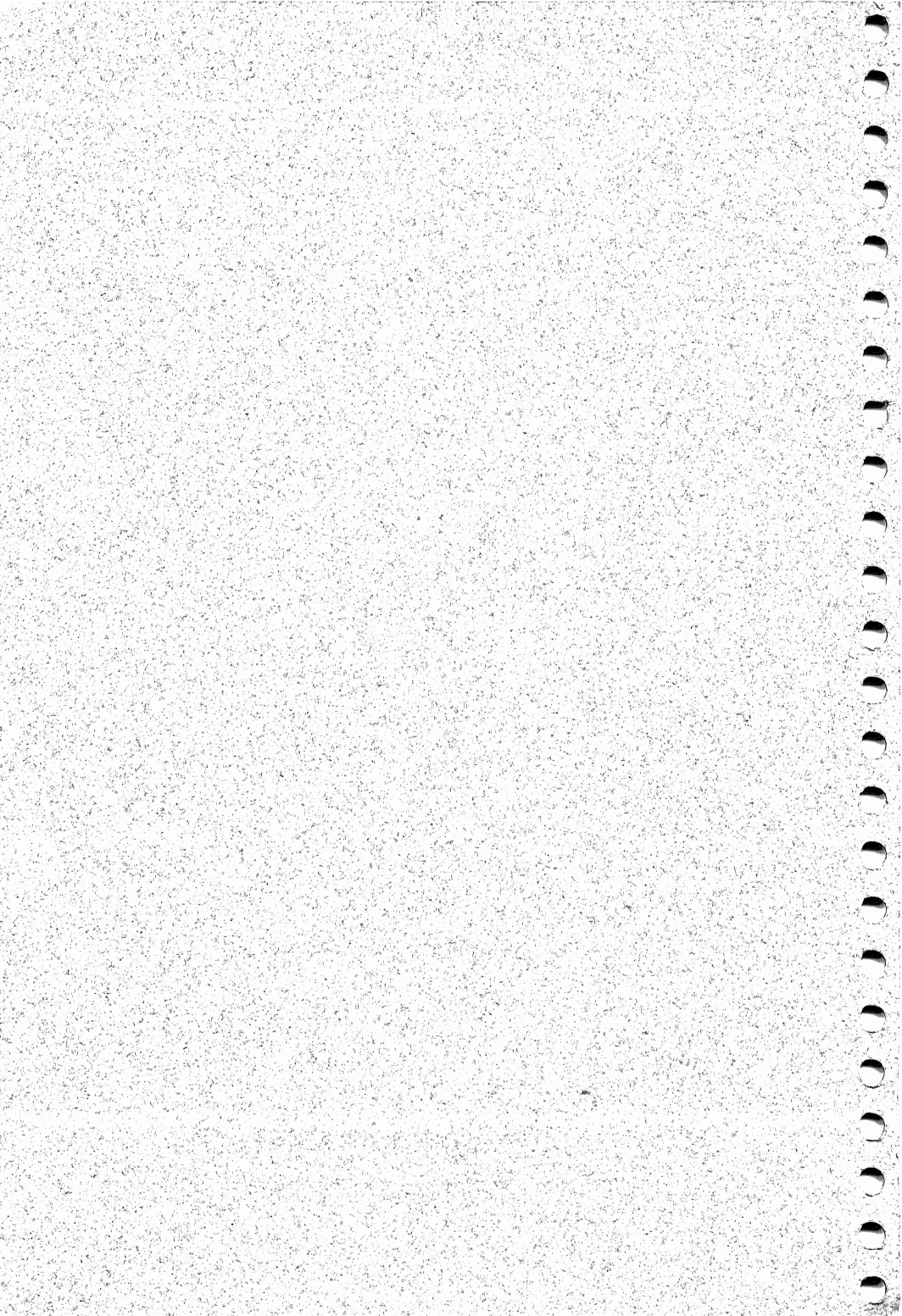


Stories in April
&
Gîte Stories

Satsvarupa dasa Goswami



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GN Press, Inc.

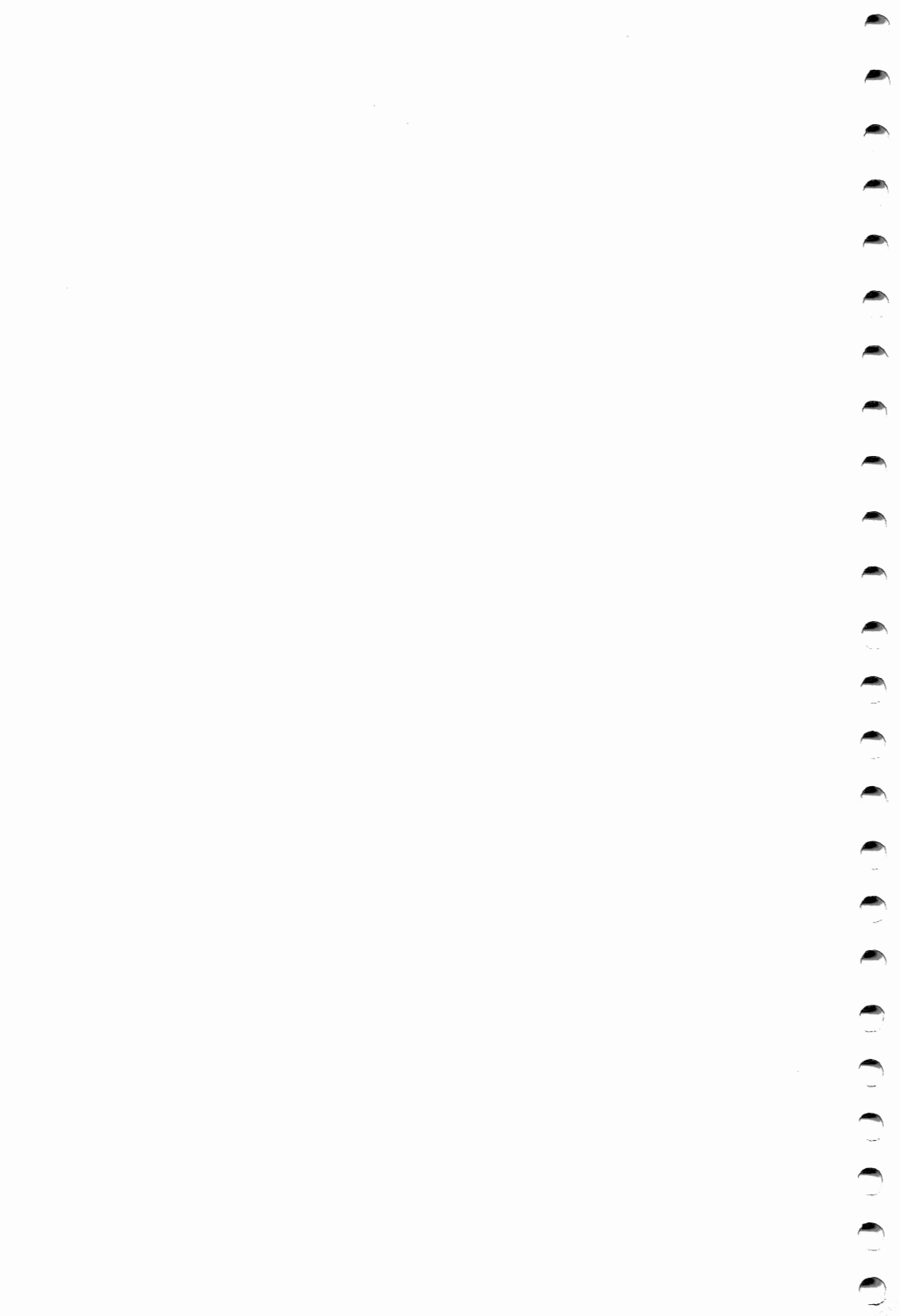


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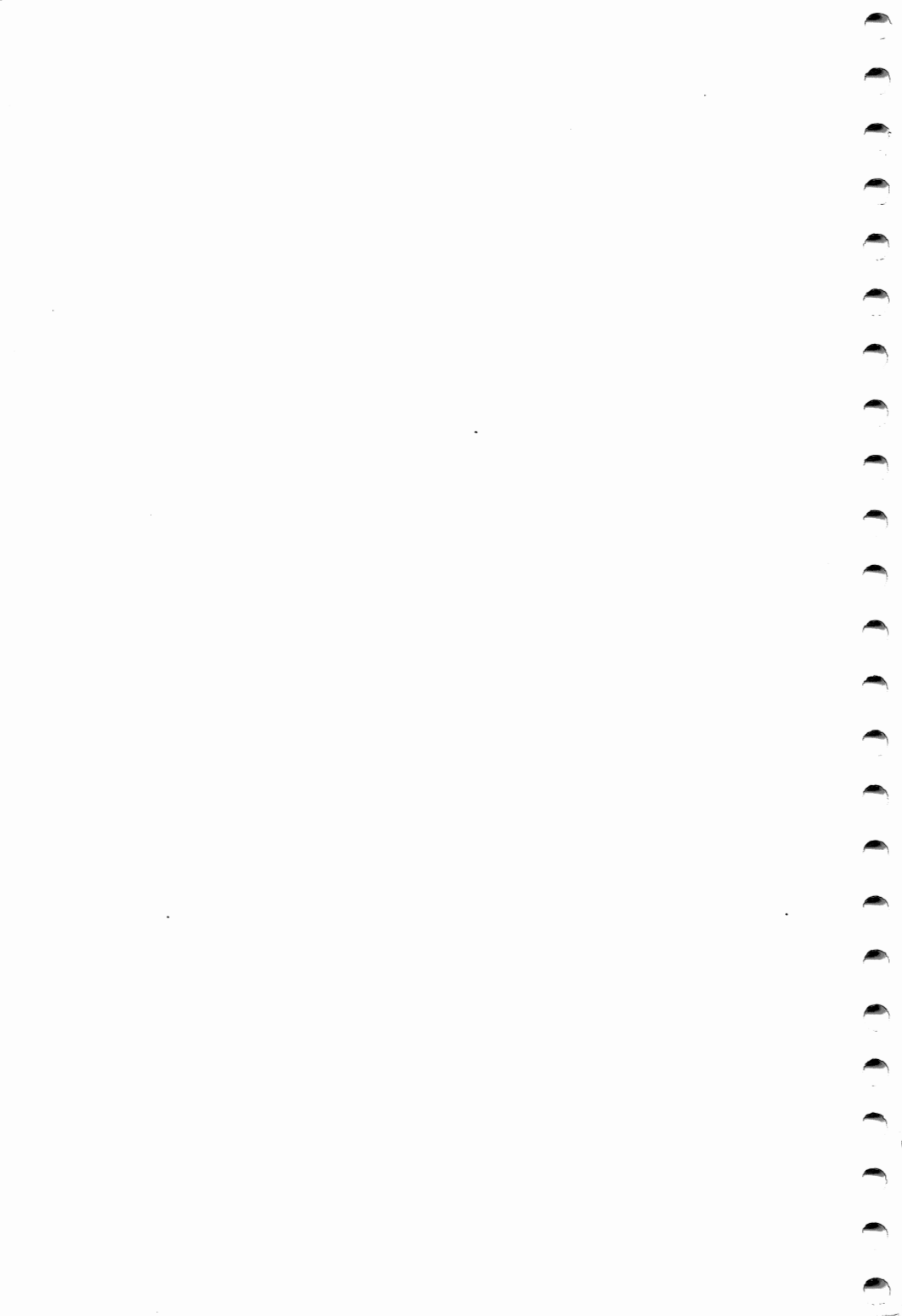
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STORIES in April

In the Flow

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

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

It would be nice if this feeble, flow-desiring storyteller could go to the realm of transcendental knowledge and speak stories in authorized, disciplic succession. That is my attempt, although I don't know quite how to do it. I enter the water of my own human consciousness and penmanship and assume the Divine is here, because God is everywhere and I am His part and parcel. With

that assumption, I start to dog-paddle. I think, "This will get me soon into Kṛṣṇa consciousness." And I think I'm right. Besides I can't do something spectacular like dive twenty feet off a Ganges bank into the swift, flowing river. I'm too lean and old and fearful for that.

Nor can I read Sanskrit or be content to write out *slokas* and leave it at that. So I swim by the shore feeling a flow.

A rubber band sits on the arm of this chair. It greets me as a complete circle, a muscular arm. "I'm ready," it says—to band together a bunch of letters addressed to me, either answered or unanswered; to tie up some business I can file away. Sunlight, the hottest of the year, glances and angles into this corner of the room over my shoulder. Some kind of farm machinery is noising outside; I can see later what it is. Birds chirping only if you calm down and notice. The cars passing below this window are the easiest to notice. I am not the center of existence.

The story-writer passes up a number of leads. He could tell the news he just heard: Italian devotees will be returning from their Indian pilgrimage, arriving in Roma tomorrow. They will carry some medicine for you and maybe agitating news of the annual conferences and something that affects me. No need to go into it here because this is where I seek the flow. My Australian crawl is to bring me away from those relativities. but if you're not willing and able to face what's actually floating in the flow, as well as meeting with big-bodied fellows who have come to the river, then your

timid, few strokes near the bank will not bring us fearless inspiration either materially or in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Oh, you may say that. But in my heart is a partial view of the universe and a way to Vaikuṇṭha (Kṛṣṇa-loka). It's in your heart too, dear reader. We can paddle together, nearby, and discuss it. Let us—and who will prevent us? No one—sit on the muddy bank. It is warm enough today and we can put some wet mud on our legs and knees and arms and head. Lord Kṛṣṇa is in His holy names. The deluded Māyāvadi scholar thinks there is some formless existence beyond Lord Kṛṣṇa. But the fact, as told by the ācāryas and Lord Caitanya and Lord Kṛṣṇa, is that *nāma cintāmaṇi kṛṣṇas/caitanya rasa vighraha*. Kṛṣṇa is in His name. That is the great discovery for a practitioner in this age and you can get it even a few feet after paddling into the flow of holy river. You can chant as you put mud onto your limbs, Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

Your friend beside you on the bank says, “I’m going to China to preach.”

