

Krsna, Krsna,
the soul burns bright

**Kārttika Lights
To Increase Your Devotion**

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• Prelude

(Writing Sessions from October 1–7)

WS #1

It's October 1st and I'm writing with a knit hat on my head. The question is, can you break a long-standing habit of inattentive chanting? I think, "Yes, you can." He gave the example of learning to play the *mṛdaṅga* the wrong way (or holding the tennis racquet the wrong way). You have to break down to the elementary thing you did wrong.

Okay, you have to help yourself. But you have to call out to Kṛṣṇa. Whatever you wrote . . . You chanted 64 rounds a day for seven days and learned some things about yourself. You can improve your *japa* if you work at it more. We'll have to do that.

And for writing, I proposed that I could use this period of time, October 1–12, to help myself enter the longer retreat. Yes, you'll have a lot of time to write and to read. You'll want to sink once you get there, but there's no harm in clearing the way beforehand if you can. What do you want to write? What discipline might you take on? I don't have much time right now. This is an intro to those early October WS.

I do wish to communicate to people. Not selfish. Didn't go all alone to chant but took two men and Madhu too and we worked together. We may do it again next spring.

I do want to . . . also have it and discipline in controlling the mind. Writing is also to control the mind, but sometimes we do it by tapping in for a while and seeing where the mind is already going. Then steer it. Writing is in some ways different than *japa*.

Today is Sunday, two lectures, get ready to travel tomorrow.

Decide what to read, what to read . . . in the next few days and also at the retreat. You could read Cc. But first I must "finish" *Bhagavad-gītā*. Start that up and answers will come.

Always my health . . . last night I felt a headache coming and had to end the meeting. Now take care so you can do the two lectures today. In the first, I'll tell the devotees nearby here, who have cooked for us at this retreat, what we were doing and the glories of the name. In the afternoon, talk of how we are advised to always think of Kṛṣṇa and that it's hard work.

Can you break the bad habit learned early? Maybe not? I think you have to be willing to go to a rehab house or just break it all down to become a beginner again. Under a teacher in some setting where you are willing to be a baby neophyte and learn things from the beginning, teeny, teeny-taw. What did NG say

about the habit of her holding the tennis racquet in the wrong way? She gripped it up rather than at the end because gripping it up was easy. But then she could never become the best player. But one could, one could . . . it takes breaking down the act and starting all over again. Like Erickson learning to walk after polio; crippling, slow, guts, did it.

All right, let's end this early and look at a book and start *japa*. It's a short WS, not even a "session," but at least a hello to October and desire to write. What shall I write?

(October 1, 15 minutes or less, Jalon, Alicante, Spain)

WS #2

Itch from midge bites, scratchin' and they bleed and your *kūrta* gets stains. Local devotees say it's best to just tolerate them and don't scratch. See if I can learn that. But tomorrow we leave. This afternoon, leave in half hour to go lecture at a householder's where five families gather every Sunday and like they do in Wicklow, they read out loud together for a half hour and then share a feast, each family brings a prep.

I decided not to inquire how the GBC actually dealt with the "*rasika*" GBC members. Whatever news comes to me, that's enough. Don't be curious. I looked up the words "curious," "busybody," and "nosy." Habitual inquiry into other people's business unnecessarily. Stay clear of intrigues. Chant and read; inquire as to what Kṛṣṇa is doing and your own *sādhana*, etc. This will help in my desire to avoid *sādhū-niṇḍa*.

Flies. One bothered me during hour I tried to rest after lunch. They are busybodies going to my face and its sores. I hope it will be dark enough at 7 P.M. when I take rest for the night so the flies may also take rest.

The *September Catchall* asked me to perform a bit to tell the story of the day. Now write without that.

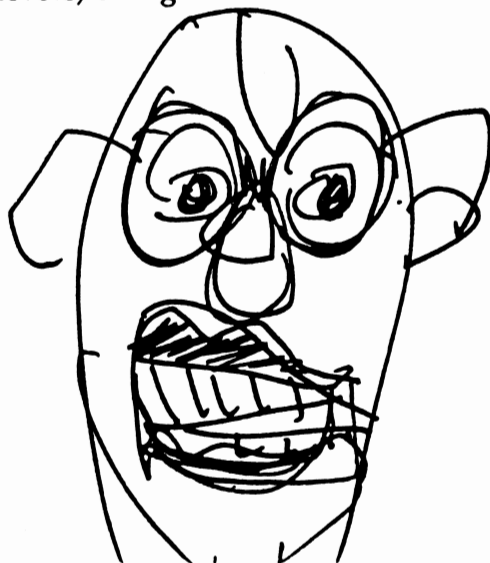
I'd like to resume reading Cc. with notes. So I tell myself.

And we will see what I like to write or what Kṛṣṇa allows. *Haribol, haribol*.

Chanting the names of Jesus, they say, stopped the Lisbon plague of 1432. What if it didn't? Why pray to be saved? It's natural. But Śrīla Prabhupāda doesn't advise that. If Kṛṣṇa wants you to die, don't pray to Him to save you. Pray to remember Him as you die. Do we like to hear of the power of prayer? But what is that power? That He may give me the nectar of *harināma*? Or allow me to live without the nectar (like a cactus that goes so long on a drop of water)? But let me chant and chant and remember Him and serve His devotees.

At the Sunday gathering, I'll speak of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Yes, do. Tell them he's great. They know that. Let us remember him. Hare Kṛṣṇa. I'll read that he said I should go on reading three hours daily in his books as I was doing then. Be with Śrīla Prabhupāda in that way. Read his books and read of him too.

Haribol. Can't write much longer; got to get ready (put teeth in, polish head, shine hubcaps, align motor and fevers) and go there and smile and talk.



Dear folks, be ready for your end when bell strikes
11 or less, you'll get to crawl like an ant, well chant
then, and chant now to practice.

It's brown October
or green and hot like the
days we chanted in
Tompkins Square Park
Rāya Rāma and Hayagrīva and
me too, Bruce,
etc., but don't find fault
with them and make yourself
as if the best
in your mind. It's absurd
and you lose
when you think ill of
others.

(15 minutes, October 1, Alicante)

WS #3

Vital questions on the mind and consider what to do. One might even stop the show, later in life, of traveling and lecturing which is often a social act in which one says things without much conviction. Why go through the motions? What is the affect of it? Could I be doing something more important for surrender to Kṛṣṇa? I felt a little of this last night, that my talk at the Sunday gathering was nice reminiscences of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and yet some of it was just a public performance to please the audience of layback devotee householders. I am also layback.

You know what I mean? I told them how we preferred the Swami in his 1966 mode and didn't want him to leave NYC. That's true and that's a sweet mood, how Śrīla Prabhupāda sacrificed to preach, and so we also had to sacrifice the life of being with him as the father of a small family. But maybe I didn't feel it as I said it. I could be honoring that feeling in some more intense way, maybe by directly writing the emotion or drawing a picture of it . . . anyway, to have recalled it as I did doesn't harm me, but maybe I can do better.

I am not Śrīla Prabhupāda, that by running here and there I hold ISKCON together. Even disciples . . . I could see them only if they came to me. I might situate myself somewhere and "do *bhajana*." Of course, how do you reconcile that with Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and the ISKCON mood and his saying, "Preach, preach, preach," as he handed me the *daṇḍa*? But he also said preach while you are young, and when you are older, retire and go to Māyāpur or Vṛndāvana. But the ISKCON *dhāmas* are sometimes "contaminated" by

persons who don't make it possible to live there and do that *bhajana*, or one falls into the *rasika* mood prematurely. So sometimes we consider the idea of a life of solitude outside of Vṛndāvana.

What is best?

As I go into the next retreat, I continue to consider these things. I have to also decide the bounds of reading-writing-chanting, maybe favoring one over the other in this retreat and then shifting it in the next retreat. We just spent seven days of 64 rounds each.

Also I asked but didn't answer whether my writing should be a more direct effort to control the mind rather than practice tapping into the wild and wandering mind. But what does that mean?

Immediately we travel today, so try to stay in Kṛṣṇa consciousness one way or another. Lecture to devotees

...

You are a good boy, kid, old man. They laugh at your jokes and give you *prasādam* on time and a garland and a garland for Śrīla Prabhupāda *mūrti*. So many opinions! The most senior devotees who have the most opinions so you should know yourself by now what to do and think as a servant and not run to others like a new *bhakta*. Sounds proud and wrong? It may be practical and humble too.

(12 minutes, October 2, Jalon, Alicante, Spain)

WS #4

12:34 A.M.

Time is racing. My health is weak. Our van has major engine trouble. Typical of a visit to Spain, the jinx. I hope we can get to our Ireland retreat on time. Pay money and you can get that.

More themes—Suhotra Swami against Brother Aelrade and implication of a threat that holds for me. Am I wrong to encourage Aelrade? Does it deviate me from Kṛṣṇa consciousness? Will SS come after me?

And other themes, all the live pass through me at least temporarily as I imbibe their letters and reply to them. Remember your duties of lecturing and letter answering on nectar, life-giving links of service to Śrīla Prabhupāda So don't begrudge them. Live in the day. It's here and soon you too may reach your beloved retreat and spend more time on reading and writing. I feel denied in both these areas by the duties of a temple visit as *sannyāsi* guest. Speak twice a day. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Ask disciples to ask me question in the meeting tonight. I've spoken twice on the qualifications of a disciple. I could speak more on that in a personal way to them—responsibilities of my disciples. You don't want to demand so much of them.

Health is good for *sādhana*. Keep it for that reason. Don't eat (overeat, etc.) in unhealthy way.

In a dream, an elephant trainer used the *daṇḍa*, long, strong stick wrapped by saffron, as a means to control the elephant. What does that mean? Use *daṇḍa*, use *sannyāsa* life to control powerful senses? Also to control the powerful forces of everything and everyone “out there,” outside of me. I can exert control over my own life and achieve my purposes.

Speaking here on qualifications of a disciple, I see it's very demanding to come up to standard.

History of Śāntivāna seemed external. But that's one way of telling things. I do it too sometimes when someone asks me for it. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Who is the best poet in ISKCON? Don't think you are. Be a poet. Write then—with divided lines and without. All poetry. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Write, write, write.

My strength as writer. All strength is in Kṛṣṇa. A good writer gives us Kṛṣṇa.

One tends to see Śrīla Prabhupāda as very restrictive, not allowing for artistic expression. But that's not really so. I have to, however, stay close to him and his books to earn the right.

Just paused five minutes or so to write a thank you note to Madhu. We want to push on and reach the upcoming retreat. It's okay that it's a secret, but even if we were to be found out, I'd take it, need it, for body, mind, and spirit. Let them criticize if they will. I must do what I feel and think is best for my spiritual life. I can't repress it. In the meantime, and after retreats, let

me render the temple service. And even in retreats, I'm not going alone in a selfish motive. I make myself fit; I advance my art of service. I preserve my integrity. I take time to *read* (next is *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*). Thank You, Lord, for this sublime, happy way of life. The strain of lecturing and travel is part of it. Answering letters too. Even *japa* is a strain and I should go for it now, concentrating to hear.

(15 minutes, October 4, New Vraja-maṇḍala,
ISKCON Spain)

WS #5

Haven't written in a few days. Answering mail (almost done now) and preparing lectures here at Nueva Vraja-maṇḍala, and getting headaches. So no writing and no reading either, and no drawing. The internal pressure is building up. I want to go on a retreat. I'm an ISKCON man. I go apart to gain wholeness, to hear again the pure sound.

What will I write when I go there? More WS or will it be a "timed book?" Do I want to shape, to tell a story, create a book? That's an ambition. But what about straight, released writing as you did in Castlegregory and later called *Forgetting the Audience*? A collection of knollard WS can also be made into a book. Writing everyday, sessions . . . I look forward to it, come what may. Can't control life.

May our van, old as it is, get us there. May we not sink. Even if we . . . break down. Madhu said, "I'll get you there somehow or other."

This morning I began a reading of Cc. Good start. Made some honest notes, not like the mere review of contents, but express how I feel. I don't live in Vṛndāvana and maybe it's just as well. But by reading Cc., I can enter the divine realm of Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavism at its best, with Śrīla Prabhupāda as my guide. Śrīla Prabhupāda (not demanding that we do management or cooperate with our Godbrothers. Or does he? We'll read and see.). This fellow grows older, is already

among the oldest men in ISKCON, needs his space, asserts his right.

Afraid they may come after me. Even if they do, I won't come out. They may know, if my secret leaks out, that it's not a bad act; I have gone for the month of Kārttika to a hidden place to write the story of my life as I try to enter the nectar of the pastimes and instructions of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. They may know.

May I write poems,
take walks,
be satisfied with good companionship
of two brothers.
All glories to Prabhupāda.

You are free to write as it comes. Now go through these last days here, lecturing through the translator. The devotees don't demand of me. They leave me alone during the day. I can read an MS of my book being prepared by GNP. And maybe a few more sessions like this.

I can't expect to unwind here. But live, persevere, and save a record as you go. October-fest, quiet life. Get us through. Mid-November go to India. That's what's scheduled. Keep in touch with Lord Kṛṣṇa by the chanting. Aware my *gāyatrī* chanting has dropped so low. Dallus Weir in prison. Me here. He says, "Prisons are getting tighter." He's in "the best place to do time in the state (of Washington)." He says if they

and bring your brass pot
and knucks."

Geez, oh no, my heart
skips, not that.

And I dreamt I was
faking it in the welfare
office.

Enter the water where you write and care. The light
is dimming at 6 P.M., 6:30, and you ate enough today,
4x4 trucks have air bags when you crash, the greatest
danger is if the truck rolls over. They are not always
safer than cars.

Remember in a yurt
then in cold south Italy
it was nice writing there,
one retreat after another.

Well, that's coming up again. You want to say, "And
nobody can stop me." But it's up to Providence.

JG shocks us (shocked?), dropping out of ISKCON.
Someone may say that's what I do too. But no, I'm in
ISKCON temple lecturing and after a hiatus sab, I'll be
back again giving a seminar, visiting a temple, or mem-
ber goes to health clinic.

Get any better?

Yes, Charlie Parker
I'm cured of my jazz-
listening and hyper-rash
and tooth ache and mild
azma.

Oh, but what about—
I heard you get headaches. Don't believe anything you hear.

Is it true you are milding the autumn orange, yellow leaves on trees in Spain villa? Is it true you could have eaten more but didn't want to look like a glutton before your host? Yes.

Is it true I heard you are embarking on a reading of Cc. and you write some nice devotional sentiments down?

Yeah, that's so.

So I want you to tell me how I too can read like that. Wait and I'll tell you later.

Director of broadcast reads a word and makes Kṛṣṇa conscious sense, write any damned thing on the road, you'll be okay. Preface to Kārttika retreat. You can't talk to M. now; he's too wired up in van mania. I wish I were too, am getting that way for upcoming retreat. Think of it this way—after tomorrow's class, you are free to read and write as you like.

(14 minutes, October 6, Nueva Vraja-maṇḍala, Spain)

WS #8

October 8—Time flies; *tempus fugit*. Also flies buzz in this room, dying, respect them, don't just be annoyed with them. It's a tough life. You are fortunate, just a little chilly, but you have some clothes to keep warm and can use heaters. So unlike the flies, you intend to survive the winter. And many more winters. Then like the flies, you too, go against the window pane, buzz some last times, bump and grope and expire and it's another corpse on the floor.

But you leave your writings; you and Thomas Merton. Library. Library of Congress. "A spirit embalmed forever." Spirit goes on to a next body. Where you go is real self-interest, more than what you leave in this world. But what you leave is also important, as a contribution. You should do something worthy.

Some disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda think maybe he is not the only figure in their life. They want to find themselves. Maybe they think, "I am meant to do something further; maybe being the strict disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda in ISKCON is one long phase of my life, but I need to move onto a next." They could even argue that Śrīla Prabhupāda went outside of his spiritual master's institution when it broke into fractions. That is circumstantial, however. The essence is he dedicated his life to full-time carrying out of his spiritual master's order that he preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the West.

