that I become defensive, even though I don't intend to. I just want to tell these stories, to pass through them, and to record them. Therefore, I call this a litany, a calling out of one name after another. How it's to be a prayer, I can't always

make clear, but that's my intent. I want to offer each name up, tell the hard truth about it, admit that whatever I say has to be incomplete, admit that my sincerity may be shallow and my compassion lacking, but that I want to avoid covering it up. Neither do I want to simply terminate these relationships. I write in order to open the door, to remember the eternal nature of devotional service. I wish each of these persons well.

I have to admit that I find it sad to remember Śraddhā dāśī. I tend to harden myself when I think of her, but I also want to go deeper and to find what is truly loving in devotional exchanges. All that glitters is not gold.

*

As for the active disciples, of course, I don't live with them every day, but I know they are active and not gone to me. As I write of each disciple who is gone, at the same time I see the names of those who have stayed. I decided not to mention them by name, but I write this for them. It's an instruction to them: "Don't let this happen to you." And I thank them.

*

Rādhikā-devī dāśī was first initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda. Even before the GBC decided in 1978 that there would be initiations by only eleven gurus, Bahūdak approached me in Māyāpur and asked me to give second initiation to Rādhikā. I didn't know who she was and I asked him to give me some time to think about it. It was

one of the very first times I had to face the suggestion that I initiate.

An even earlier incident was on November 23, 1977 (as recorded in my diary), when a GBC man asked me to initiate two devotees from Fiji, recommended by their temple president, Vāsudeva dāsa: “All I would have to do is chant on their beads and give them names and Vāsudeva would go back to Fiji and perform the *yajña*. Vāsudeva has real faith in the *paramparā* system and came here asking that these two be initiated.”

I didn’t do it. It seemed to me that more was supposed to happen before you accepted disciples. Of course, that depends on your philosophy or understanding of initiation. *Guru na sa syat . . .*

Rādhikā—I hesitate to say it—was an artist and a painter, and had lived a full life before coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. She had been married and divorced, and she had two children, a teenager and an eleven-year-old when she joined the movement. She was the Vancouver women’s *saṅkīrtana* leader and collected a lot of money by selling painting. She wore white. She was lively and intense. I remember she started to write a drama about Lord Caitanya. She put a lot of original words into Lord Caitanya’s mouth and I suggested it was too daring. Anyway, I will jump ahead and say what happened after six years of a happy relationship with her as the fired-up representative of Vancouver ISKCON and me as honorable zonal guru.

The reform happened. One aspect of the reform movement was that the initiating gurus—and all of ISKCON—had been wrong to treat those who were first initiated by Prabhupāda as full disciples of the new

gurus. By then (say 1985), the initiating gurus were losing ground and credibility. Those first initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda were told that Śrīla Prabhupāda gave them the most important initiation and that he was their main guru.

“All right,” I said. I tried to go along with the progressive mood. I too was losing ground. (Don’t make this up; don’t write a slanted history. Say less if you have to—others have written plenty—just say what you remember.)

Rādhikā got angry with me for the years in which I interfered in her relationship with Prabhupāda. One day while I was sitting on the *vyāsāsana* in the temple, she brought me a letter I had written her and said, “Look, here’s the proof.” It said that she should approach Śrīla Prabhupāda through me. I could hardly believe I had written it so bluntly, but there it was. I apologized, but she remained angry. She wouldn’t attend any of my lectures or meetings or do anything that would imply she was my disciple. Previously, she had been such a bright face and a strong presence at my lectures.

Did it all suddenly become invalid, all we had done? “Yes,” she seemed to say. “You misled me with a false premise.” She wouldn’t give me the time of day after that. I abided by her attitude, although it hurt. I supposed that because she felt hurt, she wanted me to feel her pain. I think there are better ways to acknowledge a mistake binding two people together, but it’s not always possible.

This “freeze” continued for years. Every time I visited Vancouver, she stayed away, although I caught a few of

her icy glares as I walked by. I imagine she told others what a rat I was to assume to be her spiritual master when she was really Prabhupāda's disciple.

Later I heard she drifted away from ISKCON and went back to her life as an artist. She gave up her vows.

I saw her last year when I visited Vancouver. She was at the Sunday feast. She was standing to the side like a distant-looking guest. It was so strange to see her like that because she had once been a pillar of the community. We exchanged looks and I sensed a sudden flood of mutual compassion and forgiveness, as well as fear and embarrassment. After my lecture, I found myself walking toward her, intending to say that I was glad to see her. The crowd in the temple was divided between the men and the women. I headed toward the women's side, but a male voice loudly called my name and I decided I was acting too boldly for a *sannyāsi*. I turned, heeded the man, who then asked me to come back over to the men's side. But I almost made it, almost made contact and amends.