You say that you are writing, sessions and sometimes stories.

“What are the stories?”

You can't exactly explain. “It's like the gentle flow here a few feet off the bank.”

“And further out? The Bay of Bengal? The lives of the aquatics like porpoises in the deep? And the ships and men and the land and villages, life and death and struggle and worship? Are not these stories? The fear in your heart that you will be cursed and not allowed, that

you'll be disabled from writing as you like—isn't that a story too?"

Yes those are stories. But how far can I venture? I don't know.

Now the sunlight is moving to only a small, right section of this chair and on the wall. The left side of me grows chilled. I'm feeling gratitude for this trip just taken as well as awareness that I've taken up your time as much as I dare on a swim and a rest and analysis in the flow.

Stories I Can't Tell

A "liberated" Indian woman named M. Bhattejee was being interviewed regarding her viewpoint about dreams and her writing. MB said, "If I had stayed in Calcutta my life would have been extremely confined. And if I were a member of the nonprivileged class I'd have even less options." She mentioned in passing that she was a Hindu, "For Hindus the whole purpose of existence is to escape from life, right?" I thought how far gone she is, and how little she knows of Hinduism. And how her "liberation" will prove false. In the photo she poses glancing backward over her shoulder. I could detect from this that she is acting out the role of a Westernized Eastern lady. She called herself, "A brown woman in the white society of Canada." Why do I mention her here?

Because I wanted to tell a story about someone who left Kṛṣṇa consciousness. And I wanted to tell the story about the role of golden-leaved trees that border the farmer's field. The earth is plowed and planted and he has been irrigating it. Soon some green shoots will poke up.

The person who left Kṛṣṇa conscious practices was named Mary Bhattejee and she was walking away from the temple when a devotee stopped her just under the row of golden trees.

"Why are you leaving?" The *mātāji* who asked was nine months pregnant and wanted to be careful. But she thought it won't hurt if I at least ask a question. I

have seen her leaving and now can I not ask? Besides the child about to be born, who is already sometimes kicking me, can hear me preaching and that will be good for her or him.

"I'm leaving," said MB, "because it's not for me. I don't believe in the scriptures." The story suddenly becomes too sad and complicated for me, the author, to continue. I admire the sincerity of the pregnant woman but what can she do against this decided antagonism, this deliberate and determined choice to leave Kṛṣṇa consciousness? Even God doesn't touch a soul's little free will. He lets her walk away, the modes of nature will have their sway.

You can't expect everything to come so quickly, so easily. The temple president and his American friend boarded the plane at 2 A.M. in New Delhi and endured the flight through unusual hours, in the crowded cabin. He had gone to India seeking relief from the pressures of temple duties in Italy. It was a "nice" pilgrimage but now he had to return and the same problems were awaiting him. The temple was a big building with high overhead. They had already spent a lot of money to renovate it. Their assumption was that many devotees would join them and all would work together in a community spirit. Finances depended on a *brahmacārī* traveling book distribution team. But not so many people joined. Of those who remained, some didn't like the pressure to work hard for maintaining a centralized temple community. They moved outside with their families saying, "I want peace and more time to pursue spiritual life at my own pace and my family's pace."

Now only about four men were holding down the key posts, *pūjārī*, *saṅkīrtana*, *gurukula*, temple president, etc. and each one was overworked. I've told this story before but not from the temple president's point of view. He was so fried he began to think, "I too would like to live in a small house and not have to carry all this burden and try to force others to maintain it, those who are reluctant." That same temple president is arriving back at his temple today. As with the story on MS Bhattarjee, I don't have the heart to get involved with the temple president and his problem. Anything I say might be repeated to his higher-up authorities and get me into trouble. A higher-up will be inclined to tell the temple president, "You got yourself into this. We warned you in the beginning that it looked like an over-endeavor. But you and the others were so enthusiastic so you had your way. Now if you quit it will be a dishonor. Consider yourself like Arjuna and I will speak like Kṛṣṇa, 'Where has this petty weakness of heart come about? You must fight.' "

Two stories I can't tell. Hinduism, she said, is to escape. But Śrīla Prabhupāda said if you are imprisoned then it's a virtue if you can escape. He also said Vaiṣṇavas are not interested in novels and dramas of the material world where girl meets boy. That is *grāmya-kathā* and we are interested in *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. What God does and how His pure devotees act in loving service to Bhagavān—that we want to hear as recorded in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and other Vedic books.

"Who lives in this room?" asks the guest.

"There is a man sleeping there. His name is Mucukunda. Don't disturb him."

"I'll disturb him if I like," said that guest and he taps his cane upon the ground.

On board the *Saratoga*. We enter the operations room. The sailor-technician who is supposed to be carefully watching the blips on the radar screen has slumped forward, fallen asleep.

He is admonished by the office. "Dragons! You could get court-martialed for this."

Seaman Dragons stands at attention and begs pardon. He's mortified. They give him another chance but note what he has done and don't care why he may be sleepy. He's supposed to organize his schedule and life and mind and be motivated, awake at the screen.

There's nothing more to say. He's hopeless and the whole ship is hopeless. They have nothing to look forward to except another war or peace for the time being, some slops for lunch, liberty in a Mediterranean port and you know what that means, and after six months or more return to Florida and tie up the ship at a remote dock. But things are so tense in the mid-East they may have to forego their scheduled return.

The captain wants a medal, recognition. He doesn't know there is a spiritual world beyond this one. He hardly even thinks that his source of life is something different than atoms and electrical charges in a void. If he does have a thought like that, "Who am I?" or an intimation of death, he dismisses it as dangerous, like

the thoughts which led to Seaman Dragons' collapse onto the screen.

That's approximately four stories I couldn't resolve. There are plenty more where those come from. There's a high school freshman who is asked out on a date, to the senior prom by a not-so popular boy in the 1950s. There's a dog who died while crossing the road with a hambone in his mouth. Let's stop.

Not So Easy

A man teaching in the *gurukula* had a five o'clock shadow and a villainously handsome face. He was Purna dāsa and kind to children. He had five or six boys in his *āśrama*. A visitor to the temple could see how well-behaved the boys were in the temple room. They wore sweaters and sweatshirts with American sayings on them, "Country Skiing, Wyoming," "Baseball," and one wore a Mickey Mouse picture where Mickey has his hand up in a V for victory and he's wearing a hippie headband. One day Purna dāsa took his group of boys in his van and as he drove he began telling them a story. It was a story within a story.

Spring came to the field of Naimiṣaraṇya. Buttercups were blooming and a lad sat in the grass. He had been throwing his pink ball against the Cape Cod house and batting the ball against the house and rushing forward to catch the rebound before it hit the earth. In his mind he fantasized that he was Carl Furillo or Duke Snider or some other Brooklyn Dodger lunging forward and making a great catch diving in the grass. Now he was tired and lay on his back and the earth was spinning and he smelled the grass and watched the sky as his young body felt fatigue and began to shrug off the fatigue. He got up again and picked up the bat and the pink rubber ball and whacked it but this time so hard it sailed over the apex of the blue-shingled roof and onto the front yard and bounced onto Katan Avenue.

Once a sage was asked to tell the story of Satī the wife of Lord Śiva. It is a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* narration that ends with Satī giving up her body. When the sage briefly mentioned this, his inquiring audience was shocked. Why would Satī do such a thing? The sage had mentioned that it was due to enmity with her father, Prajāpati Dakṣa, so the audience asked, Why was she so aggrieved with Dakṣa? What had he done to turn his daughter to the act of suicide? Satī was the wife of Lord Śiva, so why didn't he protect her from destroying herself?

The sage begins to tell the whole story in six chapters. Due to the pride of Dakṣa he insults Lord Śiva who is faultless. Basically it is this prolonged insult to Lord Śiva which drives Satī to destroy her body. She tells her father, "My body is created by you who are a great offender, so I do not want to live any longer." She ends her life by creating a fire from her own body. Although the subject matter is ghastly, it doesn't lead to mundane horror. It is filled with instructions about pride and the danger of committing offense to Vaiṣṇavas. These are the pastimes of great souls and the whole story is related to Lord Viṣṇu the Supreme Personality of Godhead and therefore worthy of hearing.

Voice: You usually make light of what you tell, as a way of showing you don't take yourself seriously, laughing at your inadequacy and with a cynicism toward others in the world.

Yes, but I realize he doesn't need to always do that. He's a poor man just serving despite his shortcomings

and if you laugh that's your decision. He's not going to explain or be embarrassed at his wares today.

Is it true he went to a flea market and sold flowers and that his brother made ballpoint pens covered with hollow pieces of wood and varnished them up and sold them there?

Yes these things may be so.

Giacomo! Giacomo! Giacomo! A man in socks and no shoes strides through the building calling out that name, Giacomo! They are ready to go out on book distribution. Giacomo is not faint-hearted or hiding. He's doing some errand. He'll show up and go out with Śrīla Prabhupāda's books all day.

This is the last day in Vicenza for that traveling *sannyāsi* whose story we told in *The Week Before Gaura-Pūrṇimā*. He is filling milk crates with his belongings and moving them into the van. He owns some votive candles. He has some books of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

I wanted to read a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* lecture. Prabhupāda will speak and I will listen. I am not a member of any temple with my name and number on the telephone numbers sheet. No one can call me. I am like Basho on his trip, but it's modern times.

At the end of the initiation lecture Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Jayānanda looks like Lord Caitanya," who is also tall and strong and light-complexioned. The devotees laughed and were delighted with Śrīla Prabhupāda's words. He said that all the white people, when dressed in saffron, shaven-headed, *tilaked*, with beads, look like

they are coming from the kingdom of God. They will be worshipped by people who may go to India. But Westerners don't know and so they don't favor devotees.

"Be happy, chant and take first-class food, first-class philosophy, best dress and education and sing and dance—tell others about Kṛṣṇa. Do that for your whole life in this world and next life go back to Godhead," said Śrīla Prabhupāda. And he wrote to Pradumnya dāsa in 1967, "I see special mercy of Kṛṣṇa in you. I hope that you'll be able to go back to Goloka Vṛndāvana in this very lifetime." Our spiritual master could say these things. It was possible. We believed him in a simple, trusting way. We still believe him but we are more aware of our shortcomings and the complicated nature of gross and subtle material attachments. What Śrīla Prabhupāda said in offering us the first-class easy way to the top-most kingdom of God, is still true, but not as easy to attain as we may have thought when we were twenty years old. In fact today I thought . . . something of my shortcoming. I can't even remember.

I'm unable to taste the nectar of the holy name because Lord Kṛṣṇa is deliberately withholding it. It is not so cheap. His pure devotees say *saṅkīrtana* is easy, but it's not as easy as dialing the telephone and ordering a pizza to be delivered to your door. It's possible to attain *bhakti* but also difficult—if you make it so with your crooked mind.

Without shame, set up the tripod on your desk and the volume of Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* lectures. Start reading, running your forefinger across each line of print as you slowly comprehend the sentence and the next and the next. Be peaceful. You want

to live? Do so and note down what he says that you want to retain. In the future maybe you can tell a story like that, not so easy, not so hard either. It will come out with Kṛṣṇa in the center and a devotee serving Him in an exemplary way.

The Dream of Losing Your Teeth

It was a good day for having your teeth pulled out, thought Sid Frances as he rode in the back seat of the car on the way to the dentist. He was an American in Italy. He was a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, or as he said, "I'm aspiring to be a devotee." It did look like a good day in terms of the sky, though the traffic was congested. You could always see some good in it. Sid remembered reading in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books that a great soul magnifies the good he sees in others, whereas puffed-up Dakṣa criticized the greatest Vaiṣṇava, Lord Śiva.

Ah, it will be all right, he thought. His car companions were quiet. It was Spring. They drove fast except when the traffic got slow. I'm not afraid of dental pain or having no teeth, thought Sid and he was surprised with himself. By coincidence that morning he had read about the demigod named Puṣa who had lost all his teeth at the hands of Lord Śiva's followers. When Dakṣa had cursed Śiva, this Puṣa smiled and so his appropriate punishment was to have his teeth taken out. Later Lord Brahmā approached Lord Śiva and asked him to forgive the offenders.

"Give Puṣa back his teeth, please," said Lord Brahmā.

But Lord Śiva said, "The demigod Puṣa will have to chew only through the teeth of his disciples, and if alone, he will have to satisfy himself by eating dough made from chickpea flour. But the demigods who have agreed to give me my share of the sacrifice will recover from all their injuries" (*Bhāg.* 4.7.4).

This is interesting, though Sid. Although Lord Śiva forgives easily, he continued the punishment of Puṣa and Dakṣa and others. Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, "He could not use his teeth for eating, since he had laughed at Lord Śiva, deriding him by showing his teeth." Of course if I mention this to my friends, thought Sid, they would say that it doesn't apply in my case. They could say many *sādhus* in Vṛndāvana have no teeth; it's just what happens with old age and in India poor people and mendicants don't have the money to go to the dentist. But maybe their hearts are clean. So here I am going to the dentist. After he pulls them—and they won't all come out at once as in the case of Puṣa who had to suffer without anesthesia at the hands of a demon who sat on his chest and knocked him out—they will give me good false replacements. But there may be an interim where I have to drink my food. So maybe I could put in a bid for chickpea flour, on the authority of *Bhāgavatam*.