So for me too, *guru-sevā* is the essence. I seek it in reading and writing. Associate with devotees. I don't see ISKCON as fit to abandon. "Not yet."

Tomorrow is Kārttika's first day. I won't be in Vṛndāvana or Gītā-nāgarī. In the afternoon, we will start to travel. Can I begin some writing project on Kārttika? Could it continue the five days' scheduled travel until we reach the retreat house? Would that be nice? It would give you a cause, a means to absorb yourself as you travel. But you don't want to confine yourself to what you write once you reach the retreat.

But you could use guidance, no harm in a running start. The retreat can sometimes be a time when you are relieved, grateful, but can't write as directed as you'd like to.

Seems you do either WS or a timed book or both. And poems and drawings. Let your spirit wander in the free realms. While you practice reading at different times in the day and with limited body and intellect.

Yes, no harm if you get a head start. You could put down a state tomorrow, "Here starts my Kārttika book."

Kārttika book, a schnook in spirit. No, don't mock yourself.

A Kārttika festival. No.

A Kārttika in Ireland. No. But that's closer to the truth.

A Kārttika retreat. But what the heck is Kārttika to me? Don't you have some direction actually?

No, not yet. I'm looking forward to increasing writing. I don't call it a vow. *Vrata*. Let it be more free than that, a love, *Katyāyanī*. Let it be freer than that, a love.

Katyāyanī, we want *Kṛṣṇa* as our husband.

Can't claim that either.

But like it or not,

ready or not,

Kārttika is upon us

time flies

we are writing

on the run

and when settled in

it's *Kārttika* and

you are supposed to do something.

(15 minutes, October 7, New Vraja-maṇḍala, Spain)

WS #9

We are going to go with the Kārttika lights to vow (sort of) that the whole Dāmodara month is a timed book. Not to quit it is my vow. That means the WS method will probably retire for now. We can “always” write WS, eh? It is good, the no-form form.

This day at ISKCON farm which is not a farm but has a small *gurukula*. I told M. I feel anxious about the stressful five days of travel ahead. Partly I was anxious because I had no definite writing project and the precious days would go by on the road disjointed, without the center that writing gives to life.

(Just see, he’s *in* the writing life, this guy.) It’s true.

Also anxious because on the road means you may break down. The Brittany Ferry company said phone them 24 hours before the scheduled departure. Why? Because something might happen. The whole trip is like that. We already had warnings that our van is gradually falling apart. Therefore, if I am committed to writing, even if there’s a breakdown, it can become grist for the mill. Even a bad situation can be interesting writing. But I like to be prepared for that. For example, if you decide to write a travel diary, then unusual incidents provide you with something to write about, and of course, you reflect on it in a Kṛṣṇa conscious way.

Is the *Kārttika Lights* a book you can start and take on the road? Yes, we will. But it’s more for settling in at the retreat house. Kārttika in one place, in contemplat-

ing, concentrate on your practices. And if you are in Vṛndāvana, reap the benefits of residence in a holy *dhāma*. The retreat is a holy space. The road in our van may be less so. But you can transform it from mere mileage and fatigue and ache into something I hope “to increase your devotion.”

We’ll see when we get under way.

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare.

A writing session is a shesh-in, a kind of dance
where you sit in a wigwam
but you are not a redman.
You’re a devotee of Kṛṣṇa
and pen words to that effect.
He taught me three modes,
taught us how to transcend.
You can listen to a lecture,
say We are at a P-stop,
here’s a biscuit offered to
photo of Prabhupāda *mūrti*, now on, on, M. is
pressing
to cover 500 kilometers and
soon stop, reach the ferry
port, Kārttika *kī jaya*.
Somehow we’ll get there
and then write in mood
of studier of books
chanter of rounds.

(10 minutes, October 7, New Vraja-maṇḍala, Spain)

• Introduction

used
in 1984
book

I was going to call this “Kārttika Candles,” but it doesn’t sound right. I do burn candles (non-animal products) every early morning while I chant *japa* facing the altar. One Godbrother read of me and my votive candles and wrote me saying, “Why don’t you try using ghee and wicks? It’s more Vedic than candles.” I supposed it’s possible, but I think that the life of travel makes candles easy for me. Sometimes we have to start so quickly that I have only a few moments to blow out the candles and put them away in a bin in our van. Ghee and wicks sounds messy for a van traveler.

It was candles, skinny little birthday candles, that Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us in the autumn of 1966. It was a surprise. I remember going to his room in the evening as usual and one night a little ceremony was in progress. On Prabhupāda’s low table, which was his altar in his worship room, he had us place and burn candles. He directed each of us to go up and set the candle on the table top, which we did by first burning a little wax until some drops fell and then fixing the candle onto the table.

When we asked Swamiji what it was for, he replied only, “To increase your devotion.” Only later did I figure out that this was our observance of the evening ceremony of Kārttika lamps which goes on for the

whole Dāmodara month. This is observed in the temples in Vṛndāvana and done in a very grand fashion at ISKCON's Krishna-Balaram Mandir. But for me, nothing will ever be as sweet as lighting those birthday candles on Swamiji's tabletop in October–November 1966. After we would light our candles, we would sit around and watch them burn down. We would joke quietly to one another, saying that the candle represented our soul and we would see whose soul went out first. Sometimes it was a close race down to the very bottom of the candle—"There goes mine!" And we would laugh as a puff of smoke went up in the air.

I want to write this book in that mood, of watching our souls burn down, day by day, mine and yours too. I'll try to increase my devotion during the day, light the candle at night, and watch them go down, day by day through Kārttika. Each day is a candle which starts off with a fresh new wick and full length and gradually burns down and goes out. And the next morning we light another. My supply of candles (days) is not unlimited. But I hope to last at least through Kārttika, and even that will slip by day by day. So this book is also on the theme of *tempus fugit*, "time flies."

I write seeking devotion in the day. That's all I know. When I grope and wander, I'll remember my purpose is "to increase your devotion" and steer to *kṛṣṇa-bhakti* again.

This is not exactly a Kārttika *vrata* (vow). I want to feel free and do what I like. But I do intend to read

and write every day and to stay at our retreat house, if Kṛṣṇa desires.

Here is a letter written by Dhanurdhara Swami, announcing the First Annual Gītā-nāgarī Kārttika Festival, October–November 1995:

Dear Baladeva Vidyabhūṣana Prabhu,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

I am very excited about the Gītā-nāgarī Kārttika festival. My initial inspiration for the idea came in May this year at Gītā-nāgarī Institute while staying in the cabin. Thank you for fixing up the cabin. Śrīla Prabhupāda visited there and Śrīla Satsvarūpa Mahārāja wrote the *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta* there. You're right, the place has spiritual potency and should be used so that ISKCON *sādhus* in the West can spend some quality time in *sādhana* and writing. On the basis of your desire to use the cabin for this purpose, and your hospitality, I became inspired that Kārttika festival should be a mainstay at Gītā-nāgarī, and I should do Kārttika there. Here is my idea.

Personally, this is my first year out of Vṛndāvana during Kārttika in 19 years. Kārttika in Vṛndāvana is wonderful. During Kārttika in Vṛndāvana, devotees come from all over the world and perform *nitya-sevā*. *Nitya-sevā* means that they stay for the month and increase their spiritual practice and regulate their spiritual lives. Vows are made, "I will increase the number of *mālā* (rounds) I do every day," or "I will circumam-

bulate the temple every day ten times," or "I will not eat sweets," or "I will read a chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā* every day." Of course, one can take several vows, but according to one's capacity, he should increase his spiritual practices and do them every day in a regulated way, *nitya-sevā*. Especially the *sannyāsīs* who are constantly traveling, stay in one place for Caturmasya and perform activities. Of course, the Vaiṣṇava *sannyāsīs*, out of compassion, cannot stop their preaching for four months, but to this day, all Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sannyāsīs* for their personal purification, go to one of the holy *dhāmas* (Māyāpur of Vṛndāvana) and for one month live simple, regulated lives and increase their *sādhana*. So in Kārttika in Vṛndāvana and our own Krishna-Balaram Mandir, there are many *sannyāsīs* and senior devotees increasing their spiritual practices, and even Vṛndāvana becomes spiritually surcharged. Devotees from all over look forward to coming to Kārttika, associating with the *dhāma* and uplifting their spiritual lives. There are also benedictions which Śrīla Prabhupāda discusses in *The Nectar of Devotion* (see page 103), the essence of which is that what spiritual attainments can be achieved only with great effort can be achieved easily if one performs Kārttika *vrata* in Vṛndāvana. There is an incredibly intense spiritual potency during Kārttika. It's a time for purification, a priceless opportunity to increase our devotion to Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Śyāmasundara. I hanker for Vṛndāvana, especially in Kārttika, but Śrīla Prabhupāda has asked me through my Godbrothers to spend this year in America assisting

the preaching. What to do? Now like most of Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers, I will not be able to go to Vṛndāvana in October. In separation from Vṛndāvana and sitting in "Satsvarūpa's" cabin last May at Gītā-nāgarī, I came up with this idea.

I'm not there at Gītā-nāgarī. It makes me ask, "What am I doing for Kārttika?" Not at Vṛndāvana, not at Gītā-nāgarī. In a hidden place, a rural retreat house, three of us. We can light our candle each evening. I'm eager for the relief of the retreat. I can't think, however, in terms of rigid vows. I want to Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and to write. Do it every day and light the candles—the candles of hope.

Part I

• Chapter One

October 8, 12:30 A.M.

Woke with some pressure in the head, read for 25 minutes in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, the opening chapter. May that Lord, the son of Śrī Śacīdevī, the Supreme Lord (source of Brahman and Supersoul), appear in the core of your heart, accompanied by Lord Nityānanda. He has come to deliver the secret treasure of His own service, of *ujjvala-rasa*.

And here I am, unfit but not unwilling.

Woke thinking maybe I should take a Kārttika *vrata* of “no sweets.” I did it one year. It wasn’t so hard. Just a month. You still have honey with your milk in the morning. Everything is sweet. What does your tongue and body need? Can you control them?

I asked, But will this increase devotion? It’s at least a requirement to be able to control one’s senses (*gosvāmī*).

I ask, But Śrīla Prabhupāda didn’t fast from sweets. Maybe he did before he met you. If you could do it as a devotional offering to him, then it would have meaning. When I thought of it first, however, it wasn’t so devotional; more like a health item, a warm-up for my entry into a natureopath-yoga clinic. But I see your point. Better decide quick, before 6 A.M. breakfast. Or at least you could skip the sweets at breakfast.

I see the point—those scrumptious extras at dessert. You can give them up and say I want to live not for the pleasures of my own tongue.

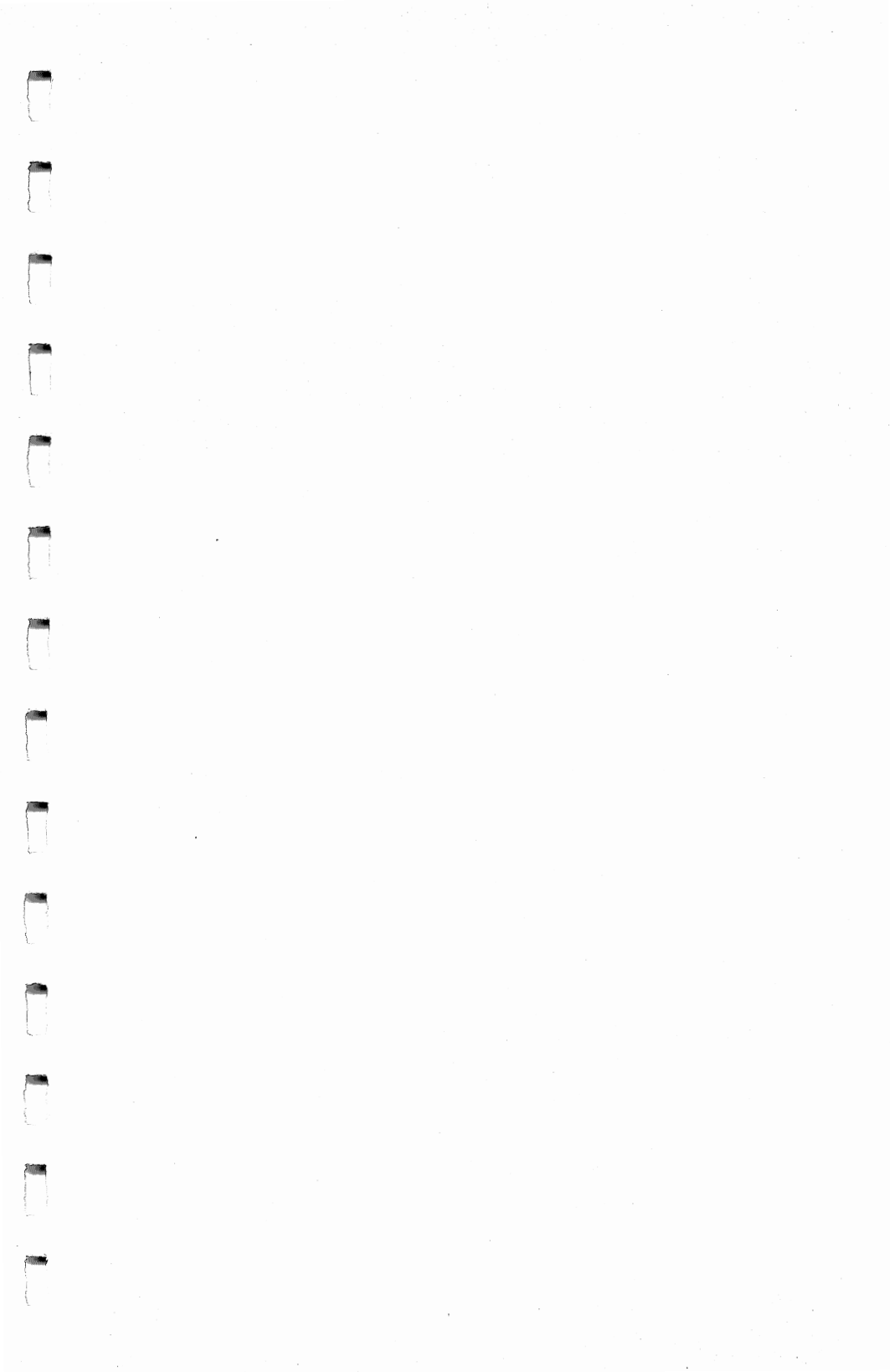
Modified: sweets on Sunday only.

So here we are in Africa, in Spain, in this olding body not yet all clear in head despite six hours spent in the sleeping bag. Awoke to greet the Kārtika in the temple of Rādhā-Govinda-candra and Gaura-Nitāi and Lakṣmī-Nṛsiṁha and devotees of ISKCON Spain. No more lectures by me here this visit. We leave at 3 P.M. to start five days of travel.

All glories to the son of Śacī. I criticize or fail to appreciate the dress and decoration of the Deity. But when you are away from Them, traveling in the vast realm of *māyā* (Spain-sea-England . . .), we will with for Their shelter. Prabhupāda has given it to us Westerners.

I spoke what I could, my prepared lectures. But yesterday I heard myself speaking to them during the actual delivery of the lecture, and it was not so ecstatic. Some drowsed.

May this be honest writing. I do feeling happy to be given this project for the month. I hereby light my first symbolic, literary candle.



May Gaura-Nitāi light the way.
Please let me serve.

3:25 A.M.

I feel some special potency. Hope it lasts. Whatever you think of seems spiritual. A hope that no matter happens, you'll see the spiritual side of it.

Thinking to make some increase in daily *japa* quota; maybe just up to twenty.

7:45 A.M.

We all sang *Dāmodarāṣṭakam* in the temple room here at New Vraja-maṇḍala. Madhu led with the harmonium. We beheld Rādhā-Govinda-candra. She looks like a young, innocent girl, and He is very *śyāma*, blackish, transcendental Lord.