Rādhikā-devī dāśī is not gone—no one is gone—but I had to put her on this list. Let it soon become outdated.

*

Is it a relief to have lost the responsibility for so many devotees? What if those hundreds (are there that many?) who are gone all came back to me and demanded attention? In the meantime, I've grown more aloof. Disciples who know my mood and policy know that I don't meet individually with anyone anymore. I say everything through letters and in lectures and talks, and in

my books. If the prodigal sons returned, they would probably expect more than this. But this is how I am now.

Then what is the point in saying in my literary voice that I hope they come back to me? I mean I would like to see them at meetings and walks and *kīrtanas* in Māyāpur, at seminars and *parikramas* and at rooftop feasts in Vṛndāvana. I would like to get to know them again through their services and by hearing what they are doing, offering my suggestions, and giving my good wishes. It would be nice if some of them discovered that the best of me is in my books, the books that have been coming out all these years and which they have never read.

It's true that I would welcome them back in that realistic way. I would also be cheered to hear that someone like Rādhikā-devī dāśī is faithfully worshipping the Lord by hearing only from Śrīla Prabhupāda, even though she has no need for one Satsvarūpa dāsa as yet another guide.

*

The list is still long. Liṅginī-devī dāśī was Rādhikā's daughter and was initiated at twelve by Śrīla Prabhu-pāda. You know how lovely and auspicious those young girls seem when they are pretty and still possess a virginal aura. Liṅginī was brought to Kṛṣṇa consciousness by her mother. She didn't decide to become a devotee on her own. Later, she left. I can't remember what her complaint was or what it was she wanted to do, but I think she resented that she was shunned more or less when she revealed her doubts about spending her

life in devotional service. That made her not want to come around at all. It was a difficult situation for everyone involved.

The vows become a restriction. They're difficult to follow unless we *agree* to follow them and understand that they will help us achieve the ultimate goal (*śreyas*). If all we are in touch with is our immediate desires (*preyas*), then the vows don't feel like the "regulative principles of freedom." We feel straight-jacketed. We resent whatever is holding us back. (All such a person has to do is consult any nondevotee to discover that we shouldn't feel guilty about breaking the vows. What Prabhupāda calls illicit or sin is normal behavior.)

With *māyā* so predominant in Kali-yuga, and with so many volunteers in *māyā*'s cause ready to welcome devotees back to illusion, it's no wonder they leave.

Some stay and don't follow the vows. Which is worse?

Liṅginī burst out and joined her generation. The fact that she was Prabhupāda's disciple didn't seem to cause her any regrets. In fact, it might have made it easier to leave since she had so little sense of who Prabhupāda was. She'd probably never even met him. Everything in her life had been decided by her mother. (Rādhikā also had a son. He joined New Vrindaban and became a core member. I think he drove a big truck. I tell you, this is hard to write.)

For kids like that, carried to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and initiation by their well-meaning, absolutist parents, what is the recourse? After they leave Kṛṣṇa consciousness and have acted out their material desires, their karmic birthright in this developed nation, and have gotten in on all the latest music, food, fads, promis-

cuous sex, and drugs, and after getting busted by *māyā*, maybe they will come back. Probably they will no longer be so pretty and life won't be either, and they can stop blaming their parents and ISKCON's teachers. Maybe they can reconsider the whole thing and come back. Maybe not.

If we want to "bring them back," there's not much we can do actively, and nothing aggressively. Kṛṣṇa allows everyone their free will. The best thing I can think of is to make our own commitment to Kṛṣṇa consciousness as honest and deep as possible. Aspire for purity. It will help others indirectly and directly if we who stay are not unreal, dogmatic, uptight, but satisfied after twenty or thirty years. And it happens. We eventually relax. Maybe that will help others come around and take it up seriously—no hype, no trips—we're honest folks. We like Kṛṣṇa consciousness and it is sublime. I think you will agree that life is hellish without Kṛṣṇa.

*

Devakūlya was first initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda. I can't remember anything about her right now. I can envision myself staying in the apartment they gave me whenever I visited Vancouver. Disciples like Devakūlya would send me letters. Her's might say, "I feel I am neglecting my relationship with you by not writing to you." Then I would encourage her to inquire from me and she would ask some questions. Maybe someone like Devakūlya would enclose a decorative bookmark with her letter. I would see her and others when I went out for the pageant of gathering in the temple while Bahū-

dak played harmonium and sang Śrīla Prabhupāda's *guru-pūjā* prayers.

Bahūdak used to sing the prayers for Prabhupāda and then start over again to honor the present initiating guru. Ladies stood on one side and men on the other. They would come up one at a time and offer flower petals at my feet—Devakūlya too. She probably also cooked my lunch sometimes and I would see her for a few moments in the kitchen. Someone would say, “Devakūlya—” or “Śraddhā—” or “Liṅginī—” made this for you. Group worship.