The car stopped at the entrance to the Autostrata. The driver reached out and took a ticket from the machine. A recorded voice of a woman said something Sid couldn't understand except at the end she said *Arrive merci*. He remained silent in his thoughts. He was wondering if he had committed an offense. Maybe his inattentive chanting was the cause or something he had said blasphemous.

I am an author who incidentally is about to have his teeth removed today. It's a notable milestone in life. But I don't think like fictional Sid Frances, that I'm an offender. Oh it may play through my mind. But I am

more amused by it than anything else. To me the loss of teeth is an occasion for realizing that you are not your body. It's a good joke; something to talk about, although I'm not even sure you can speak once they're out. I'll use it as one of those earned moments where you can practice *mauna* without the devotees telling you you're in *māyā*.

I can get back to Sid and his car, but what's the use if his worry is made-up? There is enough real worry in the world, or rather unnecessary worry, worry by people who cannot think of Kṛṣṇa as their protector. A fictional worrier could serve a good purpose I suppose. It could teach a moral. He could realize that he has it easy in life and that even if he can't think of an offense for which he has lost his teeth, his very position in material life is one of an offender to the Supreme. Why seek to exonerate yourself? Realize that you are meant to suffer as long as you have a body. This would have to come through the story, not by my saying so. Let's get back to Sid.

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

Sid and the city. Remember Symphony Sid?

There are two people who have got to get together. There is Sid who's about to be toothless (if the dentist shows up) and there's me the author who is also about to have his teeth removed after the needle goes in and you taste the bitter liquid of local anesthesia. Sid and I have that in common. We also both thought of the demigod Puṣa. What a coincidence.

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

The author doesn't mind going to the dentist. Maybe Sid can go in first. Maybe I'll need him there. When it's my turn and I lean back and close my eyes and try to relax my feet and legs as they tense up . . . I could see Sid in my mind's eye. Think of what to do with him. Or where's he going on his own? He could have such interesting adventures if he'd be willing not to mix with women or have dirty thoughts or complex . . .

I could better spend my time chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa on this day. Celebrate it with flowers offered to your spiritual master. And why not be straightforward? Without any rigamorage just tell Madhu, "When my teeth come out could you make bread with chickpea dough? A demigod who lost his teeth ate that way." (I wouldn't want to eat something someone else had chewed.)

Just be straightforward. But Sid is already loose. I wish him well. Hey Sid, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, there's nothing to worry about. People lose their teeth every-day. The real thing is to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

A Rainy Afternoon Near Brescia

What's the different between a story and a writing session? My heart just dropped out, excuse me. Her brassiere undid and slipped to the floor under her dress. His underpants fell down. He felt his wallet fall out. His teeth and pancreas . . .

Calm down. Foul play. False start. We will do this my way, you hear?

No, no, we want to do it God's way.

At any rate, start again. You were saying . . .

I was saying that I started out like a steeple-chase but after two steps I felt my heart drop.

What do you mean by that?

I mean the original purpose—I lost the guts for it. Lost the love, fumbled it, old feet, stumbled.

But why?

I don't know. All the forces of civilization and conditioning, I guess. Or maybe just plain good sense, "You can't do that!"

Do you think it would have been better to persist? Was there a pristine energy, a Kṛṣṇa consciousness as good as spring?

Maybe. Maybe a young boy and he's afraid he'll get raped and killed. Such things happen on the way to the market. Oh where have you been, billy boy, billy boy, oh where have you been? But I think it was better I had persisted. Do you want to do another take and try again?

Story #97, Scene 1, Take 2

Bang I was off at the start havin' a pint of Hare Kṛṣṇa *jāpa* and before I knew it me friend Jinks comes in the room. M. sez, "Me and Jinks are goin' out to make a phone call."

I sez, "Don't leave me alone because the guy is supposed to come to fix the bathroom light and the stove. And I can't speak Italian."

But Jinks has a cheap car insurance and says he has to drive so the two of us has to go . . .

Here's the fictional part: they go and leave me alone. The guy comes to fix the light and he speaks English. He wants to be preached to. I told him first thing is to know you are not this body. Then who are you? *Bhagavad-gītā* teaches. He sat down on the soft cushioned couch and I sat on a nearby hard chair and told him. I hadn't done this in a long time. Tears started to flow in me for lack of heart. I couraged and continued.

"So life isn't for only prosecuting the four animal needs, eating, mating, sleeping, and defending. They can be done as animals do, with no restrain. Yet we humans make it a whole endeavor. These are not the actual problems for purposes of life. The purpose is to solve birth, death, old age, and disease."

The repairman had no teeth. His face was pock-marked. Hadn't I seen him on a bicycle stopping for a red light, a delicate-boned old, old man surprising you by driving slowly on a bicycle through a town square in modern Italy? And here he was like a chimera in the tiled room of the rented apartment.

"What was you sayin'?" he said. He was like a turtle, sticking his head out out of the socket.

"I was saying, love is for getting out of the cycle of birth and death. *Bhagavad-gītā* teaches that. It's not another religion, although it comes from India." I was trying to figure my strategies, what to say and what to leave out for the maximum effect. I figured he was not an educated person and might have trouble with the terminology and the concepts. He was also a chimera and I expected to see him roll on his back like a turtle on its shell.

If he rolled like that, what would I do? I'd have to explain it. It could get messy. Also I didn't want to delay him in his main purpose which was in my interest also, that is, fixing the bathroom light and stove.

Without a light this morning I couldn't see and the tape recorder fell off the shelf when I was trying to listen to it while sitting on the toilet bowl. You need light in order to put on Vaiṣṇava *tilaka* and to do so many things. You can't even pee straight into the bowl. It's dangerous.

And M needs the stove. He says, "I can't make any sweets." That's his department, cooking, but I would hope that he can cook interesting sweets.

Yet here was the repairman sitting submissively in the room and I could not neglect him. Was I more interested in cooked sweets or in saving one's soul? Was I more concerned to be alone to write or active to help someone by saying the vibration into his ear, as I did, Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

"This is the age of Kali," I said.

"Kali. C-O-L-L-E-Y," he said.

Oh gosh, I'll have to explain so much, I thought. He may think that this is too Indian.

Sure enough he said, "How come you wear those robes and not the serge brown of our Franciscans who look well-tailored by the institution with hood and it goes all the way down to their feet and an elegant, brown cord at the waist?"

I said, This is the same as them. We are from the spiritual world.

"Could you say that chant again?"

I told him. Then I was satisfied and figured he'd taken in all he could, all that the traffic would bear and I had also extended myself as far as I wanted.

"Could you fix the light?"

"I'll give it a try." He fixed it by using a ladder to reach the ceiling and he replaced the bulb. The stove was more complicated. He said he would have to come back another time. And so he left out the front door and I sighed and was controlled and alone chanted a pint, that is, a round, walking over the tiled floor.

Oh this is the garden of Eden
and here on threshold we stand
... hold my hand.

What do you mean? This is not strongly your voice. This is no story. Neither is it bona fide.

It is. I wanted to do a story. I told you. I'm not a baby who used to urinate in his bed. I'm a man and always was. My father was strong in muscles and ready to fight anyone in fist-a-cuffs. I inherited that. My mother is a scaredy-cat; I am more like her but with his potential lurking.

And when I was 26 I met my spiritual master, His Divine—I am almost ashamed to put his holy name in this story because it's so meager. But you see, I trail this stuff, it's still with me. So I wanted and this came. Did I answer you sufficiently?

About the steeple-chase start. Was this the heart you were talking about that slipped and fell? Was there anything else and something else and something more substantial and glorious? I have to submit this story to my newspaper and it must have something to it. Were you about to tell a better story and lost the inspiration?

Maybe. But I settled with this and I'm fairly satisfied. The men are now coming up the stairs and back into the house. We're going to make our quotas. Even if the guy didn't fix the light we could have used a candle. I think I'll live . . . And when we die we will not be forgotten by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Reporter: "Is he the one?"

Yes. In the picture. He's the one who came to America.

Reporter: "What do you reckon he'd think of this?"

That's a touchy question. I think of it a lot and don't have the answer for you. It's not something you can print in your tabloid: Toothless Monk Doubts His Zany Writing Appeals To Master.

Reporter: "Hm. And that's all?"

Take a cookie. Take an apple. Take a *Bhagavad-gītā*.

"No thanks."

Hare Kṛṣṇa. They go to the door and the one exits and the other recommences chanting *japa* walking over the tiled, rugless floor. He and his friends talk a little how tomorrow is Ekādaśī. They hint that he ought to

have only one cup of fruit juice in the morning and one bowl of soup at lunch. Give the digestive organs a rest. "No," he says, "give me a little more." They quiet down and only chant, three persons doing *japa*, like religious monks anywhere. Monks are monks, just as scholars are scholars. Rainfall and misty sky darkens chill but winter is over. Winter is over.

Story at the Big Table

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

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

Literature.

I'm writing this in the big room. This is the story. I've discovered it. The table has three sections, the kind you can spread out if you have a big family or guests. Like the Guarinos when they got together, the table covered with white cloth and the elders saying, "Manga,

manga!" On the table is tiffinware, the stainless steel Indian plates and little cups, a water bottle, farina in a bag, cardamom powder . . . the stainless dish rattles when I move my hand to write.

The room is quiet like a library. M. is reading *Kṛṣṇa* book. He told me he is reading of *Kṛṣṇa* after He leaves *Vṛndāvana*. He very much likes *Kṛṣṇa*'s dealings with *Rukmiṇī*. He perked my interest. It's a treat awaiting me but for now I'll stick with Lord *Śiva* and *Dakṣa* and Lord *Viṣṇu* and then *Dhruva* and *Pṛthu Mahārājas* in the Fourth Canto. I hope when I get to *Kṛṣṇa* book again I'll be chastened and ready for it, not thinking it's a kiddie's video of "The Terrible Agha Demon."

He told me his heart went out to *Rukmiṇī* who wanted *Kṛṣṇa* to be Her husband. But Her brother wanted Her to marry *Śiśupāla*. She went to *Durgā*'s temple . . . then when She was *Kṛṣṇa*'s wife He teased Her one day saying that He was qualified . . . M. liked it all.

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

The main thing is don't grind an axe. Then it's a story. And if your hand twitches, put it in. Say and if your left hand twitches, put it in. But don't reach too far for an effect. Don't stoop too low, and yet . . . it's all instinct and it's *paramparā*.

This room setting is the plot. M. is reading quietly and I hope he likes the *Kṛṣṇa* book. *Dina-dayārdra* is in

his room. He's reading one of my little books translated in Italian. He won't get anything directly from me as speech, especially these days in this apartment perched near the dentist's office.

Today is Ekādaśī. I drank "only" one and a half glasses of pineapple juice for breakfast and nothing else. Then for lunch no *sabji*, nothing except a tomato-kind of spicy soup. The idea is to partially fast and allow air to pass in the stomach; you get a relief. But I took two and half small metal bowls of the soup—and I've got indigestion. My stomach is churning as if I had over-indulged in a big meal. I don't get this when I eat heartily, two bowls of *dāl*, six *capātis*, rice, *sabji*, sweets . . . but today I get it. It's ironic but I don't appreciate the humor of the situation. I took Tums and I may take more.

All this is happening in the big room which is like a public library except no kids are going to barge in here barely restrained by the librarians or single men browsing and good-looking girl looking for Emerson or Thoreau. No noise, no library like that.

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

So what happened? It turned 4:15 P.M. You can go as long as you like, I mean within the limits of an hour.

In this large room I wrote a story. It was not like a hatching of an egg.

Maybe my story is not in this room. I have my back turned to the room. The story could be in my chest, in my boyhood, in my wrist which I noticed while writing when I was on LSD. In such madness.

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

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

Two oak trees on either side of a wandering cement path leading to our front door (Great Kills, Staten Island, 1950) like the opening of a Looney Tunes full-color cartoon.

All these things in the past. Do *sādhus* of India know with what we have to contend? Śrīla Prabhupāda knew. I am a police sergeant (in the library) studying for an exam. He has to know law and guns and handcuffs. I'm a professor escaping the grind, whose intelligence is stolen by *māyā* and Darwin. I'm a mayor. A footloose—a reaching out as far as I dare. The apostate cultist who skipped college goes back to read Walt Whitman and is thrilled by his cosmic I-ness and he believes it. Sucker. But here I am employing that same lying technique

from *Song of Myself*—I am a professor, a housewife, whereas I am not actually those *brahmas*. God is all, in all, knows all lives. But I or Whitman know barely one *jīva* and the rest is fiction, puerile fiction.

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

I am a saint in the YMCA. Not true. I am thinking of Śrīla Prabhupāda in the YMCA—that's better. I am a butter batter like little black Sambo running around the tree chased by tigers. I am nearing the finale of this piece about the big room and the shadow of death that moves toward my left shoulder. Good intentions, grateful God consciousness and the innocent young girl who may read this and whose mother says, "This sort of literature with references to a past of LSD is not suitable for children raised in Kṛṣṇa conscious families. We never let our daughter and son see Mommy and Daddy as ex-hippies. We have been living in India for ten years now and appreciate this culture is vastly superior to the West, which disgusts me. Why do you linger in those self-images?"