So it was a nice way for me to start my own Kārttika. I'm sorry we didn't plan in advance to be settled in one place for Kārttika. It just rushed up on us and suddenly I realized it is special. For five days we will travel and try to keep the mood of Kārttika and anticipate our arrival at the place in the North. But that also will not be Vṛndāvana. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in *The Nectar of Devotion*: "Even unserious persons who execute devotional service according to the regulative principles during the month of Kārttika, and within the jurisdiction of Mathurā in India, are very easily awarded the Lord's personal service."

Dhanurdhara Swami says he will be as close to Vṛndāvana-Mathurā as possible by staying at Gītā-nāgarī.

He's setting the example that Western devotees, most of whom cannot go every year to Vṛndāvana at Kārtika, should come to the *dhāma* at Gītā-nāgarī and to the spirit of Kārtika practices. We will try also in our own way with a small group and blessings of solitude.

10:30 A.M.

This is an opportunity to write. In half an hour, I'll begin the Prabhupāda *pūjā*, and after that, it will be straight movement until our ETD, 3 P.M. So write. You have not written for more than 20–30 minutes at a stretch for *quite a few months*. Let the arrival in your Kārtika house be a time to increase that. Nowadays you say what's quick on your mind and that seems sufficient anyway. But there is more. Don't think the world is tired of hearing from me, I have nothing more to say, etc. Write on through your process to reach many things ahead. Even if it's "The End," you want to reach that having fully expressed yourself.

Prabhupāda with a dark pink and purple flowered garland. He's ready to go. Our outer life. Don't worry, sir, about Institutional figures catching you on a retreat hideout. If they ask, if they find out, then say I am here to prepare for a VIHE seminar and also to write some Centennial *BTG* articles and a book on *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Taking a writing retreat, that's what I do once in awhile, not often.

The last full one was in May.

So I am building an expectancy. Waiting out the days from Sunday until we are supposed to arrive be-

fore noon on Thursday after many kilometers in the olding van and two ferry sea crossings and two barter crossings.

Hare Kṛṣṇa. The flies are dying against the window pane in October. A few are spending their last hours on the ceiling. Rādhā-caraṇa dāśī is baking thin biscuits for our road trip. No sweets to go. Eighteen rounds done so far.

The devotee was basking his face in sunlight in the courtyard here. He's one of the *pūjārīs*, an older, good looking man, *brahmacārī*. Taking shelter in ISKCON and doing his bit. Wanting to receive the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda and Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu and not something else Catholic or business or family or whatever. Who knows why people, such a few, join in each nation. They come forward, as I did, and hear from the Swami and it all makes sense, it's what they always wanted.

Spoke to a Marcello from Porto, Portugal. He has my book, *From Imperfection*, in his hand. I glance at it and think, "Yes, that was a good one; maybe I'll get to write another like that, a deep theme, śāstric commentary, and diary of road all within one directed free-writing." Marcello wants to take initiation. I write him a letter not me.

Jagadīśa Mahārāja on our minds. "Dropping out of ISKCON and out of reach which I try to find myself." Reverberating words into one's psyche. You try them on for size; could *you* do that? Do you disapprove what

he says he's doing? It's not for me. People may think
my case resembles his.

So Kārttika is here
leaves turning brilliant orange
and yellow from green
in heartland Spain,
get off the country roads
and head north to a port.
How is this observing Kārttika
in Vṛndāvana or like Vraja?
Not the Tuscarora,
or Rādhā-Dāmodara.
It's okay, man, I've got
my desire to serve Śrīla Prabhupāda
in a deep way in his books.
Don't forget to read even
at some foreign language P-stop
in a spare fifteen minutes, the
opening verses. May that
son of Śacī-mātā appear in
the inner core of your heart.
This is not merely transit,
this is life too,
good as a retreat house if
you can just feel the pulse
and pray Hari, Hare Kṛṣṇa,
Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, taking the photo
with you of
Rādhā-Govinda-candra
and Gaura-Nitāi

and everyone's kind wishes,
Go with God.
(16 minutes, October 8, New Vraja-maṇḍala)

1 P.M.

While eating lunch *prasādam*, I realized that there wasn't going to be any dessert, no sweet. It occurred to me that perhaps I put my heart so much into anticipating and tasting the sweet foods that it's a taste that could be invested in something else such as the chanting of the holy names. So I tried to think, since I was being denied a food-sweet, if there was any other sweet that I was taking today. I recalled the morning in the temple when we were surprised to hear that they were going to have the song to Dāmodara and offering of the ghee wick flame to the Deities. They had asked Madhumaṅgala to sing, and there he was, sitting before the harmonium, singing *Dāmodarāṣṭakam*, and there we all were sitting before the beautiful Deities of Rādhā-Govinda-candra and Gaura-Nitāi, getting Their full *darśana*, and then going up to the altar and offering our flame. Yes, that was definitely a sweet.

On the road

You are telling a story which is not false yet it's a story—of traveling during the first week of Kārttika and wanting to reach a haven. Up front in the van driving cabin with the driver, hot sunlight, deserted Spanish land, the ash-fault ribbon of road, craggy moun-

tains and plenty of sky bigger than Texas. Don't desert this place while you are here.

We listen to the *bhajana* tape of our Rādhāṣṭamī in Belfast with the room full of Irish devotees. An hour passes that way. Maybe I should not sit up here with the sunlight, but you get hypnotized by road and it's lonely in the back with your mind.

5:05 P.M.

Still riding up front. Talked about people in the letters I receive, about Jesus, how women need to get married . . . the land is so deserted there is no place to stop for the night. Big, black bull sign on the horizon on a hill. Stork nest like a bale of hay in deserted church steeple. Maniac on high-speeding motorcycle passes us and veers a sharp angle low to the ground. City of Burgos ahead. M. says if we can't find a safe spot out here, we can go into Burgos and find—what? A supermarket lot? Wherever we go will be alone and deserted by 10 P.M., maybe investigated by police or robbers. Other countries have places where trucks park on the highway, but not here.

5:35 P.M.

Stopped for the night, I hope. A little while ago, a motorcycle policeman waved us down on the highway. He wanted to check our papers and ask a few questions, and finally asked (at least I think that's what he asked) why we looked the way we do, hair cuts and so

on. Madhu said, “*Religiosos*, Hare Kṛṣṇa.” The cop told us to put on our seat belts, and he let us go.

A little later, we stopped to check out a gas station with an accompanying hotel. Madhu was willing to park in the parking lot of the hotel, but I thought it was too outrageous. So we went on, but I said, “If you show me a place like this for a second time, I’ll take it.” A little further down, we finally say a “P” sign, an actual place for people to stop along the road. It’s just a small one, and there’s a hotel nearby, but it looks like a bona fide place for a traveler to stay for the night, no questions asked. So we’re stopped and Madhu has immediately gone out to make a phone call for his ongoing saga of trying to purchase a van in America and so on.

6:40 P.M.

You could be chanting last *japa*, extra, before taking rest. I am doing that, Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare. Cars and trucks go by, you know this scene. It’s Spain, but not the secure tower *sannyāsi*’s room in Hare Kṛṣṇa’s estate. Just you and M. out in the world of the road. We depend on Kṛṣṇa and safety of the government?

You are alert to the simple life. Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa. He went into the bar to make a phone call. Said it’s the same scene in there as in bars all over the world. The bartender slow to recognize you, checks you out. Two guys playing tough at one end, another two tough at another end. One looks M. up and down. He said he ignored him, looked through him to an-

other guy. "I'm glad I'm not a part of that anymore!" He used to know it well.

I get more upset if someone looks me up and down? I'm ready eventually to depend on Kṛṣṇa, take my position as devotee. All these years part of the unloved cult. What do you want, to be a mainstream, a Catholic in Spain? You'd be unloved there too. Be glad and grateful you can visit places like Nueva Vraja-maṇḍala where some well-wishers gather around the van as you leave.

I said to Sucandra, "Are you going back to Jalon (where he lives with his family in an isolated rural place with other nearby devote families)?" "Yes."

"Be happy there," I say.

As I write, M. starts up the engine and slowly moves the van to a more bona fide spot. We were too near the hotel parking which is for customers only. He moves slowly as I write, the pens and clock and other things all out on the desk . . .

Thank You, Lord, for this first day of Kārttika in Your shelter. You don't reveal yourself to a carper like me, but even I was allowed to sit in Your temple and sing, and I led the singing of *maṅgala-ārati* and gave the *Bhāg.* class. I can do that anywhere in the world in ISKCON. I'm afraid if I lose my passport, I have no other good piece of ID that I'm a US citizen and my standing in my home nation is hardly traceable (no home, family, job, records, accounts, etc.). But in ISKCON, I can go anywhere by my name, face, reputation, uniform.

My home, better believe it, the international society of devotees created by Swamiji.

• Chapter Two

P-stop, Spain, 1:03 A.M.

Overnight wasn't too cold. Was quiet, thanks to ear plugs. The truck behind us. We slept and woke and slept and at midnight didn't get up. I got up 15 minutes ago and read *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* opening verse.

You want something. Maybe it's here and maybe it's there. You tell yourself, "Calm down and concentrate on your *sampradāya*." But you can't help but listen to stirrings of the heart. Things keep coming up.

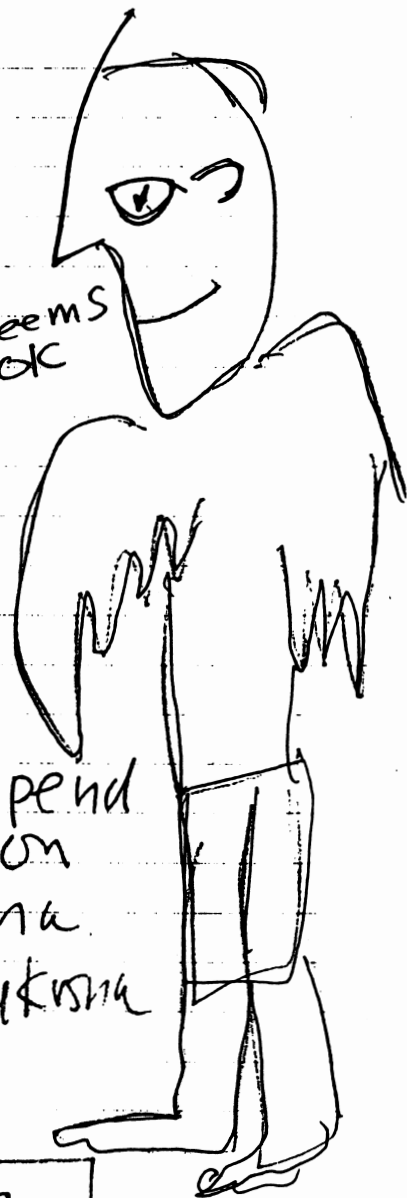
One is about Jesus, I mentioned it to M. Another is connected to why we went to see N. Mahārāja and what it is we got from him. You think, "Maybe I could look again at *Malak-sikṣā*." You want something more. And yet it's here too in the book, *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, no shortage of esoteric nectar, love, yearnings.

So you agree and get back to work. Travel now is the main thing. The drive, the ferry ahead. These big, external things. And internal life bubbles underneath. Travel keeps the internal pressure building. You wish to stop and study and write. You can't immediately because you are in a moving van. But you are on your way directly to a retreat, so it's good. The impatience is also goo. In this building of pressure comes these stirrings of the heart.

Hope we're
Safe here.



Seems
OK



Depend
on
Kṛṣṇa
Haukṛṣṇa

Stop for night,
Spain

I read again the blessing of offer Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī. I received in the mail a glossy photo of him (is it?) crouched and writing with a water pot beside him, in Vṛndāvana. (Also have a photo of a *drawing* of Rūpa Gosvāmī, from a temple in Jaipur.) So? So, it has Sanskrit on it but I don't know what it means. He is writing. He lived.

East and West, which am I, or neither? Hear your Swami who came to you on the Lower East Side. It wasn't long ago that a devotee asked me to tell again how I met him. Was it France? No, it was Jalon, Spain. I said I worked in welfare office a few minutes from his storefront. A piece of paper taped to the store window, classes on *Bhagavad-gītā*.

That's a real history too, of you, Steve. In those days, you were hankering for worship, and when he came with Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, you took it. Don't forsake it. Follow it. Follow it.

X Swami, my Godbrother, had deep reservations recently about wrongs (and maybe also just the dol-drums) in our society, and he spoke to a few friends, myself included. I told him not to see it as so bad. Then on Śrīla Prabhupāda's Vyāsa-pūjā day, he felt the *mūrti* said to him, "Bear the burden of the ISKCON mission and"—and something like "I'll be with you," or "You'll be blessed." He wanted to do as Śrīla Prabhupāda did, carry out that mission.

Yeah, I said, ISKCON is
Ganges with stool
but still pure. You can argue

like that.

Turtles in *kuṇḍa*

N. Swami in Vṛndāvana,

me in Spain—all

under God's surveillance.

Madhu will get up soon and we'll drive off.

Last night he was taking a photo after sun had gone under hills and sky was radiating red faint. "I don't know if the camera can catch this." Green trees October but still green delicate leaves, seen from the highway, cars passing by with their headlights on as night came, it all seemed a friendly place not that we could live here but we could at least stay a few hours overnight, grateful for it, grateful and comfortable in our self-contained tin can Renault. A nice moment, thanks to God. This sublime life has been given to me by my Guru Mahārāja.

I will go to the retreat and seek myself as a person who can read *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and write exploring, praising, groping. Write it honest, man.

Kārttika lights, little
candles of faith and hope.

It's like we say unless we get some nectar of love-hope, how can we go on just doing duty? Yes. Mahārāja said, you need to hear at least of *rāgānugā*. So we did. Then others came and said that's forbidden, unchaste, premature. You'll find the taste in preaching and in holy name. So we switched to that.

But then other old things (unfinished business?) pop up, Jesus, and Mercury and Miles and geez, wait, expression, dreams.

Get back to work, you say, this is all diversion.

So you light your candles wanting to be straight and honest.

Don't forget there's a chapter on faith in the rabbi's book. That may help. And a book on Salinger, the writer's life, your poems, your drawings.

Yeah . . .

Better light a candle and see your face-soul—the candle is your soul aspiring to . . .

M. said he's not on that trip (that we were on in 1966) where you say the candle burning is the soul.

It's not a symbol for body and soul, which is brief life burning down. It could be. Or take it as the flame of love. Burn up, flame, love God and sacrifice.

Quite a spiritual meal here yet confusings too as if you were a young man deciding on a spiritual career. But you don't want (and can't find anyway) is some Big Brother *bhakta* leader to tell you, "Look here, straighten your head. Get rid of these ghosts. Get on the straight and narrow. Your dreams are of no account. There is no other way. Read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and go out and collect money."

Now time moves to 1:24 and I ought to get ready to chant.

The story of our travel is a precious few days. It's a botheration austerity with uncertainties and fears of delay and breakdown. But also it's rare road time in

which intimations come, not all to be followed and not all to be ignored.

4:45 A.M.

Almost a full moon. Trucker safe asleep behind us. Get out and do vigorous exercise, march in place up and down 75 times, you're not so old and decrepit, light body; next, wave both arms around like a softball pitcher 50 times, then go in opposite direction, little heart responds okay. See the full white moon without your eyeglasses, it's just over the top of the van and spreads rays all directions. Occasional car or truck goes by on highway. Exercise a little longer but you don't belong out here. Someone could go by and you'd be alien and your fun over. So 20 short push-ups, then bend down and bend back and get inside snug van submarine outerspace capsule, get ready for Kārtika candles.



Kārttika Lights

the way

bell dull

in Spain

we parked at

dawn still dark

October. "I'll get breakfast

ready as soon as possible

and then take a good rest.

We are only one and a half hours

from the port."

His mate in back drew a quick pic, changed batteries in the tape recorder and got ready to hear Śrīla Prabhupāda lecture in 1966 on *Bhagavad-gītā* 9.22, *ananyaś cintayanto mām*. What would his master say? He pledged to listen keen even while eating.