9

In August, 1978, I flew back to Hawaii. I wrote in my diary on the plane as it flew over the Pacific: “You have to withstand *māyā* on your own, my disciples, but I have come to see you and strengthen you in your own conviction.’ Inspire them to be true, don’t cheat. Don’t take it cheaply.

“These disciples have barely been serving the required time. That is weighing on me somewhat. Being a spiritual master is described as difficult business. As the book distributor-preacher is praised for his willingness to endure all trouble for spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the spiritual master is praised for taking disciples who may even cause him trouble. It is not as immediately felt. But with every disciple, it is a further burden. It is not simply counting numbers of followers and thinking, ‘Now I am greater and greater.’ No. Is it a matter only of suffering reactions in the form of disease and bad dreams? No. I should become more grave to know so many souls are dependent on me. I should feel it. I should be enough of a devotee that the happiness we

speak of that is coming to them is also felt by me. I should not merely feel happy that ‘Now, more followers, more worship, more business.’ No, but like the book distributor, more souls in contact with Kṛṣṇa. In my case, they are not merely buying a book, but they are being linked with Kṛṣṇa. It is my happiness as a genuine member of the *sampradāya*—specifically the disciple of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda—to see more devotees coming forward even after his disappearance. This is my happiness. Glad I can fulfill the post or role of *via medium* to help them. I have to convey that, not simply that I should give them the heavy sense of obligation.

“As for the haunting worry that they may leave, that is the chance we (both they and I) take. As in any endeavor, soldiers fall. But if one takes great care, he can protect himself from falling. He can avoid being a casualty. So preach to them that I am happy they are being picked out of the material ocean. Now they have to begin it in earnest . . . ”

The temple president was recommending three devotees for initiation, even though some of them had only been serving eight or nine months. He insisted that he wanted it done and I thought, “What the heck, what’s a few months?” But I worried about it and started to reason it out in my diary. I came to the conclusion that the devotees were recipients of mercy and “I can only pray for them and try to guide them as Kṛṣṇa’s trustee, ‘Please take this mercy and be good and worthy. It is the most wonderful thing.’”

I advised myself to be humble about everything. Consider how to give them more Kṛṣṇa and more Prabhu-

pāda. “Be concerned,” I wrote to myself, “so that you can *really be sincerely concerned*. Pray for energy. How can I have love and real concern for so many disciples? But Śrīla Prabhupāda had thousands! See them in each place, and with no material aspiration help them, guide them.”

I also pondered about the fact that some of my preaching was to advise them to be personally attached to me. I thought that that was not wrong, provided I not take it in a selfish way and try to stand in the way of their worship of Kṛṣṇa. “The sin of accepting worship for yourself! The sin! The guru is not the enjoyer of facilities provided by his disciples, but a father, a transcendental professor who teaches them love of God. He may accept on behalf of Kṛṣṇa as His ambassador, but he has to immediately surrender the service to Kṛṣṇa through his guru.”

*

On August 9, 1978, I gave first initiation to three devotees. One of them is now gone, Saṅkirtana-devī dāśī. As I look back now, I think I over-extended myself, thinking that by a firm relationship with me, a disciple could overcome all their problems. In other words, it wouldn't be just the philosophy that I would preach to them, or their taking up the disciplines, but their very relationship with me. I would always be there for them. Once I opened up that expectation in a disciple, then I had to be ready for many hours of counseling.

I recall long-distance phone calls with Saṅkirtana dāśī. She would phone me from Hawaii when I was on the east coast and ramble on about her problems,

vaguely and specifically—something to do with controlling her mind and conquering her material desires. I would preach to her. I told her what I could to persuade her to be a good disciple, for my sake and for the sake of our relationship, for the sake of her own Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Preach, preach—it was right, but I bit off more than I could chew. I couldn't follow through on the intimate relationships with the strength that I envisioned myself infusing in them just by our loving exchanges.

Even as I write this, it seems like too much hindsight. Memory is tricky, history illusory. That's why it's good to keep a diary. Although later it may become embarrassing as we fix on a fragment of present reality, nevertheless, at least our feelings are indicated and the names, places, and dates are in order.

*

August 21, 1978: "Headaches almost every day—*brahmacārī* meeting tonight, tell them to avoid the misery of sex life—aware I'm shallow in thinking of Prabhupāda—get ready to go to New York."

I wrote in my diary on August 23 while flying to New York. I went through doubts I think I went through repeatedly in those years. I may still go through some of them. That is, I wondered whether I was relevant to my disciples. In those days, I felt that question intensely. Now I'm more relaxed. I wrote, "ISKCON, Prabhupāda, and the senior devotees of this temple are the instructors—how am I also the instructor? How can I forcefully speak as if it's me, since I haven't been here in five

weeks? And even in my absence, how are they relating to me?"