Ma, I say (although you are not my My) you have hit an important point to end this story and it permeates all that I write. That is, I am from the West, did get shattered into prisms back then, like kaleidoscopes, can't and won't think straight like an Indian, I shoot

from hip like Tom Mix whose mystery ring I sent away for (am eating hot Ralston in my brain, and never satisfied) . . . I am proof—as I told a Hindu Alliance Meeting in North Carolina—that a Western jiver can become a devotee of Indian spiritual truth. Prabhupāda accepts me. “Why don’t you guys accept Lord Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Personality of Godhead and preach *Bhagavad-gītā* as it is without mal-interpretation?” Ma, I told them that.

Thus ends this story about the sitting to write at the big table in the room near Brescia in April 1994, by me, Closed-Mouth, the Tyrant.

Fifty-four Volumes

“My stories are sure going to be a grand collection if we can ever get it together. We will (somebody) bake a cake with *sandesa* and carob icing on top. It won't be good for health like a cup of clear mountain water. There will be fifty-four candles on the cake, one for each volume of stories in the projected series. The party will be held discreetly just outside a rooftop room on the long building at Māyāpur. Devotees and friends will gather and some *gurukula* kids, having heard about the fabulous cake, will show up at the last minute for “the *darśana*.”

I'll speak. “Friends, Romans and countrymen, we have come not to honor the writer but to bury him in cake. It is all well and good that this service to Kṛṣṇa be celebrated with cake but we should be careful to wash our mouths out afterwards. I am committing this cake distribution because after all, our lives are very brief and then it's over. Even Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't like the ‘starvation committee’ of disciples who tried to restrict him to boiled vegetables, no ghee or sweets. He said, ‘To hell with the starvation committee,’ a memorable remark.”

I'll look across the Ganges plain. I won't be able to see the *bhajana-kuṭīr* of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura from here. Some things I can see, like the orange myna who lands on the wall. I hope I will be happy. You just have to relax.

“Thank you for the coconut-spotted date balls. They are more healthy and I shall eat—er, honor—them. I

shall give them out when this meeting is over. Now as for the literature contained in these books . . . ”

I'll tap the cover of the first book. It will please me. It's not that all fifty-four volumes will be published at once. We will have an artist's dummy of what they will look like in terms of color design, number of pages, and how they might fill a bookshelf.

“You might ask,” I continue, smiling genially in the sunshine, with false teeth, “how we will live so long to be able to complete all these books. Fact is we may not. But we will try. One purpose of this meeting is to ask you to complete the publishing even if I pass away.” The words of Jesus Christ may occur to me at this point, “Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words will not.” One is always impressed with the weight and beauty of that line. I make no attempt to apply them or imitate them. Rather I show just the opposite. My own words will scatter. Still one is enticed to think that they may wander away, your words, launched like little Chinese poem boats and one or two may float down the centuries. Especially in India time doesn't always change things and something may be retained, a *Nimāi* and the *Mouse* hidden in some cupboard.

The devotees enjoyed the sunlight which wasn't straight into their eyes. One wore a duck-billed cap that said, “Surprise Reward” and another a T-shirt, “I Love Māyāpur.” There were ten devotees present, five men, five women and five Bengali *gurukula* boys who had come for the cake and *darśana*. And the mynas suspected something might come up in a way of crumbs.

I continued, “One might ask why are these books, ‘My Stories,’ not printed for the public. I read a state-

ment from the Dada Manifesto of 1918: 'There is a literature which does not reach the voracious mass. But work of creators, sprung from a real necessity of a part of the author, and for himself.'

"Another point is that the stories were dashed off, not up to professional standards that contain facts but things better kept private. I don't think I have to explain it, but privacy. The best or most public stories will be appearing in the public form of 'Among Friends.' Since we are now among friends let me thank you for allowing me and helping me to write and publish in this. It has given me a satisfaction and courage and impetus to go on, a way to practice and immediately see some tangible result—and yet not be guilty of rushing passionately into print."

That was about all I wanted to say. I could read one story. There would be time for other meetings where we would glorify Lord Caitanya directly. I hope to take advantage of Māyāpur *parikramas* and reading *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and to find the presence of Śrīla Prabhupāda in his beloved Māyāpur worshipable place. The fifty-four volume celebration was just a quick moment for private talks and celebration.

In honor of the fifty-four celebration committee I would like to tell a story. It's about a man who carved thousands of Buddhas from a piece of wood. No matter how much wood someone gave him he kept using it up carving these little Buddhas. He was a Buddhist. There's also the story of St. Francis of Assisi who was once very ill and riding on a donkey. A peasant came up to him and said, "Are you the famous Francis of Assisi whom everyone praises?"

"Yes," said St. Francis.

The man replied, "Well I hope you just live up to the high reputation that people have of you. Many folks are really counting on you."

Francis was so grateful for the man's words of crude truth that he got down from the donkey and bowed at the man's feet.

There's also the story of Raghunātha Gosvāmī who bowed down to everyone he met even when he was too old and indisposed and couldn't even get up off the ground.

I am unworthy to tell these stories of feats I cannot do and I suppose none of us can do. But we love to hear of humble saints rather than bores and worldly manipulators and doomsday speakers. A saint is jolly and light at heart. He carves Buddhas at every moment, chants the holy names of Kṛṣṇa and doesn't think he actually has love for Christ in his heart even when he becomes a saint. But he wants to love God, the son of God, he is single-pointed in his devotional service. Śrīla Prabhupāda was such a saint—always thinking of Kṛṣṇa and how His glories could be spread all over the world. And Prabhupāda personally did it by his travels and writing and strong preaching on behalf of his *guru mahārāja*.

After the talk I began to distribute the cake. It was as good as we all hoped. Yellow flaky and fresh although cooked with no eggs. Normally I don't like cake. But I like this occasion. Fifty-four books of not ribald jest and the light-hearted following your instincts the way a myna bird looks here and there and decides to dive off the building ledge or another one lands on springy legs and jumps forward to take the cake crumbs thrown his way. Full of Kṛṣṇa conscious truths and some asides, it

rattles and conjurings. But it's all a gift of Śrīla Prabhupāda. I imagine this: that all these books actually do get written and published and maybe each year we have another cake meeting as more and more books come out. Not only the private books but others for wider circulation, *The Wild Garden*, *The Churning of the Milk Ocean*, *Poems to 1995 and Beyond*, *Selections from Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *How to Read Śrīla Prabhupāda's Books*, *Prabhupāda Meditations V, VI, VII, VIII . . .* Oh it will end, I know. But that's all right. Give me life now, the facility to write today at this desk and tomorrow. And don't lose heart.

The devotees eat the cake. I know I haven't said their names or what they think or do. They know who they are. I am thanking them in advance and inviting them to the party. You can come too, whoever you are. Have you read "My Turn" or "Introducing Bhakta Bob"? This is what I'm talking about.

Cake party over, we pick up the straw mats and go back inside. The devotees and I plan to go to Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *bhajana-kuṭir* at Godruma within a few days. There is a special potency there, they say. He is our grand-spiritual master. He was keen to reach out to people and give them Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Śrīla Prabhupāda is carrying out his desire, through the order of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. I hope to go to Godruma and write a prayer that Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura may empower me to stay up all night writing the way he did. I write my little mad version. But I pray he will not kick me away. We're trying to serve those great predecessor *ācāryas*.

Of Seasons I am Flower-Bearing Spring

Once there was a springtime and it had to curb its dog. It sang in the Esso stations. The grapevines were tortured where they grew as trained upon the posts and trellises. It depends on how you look at it. Spring is Kṛṣṇa's favorite season: "Of seasons I am flower-bearing spring." I am not sure what that means because Lord Kṛṣṇa certainly enjoys in all seasons, and Kārttika is also His special month. He personally appears in Janmāṣṭamī, at the end of summer.

But it is clear. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Of course spring is a season universally liked because it is neither too hot nor too cold and the flowers and trees blossom and flourish. In spring there are also many ceremonies commemorating Kṛṣṇa's pastimes; therefore this is considered to be the most joyful of all seasons, and it is the representative of the Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa" (Bg. 10.35, purport).

What are some of the ceremonies? Gaura-Pūrṇimā thaws the ice and snow and the crocuses come up. Lord Rāmacandra appears in spring. Remember Rāmanavami in 1967 when we chanted at some Peace Be-In in the park behind the 42nd Street library with devotees from several cities, singing with drum and *karatālas* all day, then down to 26 2nd Avenue for potatoes, breaking the fast, and talking about Swamiji who was on the West Coast? Neither too hot or too cold—hopes for

spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness and making our own spiritual advancement.

Adore ye adore ye the happy day
blessed that heaven
sweeter than May
when He appeared at Puri
that holy place,
my lord and master,
His Divine Grace.

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura appeared in springtime. And *harināma* goes on to the streets again in cities where it was frozen up.

So in this story I was telling . . . it wanted spring but knew it should not try to squeeze it. Let it go. You can't squeeze a story either. That's some other story maybe and not the one you thought you wanted. Don't go running after a girl. I recall one spring three new *bhaktas* all left the Boston temple together, to seek out women or love or just to hitchhike. They'd been devotees all through the winter months, controlling their senses and minds indoors, but now it was full-blown spring and they were called to bloop somewhere else, go out and find it . . . can't be untamed in a wooden temple chanting beads and reading any longer.

Wow. You think you can get away with murder. "You'll be chastised, young man," said my friend Murray to me on the telephone after reading the manuscript of my latest autobiographical novella, titled *Sagittarius*. One of the characters in the book was Murray described as an unemployed poet living off his wife's earnings as a schoolteacher. You'll be chastised young

man for using life into literature and for thinking you can get away with it unpunished. Your raw baked stories will fail. They will throw the potatoes back at you. They'll say this stuff is not from the heart. You don't know how to write deeply enough. When you write "I think" you should do it alone in the closet.

That's what's good about the writing sessions. There's less pretense. Aw, they're feeling sorry for the audacious stories (not audacious enough). They're not even up to the skits we cousins played as directed by Uncle Jim. He burnt the cork from the liquor bottle and painted our faces black. Someone wore only a towel. Someone wore an adult's hat. We had funny lines to say and sing. Then Dutch Hess or Uncle Mickey combed their hair in the front like Hitler's and stood on a chair and imitated *der Fuhrer* making a speech. Uncle Mickey imitated a hoola dancer and a strip dancer. "Mickey! Mickey!" They knew he was wild and asked him, as the day grew old and smoke-filled, after the meal and the after-meal tangerines were peeled and after the walnuts turned into discarded shells and of course drinks, drinks in glasses in ice . . . Mickey do something funny and wild. Stand on the table and dance, do an imitation, a mockery of someone who usually mocks you. Get it out.

Yeah those Guarino gathering children's skits and Uncle Mickey routines were more juicy and wild than I can come out with today. Such a thin trickle now, and ashamed and hiding . . . So literary, and starved . . .

Hey, this is my story, don't knock it. I have no teeth, and I'm wearing an old nappy, linty knit cap. Give me a break. I'm a celibate. I'm fifty-four and a half years old. I'm all alone in the house. It's spring and I want to be

alone as any monk is in prayer and solitude but to sneak out a story.

This story is that spring came and he was in Italy and couldn't catch it and then decided to let it go and to seek the eternal primavera in the pages of the *śāstra*. I don't want spring here of motorbikes and girls and their shapes and ice cream . . . noise, late nights, ugh.

I want quiet spring in an open window, like St. John of the Cross' poem, on the dark night the soul is going out to meet the beloved, there's no moon . . . that allegory realized in the heart of each prayer-maker alone fully rises before dawn and opens the window to get fresh air and thank God it's quiet and he begins his quiet *japa*.

Those times of April . . . that he can travel. Flowers pass us on the highway or is it that we pass them? You can't be attached to the world if you want to get out of it. Spring breathes attachment, sex desire, longing in the mode of passion.

Don't investigate it too much.

Spring of the *rāsa* dance, Balarāma's spring and Lord Kṛṣṇa's spring. The *gopis* answer the sound of the flute. Flowers gushing everywhere. The Italian version of the lilac. The native Northeast American lilac more delicate, lighter blue bloom last seen in the doorway on the fourth month . . . chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Of seasons I am spring says Kṛṣṇa. So it's up to you to find Him here. He's all-pervading but now you can find Him in spring. He's here in winter but now you can find Him in the flowers. Find out their names. Pick some and offer them to Him. Wake up. Didn't you see

right in your own house, Dina-dayārdra brought three potted plants? Why are you missing this? Water them and place them on the altar. The improved weather . . . yes it means demons and criminals let loose. But also . . . your life. You are here before the tourists' rush. Spring to me means you can't live in the van and yet it's too cold still for the campgrounds to be filled up (except on weekends). You once spent four beautiful spring days in a green grass campground that you had all to yourself, very cold in the morning almost icy yet during the day in sunlight you wrote *Am I a Demon or a Devotee?* That's the unequaled opportunity of spring. It goes by so quickly. You always seem to miss it and then it gets later into summer. Spring is special because the tourists and boaters and bikers and hikers and families in campers have not yet arrived. We have this house almost to ourselves. I'm making confessions and you can blame me I know. You'll be chastised, young man. Guilty of wanting to be alone. Of not being able to write with heart and yet claiming to do that.