WISH IT
WAS
PRETTIER

From my
master
speaks to me
I hear
what can

Ten to 11 A.M.

We are parked until after lunch, then go fill up on diesel. M. will phone America to talk with a devotee who owns a Ford Econoline and get his testimony. Then we'll drive two more hours to reach the ferry port and get on queue. I've filled up a big shopping bag with things to take and use on the ferry. Seems like I've thought of everything. Toothbrush? When we are onboard whiling away the 24 hours, I'll tell you what I use.

How will it be different when we reach our month haven? You'll be able to relax. Don't have to move. Will probably feel more security in your surroundings and so you can unwind more in reading and writing. Out here with only the small van to separate us from the chaos, meanness and foreign-ness of *vikarma*, one writes about the preservation of order and routine. One is occupied and aware that he wants first of all to survive, *anamāyā*, *pranamāyā*. Thus I write, "We are now parked in a P-stop. The ferry company says they plan to leave on time. Now we are scheduled to arrive in England by 7 P.M. tomorrow night. So far, so good."

Breathe in and out. You are the rider and M. is the pilot, but we share the purpose. Our service is to co-operate and get there. There, the haven, is the place for extended reading and writing.

This morning at 5 A.M. we each lit a birthday candle. Mine was blue, his pink. Wax dropped onto the wooden desk. We held the flame toward the picture of Prabhupāda and then Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. We sang in unison,

Śrīla Prabhupāda's *praṇāmas*, Pañca-tattva mantra, and Hare Kṛṣṇa mantras. Then prayers to Lord Nṛsiṁha-deva. Instead of *prema-dhvani* prayers at the end, I said, "The wax dripped onto the desk."

No deeper. A devotee is supposed to live in Vṛndāvana. But either there or here, you have to do it with your mind. It's where Kṛṣṇa is and His pure devotees. Chant a few more rounds and attempt to pray. At least recall that point. This is a month where you do things to increase your devotion. Don't get left way behind by your peers in Vṛndāvana, India or Gītā-nāgarī. From this P-stop and ferry crossing too, you can call out your prayer, "O Hari, O energy of the Lord, please let me chant Your names with devotion."

1:15 P.M.

About to leave. Get fresh water for bathroom bottles. I warned M. not to leave late. I want to arrive two hours before possible boarding time. Best to get up front on the queue so you can get off first. Also we have a two hour drive, so there could be delays; don't cut time short. Have a leeway just in case. And the "long" voyage; entry into England and Customs where they always ask some questions. One man I remember said, "Lovely," when we gave the right answers. I've got my *dhōtī* on. It was cool in morning but now warm. It's what Rādhā-ramaṇa dāsa in USA would call good World Series weather. Good weather as we encount-

ered in October 1966, chanting Sunday afternoons in Tompkins Square Park.

You are talking to pass the time. Waiting for him to say he's ready. I plan to spend the two hours back here. Maybe lie down; sort of blot out on the time-stress so I'm less likely to feel any head-ache. Śrīla Prabhupāda said on tape that sunlight cures without any medicine, by its ultraviolet rays. But if you get cured from the sun (worship) and you are satisfied with that, you are less intelligent. You'll get another disease later. Human life should be used to go back to Godhead; no more bodily diseases.

You are talking to pass the time as in a waiting room or driving in van. Listening to the rattle of parts as he cleans up the kitchen. We will go soon. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

2:20 P.M.

Madhu did just what I asked him not to do. He caused a delay by a phone call to America. He pulled the van up outside the gas station right near loud music and loud talking while he went inside. I felt like a dog in a cage in a cargo bin. He didn't seem considerate of my situation although he was acting on my behalf to make the phone call. So I waited in there five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes . . . of course I could have chanted and made the best use of time, but I didn't. Then on an impulse, I reached up for the Charles Mingus tape. I paused before putting it in and thought to myself, "This is a crucial moment. You could be spending this time chanting with awareness

that life is very short and every moment should be used for Kṛṣṇa. If you listen to that music, it'll just cause forgetfulness." But something in myself said, "No, I'll go ahead and listen." The voice didn't say exactly, "I don't give a damn about Kṛṣṇa consciousness." But still, I knew that it was not directly Kṛṣṇa conscious, or not Kṛṣṇa conscious at all. The naked moment was right before me. This is the moment when people do even more heavy things like commit illicit sex or intoxication in that mad moment when they decide, even while with some awareness, that they're choosing to forget Kṛṣṇa or to take a much, much lower position with the hope that they'll come back soon to Kṛṣṇa.

I listened to the music "Haitian Fight Song" for about two minutes. Some piano with a rhythm in the back. I was rationalizing that if I didn't hear this, I'd have to hear their lesser music. But the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa was far away.

Then I took that tape off and burned slowly, waiting for Madhu to come back and also regretting what I had done. When he came back, he opened my door and said, "Now we're ready to head on." I said nothing and looked at my feet. Then I mumbled, "All right." I wanted him to feel a little bad. But it's I who feel bad for wasting my time. Now maybe I can make the best of it—maybe that's the secret lesson—turn to Kṛṣṇa now with more awareness that you're wasting time at every single moment. What does it matter if you get to the ferry queue earlier or later? What matters is to chant

Hare Kṛṣṇa, and even more than that, to hear Hare Kṛṣṇa and to love and to pray.

Lunch was dry. We had two kinds of road biscuits. One was salty and like sawdust almost. The other was a little better, but nothing great. Along with this was couscous without any kind of sauce and there was no *dāl*. Of course I'm grateful the meal was really nice, in another sense it was hot and it was good vegetables which may have been fresh from their farms. But it was all definitely on the dry side. So now I have to come up with some non-food sweets, nectar to relish.

What about the chanting? Were you chanting in the van for those two hours after you left the P-stop?

Riding up front

Sharp hills, upgrade 10%, too much for our van. Twisting. I'm not angry at M. Not chanting *japa* either. Talk about no rural places very friendly for a devotee in this world. Clans and sheep in Ireland. Italian I don't speak. Better not to have a home base. But then you have to pay with transit days.

Santander is the port. I don't think we'll make it by 4 P.M., but certainly on time. Relax onboard the boat and do *bhajana*, chant and read and write as you would do anywhere.

Twist, twist, the mind too.

I want to go in the back of the van, but there's really a hypnotic hole once you get up front here. What is it you want to see? You want to go on record as having

driven all the way through the hills into Santander?
Want to have a memory of Santander village town?
Want to see a girl cross the road? Want to see that man
with his cap on backwards and a big Pole walking out
towards the cows and another one with a bucket
walking after two calves tied down? Want to say at least
to yourself, "I've been here"? The beautiful country of
Spain in these hills in this warm October weather . . .

Seven minutes to 5 P.M.

We're on queue. Two full lines of cars and vans
ahead of us. Directly in front of us is a young, blond
man juggling. He has three bowling pin-shaped objects,
and he keeps them up in the air by constant eye and
hand's art. He's got a beard, no shirt, low waistband,
head-hair pleated like a Rasta man, tattoos. Quite a
show. M. and I don't even mention that he's there. M.
is lettering a "For Sale" sign and wants to tape it on the
back window. So we are for sale, our home, that is. We
are planning to get another.

If you could go within, I don't know what you'd
write. I can't claim . . . it's enough to cope with this day
in the travel, those hills we just went through and the
sea journey that awaits us.

The juggler's not alone; there's several other young
men also bare-chested doing other kinds of small-time
juggling acts and tricks. I guess it's part of some troupe.
Life goes on.



6 P.M.

Waiting. Calm down. When do we board? Why is no one behind us? If I were a better devotee . . .

Listen, Kṛṣṇa, put Kṛṣṇa in your heart.

Where is your *śraddhā*? I'm grateful I have no pain at least. Let me keep calm. Got my bags ready to carry to our cabin.

This is Kārttika. A *mātāṅī* at New Vraja-maṇḍala gave me a green-yellow feather just as we were leaving and said, "This is from Vṛndāvana." I said, "That's what I want." It looks like a parrot's feather. Fell off his wing onto the dust. It's the king of *dhāmas*, Vṛndāvana.

Listen . . . it's too dark in here to read. I'd read something where Śrīla Prabhupāda says Kṛṣṇa is your friend and you can meet Him. He hands over Kṛṣṇa to you. But you have to work for it too.

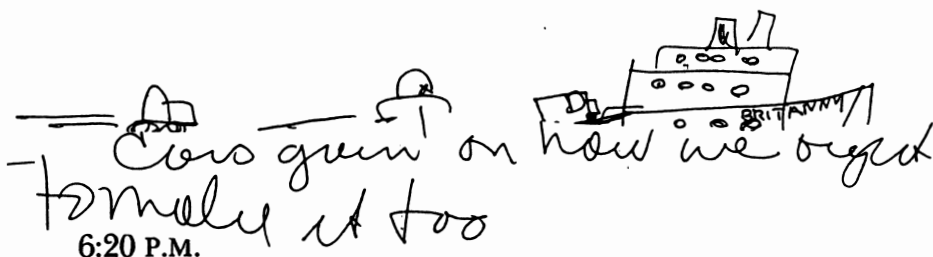
Every minute, this is the story.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa. My dear Lord . . .

Words come out of pen
not realized but still . . .

Kṛṣṇa is the chief name
of God.

He speaks *Bhagavad-gītā*.



Still no move.

Reason it, man. They won't leave without you. Reason it—you are at the start of a substantial retreat, followed by India-going. No shortage of time to yourself, for *the right purpose*. One reason you go alone is to write and explore your life, to pray to God, and so on. Well, commence it on this queue; and I don't mean

pray, "Dear God, let us get on the ferry boat soon. Don't let them leave without us. Spare me a headache."

(I remember praying that my father and the other men would dig their cars out of the street on the snowy night when they were laboring out there and me and my mother and sister and other ladies waited in our house.)

I will read *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. I will look at it and take it to myself and worship and pray. Please make me an exclusive devotee of Gaura-Nitāi. Give me a taste of this excellent book. In steady, daily reading. I don't want to show off, become any kind of artist or writer and not a devotee. You just read those verses in the ISKCON temple in Spain, that Vyāsa was despondent and Nārada said it's because you have not broadcast the sublime glories of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Why don't they let us on the ferry? It's almost 6:30.

Madhu came to the back of the van and told me the reason for the delay—they were loading a railway car onto the ferry by a trailer and it was scraping the ground. He said it's almost on now and so we should be going on soon. That was five minutes ago. Still, a deadly silence here as we wait. Now it makes me think that if we had left early as I wanted to, this wouldn't have happened. Three-fourths of the cars and vans went on before this railway car. It also is likely to mean that if and when we do get ^{on}no, we'll be stuck behind

that monster and it'll take ages to get off the ferry tomorrow night in England.

It's five minutes to seven and we're still on queue. The night is getting dark. He started his engine up when we moved about thirty seconds and now stopped. I'm not even going up there to look at what's going on. But my thoughts have been pushed forward to another kind of brink, and I'm thinking just why am I striving to go alone? In other words, if I'm all riled up just about getting on the ferry for my own purposes, is that right? Shouldn't I be meeting with other God-brothers and on the phone about some strategy for distributing books or some crises in some Russian country or something like that? Why aren't I preaching Prabhupāda's movement? Well, the answer I come up with is that we're all preaching in different ways. We've got some people like Mahānidhī Swami there in Vṛndāvana, and then you've got others on the front lines and in the communications departments and so on. It's not that just one department is right. So I've really got to prove myself though and study those books nicely and keep going to lecture in temples when I do. But it's not wrong if I take a good amount of retreat time. Besides, I haven't had a retreat in a long time! So let's get on that damn ferry. Let's go there. And let's not wait, let's think about it now how to chant better, how to pray to Kṛṣṇa to make you a better devotee and to tell you what to do and give you the courage to do it.

• Chapter Three

12:34 A.M.

Yeah, we made it onto the boat; it left over an hour late around 8:15 P.M.

Last night I had a dream that all black men were coming forward to meet and be represented. First, only the warlord types were in gangs and ready to fight whites or even other blacks. Then this meeting and participating spirit started. Someone stood at the meeting and said, "I represent the blacks of Wellborn, Michigan," and someone represented blacks of another place. It was surprising because those places, like Wellborn, might have been considered by warlord blacks as just white places worthy of attack, but now a black voice and contingency from that place came forward.

In the dream, I also met Bhagavān dāsa and John Young from my childhood, who was doing something, selling things in Tottenville. ("Did you know," I told someone black in the dream, "that John Coltrane was played at the Tottenville?")

Let's get to the point. At first I saw this dream as a call for me to come out and attend meetings (like GBC or main ISKCON festivals or newsletter writing, etc.) and participate with my voice. In that way live up to Śrīla Prabhupāda's "Your love for me will be shown by how you cooperate with one another to maintain this institution." But when I woke, I thought, "No, I can't do that because 1) my health won't permit at present; and 2) they would manipulate me, you'd lose your

integrity.” It doesn’t seem possible for me to come forward physically in that way. Not now.

Then I thought maybe the dream signals to me, at least among my own selves, sub-persons or interests should be allowed to come forward and integrate and speak up. For example, I have this suppressed desire to listen to jazz. Why can’t that sub-person stand and be heard? Why does he have to be rejected or not a part of myself anymore? And in my life, there were figures like Bhagavān dāsa and John Young. So if it’s not physically possible for them to come together with me (I’m too weak, too influenced, etc., and they are not in Kṛṣṇa consciousness), then why not at least in my own life admit they are there and we talk and—

I think, however, that my life is getting a little exclusive in focus on Kṛṣṇa consciousness and that’s not bad. I mean, I don’t think that the sub-person representing the taking of marijuana or illicit sex desires to be with women, etc., ought to be allowed participation in my life in the name of democratic freedom. Yeah, in the dream, all folks coming forward to speak seemed healthy. But it was getting to resemble the United Nations.

Maybe my place in ISKCON is to stay apart a lot and still participate in my own way in seminars and books, etc.

I saw the dream and I’m not criticizing it. It speaks to me. Those people were meeting, not allowing *only* the tough, strong gang leaders to be the only voice of the blacks. And the blacks themselves are not the only

people in the world. A feeling of healing and integrating could take place. That dream was just beginning. It might have deteriorated into too much meeting and talking, politics, etc.

There is no easy solution. Yeah, I woke thinking, "Why don't you work more active (pro-active) for a better ISKCON and Śrīla Prabhupāda wants? The world needs a healthy ISKCON." Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't think hermits were making a contribution to ISKCON. Well, maybe now one semi-hermit is.

Maybe. Śrīla Prabhupāda himself wanted to go alone to write more; give us more books that way. But he was afraid that the society he built would fall apart without his management of it. But I am not in that position.

Here re-affirm the plan to read and learn to open my heart to him and his books.

I don't want to do non-Kṛṣṇa conscious things. One devotee refers to this as the "one notch down" syndrome. A person or community in honesty says that they want to allow, admit some less than 100% strict Kṛṣṇa consciousness in their lives. They do it, but soon their whole life becomes almost unrecognizable as Kṛṣṇa consciousness. For example, say they say they need the help of the 12-step program. Well, soon it deteriorates their whole Kṛṣṇa conscious dependence on Kṛṣṇa. So I hold open meetings of sub-parts and allow them to all act out their proclivity and then we'll go notches down from the strict and narrow way. The Jesus man, the jazz man, the poet researcher, yeah, the

dream worker, natural path yoga healer, former member of GBC who was to contact that part again by hypnotherapy—you name it.

But neither can I claim to put a lid on the “mad-house.” ISKCON contains many interests.

Anyway, I’m up now and could do some reading of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Then maybe catch some more rest. M. and I sharing one cabin room so I will have to coordinate my activities, when to rest, with his, somewhat.

Let’s at least say that going to the retreat is good. That’s this story. I don’t know exactly what I’ll do when I get there, but it will be reading and writing more. Yes, let it not be just any old cause or multiple causes speaking out, “I too have a right to exist.”