I felt I had to instill attachment for me into my disciples' hearts because they had to relate to me to go through the *paramparā*. But again, this was taking on too much of a personal burden. I didn't mean it to be egotistical, but I thought the guru had to personally feel the disciples' worship going through him.

On the airplane I wrote, "I want them to report on how they have been worshipping me, but how have I been serving *them* as guru? Sometimes they even ask that—'Do you hear our prayers?'"

I finally arrived at this solution:

1. When you speak, cling to the lotus feet of Śrīla Prabhupāda and say what you have heard and read from him. No other apology or explanation is required.

2. Being a dumb man, pray to Kṛṣṇa to let you speak in devotional service.

*

I held an initiation in New York City on August 26, 1978, for ten people. Five of them are now gone. The last I heard, one of them was a junior executive in a hotel and he and his wife were no longer chanting or following the four rules. One of them is now a career soldier in the U.S. Army. One of them left the "cult" and become a born-again Christian.

After New York, I went to Dallas and initiated five people. Two are now gone. Then I made another visit to Vancouver, where I initiated six. At least three of them are gone. In November of that year, I held an especially

big initiation (twenty-one devotees). Thirteen are now gone.

As 1979 began, I held an initiation in Washington, D.C. in January, an initiation at Gaura-Pūrṇimā in India, and then returned to New York City for another big batch of initiations.

Dear reader, although this personal history covers only a year, I think I will go no further with it. As of 1995, I have initiated about seven hundred people. I don't intend to initiate more. I haven't counted up the total number in the "gone" category, but my guess is that it comes to at least fifty percent.

By this sampling of twenty-eight names, I have already felt the basic emotions I would continue to feel if I repeated the process over and over again. I feel remorse for my mistakes. I am also sorry for those who have abandoned their vows. I wish and hope we might continue our relationship again, that they might come back, if possible. And I wish them well, wherever they are.

At the beginning of this litany, I realized that people might object to my talking about them as "goners." Most of them, however, will probably never read this. Still, I didn't want to trivialize anyone's life by my subjective and possibly even inaccurate view of what happened to them in their Kṛṣṇa conscious careers. Still, I went ahead because I have a right to tell my side of the story. This book has been cathartic. I have never been able to write of those years, but this litany allowed me to at least attempt to confess my wrongs and to express some righteous defense. It has also allowed me to ask forgiveness in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The most important thing is to continue in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and to learn from our mistakes so we don't repeat them. Although the list stretches ahead, I won't work it anymore. How can I continue such a sensitive operation if I no longer have the burning desire to do it?

I can also defend this abrupt ending artistically. A book should end while it's still going strong. For example, Dostoevsky's *Notes From the Underground* goes for a hundred pages, fully introduces the underground man, and then stops. We never find out what happens to him. V. Nabokov said that he personally cannot read a novel past 150 pages. After that, he says, it becomes pitiful as the author tries to manipulate the plot and characters to reach a satisfactory ending. Nabokov says he reads a novel to appreciate the author's sensibility and he can achieve that in the first 150 pages. After that, reading becomes duty.

I hope my readers will sympathize with this abrupt ending for the reasons I have stated. I have learned something through this writing that will stay with me, especially that I should be ready if and when anyone wants to come back not to judge them. I should never see myself as the victor in spiritual life and then the defeated. That's a humbling realization, but it's overwhelming to see the loss that occurred, no matter how I try to explain it.

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura said that in the battle against *māyā*, some soldiers will fall. Leaders of the battle also make mistakes and must share the responsibility for the casualties. We have no choice, however, but to continue the struggle against the form-

idable forces of *māyā* in Kali-yuga. We cannot quit—we don't want to quit—and we are assured by Śrīla Prabhupāda, the previous *ācāryas*, and by Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, that the Lord will protect us. “Arjuna, declare it loudly, that my devotee will never be vanquished.”

With these words, I leave you and I hope that we may meet in another book. Let us be kind to each other and execute our duties in Kṛṣṇa consciousness to guru and Kṛṣṇa with enthusiasm and patience.

Finally, I ask those devotees whose names I have mentioned to please excuse me. I did not mention your names out of malice, but with the hope that by remembering the history, even fragments of the history, it might awaken again the ideals and convictions that we all held at the time of your acceptance of vows. As long as we have the human form of life, we have time to rectify ourselves. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in one purport that ideally, Kṛṣṇa consciousness should be executed from the very beginning of life, but he reassures us that even a late starter can make full progress. Real progress begins whenever we sense the urgency for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It's never too late to come back.