Drink water not ink. Don't make a fatal mistake. Don't blame spring. And then they will be back soon from their [?] phone call. I won't tell them what I've been doing. The story of spring is heard from the chirping of birds. It's timeless and eternal always and everything is good and One in Kṛṣṇa. It just happens to be spring. The Esso stations. The Agip stations also. The woman in the small car stopping at 7 A.M. and beeping her horn and her girlfriend runs out of the big building, running, getting into the car for a ride to work. All this happens in winter too but with heavier

coats. Now I go for dental treatment, three years in a row in spring and then—if our van's papers come through and the denture fits—we *escape* over the border with no questions asked into the wider Europe of the circular stars on blue flag, spring on the highways. Beautiful south France and jinx-ridden Spain. Machado's Spain. Better end this while I can. It's already overdone. I'll be chastised. I've run down. Be sober now and chant. You've done it.

Twenty Steps Down With the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*

We are at the top of the steps in the building which is the Vicenza, Italy ISKCON temple. We call the whole building the temple although only one room is actually the place of the Deities, Gaura-Nitāi, where we receive Their *darśana*, where we hold *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* classes, *kirtana*, and offer *pūjā* to Śrīla Prabhupāda on his *vyāsāsana*. I'm at the top of the stairs and maybe you are with me.

The stairs are made of marble. Each one has a strip of tape on it to prevent you from slipping. Some of these tapes have worn off or have been worn off. I've seen this before—the wearing off whatever you put on stairs, carpets, strips etc. No one seems to know how to make something that will last a lifetime.

Okay here we go. Come on, ask me, “Why are you going down the stairs?”

Twenty. There are twenty steps and this is the first. It's a dramatic stairway. If you are on the ground floor you can see someone descending—it's open, lots of space between here and the ceiling. Here he comes, he's coming down the stairs, one at a time, and as he does so, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* verse unfolds.

“The Vidyadars said: ‘Dear Lord, this human form of body is meant for attaining the highest perfectional objective, but impelled by Your external energy, the living entity misidentifies himself with his body and with the

material energy, and therefore, influenced by *māyā*, he wants to become happy by material enjoyment. He is misled and always attracted by temporary, illusory happiness. But Your transcendental activities are so powerful that if one engages in the hearing and chanting of such topics, he can be delivered from illusion" (*Bhāg.* 4.7.44).

This is a verse offered to the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu when He appeared in the *yajña*. I prostrate myself mentally before this verse. I slap my wise-guy mouth which is like the mouth of Amogha who blasphemed Lord Caitanya and a mouth of Sārvabhauma who spoke Māyāvāda philosophy for so many years. In the case of Pundarika Vidyaniddhi, Lord Jagannātha personally slapped his mouth for speaking against the devotee.

Nineteen. We are alone and relaxing, writing at a table which is completely cluttered with kitchenware, pots, bottles of spices, boxes of herbal tea, a blender etc. Just a small space for this notebook. The next-door neighbors make noise—not so obnoxious but family-loud, Italian—so I put in earplugs to spare you and me from the interference. However the earplugs create an unreal situation.

What does the verse say? We are attracted by things that cease to exist. We are trying to be happy by material enjoyment. That's wrong but we don't even notice it. If someone tries to tell us we fall asleep with boredom or simply turn off, get agitated, say, "Hey, shut up. I don't want to hear that." It's too hard to understand, it's just some philosophy metaphysics. Get outta my face."

Eighteen. This is like in hypnosis, you go down the stairs in progressive relaxation. *Muto bene.* Very good. You are feeling comfortable. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is accepted by me, in principle. What does this verse say? How can I benefit from it? How can I be true? And am I supposed to entertain someone or take care of someone? I don't think so. They can take care of themselves.

What's the next number, *seventeen*. *Seventeen . . .* so believe it, that these activities will lead to more unhappiness. The thing to change is "in the hearing and chanting" of the transcendental activities of Kṛṣṇa. Work at that, lad. Read the book and when you feel tired spray your face with multi-droplets of water from the plant sprayer. Your chair is not so comfortable? Make the best of it. Make the best of it.

Sixteen. It's slow but sure. You see the devotees at the bottom of the stairs. Some sit on a bench just outside the temple room. They will go in there soon and you will join them. You may speak on this very verse. Or not. It doesn't matter. Right now you are just going down and with each step you are able to be more honest and accept yourself but at the same time you accept *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. It's been a day since I didn't write at all

...

Fifteen. It's nice to hear about the importance of chanting and hearing. I saw this verse the other day and saved it with a book marker. I can't recapture exactly why I did it, but here it is, please take it. The purport says two books especially, "two narrative books," contain the words and activities of Kṛṣṇa. One is *Bhagavad-gītā* and one is *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. They're exclusively about Kṛṣṇa and His devotees. What about the fact

that the Lord so often appears as Lord Viṣṇu in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*? You can take it that He is also Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is the original form and all *viṣṇu-tattvas* are His expansions. Śrīla Prabhupāda reminds us that we want to worship Govinda who is revealed in the *Brahma-saṁhitā* and whose name we chant in Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. So these two books are the special nectar “for those who engage in the preaching. For those who engage in the preaching of these Vedic literatures it is very easy to get out of the illusory conditioned life imposed on us by *māyā*.”

Fourteen. I know it's not easy to read. You have limited time. You want everything to be easy, like eating a cream-filled pastry—but that's not so easy to digest is it? And it's not good for your health. Be concerned with *śreyas* (ultimate good), not *preyas* (immediate satisfaction). Take care of yourself. Live up to it. Do at least a little everyday. Now you are about one third down the stairs. Are you feeling a little better?

Thirteen. Unlucky. I don't care for that. Stay awake. Take off your sweatshirt. There are girls sitting on the bench on the ground floor. One man is with his wife. I see them always together even in the temple room. I've left that. It may look good and maybe it is good for them, but at my age . . . Down the stairs, the worn-out strip on the stairs, the marble and it's right now and passing . . . The Lord is with us. Our spiritual master has saed us.

We can sing and this body can relax and feel okay. When he gets into the temple room he'll be cool in brain and feelings. And later in the day he can write.

Twelve. Don't worry. You are not conducting a tour of old people, nondevotees, who come by for one hour in a tour bus because this is a historical building. You are alone and not responsible for interesting someone who doesn't like devotees or *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Just keep alive. Kṛṣṇa will tell you what you have to do next. Give your energy in His service. At the ground floor I see a person who gave me socks. I'm carrying a *daṇḍa*. They will bow down to me when I reach their level and I will bow down equally to them. We won't think about it much but the idea is that God is in the heart and you bow to Him.

Eleven. Śrīla Prabhupāda wants us to preach. Lord Caitanya said, "All of you become spiritual masters. Your duty is simply to talk to whoever you meet of Kṛṣṇa or the instructions given by Kṛṣṇa." That's why ISKCON is operating. We invite everyone to come and chant with us "because we know that if one simply chants and hears the topics of Kṛṣṇa, his life will change; he will see a new light, and his life will be successful."

Ten.

Nine. Are you preaching?

Eight. Why is it going so fast? Take your time. We want to relax. We don't want to die in a hurry. Yes I want to know what will we do when we get to the bottom? Will there be a post-hypnotic suggestion? Is there any trance at all? Any altered state? I'll tell you: at the bottom you'll turn around and go up again. At least in your mind. Or that's what you would do if this was actually induction in hypnosis. You'd be profoundly relaxed and we'd have to send you back up to waking. But

this is not like that. It's just leisurely meeting and going down the stairs together. It's an attempt to be with another person and share *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and share personality. Just as you might meet a friend walking down the stairs, knowing that when you get to the bottom you will part and he will part and be on your own again. So for the duration of the descent you feel a certain lightness of exchange, happy for profit and sharing and aware—even jovially—that being together and chatting is part of life but not the normal state.

Seven. So life is influenced by *māyā*. Everyone is in *māyā*. But if you chant and hear about Kṛṣṇā you'll get out. This is a valuable verse to remember and others like it. We may not be pure, we are not austere, but we will not succumb to the life led for material sense enjoyment without chanting. When we get to the bottom of the stairs and even right now we will chant Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

Six. As I write, I'm no longer alone. My two companions "burst" into the room from the outside world. They are back from the place where they sent a FAX. Life will go. Madhu will measure miles to Spain with his road atlas or read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* with a highlighter. Dina-dayārdra went to his room and shut the door. I'm free to finish this at my own pace. Maybe it will be good. Don't blow it.

Five. It's a prayer. Follow it. Read those two narrative books and take the opportunity to speak them. Kṛṣṇa is far away you feel, but He can come closer. Sometime I would like to write a dialogue and express how I am tied to this world and would like to express the

reality of the world described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. When I write in honesty I have to say how my frinds burst into the room and how our neighbors are so noisy I wear earplugs and still I hear them and I feel uncomfortable pressure and pulse-beat in my head. That's this material world. End it, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* says, and hear of the world of Lord Kṛṣṇa. I want to do that but I'd like to talk it out with someone about the two worlds.

Four. One world is the temple, down the stairs. One world or two at a time. Just relax and feel fine. This is a Sheaffer pen. Be pleased you have recovered from your headache and can write again. What do you expect? You have no teeth now. You can't expect it will be painless wearing full dentures. And even if it is, can't you see the obvious signs? So relax and keep light and active and sing in your mind, Kṛṣṇa is protecting you in this fearful world. That's what the verse is saying.

Three. Kṛṣṇa save us. This world is predominated by the serpent time, and the tiger and the ditches of duality, the ocean of tears . . . Threatened on all sides and Kṛṣṇa is our protector.

Two. When I get to the bottom this literary piece will be completed but life will go on verily. However I'll say, "Did you get a reply to your FAX?" I feel good that I wrote this, like putting money in the bank. I don't think that's an illusion. I went through a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* verse that said we should hear about Kṛṣṇa. *That's the post-hypnotic suggestion.*

One. His activities and pastimes are so powerful that if one relishes them he can be delivered from illusion. You can preach, everyone. At least in some way. Find the way. Start by hearing.

Here we are. Let's go into the temple and see the Lord. There's Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Writing Alone in a Big World

Whew. Here we go. The apartment is empty. They're out shopping. They said they're going to a further distance today and may not be back until 7 P.M. In some ways my life is very protected. I prefer it this way. It leaves me free to go within. But when left alone in the house (with the refridge engine whirring) what do you turn to? Tell a story to pass the time and keep yourself from worrying and keep yourself from wondering what's going on in the big world? When is the next wave going to come in and hit me? Not right now. Just now you've got a little time. It's calm at least outwardly.

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

But handicaps and handi-cuts can happen to anyone. A star skier or a baseball player suddenly has to spend the rest of his or her life in a wheelchair. Don't put someone down because of their body and its defects. Even if it's something they could apparently control like better shaving habits or they are obese, still for some reason that's the way they are. Try to see the soul.

This Bridget was told by the doctor that we have to replace more or less your whole body but you are fortunate to live in almost the 21st century where we have all this wonderful technology of parts to replace your body parts. The doctor shook his hand and it almost fell off. They told Bridge that he'd have to go to a used parts place and get some of the replacements himself and then over a period of a few months, they'd squeeze him into their schedule maybe once a week and start replacing the parts.

"Who will pay for it?" asked Bridge.

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

Leave that. Just write here. It's my stories. I don't know who I am. By rapid methods we can learn. Tomorrow (here's a real tale) I'll ride in the back seat of this small car. It's a Citroen but a cheap-o. The two men will ride in the front seat. Dina has some cheap insurance where he's the only one who can drive. So we all go together. Madhu would drive faster but we settle for Dina's pace. We'll leave at 6:30 A.M. when it's starting to get light. The headlights of cars and the streetlights are like illuminating jewels. It's a beautiful time of day. Even if you pull off the Autostrate to get gasoline you think, "I'm here before the rush." It's not fully dawn.

The attendants rush out in their overalls and give you gas quickly and you're on your way. I don't want to make a romance out of it by telling it. I know when it actually happens, the thrill was there but also the nervousness that at any moment if you get a flat tire, you could crash and die and people will say, "If he was such a pure devotee how come he died like that?" You're supposed to die in a cot in Vṛndāvana saying holy things. That gives you more credibility.

We will drive to John Frances'. Our appointment is 7:15 A.M. That's a sweet time of day. We are always there before he is, parked in front of the gelataria. Then a small car pulls up. It's John's wife driving. He gets out and she drives off. We go up the stairs with him and he unlocks the door to the dentists's office where he works. Within a few moments I'm in a chair. You get the feeling that you've got a great jump on things so early in the morning and you're going to get this over with promptly and maybe John is also in good form. He's young anyway with a steady hand. No question of a shaky hand. He plays a Kṛṣṇa Vision tape. You try to relax although that dental chair never fully supports your neck. What the heck it's only for a few minutes. Now relax . . .

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

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

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

What do I want? Some little entertaining tales that I can get off without too much labor an hour a day, while my friends are out shopping or even while they are in the same room with me and cleaning and reading while I write. A collection of short, short stories that I already finished, that's what I want. And new ones everyday.

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

All right . . . not yet . . .

I loved those flat crackers that Madhu made for lunch which he served with a fig jam. The figs were gathered by Śrīdhāma and his wife near their home in Florence. I ate five crackers with the jam. We offered all our food to Śrīla Prabhupāda. We did the offering in a rush. I'm going to bed down tonight at 8 P.M. and be up at 12, at the desk by 12:10 at the latest for that free-for-all I call, "writing session." The sessions are different from these stories, there are no holds barred. The story

is trying to tell something and that's what can make it different, more lasting or less close to my truth.