Kārttika is for increasing your devotion. Devotion is a *part* apparently. You choose that one part (SK says, referring to the “best part” that Mary Magdalene chose) and then you get Everything. You choose to make Kṛṣṇa conscious activities rule in your life, the reading part of you, the celibate and not the man who indulges in sex, the *kīrtana* music and not other music (or else like Upadeha—Nārada in his former life—you’ll get cursed for enjoying cinema and other music)—take that Kṛṣṇa conscious part and gain all, your entrance into the nectar of the service and sacrifice.

Yes, I guess I admit the other parts are there. Sometimes they may speak. In a Kṛṣṇa conscious society, the government doesn’t kill *śūdras* and *mlecchas*—but some outlaws (cow slaughterers, etc.) do get killed right away.

6:30 A.M.

Boat is tilting back and forth noticeably, uncomfortably. We went out on the deck for walk and exercise and I did the vigorous exercises, but then it was too much tilting back and forth and wind and fog-wet. So back inside but it rolls and you hope your stomach can take it. And hope nothing worse of a storm. You imagine, worry how that railway car is so heavy, does it affect our ferry?

But I chanted 15 rounds sitting in one place. When you know you have lots of time and nowhere to go, not much to do, it's better for chanting. Don't think (I mean, I can't) of Kṛṣṇa or philosophy, but I hear? Not exactly hear either, but at least enter the state, "I'm chanting; I'm chanting, I'm chanting." You watch the clock closely to make sure you don't go too slow, watch the counter beads so you don't lose count. It was quite slow, nine minutes per, but steady, chanting, chanting, and inside, way inside some hope for it, praying in *japa*. And *this* name of God, this Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, definitely this *mahā-mantra* is the one I live by.

The ship rolls to and fro
M. cuts fruit for
a light breakfast.

You . . . your voice sounded weak and not quite connected to the body, yes, sort of disembodied when you spoke to him. Something a little unreal being out in the empty ship, everyone asleep, walking past model of Queen Mary ocean liner and ads for beauty salon

and restaurant . . . and then outside in the fog and the tilting so your steps go up in the air, like a ghost's? But chanting is the spiritual anchor, the reason-to-be. And of course, our travel purpose.

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa
Beadbag placed on deck
chair. Don't blow away
or I'd have to use another
after almost 30 years.

Rattle of pine nuts onto the dish. He's preparing the plates and I clear the desk and set the *Caitanya-carit-āmṛta* volume one up for Prabhupāda back photo cover to offer *prasādam* to.

(
9:07 A.M.

Boat may be plying smoother or we are getting our sea legs. I feel British accents vibrating through bulwark behind me as a group receive guests in their cabin. May Lord Caitanya enter your heart. Śrīla Prabhupāda said one should first become liberated and then deliver others. If your hands are tied, how can you untie the hands of others? Yes, that's my working method for retreat. I tell people, "Please chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. It is the most easy process and sublime." And I say, "Hear the astonishing nectar of the pastimes of Caitanya Mahāprabhu." But do I do it myself? Yes, I'm going now to do that.

What will come if I try writing for an hour at a time, several times a day?

Twenty to 2 P.M.

Time for more rest. Talking out things but to yourself you keep on winding thought . . . what to write. What . . . read a little in Peter London's *No More Secondhand Art*. Discover something about yourself or life as you write. That's what makes it fresh, makes it art worth giving a second look. You discover something important to you as you do it, write, draw, etc. Others can see that you are not just repeating something you read or something you said before. That makes me wonder if there's something I may discover by the process of writing freely.

A devotee who wants to prepare himself for death. He too has to take a fresh approach to things. Face himself actually; see with attention what's in his heart. If I like to do it, that doesn't mean it's *māyā*. Make it important.



He's looking up to heavens.
He's been reading all day
in his hut, brief life,
go out and preach, old man.
Yeah, he says. I do,
I do but today I've been
reading and preparing

long days boat journey sea calm now. They are showing a movie. And for kids if they have a good enough turn out they'll have some kind of show. Maybe those jugglers we saw. *Haribol*. We have two Hare Kṛṣṇas who can come and teach folks how to chant *japa*, do yoga, and answer questions. "Ladies and gentlemen, we are fortunate to have two *sādhus* onboard for today's crossing to England. They will be available to answer questions on spiritual life from two to four and will sing *bhajan*s. Please come and it's non-sectarian. They are Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava monks but say they honor all religions and want to help any person be better at the religion they practice."

Five more hours and more. Then we get back into van, into England, and then look for a place to park for the night. May get to rest as late as ten, eh? That will take away from any early A.M. program you'd like to do tomorrow.

Discover . . . I am a person who has a taste for devotion to Lord Caitanya. I can tell a story. It can come out as a poem as art or I just follow my hand and spirit.

5 P.M.

This trip isn't over yet. It seems ridiculously long and roundabout.

Talking with M. about my lack of solid standing as a U.S. citizen. If I lose my passport, I can't show family or normal residence or job (or credit cards, licenses, etc.) in U.S. But I do have birth certificate and my story is I am a member of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement and live at Gītā-nāgarī temple; although I travel a lot, that is my "permanent" address. And I can bring a cult member into the passport office to vouch for my standing. So I guess I can pass as a sub-culture citizen of sorts. Funny I should worry about that. Kṛṣṇa will take care of me one way or another. He may choose to keep me not identified or living in U.S.A. It's up to Him in the form of providence or His direct handling of this *śiṣya* of Swamiji.

Prabhupāda says you may be satisfied to live in America and think next life you will again be born there, but that is not in your control.

So I'm writing to give meaning to this trip to the haven. Don't want to feel these days are spent *only* in moving the package from one place to another. I'm not dead contents in a carton. I'm writing as we go and hope to show (show who?) that this is as good a time as we treat itself. At least I can't accept that this is only transit superficiality and stress, cues and moves.

Fact is we are due to arrive 7:30 P.M. at Plymouth, England. Hurdles tonight: get off the ferry (how long?); go through Customs (what questions and de-

lays?); get on highway and drive until we find a legitimate place to stay for the night. And tomorrow, five hours' drive to another ferry.

Okay, okay,

you are a devotee of Madana-mohana, Govinda, and Gopinātha. You have no earthly permanent address. You tolerate and don't scratch at mosquito bites (or else they'll bleed). And the same goes for illicit sex desires. Fell asleep last night in nautical condition, both horns and shudder of engines starting up and pushing out to sea. That led to train of thought of me in the Navy, actual memories and fantasies too. I imagined watching the Saratoga pushed by tugs out of Mayport for her final trip to the scrap yard. And me in some PIO office and then thought of the echelons of Navy officers, how one goes from lieutenant, lieutenant commander, commander (three regular stripes), captain, admiral . . . and back down. Finally I fell asleep and it was comfortable birth. Thought of Śrīla Prabhupāda writing in his diary that at first the boat was so smooth in water he didn't even know they had started. Thanks to Lord Kṛṣṇa, he wrote, for inspiriting Sumati Murarji to make all these arrangements—to give him the use of proprietor's cabin. Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda.



Had an idea for my notes while reading *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*: allow yourself to make doodles, picture-grams, loose notations, and a voice of poem-fragment, appeal, cry . . . write not always in between the ruled lines of the page but at angles, grow larger, etc. If I go with this, it could be a nice addition. This I offer as a piece of evidence that good ideas can come while the body is in transit. I'm also simmering and occasionally bubbling with what I might do in the retreat(s).

Seventeen minutes to 7 P.M.

Water very calm. Some rain broke color in it, sunlight. Boat cruising last miles to Plymouth. From cabin porthole, we see only the ship's bow and a patch of sea. M. said he feels like it's the end of the day, relaxed, etc., yet he's aware he has to drive more.

“Get revved up,” I say.

He reads Hari-śauri’s diary, recites aloud with Śrīla Prabhupāda walking in New Vrindaban and a dog barks at them. “Immigration department,” says Śrīla Prabhupāda. He says the devotees are walking with no offense, but still the dog is barking at them; that’s the mentality of the dog. M. says he has a tendency to be like that but doesn’t want to be. I’m reading a few short chapters of *Wild Mind*. You can’t read the Zen advise or even writers’ advise submissively. But the dedication is good. Writing practice without thinking, editing, and so on. Go on writing; the hand will tell the truth if “monkey mind” can be quieted or even if it can’t be quieted, but we go on writing.

Closer to land every minute. Many circus vehicles on this boat. I also saw a group of people in wheelchairs. Odd folks and us. I tend to want to be seen as respectable. I am staid, no longer wild and adventurous in the world. Yet my appearance—orange sheets for clothes, short hair, etc.—draws surprised looks as if I’m another bare, tattooed juggler. I’m a quiet senior citizen of the Hare Kṛṣṇa cult who writes. Give me easy passage so I can go to a writing retreat and discover. Discover what? That I love God (Kṛṣṇa) and He loves me; He loves us all.

We need to remember Him. We are not these bodies. Tell it in a new way, or the old way, compelling; write from the quiet place. Don’t try to impress. Let it come out—powerfully. You pray as you travel, as the boat nears land.



Kṛṣṇa the Supreme. He exists as His energy in all things. But as person He's not involved with that material energy. You can be aware He's there. Better remind you of Him.

Happiness is getting off the ferry quickly.

As we neared the shore, they announced that access to the car deck was strictly forbidden and that we could expect a delay in disembarking. Madhu said that was because everything would be held up by the railway car onboard and even the cars on top would have to wait until the lower deck exited. We went onto the

car deck, however, before they made any official announcement. I went into the back of the van and figured I was at my leisure to put articles back in their places, but then suddenly I heard Madhu start up the engine. I opened the door and saw him slowly inching forward. We were at the very rear of the ferry and by normal procedure, we'd be one of the last ones off. But he had found an open lane all the way to the front, and he was slowly crawling forward. Several times we met deckhands who were busy removing chains that held trucks down. We went so slowly and yet so outrageously and none of them stopped us. They seemed preoccupied with their own work. Finally we went right to the front of the ferry and with no one signaling us, we just went right off and I think we were the second vehicle off the ferry boat. It was a masterpiece of sleight by Madhu.

The immigration man was an elderly British fellow with some yellow kind of raincoat on, and there were others assisting him in the booth. He was friendly, but he had some penetrating questions which I hadn't been asked before. He was interested in Mr. Guarino, the American. When Madhu told him we were going right to Ireland, I thought that would take the pressure off his inquiry. But he became curious as to the frequency of my visits to Ireland. Suddenly I saw a pattern unfolding, that I was going to Ireland too frequently. He saw a stamp for my entry in March and asked if that was the last time I went to Ireland.

• Chapter Four

Madhu couldn't sleep, and so we started out from our English "Welcome Break" spot at about 2 A.M., for further driving. I rode up front and chanted nine rounds and now we've stopped in Wales to rest. What more is there to say?

6:15 A.M.

Dreamt some people were filming India, all optical details, rats, children, workers, etc. I said, "This isn't the spiritual inside of India." How would you actually film that? Go to an ISKCON temple? But you'd have to find the essence—spiritual of ISKCON.

I daydream, plan, scheme, of a long poem, "the real ISKCON or what's wrong with ISKCON or make believe *ubu roi UR* sort of thing with drawings" and especially it should be make believe and should love it despite faults. More on that elsewhere.

M. says he's serving breakfast right away and then drive off. I didn't even shit today or shower! Strange day but upbeat too, all the miles we covered, \$12 fee just to cross one troll bridge to Wales where they are reviving their dead language. I should talk while alive in this tongue. I said to myself, "You could die at any moment as Śrīla Prabhupāda says, so you better chant and pray." Well, I did, nine rounds. I know my ISKCON

contemporaries must sometimes pray too. Don't say, "I'll teach them. They need me to solve the riddle. I'm the only one, the old leader come to the fore in hour of need." But do it yourself, for yourself. It will make your books better.

It's 10:30 A.M. and we are lined up for STENA Sealink crossing at 3 P.M., Holyhead to Roselare, or is it Fishguard to Roselare? Anyway, it's Wales to Ireland. Śraddhāvan dāsa is supposed to meet us on the other side. All this is a secret from most folks. We then have a full day's drive tomorrow to the north.

Don't know how this writing will develop. It will definitely change from the jouncing ride in the back of the van, irregular hours, queue anxiety, riding on board the ferry, etc. So what that changes I don't know. I figure the first two days there will be a winding down from travel. You could even stop *Kārttika Lights* but I sort of promised to stick it out like my "vow" of no sweets during Kārttika and 20 rounds per day. You want to maintain some flavor of observing Kārttika in Vṛndāvana. You may not feel it, but it's a fact that it's Kārttika and that you are living in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* who take it seriously as a time special to increase your devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Okay. But writing may take any turn. But promise is only to keep writing and call it *Kārttika Lights*.

"Moderate swell" is the weather report. Wind is "3, 4." That's a numbered code. I think "10" is gale for us.

So it's not bad. Of course, you'd like it all velvet; you'd like everything handed to you on a silver platter. Can't have it your way.

Moderate swell. Middle aged couple pull up behind us in their white van. She gets out and reads Madhu's "For Sale" sign. She jokes she'll give £5,000 or a swap, theirs for ours. This goes on while our back door is open and I'm face to face with her. I say, "I didn't think anyone else would get on line so early." But my words are lost in the wind.

What's wrong with Fiskon, the bear? His tummy ache? His uncle left him? People go to see him and inquire. On the way, they speculate what's wrong. Here's the unofficial song.

Just now a knock on the door. I go up front. It's a man, suit and tie and intercom in hand. He asked me if I'm waiting for the 13:00. I said, "Oh, yes." But we are not for that. We are for the 3 P.M. So he said we will board at 12. I said the wrong thing. M. is out making phone calls. We are for the 15:00. Why don't they leave me out of it? I'm writing in the back and not thinking of 13:00 or 15:00 boat timings. Now I'll have to tell M. when he gets back. I don't like dealing with the world and grateful I don't have to. If I didn't have M. here, for sure I'd be staying in a room in some temple, make it my residence and not so much adventure of outward sort—or opportunities to run away? No, you could get that in another way.

So far so good on headaches this trip. But it's never far away.

STENA Sealink has magic words flashing on a screen. You get hooked into reading it. Timings and ads. My writing today feels on that level of communication. Pushing on caravan. Hope to get to inward place by noon. I anticipate winding down time needed but at least we'll be in retreat outwardly, if all goes well.

2 P.M.

Sound familiar? We are on a ferry again. This one's called Felicity. The desk where the games are located is madness. Loud, loud, aggressive music and a dozen different video backgrounds for the games. It confuses me to stand anywhere near it. We made our way to Reception and M. got on line to buy a cabin. I sat down before a T.V. showing Milton Berle and Elvis Presley doing a routine where Berle is imitating a rockabilly and Elvis is coaching him and singing "Blue Suede Shoes." I was curious and sat down. Then I figured I shouldn't watch it so I went to the other side, but another T.V. had the same black and white film on. I resigned myself to it, half eager to see the documentary of a history I had been a part of. The narrator was saying how Elvis was so wild and insinuating as Elvis the Pelvis and so something had to be done to tone down his image. He said the answer came on the historic Steve Allen Show in 1956. Then we see bespectacled Steve announcing Elvis and a grease-slick-haired Elvis singing "I want you, I need you, I love you with all my heart." By then, M. had the key to our cabin and

pulled me away from the T.V. which I left out of duty
and relief.

So here we are again, me and Tom Merton's history
(I don't mean I have a book here by Merton, I mean
. . .). Here we are one hour before departure. M. says
he is sleepy and hopes to rest during the short journey.
Yes, after the 24-hour journey, this one should be
relatively easy. You can read something.

Māyā is dangerous
is powerful
can appear beautiful
nostalgic, tugs at
heart strings, sex stirrings too.
But Kṛṣṇa is more
powerful, beautiful and
transcends all sex for
highest pleasure
of love of Kṛṣṇa.