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

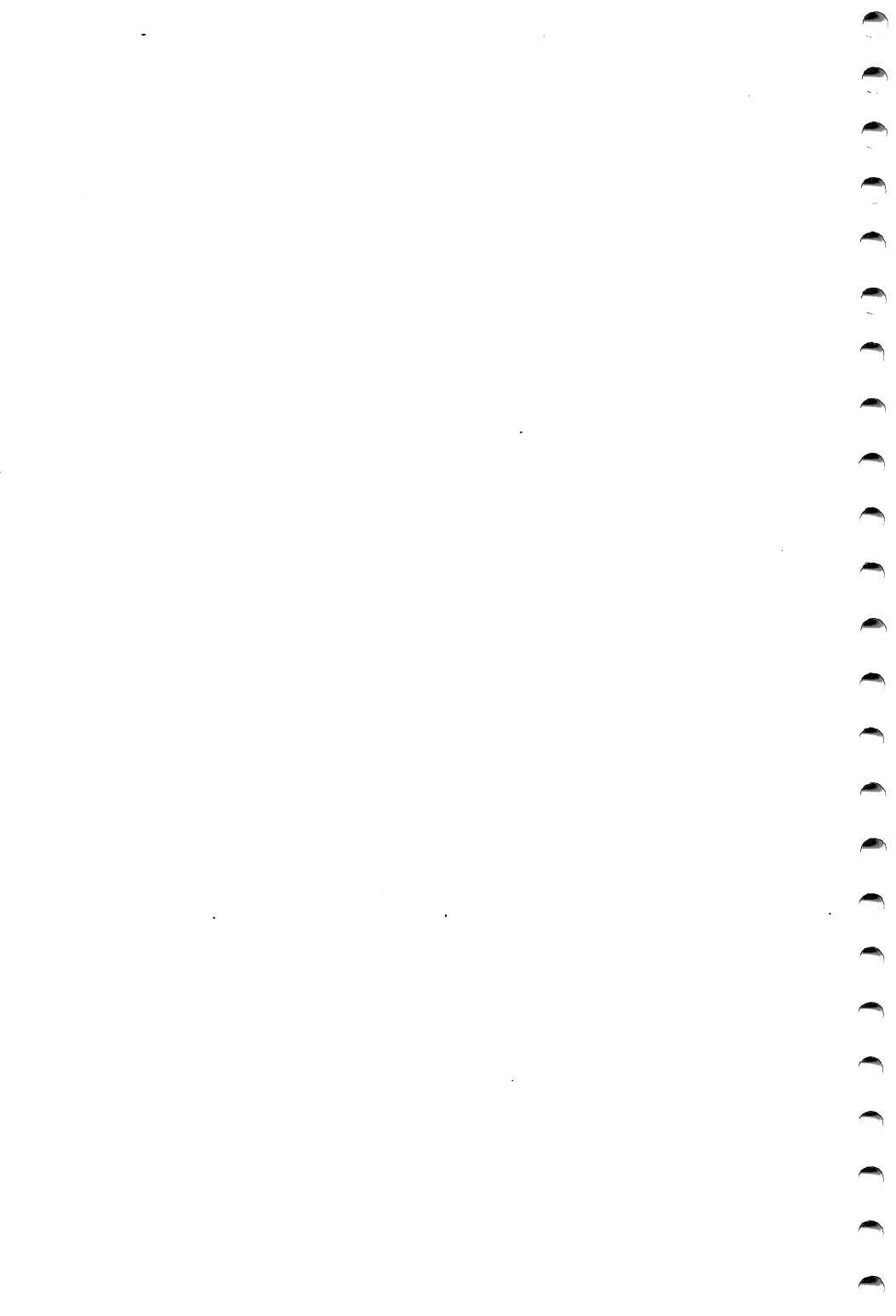
The thing is, Bridget (who was an initiated devotee named Braja dāsa, but the doctors kept calling him Bridget) knew that they could not become inspired like Mahārāja Parikṣit to stay awake and to fast and to attain the height of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in seven days. Sure Śukadeva Gosvāmī is available today and Śrīla Prabhupāda too—and we are similar to Mahārāja Parikṣit in terms of our limited time. But Braja just felt that he didn't have it in him.

Instead of such round-about stuff why not just do the writing session as usual. You could complain, "I am drowsy when I try to read," and you put that in. Then at the end of the session put in a plug for positive thinking, "After all, I did log in two hours of reading today; it could have been a lot worse."

Bridge refused to be condemned. "I could take up a short episode in a story," he thought. "I have this one day at least and it is spring. The birds are singing. I'm

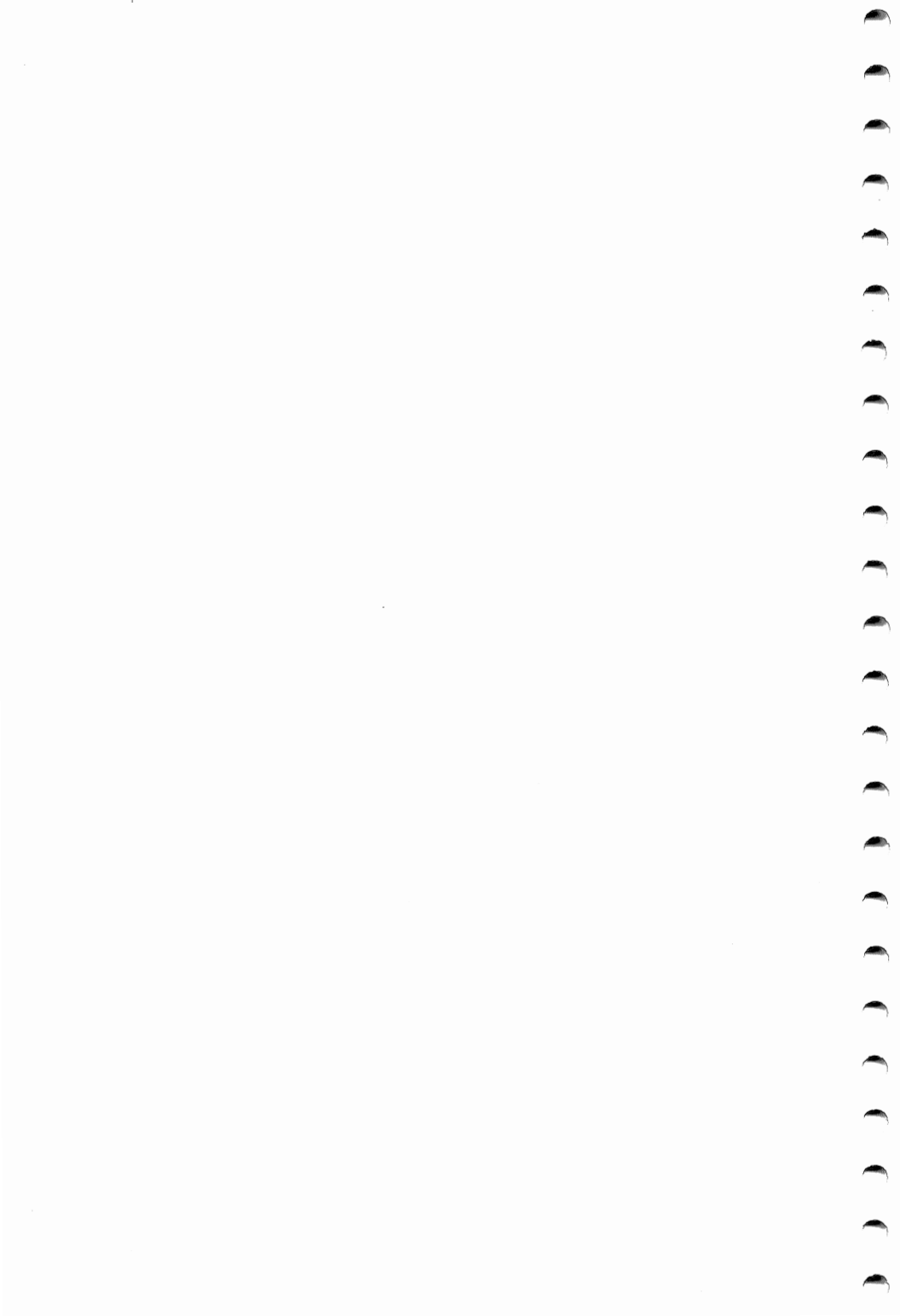
on my own. Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. How could I forget it? Let me remember Him, just as Arjuna did after he apparently forgot. I'll spend my time chanting. I'll finger the beads and hear and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare never mind what anyone thinks."

And so Bridget did that. He figured that he should also not deliberately use the *japa* rounds as a time to plot out how and where he would find new body parts. *Kṛṣṇa will arrange*, he knew. "Just let me chant in a cool brain. I could surprise myself and do real well through this ordeal," he thought. "It's prophetic and symbolic. No, never mind those thoughts. Just chant. The doctors and authors can get back to me later."





Gîte Stories



1. Witness Life

This is a hot breeze, it reminds you of India, the famous wall of heat the Westerner meets when he steps off the airplane in New Delhi. On the top step of the stairway that meets the plane, the heat wave hits him. This is all bodily consciousness. And so am I in light pink socks up to the knees in short pants sitting back to the wall on the stone porch.

Peek-a-boo, where are you? I am frankly on a pillow and it is on flagstones. The pillow has a quaint design on it, shall I tell you? It shows a child clutching a book to its chest. Or maybe it's a clown, tri-cornered hat, playing an accordion. The green leaves on tall trees have a silvery underside to them in the mid-day July heat. This story is being written from a *Gite*.

So welcome back to a storyland, I haven't been here in a month. I remember being alone like this by the Tuscarora Creek and hearing masses of trees in the wind. I don't remember such heat, unrelieved blue sky. I never before owned a white Renault van. I don't own one now, not officially. But I'm the reason it's traveling.

A salamander flicks its tongue. He's dry on the hot stone wall. Mosquitoes have not found me here. Today sleep at midday?

Now we are expecting that I should be Kṛṣṇa conscious. What does that mean in terms of this writing? It means when you read it back we won't

be worried that you are misleading us. No one should become a spiritual master or a father or mother or king or story-writer, unless he can free his people from birth and death. That is your responsibility. If you take people's eyes and ears—attention—for awhile, you have to lead them, as Lord R̥ṣabhadeva led his sons, to the ultimate conclusion. That is, we advise you to engage yourself a hundred percent in devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa, under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master.

A story puts the message in a context where it's easier to take or is effective in a special way. The writer says I won't mislead you. When I speak of summer heat or whatever, you can know I won't mislead you. I have not left out Kṛṣṇa consciousness and I will never leave it out. It is always central and nothing can change that. The heat may remind us to mention India, memories of Gītā-nāgarī, mere mention of . . . years gone by when we are all bound in the obligation to work not only for this lifetime but the next. We both understand all these.

I read a statement where Śrīla Prabhupāda said it was advisable to read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 24 hours a day, if possible. *This* is what I wanted, I told myself and underlined the passage in pencil. Lord Caitanya said *kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ* and that could be taken as always reading Kṛṣṇa's glories and teachings, or chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra or moving through a variety of Kṛṣṇa conscious activities, never ceasing to remember Lord Kṛṣṇa, to

serve Kṛṣṇa in the context of Śrīla Prabhupāda's order. If the world could do this.

Today I sat on the edge of the bath tub and Madhu shaved my head. I mentioned I saw an ad for a book by Bhakti-tīrtha Swami. And I began to tell of my close friendship with him years ago. I was a *sannyāsī* when he joined the movement. He traveled with me. I sent a letter to Śrīla Prabhupāda recommending Bhakta John Favors and Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote back his name is now Ghana-śyāma. I told him, how our close relationship changed. Ghana-śyāma looked up to me as a spiritual mentor. But when I observed him performing austere penances I said it was too much. GS wrote in his diary that I ought to look to improve in my own renunciation rather than criticize his as too extreme. Our relationship broke. After telling this story to him I felt apprehension. It had come out of me so honestly, like a confession, especially the part where I told I was like GS's guru and how I was sorry it had changed. Why fear to have spoken honestly? Because maybe one day Madhu will also feel that change toward me. But he is my disciple, whereas Ghana-śyāma was initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda. Still if you grow up, you grow up, if you change, you change. I also saw that for a long time I've had a need to be looked up to and respected at least by a few people. It's probably a natural urge, especially as you grow older. I thought of Godbrothers who also have this urge; it's like a spiritual fatherhood without having to beget through a wife. The urge to be supported in

many ways by followers. But it's possible that they may all grow up and feel differently about you, not want to print your books anymore. In his advanced age, Śrīla Prabhupāda had the opposite experience: he gave up his ungrateful wife and children and Lord Kṛṣṇa gave him hundreds and then thousands of children. Śrīla Prabhupāda said this was happiness in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It was with great responsibility that Śrīla Prabhupāda took charge of all his disciples. I can't match that but I think he wants me to help others in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I should do it and rest assured that Lord Kṛṣṇa will take care of me just as He takes care of everyone. *Eko bahūnāṁ yo vididhāti kāmān.*

If I have to cook for myself, if I have to earn money somehow, if I do not have a servant, if no one wants to oblige me by printing my words, I'd have to accept all that and no doubt see the silver lining in it. For now, why uselessly worry "what will happen?" Tell your stories, your stories which are Kṛṣṇa conscious.

As I said, it's hot out here on the patio. I hear locusts. A fly has discovered my white knee. A warm breeze. People in this area of the country mostly stay inside behind closed doors at this time and I'll go there now. I came out to talk with you and restart the story process. I'd like to leave many little volumes of stories for people to pick up and read in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The readers don't have to be my disciples. I don't have to be guru. I can witness life, that's all.

2. Scabs, Don't Scratch Them

I thought to write a story about scabs, as I felt the scabs on my legs. They came from scratching after a mosquito bit me about a week ago. That's a story in itself, the night we were raided by tiny midgets that came right through the screening in our van's skylights and bit us to pieces and then twice in the same night we were visited by police in Germany. I thought of "scabs in heaven." But whatever it is, you'd better hurry, because it's oppressively hot out here.

Now I can tell the difference between two sounds—crickets on the left are more rhythmic than the locusts, more steady, constant, tireless. Locusts are more like a rattle, looser, less mechanical sound. I don't really know what the insects are doing to get that sound, where they rub themselves and whether it's for mating or what. But we humans hear it as "summer." Heat waves. It's a bit crazy of me to come out here. I feel my face starting to grow flushed, uncomfortable, and the breeze reminds you of an oven. But it's stark and reminds you, Get done fast, take whatever comes and go back inside.

Still, the standards have to be kept. Boys fight in school yards. Men on battlefields. Soldiers hurl shells into a crowded marketplace. Governments torn asunder. And the big powerful ones like USA . . . as if without them the world would go to hell.

But it all could be simpler, like this French village of Chamaré.

Jaḍa Bharata says it's all false; it's just a conglomeration of earth and water stuck together with straw or sticks and so on, call it a body, a knee cap, a pretty head, it's just a combination of five great elements, like a mud pie for awhile. Make a huge combination of mud pies and sand castles and you've got a city or country. But the only truth in it is the spirit soul which people forget. Some *bhaktas* have pointed out that Jaḍa Bharata teaches the extreme, as he was meant to do. Rūpa Gosvāmī approaches matter with a different emphasis in his verse, *yukta-vairāgya*. Matter can be used in the service of Lord Kṛṣṇa and then it becomes spiritualized. You can have a story, it can be printed, you can dance on legs, embodied and not in *māyā*, chant, make temples, Deities, try preaching to the people.

Śrīla Prabhupāda had hopes. He told his disciples to stop quarreling and deliver Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the suffering people of the world.

This feels a little desperate. We may have to take extreme measures. We speak nervously on the telephone not sure if we can pay for it or if our friend loves us and understands. Besides, we may be bluffing. So there is no recourse but to at least speak Kṛṣṇa conscious conclusions, then it is always profitable.

Remember seeing very old man in gaudy sports clothes, Bermuda shorts, hideous if equally old

wives look like that, bleached blond, arm to arm going to drink liquor in ice cubed glasses. Why pick on them? (scabs in heaven) You might as well tease about a Hare Kṛṣṇa *sannyāsī* who stayed indoors and grew so old he was like Hiraṇyakāśipu and anthills grew around him and long finger nails and he didn't even attain *samādhi* in love of God, nor did he scare any demigods into coming and granting him boons. They all just laughed when his name was mentioned, "Oh him, he's a puff-ball." They knew he ate a big bowl of sweet tapioca on Ekādaśī and they didn't take him seriously.

Bell bottomed trousers,
coat of navy blue,
she loves a sailor boy
and he loves her too

Scabs are also what they call people who break strike lines. I was called a scab when I continued to go to work at the welfare office on Fifth Street, Manhattan when the case workers called a strike. It was part of my service to Śrīla Prabhupāda. I wore Lord Jagannātha around my neck, fresh *tīlaka* on forehead, *śikhā* and suit and tie and plunged right through the strike lines. No one hurt me just shouts and a threat with a clothes hanger. I heard that one morning Śrīla Prabhupāda walked down that street and when the strikers saw him they chanted the words "money, money, money, money" to the tune of "Hare Kṛṣṇa." They knew he wanted me to go to work. Foolish strik-

ers. I needed to bring home the money to Swamiji's temple. If you call that a scab that's your choice but it has no meaning.

A scab shouldn't be scratched.

Now the crickets and cicadas and chickadees and locusts are all saying "Beep summer" and the small piece of shade on this porch is wavering like a shadow of a breeze. Butterfly of black. White puff-ball in middle distance—high above an airplane sound and little moles, birthmarks and hair on this fine human body.

Dear friend this body is false enough like sticks as Jaḍa Bharata says, but it also can be used in the service of the transcendental Lord and that's the best use of the bad bargain. Eyeglasses, pen and ink, the natural function of the eye and so on, these are by no means to be scoffed at as nonsense. The summer sounds too have some reason to be or Kṛṣṇa would not have put them there. A sage-devotee sees Lord Kṛṣṇa everywhere and sees everything as Him.

Heat uncomfortable tells us we can't live here free and happy. Happiness in summer means to beat the heat by some artificial survival tactics. The body is naturally in hell (at this time). What the flies and mosquitoes feel I can't even imagine. Better not try. Hell all around. Don't be a Disney sentimentalist. But I say we can use everything to remind us to get out of birth and death. Intricate plans and ecologies also remind us of God's brain.

I just wanted to write a short short story outdoors in heat. It's like when the first humans went to the moon they tried to do something in a hurry. But it was useless. I'll go inside now and try to read transcendental literature. This is a note left outdoors.

Tell them, if you want to eat plums, there are some left in the refridge. WCW ate them all. I went to college too. It was cold much of the time and sometimes I even wore long underwear under woolen stylish trousers. The college rooms were warm but waiting on the platform for the Staten Island Rapid Transit could freeze you. And . . . mostly cold, coats and sweaters . . . I don't want to remember what I did in those summers. Don't kid yourself, it was lost and getting worse. So what that you knew about WCW and his plums or his red wheelbarrow glazed with rainwater? It doesn't help you in the heat or to get out of hell (*sarhsāra*).

Serious. Scabs in hell. Don't scratch them. Don't worry, I won't. I am a together (partly) celibate by virtue of sobriety and higher taste of Kṛṣṇa consciousness as given by my spiritual master to so many of us. Finally I'll close with this:

In Prague there's a ninety-year old orthodox Christian priest. He lives as an ascetic recluse in the city. I heard this from my Godbrother Jaya Gurudeva who has befriended this man. (As I write a huge horsefly has landed on my foot so I have to finish this quickly) The old monk loves Śrīla Prabhupāda. He reads his books. JG says

the man can't really understand the philosophy so well but he just loves Prabhupāda. The man said, "Śrīla Prabhupāda threw down a gauntlet before the people of the West. But very few have dared to pick it up." He also looked over at JG once and said, "You should do more! Be like Prabhupāda!" JG visits the old man twice a week and gives him a massage. Sounds nice.

No scabs but we are just going to ignore them. I'm glad I have a cool house to go back in to and hope you do too and that you are passing the summer tolerably, chanting and serving somehow. May your sorrows lighten by virtue of transcendental engagement and may you remember *pundari koksam*, Govinda the lotus-eyed one.

3. Didn't Want to Draw Blood

I was hesitant to come out here and do another story. I don't want to do one that walks on stilts. Let's be earnest. If a bug crawls up on my bare leg I'm not going to tolerate it. I'll flick it off. Same goes for horse flies or too much heat and so on. But I will be directly Kṛṣṇa conscious as soon as possible.

I could spend my whole afternoon finishing the last pages of Hari-śauri's *Transcendental Diary*. This is my second reading of it. You stay with Śrīla Prabhupāda in 1976 and endure the pressure vicariously in his shelter as if you are part of his personal party. Harikeśa was Prabhupāda's typist and cook and when he took *sannyāsa* and left to go preaching he felt misgivings at first. He said, "Everyone knows once you leave Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal party you never come back!" But with the *Diary* you can read some, put it aside while you do other things, and then come back again. And Hari-śauri does all the work; he stays up late massaging Śrīla Prabhupāda and brunts all the possible difficulties and he remembers it all in his trusty diary. So it's not difficult to read alone. But I'll soon be finished and can't keep re-reading.

Thus this story must be approached and as I said, I want to do it in a straightforward way. Yet it's not a free-for-all Writing Session. It's a story about the locust high up in the tree way in the

woods. I didn't know that white birches could be so tall.

If you're not in Śrīla Prabhupāda's personal party, even vicariously, then how will you speak Kṛṣṇa consciously? The first symptoms of a man, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in *Bhagavad-gītā* purport 2.54, is how he speaks. A well-dressed fool remains hidden until he begins to talk. I lectured on those verses on the ISKCON farm in Poland, *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.54–2.56, the symptoms of one fixed in Kṛṣṇa conscious *samādhī* (*sthita-dhī-muni*). He is not depressed by unhappiness or elated by happiness. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the example that if I receive an MA degree, I may be applauded at the convocation ceremony. But what is this honor? The degree is awarded to the body which will cease to exist. If I get some palatable food I think, "How happy I am!", but it's the tongue which is enjoying; I am not my tongue. A few days after lecturing on those verses I went to the temple in Prague and there they were up to the Fourteenth Chapter of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. There's a verse similar to 2.54 where Arjuna again asks for the symptoms of the person who has transcended the modes of nature. We want practical proofs. A devotee's behavior sets the standard for *dharma*.

Practice tolerance. Stick to your principles. Don't run and retreat just because some small red ants are roaming around on the flagstones. You represent to them a huge moving tower, and an unfathomable giant. I am so big the ants don't

even know it, they are so limited. And there are giants and towers that hover over me and take no account of me. Or they see me and I am fully under their control, but I can't even see it. Demi-gods are like that.

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

We are moving along. I have been three days in South France and have to leave in three. I've been fifty-four and a half years in this body and have to leave in ? . This story has stretched out to two pages and when I want I can fold it up. Just say the bugs became intolerable and I began scratching but didn't want to draw blood so I decided to stop and go inside. Make some excuse or explanation.

The shade retreated on the patio and it was all exposed to sunlight (not true). A naked man ran by, a horse ran by in Africa and I felt it (not true, not true). I wound up writing this story on stilts after all (that's for the reader to judge).

Now the purport. I tend to forget purports as soon as I read them. When I lecture I place those sticky Post-Its in a page with notes to remind me what to say. That way I give an organized lecture,

to the point. Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't have to do that and yet he always went to the heart of the subject matter. He spoke in a scholarly way, analyzing Sanskrit words in the *śloka* and quoting relevant *ślokas* from other scriptures. But he was never pedantic. Not confined. Said what occurred to him and what Lord Kṛṣṇa wanted him to say. He spoke from the strong, unassailable position of a pure surrendered soul. He was most qualified to speak of *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

We take turns sitting on the temple *vyāsāsana*. Now I am not on one. I'm on a pillow on flagstones, lying back against the stone wall. I'm not facing an audience who will detect a mistake as soon as I make one, and show it in their faces. I'm outdoors, under a clear sky and the only sound is nature's, wind on summer leaves, locusts, bird songs. I came here to do a story with a Kṛṣṇa conscious meaning. So this is it. You can be with Śrīla Prabhupāda in Hari-śauri's *Diary* and ride the airplane with him, be alone in his room with his servant and not even be noticed, observe crossfire of his chastisement without being caught in it—but be careful. Your conscience will speak to you. You have to ask yourself, what am I doing to serve him as the others are going? You can't just hide anonymously in a crowd of five hundred during his Māyāpur lecture.

As I write, a red spider dangles in mid-air beside me. He is riding his amazing invisible cable that extends toward my leg—and suddenly he

lands on my leg—and I dismiss him abruptly. I know I've got work to do, and so do you, dear reader. First, you have to fix up a *prabhu-datta-deśa* or a vocation of service in ISKCON. You need to follow strict *sādhana*. Keep reviewing how you are doing. You can't be too hard on yourself these days, but neither too easy-going. My story would like to help you. Sit a while in the shade while the locusts chime and scrape unearthly yet very earthly sounds. It's a brief respite. I offer it to you. What do you think? I mean about yourself, what are you doing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness? As for me, I'm going to go inside now where it's cool. I'll read some more *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* or *Diary* and think over what we have said. (pray Kṛṣṇa will teach us to improve and make best use of human life)

4. Preachers at Outdoor Cafe Setting in Between Missions, in France

I don't want this to be a story about ants. Yesterday was. I only discovered it later in bed. They were crawling on my legs. Not today because I'm not sitting on the flagstones. I'm on a patio chair at circular metal table alone. I've got an inner verve. A locust is going like mad like a caraca (shaky, rhythm-musical instrument from South America) in the hands of a band leader.

But this is froth. You've got to settle down. Go ahead, unclinch that left fist. Spread out your stuff on the table. Go ahead, Marlow, tell your story.

"We were three of us in the party commissioned to come back from the jungles only after we'd found the gold cache of the century. It was an exploit of danger at every step. None of us knew the verse, *samāśritā ye pada-pallava-plavaṇh*. We were all nondevotees, all characters in Joseph Conrad's novella. We had some physical courage and strong moral sense—insight into the heart of darkness and the fact that civilization is only on the surface. And many things. But not knowledge of God. Not the plain truth of God and His law, religion."

Marlow relaxed back in the chair. No candles were lit because it was daylight. No liquor bottles, no novella. Just me and the heat and breeze

sound in trees, heat of Provence, and the obligation to deliver Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Lord Caitanya stopped at Kurmakṣetra. The *brāhmaṇa* at whose home He stayed wanted to join Him and wander through India. No, Lord Caitanya said, stay home and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and tell everyone you meet about Kṛṣṇa and His teachings. In this way be a guru and I will never leave you.

Śrīla Prabhupāda has not left us. Madhu is chanting some *śloka*s inside the house. Don't claim it's distracting you. Are the trees distracting? The heat? I'm getting lectures ready for upcoming seminar. Keep vigilant for spiders and ants that may venture onto my flesh and hair follicles. The insects find it interesting and tempting, the flesh field of an aging *sannyāsī*.