I hope for that. Was tired today. Not tired of life or
of *bhakti*, but just tired in thought, "I hope at the end
of life I am not like this where you don't even feel in-
terested in calling out to Kṛṣṇa." A tired, beat person
would just lie down and die maybe with no interest.
I've got to stay awake and alive and enhance my
chances to show interest in the next destination.

3 P.M.

I'll write and the boat rings a bell and engines shud-
der the whole boat to start and man announces some-
thing we cannot hear. He is being congenial. Maybe he

says the weather will be tolerable. I couldn't hear. Elvis is behind us now, long gone. They may say the Steve Allen Show of '56 was historic, but it's gone. Twang. Boats we take, days go by. Don't complain. Everything is on time so far. You will hope to reach one destination after another. But right now with cold feet and pen, you are in a destination of sorts. En route. A cabin desk facing mirror.



On Board
Felicity
to
Ireland

This is me going too often to Ireland, according to the immigration man, but he winked this time. Better get your act together. Heigh-ho, historic reckoning. Hold on to faith.

Now we are moving. I drew some pics and read my notes on *Alligators* but couldn't do more serious Cc. One reason is I'm obliged to take notes and I'm not up to it. Unless you're willing to write what actually comes. For example, you read the verse on *dīkṣā* and *śikṣā* gurus. You think, "Yes, I was a *dīkṣā* and Ādi-keśava Mahārāja was the *śikṣā*; that's how JS put it to the devotees in the Brooklyn temple." Sounds right? Is that the kind of note that you would be willing to leave as among notes while reading Cc.? Yes, why not? Tell the truth. Even silly.

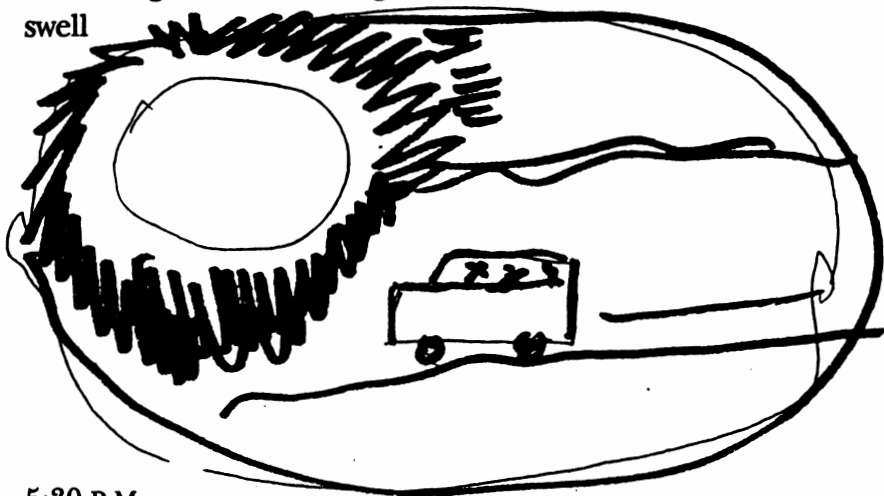
Smells in this cabin and cold. We are moving past a shore cliff. Not en route Med cruise 1961 with all aliens and me even alien to myself. I follow my Guru Mahārāja.

This too is a moment but don't exaggerate it. This is fourth day of Kārttika. The Swami is holding his *NOD* class at Gītā-nāgarī. Leaves brown in forest and most leaves are under foot now, crackling sound up to the ankles. Mr. Guarino, you seem to be hopping from one European community country to another, taking advantage.

Yessir. I actually live in France, I mean in Dublin in a scone. On Dame Street, on Williams Street, wherever the Hare Kṛṣṇa temple is.

But you are an American.

Don't get wet. Irish flag. No sunshine. Moderate swell



5:30 P.M.

One hour to go. White caps prominent but boat isn't *too* tilty yet. The one thing I haven't done well in these four days' travel is read in Cc. It seems I need more concentrate than the travel pace allows me. Somehow I lost it. I tell myself it's too important to read the verses and purports unless I can dō them justice with a retentive mood and notes. Maybe I should have chosen a smaller book by Prabhupāda and been satisfied to read it less perfectly. Keep that mind for upcoming travel to India and within India, etc. You can read some book, just underline it and *let it go*. Just to be with it, is the point. And you will write something of it in your diaries. Don't lament but it's a fact: you weren't with him in his books these last days. That's one of the main things to set up in the retreat, scheduled reading time.

Singing “Youthful Heart Thief” or the tune goes through my mind when I lie down to rest and at other times. “But there’s no solace for My heart/and it’s there I want to go . . . /and my heart yearns for Vṛn-dāvana, . . . /’neath the same trysting tree.”

Man knocks at our cabin door, “Docking in 20 minutes, okay? Okay?”

Yes, okay. Gray. Śraddhāvan should be there. I’m wearing my *sannyāsa dhotī* and knit hat ready for bearing witness and not knowing and maybe daring to be new in upcoming writing retreat. Until then, I’ll cope and help that by writing where we stay and rest and thank God we wake in the morning to note it again without slit throats. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Now you get in your van. Go up front. Smile.

• Chapter Five

October 12

We found a safe car park for overnight right at the ferry pier in Roselare. Writing this one at 12:50 A.M. M. and Śraddhāvan both resting in the front of the van amid suitcase, trunks, very limited space. M. sleeps across front seats, Śraddhāvan twisted around middle section paraphernalia. Last night we lit candles and sang in Kārttika observances.

Here gulls. A quiet, short night for me. Dreaming of some resistance movement in India against the British rule. The resistors were small and the British great, but still the preserved the Vaiṣṇava tradition and didn't allow it to be obliterated. I should work in this way against powerful time and influences of Kali—to preserve record of Hare Kṛṣṇa movement's attempts. Tell the truth but don't admit defeat—"We ruined IS-KCON after his disappearance." Fiskon the bear.

Uh, you mean?

I mean it's a good day ahead. Rejoice. We have five hours' drive to reach the place and then to move in. End your travel story and commence a retreat. This has been nice.

"We've been traveling four days," I told Śraddhāvan last night.

"Travel is austere," he said.

Austere. But Lord Kṛṣṇa has made it easy for me, inspiring Sumati Murarji to make the cabin available.

I shall quit this note now and start a whispering *japa* to tape of Śrīla Prabhupāda in my ear. Instructions of the guru are as good as the guru being present himself. In his absence, the instructions are the pry of the disciple. The spiritual master knows his disciple and engages him in a specific devotional service according to his special tendency" (Cc. *Adi* 1.45). Don't think this writing is your own trip. It is authorized. Travel too. Deep in purpose, feel right in heart. Bear witness and share.

Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī sings:

How deep the sadness in My heart

It's there I want to be

upon the banks of Revā

'neath that same trysting tree.

I sing the song in Her honor and because I like to. The Irish ballad transformed into the verse composed by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, the verse that gave Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu such ecstasy. Let it give us ecstasy also. Sing on and keep moving in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

(Read the occasion with Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu read the verse left on Rūpa Gosvāmī's thatched roof.)

Oh, these notes too. This morning. Yes, I know you fell asleep thinking of Elvis' history from the T.V. you saw. But it is a ^{sort of} sorted, wasted history of stardom ending in fall and defeat. It gave nothing to the world. He introduced rock 'n' roll, so what? A partial and twisted version of what we all need. A true troubadour sings

directly of God and uplifts us in that way. Now as you chant, keep bringing the mind back to Names.

6:20 A.M.

Stopped for breakfast. M. is tired, takes rest over front seats. Srad. serves breakfast. I am chanting and in my mind going over details of a morning schedule in a retreat—such as “When shall I go on morning walk and when breakfast and write poem?” More things to do than time allows, and all things I want to do.

On ferry yesterday, this section from Peter London is worth repeating in my story:

Bearing witness, like any creative act, is a willful expression of what it feels like to be yourself. It is a simple act, and at the same time a courageous one. You speak for yourself and you speak of yourself. You tell your own story. Instead of claiming knowledge of others as in the statement, “*When people see the color blue, they experience* a calming effect.” Bearing Witness more simply but courageously declares, “*When I see* certain shakes of brown, *I begin to feel* heavy, slow, somehow closed in.” Instead of speaking in the third person indefinite (“People are slow to anger about social injustices to minorities”), Bearing Witness speaks in the first person: “Greens upset me!” . . .

Bearing Witness, in speaking only of our self and for our self, allows everyone else to do likewise without anyone feeling misunderstood, for no one is claiming to have understood anyone else. . . . Statements are understood as being accounts of the news from unique points in the universe. Bearing Witness is indisputable, and therefore there are no grounds for dispute. Bearing Witness always draws from within, always makes the speaker the world's only expert on the subject. The authority of Bearing Witness resides in its humility, in its speaking only of and for itself. What it speaks of may reflect a restricted range, but its truths are unshakable and their expression unusually sound.

—*No More Secondhand Art*, pp. 84–85

And then some. Back to that schedule. Just swim in it. As for this *Kārttika Lights*, it might become one of many things I'm doing and fall off in interest both for me and for readers. It could take a very different shape hardly recognizable as the same book. Or continue in diary-like fashion. But I can't report the same, it seems, because there will be no ferries, no P-stops, no excuse for not writing out for an hour. Hare Kṛṣṇa; good.

Elvis "Hold me tight, hold me true . . ." vying with the song of love for Kṛṣṇa on the banks of Revā. It was no more than five minutes T.V. documentary at most,

but left its mark on me. Surely it will fade since I'll give it no fresh input and I really don't desire it.

"I couldn't hear the announcements because of the loud rock 'n' roll," said a crippled, old man to some old ladies as they walked slowly down the stairs on the ferry toward the car deck. So we were not the only ones who don't share the ferry company's choice of music and atmosphere. But most like it; it's good business to soak folks in that way.



Fiskon Bear, I'm thinking of, is not known to me yet or to thee. He may come out. But how could you write

serious poems on an imaginary creature? Poems usually mean what I see and feel on a morning walk.

This is not only the last travel day of our trip from Spain but also the last of our 1995 European touring, and it may be the last of this van for us.

8:45 A.M.

We entered Killalle town where we will stay. M. wants the van entirely emptied. I told him I don't want my room to be a storage place. I need to keep my sights focused on the retreat, not on selling the van or other "larger" issues.

Śraddhāvan is keeping a journal. He sets up a kitchen today. M. wants to go into Limerick to shop. I want to set up for the writing-reading weeks ahead. The more I think of it, it seems I'll not keep such a daily diary way. But what else?

Written directions—go past the Piper's Inn to a pink church. We go past a little graveyard with illustrations of Jesus Christ on the tombs. No sunrise over Shannon but motorboats beside a big river. Some autumnal coloring but the trees are mostly green. I'm happy to be going there. And I contain that happiness so that it befits my old face and slow progress.

Clean valleys, land divided. Wet. Yellow and blue means Tipperary is in the nationwide hurling competition. One pub is called "The Hurlers." Billboard: "Guinness for Strength." It shows a man pulling a cart and horse riding in the cart.

We feel lighthearted at end of journey, start a retreat.

3:25 P.M.

Everything went well, and we're in a modern house with all amenities, even central heating. It's been raining and raining. Madhu is running around. So there are a lot of things and I don't have to tell you everything.

Śraddhāvan gave me a letter from someone in Australia. The letter says, "Prabhupāda said words to the effect that (if I quote him correctly), 'There's no need for us to read any books other than *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, and *Nectar of Devotion*.' But many of his disciples publish books on the understanding that Prabhupāda is pleased to see the "family business" being carried on. Obviously these books are to be read by devotees, but reading them would seem to be contrary to Prabhupāda's saying there's no need to read any books other than those mentioned above. Myself (and other devotees I know) would find it extremely helpful to hear some comment from you on this apparent contradiction. I am certain you would have much enlightening insight. Please, if you could find some time to reply, I would be very appreciative." I don't know if this person is pulling my leg or what. I can give him the quote by Prabhupāda writing to the *gurukula* boy, Dvārkādhiṣa. Or actually, the letter was to me. First Prabhupāda wrote to Dvārkādhiṣa and told him he should learn English so that he

could write books. Then I wrote to Prabhupāda and said, "What is the need of any books other than what you write?" Then Prabhupāda wrote back and said that just as he had expanded the *paramparā*, so we can expand it and we should and that's the nature of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Of course we always write in *Back to Godhead* magazine under Prabhupāda's order. And who would not want additional books such as *Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, Hari-śauri's *Diary*, and many others? And how could we imagine that the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement would never have any books other than the ones Prabhupāda wrote? It could be a kind of cultural bankruptcy of its members that generations and generations went by and nobody ever wrote a book, everyone was afraid to write a book or was unable to in the name of faithfulness to Prabhupāda. How silly.

Hari-śauri also quotes Prabhupāda criticizing the Gauḍīya Maths for not producing any books other than their spiritual master's after 40 years.

But still, there's a sort of logical contradiction that the fellow wants settled. You could say that Prabhupāda meant that those four books are "sufficient." He also sometimes recommended in his purports some of the great books like *Caitanya-bhāgavata*, *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta*, and so on. Maybe we could say, "As Ātmā-tattva Prabhu says, that *first* you should thoroughly study Prabhupāda's books and then you can study other bona fide books."

I don't think I have to solve so-called logical contradictions. I myself favor the statement that we don't need any other books. Prabhupāda's books are the main ones. That's all we need. And in fact, whatever we write should be an extension or like a footnote of those books. We should be faithful to those books. We should read them again and again our whole life and that's our main spiritual nourishment and scripture. The other books are kind of lighter writing and they all come from Prabhupāda. That's all I can say, at least for now.

Yah, and then what happened? All day I moved in.

Didja know what to write in the morning?

Yes, I will. Night will bring a dream. I will bear witness. It will come to just talk truth. Don't avoid it. But some is too private.

• Chapter Six

Don't Rev, But Flow

You are telling us. You are speaking to an audience. Telling us the terrain for future remembrance. Describe the house. Backyard. Rain all day when we arrived. Took rest by 6 P.M., head fatigued. It seems auspicious. Beginning of a retreat in earnest.

Now what else? I write therefore I write. The words that drift to you like persimmons. (Does that indicate you want to read poems of Shiki who liked persimmons? Haiku masters can teach you essence of poetry which is to observe best moments.)

Mister, absurd isn't your style. Yellow pages. You've done it before. Don't rev me up though. I'm calm and limited, old physical frame. Can't accelerate, but flow. Flow ink prose.

Grand mountains I've seen. You are still fit for progressing, pushing on, therefore M. is working to get another van. I sometimes watch him and think, "Doesn't he know that this is all dependent on whether I am physically (and mentally) fit to keep traveling?" Yes, you have to take risks. That's how we work in the world. I told Śrīla Prabhupāda in 1974 that people in the U.S.A. were profoundly intimidated by The Bomb and thought life is not worth living, raising children to be incinerated, etc. He said we don't stay home and

cry because of that threat. We go on living. We also live to avert the disaster. Or we prepare ourselves to transcend any and all material upheavals. So my writing is like that.

Another viewpoint is that we need to render devotional service to Kṛṣṇa. That's our eternal *dharma*. Do it now and if tomorrow we are cut off, still we have to serve today. Yes, if we knew that today is our last full day, then we wouldn't try to sell and purchase a van. But we don't know the future.

Centennial plans are fine. Someone will live to carry them out. One thousand and eight sacred waters to pour on His Divine Grace. All powers to them who do so and fine also is Satsvarūpa's 100 poems to Prabhu-pāda and his other book sales. The year to remember, and move onto 1997.

1996—the year we plan to get another van and use the tunnel from England to France. The year in which I intend to travel as usual, until stopped. And may we write many books.

Readable sturdy.

Kārttika to develop your devotion. Don't rev, but flow. Flaw.

Flaw! Stop the process! I saw a flaw! Digression! Stop and get back on the track. No, Junior, that's not our method.

Super stress. Steel girders hold up the building. In Ireland, they haven't bothered to build a good road

system but they get by. Billboard: "The Big Irish Softie just got softer," shows a man with a soft, cuddly, white kitten, an ad for tissues. I guess Irish Softie is also an expression that people here are aware of.

A nation of fools. Hawks of America. Ship our van over by boat; not important cargo for them, just one empty Econoline Ford. Well, I better not be absorbed in this stuff so I can write a Kārttika book.

Kārttika: a girl by that name plays electric guitar in a band called "Hanumān."

France, next year.

Kārttika in Europe, write what comes. Light candles. Car-tick (bad engine).

Kārttika in India, Vṛndāvana. Dumb fires. Mahā-nidhī Swami's challenge to us, that you should live in Vṛndāvana. But the actual politics of ISKCON, the socializing, the Centennial demands if I were to go to Vṛndāvana now.

Kṛṣṇa dons His hats.

No sweets, it's easy to do. But 20 rounds a day will be harder in this writing retreat. The importance of chanting.

Don't miss the opportunity to write and read the simple, in slippers you move about.

Take the available opportunities.

You need to concentrate and that means exclude. Don't read many books or dabble in things like that

just because you have free time. Your time is for Kṛṣṇa. How best to serve Him.

The song of Judea or for that matter, Egypt, Greece, American Indians, etc., is not the song of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana but only by extension-expansion is it also within Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Why not stay in the magic circle for Kārttika? You intend to stay mostly in this house and nearby grounds, yes? (They say better not to wear *dhotīs* in rural Ireland, so M. and S. will wear Western clothes when they go to town. But I will be swami-priest in saffron.) So why use time except in pursuit of Kṛṣṇa consciousness?

Yes, but I may look at some writing books.

You have no purpose yet. Winding down from travel. Adjusting to new house and to Madhu's declaration that all goods have to get out of the van and either go to the India suitcase or in storage. So I have to make all decisions on my prized possessions. Let stuff go that has accumulated beyond what we need.

Seek and ye shall find. I am not fit to touch the strap of his sandal, John said. I am a voice crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the lord. If "perennial best-selling most popular story of great saintly person as Savior." But when they claim he's the only begotten son for all time, only representative of God, we can't accept that. We say he's the only one for that time, place, and people. If that is not acceptable for the Christians, then I'm sorry but we are not one of them. Still, we can hear of and admire Christ. He's

ours too. And we mainly want to hear the flute of Kṛṣṇa. To achieve that takes single-minded act of devotion for many lifetimes, *vāsudeva sarvaṁ iti. Kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam.*

Refer to Vedic literature.

Here I am flailing; no specific goal for the mind?
The goal is to write and write more. But this morning so far

ample proof
he's an apple.

One thing at a time
he wanted greedy with an uncontrollable tongue.
Before dawn is many hours nowadays.

Learn to live in this house. It's getting too warm.

You learn what you need It will take concentration but flow. You'd like to improve all the time, but you also will accept who you are now and what is happening. See that as beautiful.

How to increase Vraja consciousness? You could read esoteric books. But also just go ahead and say, "I will go to Vṛndāvana in winter, in January, when it's so cold because they have no heating in the houses." You wear long-johns under *dhoti* and layers of sweaters under a *bundi* and a hat and gloves.

Here's a picture of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī. Prabhupāda is always in Vṛndāvana. In Vṛndāvana, he lectured against the scientists. It's not that you have to talk of *gopīs* to be in tune with Kārttika in Vṛndāvana. Be Kṛṣṇa conscious. Use tell well. And best use is preaching. So make yourself an all-around fit person,

in senior position (like it or not) to set a good, humble example in ISKCON.

Think of Kārttika like that.

Theme is don't rev but flow. Be yourself in physical limits, but open up (like a flower). You are in a non-threatening atmosphere and can open up and talk.

Make this for yourself to improve yourself. Don't be like Upabarhi who listened to cinema and other nondevotional music.

I'm okay then. Bring tape recorder into bathroom and hear Swamiji lecture.



Kārttika dance
in pants
in part it's
devotion to self for
devotion to Kṛṣṇa.



You are to know better
but as yet don't know much
regarding Kṛṣṇa!

Mister, please take a book
on Vedic science.

The best he could do at ten
to two. He's run out of steam.

Remember, I haven't written for long stretches in a long time. I'm just building up to it. I promise good times ahead.



Geez, can't you do better than that? And why show this to others? Listen, it's all I could do. Accept it so that better can come with the beautiful picture you copied it from. At least I got to look at it carefully and

admire the artistry and devotion, Gauḍīya style. Your
botch is your own self.

Now let's go chant
botch rounds
whispered and louder
you're in a safe place
with support.

Please go nicely and gentle but quickly recite
Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra your master gave you,
you are authorized to chant.

Pray Lord let me hear.

My tongue and ear are for that.

This opportunity now.



- Chapter Seven
Stopped by Police

2:45 A.M.

Yesterday, Friday the 13th, was bad luck for me. I got a headache starting in the late morning and it built up to sharp pain behind the right eye by the afternoon. I retired to bed about 5 P.M., hoping it would go away overnight. But it didn't. I wasn't able to do any writing or reading yesterday beyond what I did in the early morning, thus the short chapter six.

When I wrote that chapter title, "Don't Rev, But Flow," I wasn't aware that I wasn't even going to be able to flow. But the don't rev warning was a good one. I remarked to Madhu that it seems as if my body was bracing itself during that five days of travel and somehow preventing a headache because it would have been even more inconvenient along the road. But now the body was letting it happen what had to happen.

Madhu said something to the effect that, "You are weak and you can't do too much." When he said it, I realized that this shouldn't be a permanent nature to my "defect." It's my mortality. I'm suffering from old age and disease. Surprised? Did you think you could cure yourself of this or get out of it? I've seen some recent photos of myself in which one can tell that the man has false teeth and his face is very emaciated.

What does it mean? Who's kidding himself? *Ahany ahani bhūtani gacchantīha yamālayam . . .*

It occurred to me that I ought to do things "as if" this is it, this is my last position or last statement in life. One should always have this awareness, but there's a certain factual accuracy to it when, if you knew you were at the very end of life. When one has a warning of a definite end, then he tends to make apologies to persons he may have offended, and he makes a last effort to cut himself off from various material interests, nondevotional books, and so on. There's no more justification for it. It's time to drop all illusions and also antagonisms and foolish, material attachments, romantic feelings, anything that will hinder one as he has to leave this body and take a new one.

I'm 56 years old, but I don't think I've reached that stage yet. I'm still producing literature and so I do some research.

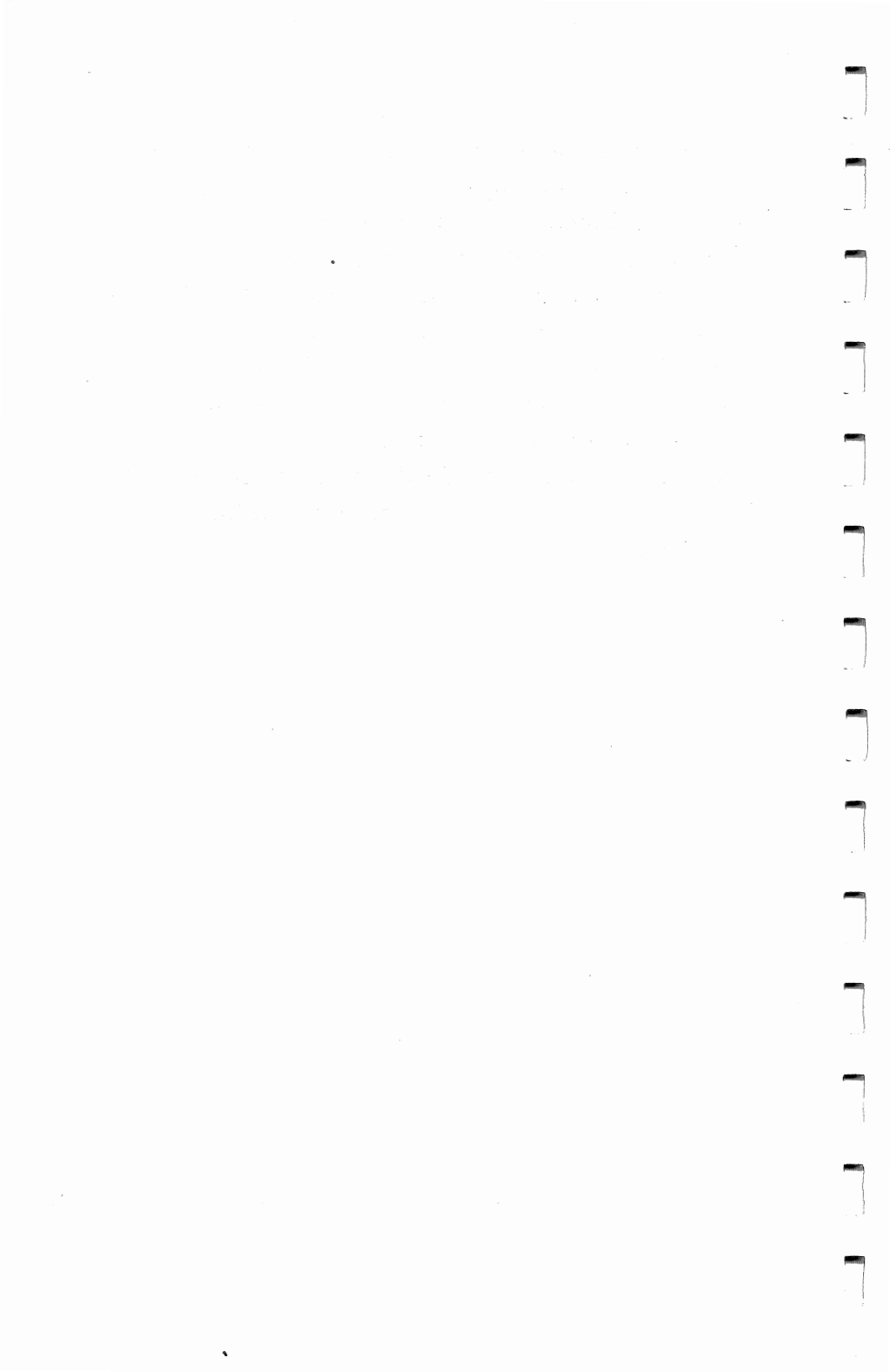
I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda comparing material nature to the police force. He said the law and order department is so strict that even a child is not excused. If a child touches fire, he will also be burned. It struck me since I heard this while suffering a headache. So it's the police.

Sometimes I've been thinking that it's Kṛṣṇa directly handling me since I'm a devotee. But even if I flatter myself in that way, still, Kṛṣṇa might be using the material energy to punish me. I don't think I'm an ordinary culprit. I'm Prabhupāda's disciple, so there should be

some special consideration. Even if I take it that way, that Kṛṣṇa is removing me from the last vestiges of material attachment, still, it appears that it is He who has sent the police. And so I have been busted.

It went on all day yesterday, persisted after 12 hours in bed, and now my lawyers are still negotiating with the police to let me free. Come on, give the guy a break, it's Kārttika and he wants to write some books.

What is my crime? Perhaps there is no crime I didn't commit. I am mostly rectified, but last reactions are being meted out in token measure. *Tat te 'nukampāṁ su-samāḥsamāṇo.*



Part II



• Chapter One

How is the Shannon flowing? Don't push. We don't have a big motor boat. Get in rowboat and drift. Be careful, lad. You can't move so quickly. That's all right for reading practice, just a little at a time. Read how Govindaji acts as *śikṣā-guru* for the pure devotees. Use the flowing pen tip that doesn't offer resistance. Walk not too fast or long to overexert. Don't overexert.

But I like to work as much as possible, produce, produce.

Hare Kṛṣṇa.

The Shannon broadens out here to a lake called Loughderg. I went down to lakeshore yesterday. Sat on slat rock there and used dictaphone to make additions to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* selections book. That was after the headache finally cleared. Leaves on trees here in Ireland turn brown and yellow slower than they do in Northeast America. That's my observation, Mr. Thoreau.

Last night (after missing it two nights), we lit candles before the altar. Mine burned down more slowly than the two others. Nice way to end the day.

Tomorrow is my Madhumāṅgala dāsa's birthday; we will break our sweets fast.

The house is the scene of packing boxes, rearranging things to go to India or to go in storage since we

have entered this van in anticipation of selling it. M. gets some phone calls about which new van to buy. He prefers the Ford Econoline. I heard him speak of V-8 and V-6 engines. I remembered hearing of them in my childhood and how I felt better about my father favoring the V-8. He used to say the V-8 has more power and we could sometimes use that power, provided we could afford to pay for it. I didn't want our family car to have the mere V-6, which although functional, couldn't give you that full power when you needed it. When was that? On some long uphill like ascending todt hill? Or on unseen hills and stress on the family drive to Washington D.C. Or when father was alone driving to and from work, maybe some as yet unseen occasion in a snow storm. Let us have V-8 power. We climb those big hills in Spain, always more of them, demanding up and up and our poor Renault straining with its 3.2 ton burden of our belongings. In the next van we will not have heavy wood for desk and shelves. Probably we will carry less, not all of Prabhupāda's tapes and albums as we have now. Less storage items. Hare Kṛṣṇa. This goes on in the retreat house. What would you have, more solitude, more austerity, more prayer? I could still go down to the lake alone. It's up to me to stay in my room; no one will disturb me or involve me much.

But we are here only for four weeks. And we do have to consider things like future in India, passport, visa, mail, travel decisions made ahead of time, and all details.

Hare Kṛṣṇa chanting yesterday was poor because of headache. I have to excuse myself. But do better today. Feel grateful for return of normal state of no pain. Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa.

How are they doing in Kārttika elsewhere? You just do this one here. Śrīla Prabhupāda singing, "*Jaya Rādhe, Jaya Kṛṣṇa, Jaya Vṛndāvana*." You think he is not in Vraja mood? Don't be a nonsense. Hear him more carefully and follow his mood in your own way.



Rain shadows fall down, be careful, God protects, He says so in heart He gives instructions to pure devotees who are convinced. They share realizations like great scientists.

In the picture above, it's a man going to pick a big flower to offer to Govinda.

Govinda:

Instructing guru, He helps you get it together so you can chant. He's the Lord of land, cows, and senses.

He imparts knowledge.

Go, go, Govinda, the stately Deity. Go back to God-head, not to go-go girls.

Get up early and chant. I'm trying to write, but I hear Madhu chanting; it disturbs my concentration. Wind outside is more part of solitude. I'm in a hurry to write what comes. Hum of heating system is also non-disturbing. Don't like to keep ear plugs in. Okay, so a man is up chanting. Incorporate that into your poems; swing with it. You have to, or else die.

The restaurants are named "Govinda's" where even an old lady can bus tables. Kowit used to go to the restaurant in San Diego. Govinda's is a nifty place, they make profit, they cook.

Go means cows. The reality of it, mud dirt udders, beasts. *Go* means senses, mine and His. Govinda and the cowherd boys.

Govinda rock music. New York, Boston (I know, it's Rādhā-Gopīvallabha there), Calcutta, Inis Rath.

Govindaji—I want to love Thee and know Thee as a Christian knows Christ and says his name. Please give sweetness to me when I say Govinda or Your many names. Gopāla, Gopinātha, Gopī-jana-vallabha.

Go Go Gopinātha
they call the Sanskrit editor
Gopī, our *gopī* elephant.

Most *gopīs* are young, slim girls.
Govinda's name we don't say in Hare
Kṛṣṇa mantra.
"We say Rādhe-Śyāma."

Write despite a chanter vibrating through
wood floors. What's it to you if
he's calling out fervent, rapid fire
names? You've got your own.
Yeah, but he disturbs me.
Then knock on floor with boots
or go down toothless and say with
puckered lips obsequious, "Dear
Prabhu-servant, please don't chant when
your bedraggled master is trying to write
his odes
because he may lose a thread.
You see, he gets headaches if he tries too hard
and he believes he's got a sacred line to
the Supreme but it's a delicate connection
like long distance phone call or
view of cloud or stars.
There, I just lost it."