What happened next?

There was a Perse pilot.

What's that?

I mean I got thirsty and couldn't think of words. Recently was the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day when Americans and Allied paratroopers dropped onto France and simultaneously landed on the beaches of Normandy, invading the Nazis in one of the boldest—and most successful—military endeavors of the century. The New York *Times* and others said those were real heroes and the cause was simple and good. Nowadays things are more complicated; people aren't as willing to do that and the technology of war is also different. Each paratrooper on D-Day carried a hundred pound

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assortment of fighting and survival gear on his back.

You're going to jump around? No it's all like one connected story for today. We are seated at the round metal table like an outdoor café. This is all on the menu, so to speak. I've been reading Hariśauri's *Diary* again and preparing sections of it for a talk to devotees. Some funny parts show Śrīla Prabhupāda angry at his servant briefly and always instructive. I'll tell the time TKG and Harikeśa quarreled over whether TKG could eat as his lunch, some of Prabhupāda's remnants from the pot or whether it all had to be distributed as *prasādam* to the devotees. Satsvarūpa is mentioned favorably in the *Diary* at the Māyāpur festival. Śrīla Prabhupāda stopped to see the display of printed reviews of his books by professors—which had been gathered by the library party. Ghanaśyāma and Mahābuddhi were the real leaders or workers on that party but they kindly looked to me as their *sannyāsī* "leader" who accompanied them in our vans all over the US.

What else is on the menu? A cool drink? Is this a Hare Kṛṣṇa restaurant? You are imagining you are seated with some other devotees in light convivial mood? Oh locusts, do rattle, for death like the rattlesnake.

Now I'm brushing aside, rejecting, incidents that come to mind. I do that too in social settings. Wait until you think of something presentable. Not Ravindra-svarūpa retelling the plot of the movie, "Suddenly Last Summer," ghastly Tennessee

Williams nightmare and Ravindra chuckling, "Of course all this is connected to Kṛṣṇa consciousness." How? Because the film used a technique of one actress (Elizabeth Taylor) remembering a whole story which she narrated just out of sight and hearing of the audience. Ravindra suggested the same technique could be used in Yadubara's proposed film of the life of Lord Caitanya.

Here are our cold drinks. They have been offered to Kṛṣṇa. What else can we say? More on films? Did you know Nṛsiṁhānanda is planning one, fiction, on the life of a young American who joins the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement around 1966? It's about Śrīla Prabhupāda, but told through the young devotee.

Ants manage to climb up our legs even as we sit civilly on chairs. It's enough to make you want to call off the tête-à-tête and retire indoors to dark cool. But Liz Taylor rattler goes on incessantly, maddeningly telling of a ghastly story. Big buzzers, horse flies, speed by. I wait for the next ant, an anticipatory faint grimace on my face. There he is! Left thigh! And another one on right elbow. Blow him off. Ow. Marlow, if you please, let's get the heck out of here.

I'm sorry friends, you know how it is. The world of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is where it's really at. We can settle indoors where it's civilized. It's not my fault that all this mundane stuff is creeping. It's the nature of the world. Even Prahlāda Mahārāja, who is not afraid of Narahari—he was sent to Him the way you might ask a boy to enter a lion's

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cave—said he found the material world fearful. Śrīla Prabhupāda said a devotee finds this world “fierceful.” He’s afraid of. He finds it detestful. So I’m in that spirit a little. I mean that’s the justification of this story and its ending.

The characters decide they can be more transcendental indoors and pursue Kṛṣṇa conscious studies, not for the comfort of sense gratification but to be calm for hearing and chanting in peaceful setting. They’re all preachers in between missions.

5. At the Round Table

At the round table. It's green and metal. They seem small so you can crowd four chairs around them. A café owner could put a dozen of them out on the sidewalk—each one with its own umbrella—and be in business. I have just one and I'm sitting here with my devotee friends. The sun is too hot and direct at 4 P.M. but there's a shade provided by a viney tree that has grown and is leafing over us on a metal trellis. Some kids are playing in a creek down in the woods and occasionally I hear them. But otherwise we are at the end of a road in rural South France, in a *gîte*.

When I sit with others I think of what to say. I don't think of what I'll write later. I know I can only go one and a half hours in socializing, then I will have to retire. I try to make the best of it and be friendly and have Kṛṣṇa conscious topics. The last time I did this, shared a lunch two days in a row with two Godbrothers in Germany, I had topics written on an agenda. One was about spiritual masters and disciples. In one I asked my Godbrother about a rural community he was part of. I also had some questions about Deity worship. It went well, even though lunch is supposed to be a time of light conversation. Of course it helped that they were gentle men and friendly.

Sometimes I'm more uptight. But still I try to function. They may not realize how limited I am in time. After one and half hours of any intense

occupation, I'll start to get a headache if I don't take a break. So I came to the social meeting ready to play in top form in a timed session, "Let's go, let's make it Kṛṣṇa conscious, not *gramya-kathā*."

Sometimes I think of the image of a taxi meter. As soon as I get into the cab he pushes down the metal flag and starts ticking and the cost increases with each minute. You are paying for this even when he stops at a red light or in a traffic jam. There is no free time; every minute is added to the bill. So I silently request my social friends, please use me well so that you are satisfied with my participation. I won't be here long.

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

Sound strange? That's me. You've got your own problems, right? So here we are and the summer wind is strong and gusty on this patio. It will blow loose papers off the table. But it helps since it's so warm. Sunlight is coming through the trellis shade in patches and circles of light.

Marlow talks first. He tells of a schooner he rigged in Baltimore time back in Sahara. Seehan is second. Tells of a sailing and drinking trip down the West coast of Ireland. People he met. The nurse is silent. Oh gosh, this has quickly gotten out of control. It started as such a nice-tone personal essay.

Well that's what happens when you come and meet with people. Can't have it your way; can't be in control. You all share the destiny of your outing.

Knowing in advance I would come here today I was determined to move to Kṛṣṇa conscious topics. Here goes.

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

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

He says you have to wait to get a signal from Kṛṣṇa. If you're not enthusiastic, it won't work.

I'm actually desperate to get help, advice on how to improve my chanting. Or I wish I was desperate. I can't come out with it rawly. This is polite conversation. But I feel like saying, "If anyone can help me, please do. I'd like nothing better

than to pick up something truly valuable—like a turning point in my life—from today's tête-à-tête."

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

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

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

Selfish. Limited. But I try to be helpful. Keep up a good conversation. Say some things that are meaningful to me. My view of ISKCON whereby each devotee is free to make his contribution, each humble, each person's service is a tiny piece in the mosaic. And we have respect for each other. I say that. They listen.

One speaks of ecology. I listen. One speaks of a seminar and a Godbrother. We listen. The wind

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

In Conrad's books a character will speak a whole novel while his friends just chime in with support for him to keep him going, as the candles burn down, bottles empty and the night turns to dawn. I know no talks like that. I favor the short shorts. I don't want to tax my friends. And I don't have such long wind or yarns to tell.

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

"I plan to have some meetings with my disciples, one for a period of five days in Ireland and then later for two weeks in India I'll give some classes."

"I heard you say," I say, "that sometimes you read from your *śloka* box. What's that? A collection of *ślokas* you keep in a box? Could I borrow it for half an hour?"

He says he doesn't have it with him.

I'm grateful they have brought me out of myself. I can go back to being alone but enriched. I can think fondly that I have some friends and I met with them. I'm not such an impossible loner. In another country, with other devotees, I can refer to this meeting.

"I am reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* this year."

I don't agree with everything they say. That's all right too. All of this is very obvious I suppose. Maybe this story is the same sort of thing, me sitting on the edge of my chair and trying to be earnestly sociable and not quite making it. I don't want to be blunt or hurt anyone and I am easily hurt. When we meet I can't come out with deepest secrets and besides, I don't even have so many deep things. I like a light exchange. I like to sit with "you all" and glance at the weeds and trees and watch time go by. I like to read ancient Chinese poems and modern American idiom, poems that express human themes similar to these—friends meeting, friendliness, what doesn't get said because we are each alone. No big neurosis here. It's okay. It's a social act. We'll each spend a lot of time alone.

I will read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and chant and look forward to writing it down. And I look forward to touching you in spirit. Not to be utterly alone. Can someone tell us about Kṛṣṇa? I mean not just in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* lecture, although that's important too. I'm running off here. Seems there's a lot more to say but maybe not now. We can continue it another time. I'd like to talk, for example, about moods. Sometimes in the morning I feel my life is wrongly directed and needs a serious overhaul; I've lost confidence in what I've staked my life on, my way of writing and living alone. Then in the late morning maybe in my noon shower, the confidence returns. What to do with these moods? I can observe them but I can't

just stay steady all the time with an abiding sense
beside the moods. Oh well. Melting. See you
later.

6. A Prayer Not to Forget

Another day we sat at the green round table and at first I observed microscopic bugs. They locomoted frantically toward the edge. For the third day in a row heavy winds were up and sunshine, no clouds. We scraped our chairs, tucking ourselves in, four of us around the table.

"Don't look so glum," he said. "It's not like we're going to the dentist's."

"Or to the plumber."

We lightened up a bit. No one smoked cigarettes. We followed the four rules and chanted sixteen rounds, we friends.

Marlow began, "I could tell . . ."

I interrupted. "I fain must remind you that today is our last day here."

"We could come back," said the nurse.

"It don't make no difference," said Marlow. He was white-haired, old-faced, wore a vest with hippie-like metal things attached—they looked like small hand symbols, and he wore a striped shirt and tie.

Mickel Mouse was the most sober. He had been through a GBC meeting this year. As we leaned forward I noticed a red microscopic bug on his hand. I blew it off with a puff of my breath. "We'll be lucky if we get off without killing any of these," I said, and blew an ant off my sweatshirt shoulder.

"They'll be lucky," said Mickel. Then he commenced.

"You know *The Road Less Taken*?" He paused and I was hoping he would come through. "Well, Kṛṣṇa consciousness came down that road. It was carried on Hare Kṛṣṇa mantras carried by some *saṅkīrtana brahmacārīs*. Seems they are often the ones to bring it into new lands."

I didn't want to interrupt, although I thought of some *grhasthas* who have pioneered.

"They carried it in the form of Prabhupāda's books," said Mickel, "during the summer distribution marathon of '93. Now when they went back a year later, they found a family was chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa regularly."

Can I leave that one behind? It's a strain. I don't blame them. They came together for some appointment. It's just the wind is dominant and the insects. The humans have come lately. If you don't want to tell—or can't tell—the real story, deeper story, then what's the sense of making believe? Donkeys are somewhere in India. I know an Irish woman who lives in the Soho Street temple. She spends most of her days on the streets of London selling Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. Her temple authorities motivate her that this is the highest service to God and human kind. She writes to me and asks if it's all right to use lines in order to sell the books, lines that are not lies, but are just commercially-tested formulas. She says she would prefer to say something honest and

more direct identifying herself as a devotee in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. So I reply, why not go ahead and say what you feel? She also asked if she can wear a *sārī* and *tilaka* instead of a disguise. I said if you think you can.

Then she wrote back and said she tried it but her scores went down. Her temple president told her that her attachment to personal "honesty" was a kind of sense gratification; the main thing is to get the books out. This disturbed her and she lost trust in him. Then she later regained trust in him and did it the way he asked. Her scores went up. Then she lost faith in me for saying that personal honesty was so important, as if I didn't understand the urgency of book distribution. Then she had felt bad that she doubted me. Then she resolved it: her temple president was right and I was not wrong to emphasis her *sādhana*. She meant I usually tell her to chant and read and then should be strong for book distribution.

Is that the story? Not really, although it is definitely important. But it is not the story. It's more kind of harassment or me confiding in how I get entangled in these areas where I have no real jurisdiction or expertise or interest.

Do you feel guilty? What more did Mickel Mouse say and why do you call him that?

I noticed the table was round. The same word we use to describe one hundred and eight mantras on beads. One round. A round table. It's hard to get into the spirit because as soon as our

tête-à-tête is over I ought to start packing my belongings into the van. The train sound of the wind in summer trees is as strong as ever, but not that wistful submission to voices that would tell the stories. We don't have time. We are in a rush, a different schedule. I don't say stories are for idle people, not at all. But you do have to have a little time on your hands. A busy man will ask you what's the profit, why do you dare stop him with your story?

These are little stories about preaching and not directly on Kṛṣṇa himself, right? The priests of King Nābhi regretted their prayers to the Lord and that He appeared at their *yajña* arena in response to such paltry prayers. They were sorry they disturbed Him from His eternal internal pastimes. Of course I too don't want to waste Kṛṣṇa's time with my so-called re-telling of His pastimes, asking Him to come to us at the green round table. But still, something is better than nothing. Even a little devotional service does immense good.

And so the priests prayed, please Lord we are prone to forget Your names and pastimes. This may especially happen when we yawn or stumble or get disease. We pray therefore that You will stay in our minds and especially at death we will be able to chant Your holy names.

This was the prayer I wish to offer and share with the knights of the round table. It's the best I can offer.

Now I too am the priest. As you go on your journey and return to your work, keep this prayer

with you and utter it. Dear Lord, don't let us forget You. Let us *hear* Your names, recall some teaching or verse from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. If we can do this socially with devotees or by reaching out and preaching to the innocent nondevotees, that is best. At least alone, let it form. Hare Kṛṣṇa. Hare Kṛṣṇa. Go pack your van and don't forget.