If you're in prison, you
couldn't control sounds.
Lord, make me a strong man
to write something people
can eat for nourishment.
Give me strength of my own thoughts,

steel, durable,
but soft too,
by your Lake Loughderg, give
me hopes to fly upward. But
Śrīla Prabhupāda says don't ask God. But serve
and please Him.

I savor and treasure alone-time
in pax silence to find my
way to him. All glories
to the Lord.

(Open a window; it's getting stuffy)
Hear the soft rush of wind in leaves
of night trees.
Pray for blessings of Govinda.

Five minutes to 6 A.M.

Govinda is your theme.

I only got five minutes to breakfast. Drawings I am
ashamed of. Not. But keep some things private. That's
all.

Then after breakfast, although it's not light out, I'll
ask him to put on some outside light so I can walk on
ground just outside house and chant *japa* awake. Saw
this poem, Japanese point of view but good description
of uncontrolled mind, applies to *japa* also.

"Satori" noted,
the mind, like quicksilver, goes,
falsely "enlightened,"

down those old long-headed roads,
each more wrong than one before.

Another, by Musoseki translated by Sam Himel, describes retreat mode.

If only people
would not come to visit me
in lonely mountains
where I have built my retreat
from the world's many trials.

Pax alone. But I roamed house feverish in mind to stay awake and pen or draw something. Sloppy *gāyatrī*. Sharpened colored pencils and drew two men, one with wings sort of sheltering the other who was dressed like stage actor in tights and dancing shoes.

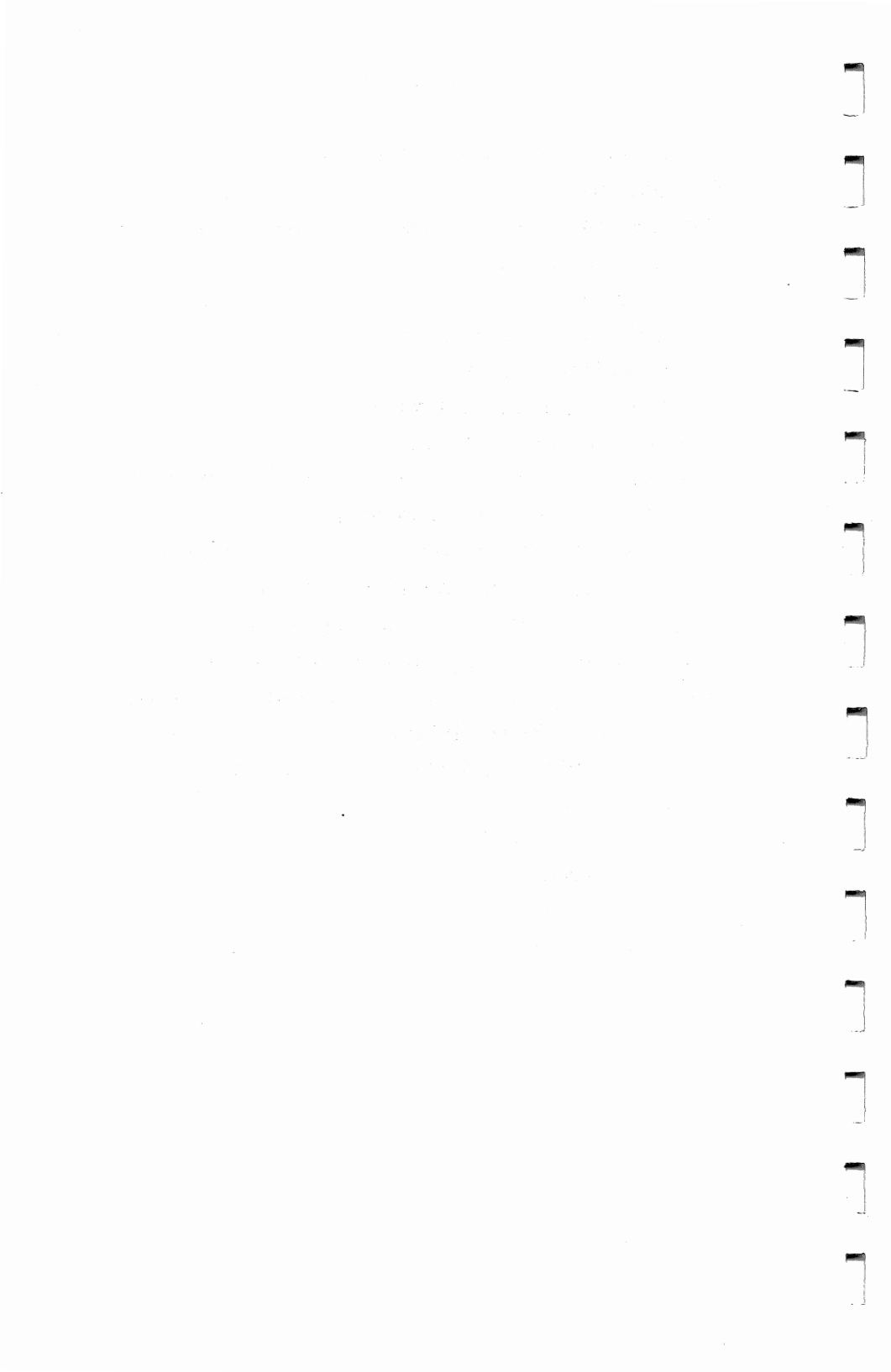
I read some Louis Simpson and another guy (whom I threw in garbage after that). Then I wanted to turn to Uddhava-gītā, Eleventh Canto. But I need to control my intake, a little at a time and not such a mixture.

Keep holy, Willy,

Keep a hold on the flower
they offered you.

Don't be drunken,
you're a guru,
remember?

Oh yeah.

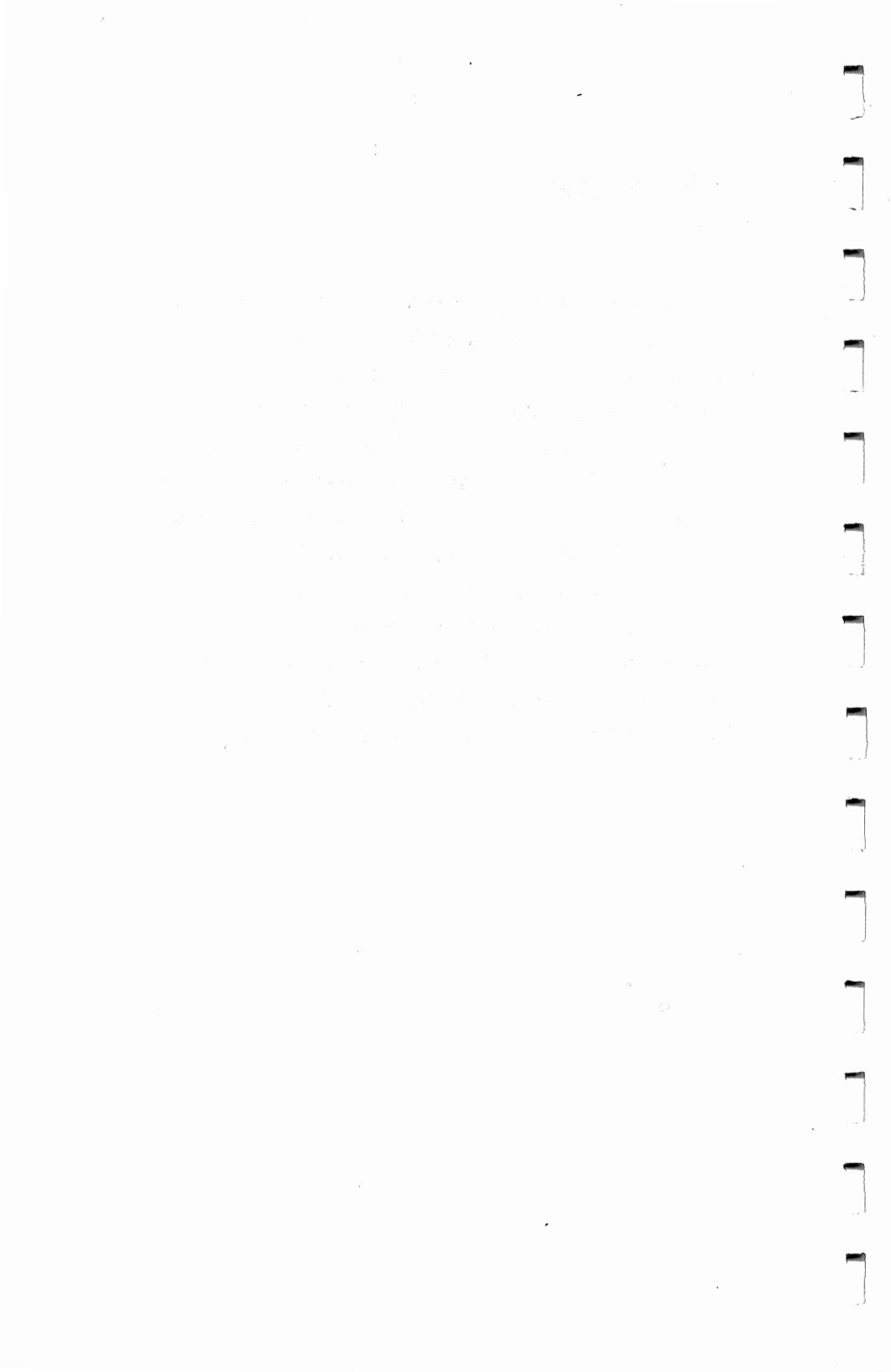


• Epilogue

What's this? Epilogue? But Kārttika is only one week old. What about your vow? My vow was writing during Kārttika, to live in a retreat, and I also desired to abstain from sweets and chant 20 rounds a day.

I'm doing all those things. But the writing of a specifically titled *Kārttika Lights*, which I saw so much anticipated while traveling to get here, seems now anticlimactic. I find myself too much writing for performance, trying to shape it so it comes out nice. So I'm thinking to switch to something more private.

In the meantime, I leave you with this small addendum, *What's Wrong with Fiskon?* which came and went during my first two days here in the retreat house.



"What's wrong with Fiskon?"

"I'll tell you. We may go to see him and find out by examining him and asking questions." So spoke some pilgrims, well intentioned, as they started on the path that leads to the mountain that Fiskon lived. But on the way, they stopped at the cottage of the man who writes.

They said to him, "We are going to find out what's wrong with Fiskon. Why don't you join us?"

He asked, "Do you have some opinions already as to his disease?"

"Yes," they said.

He said, "But first you must ask yourself *who* is Fiskon. Unless you know who he is, you may be confused as to what is wrong with him."

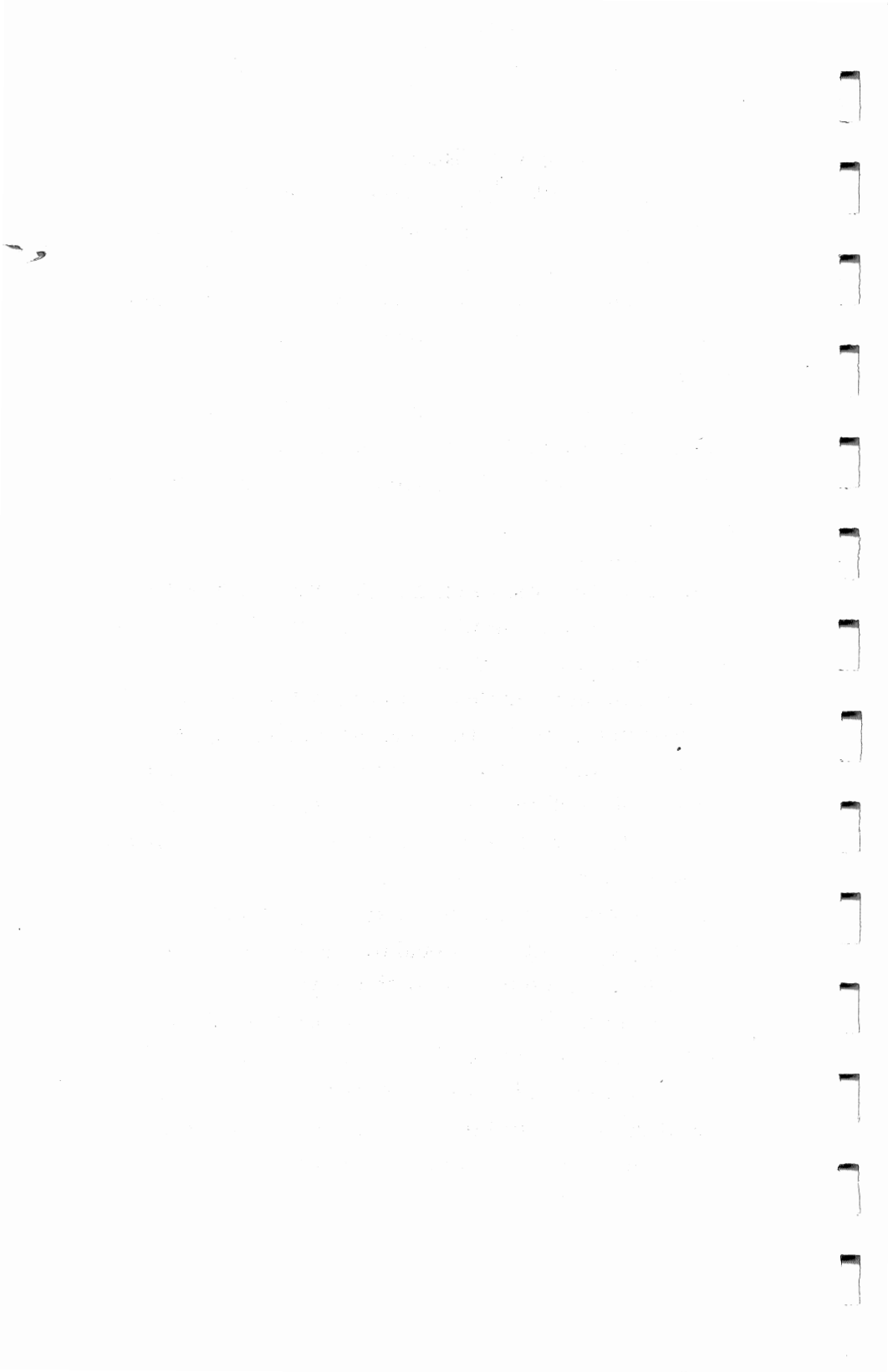
This statement made them stop. Before they could say anything more, he (the man who writes) spoke.

"I have thought about this a lot," he said, "since I live at the bottom of his hill. Why don't you pilgrims stop here for the day and first read my twin treatises, *What's Wrong with Fiskon?* and *Who is Fiskon?*."

The prospect of reading what they guessed was a position paper did not appeal to the pilgrims. They themselves wanted to write such essays.

"I promise," the man said, "it's not one of those position papers. Just stay. It will only take an hour. In the meantime, I'll brew some herbal tea for everyone."

So they agreed and this is the paper he handed them. What you are reading is an extra copy.



What's Wrong with Fiskon?

• Chapter One

It pinches your toe. You can't get free. They take all your money. Tell innocent kids to go out and collect money. And say it's for God.

Well, what's wrong with that?

I'm not saying it *is* wrong, but these are things you could *say* were wrong.

Why not speak for yourself, John?

'Cause I'm speaking like this.

It pinches your toes. They give weird haircuts. This country, America, is not ready for them. It is from India. It is not Catholic or Jew. They don't believe in fucking. They are against meat-eating, hamburgers, chicken, even eggs, and they don't fart. Or they say they don't.

They don't watch T.V. and I don't trust them. Worse than that, they say they don't watch T.V. but some of them do. I know a guy lived near some of them and he says they do all sorts of things not in their scriptures. They run out naked and scream and someone set fire. So the guy I knew said, "What's this?" They said, "It is not us. It is just a new member who is not to the standard of our behavior."

They fight back. They are getting smart. They have a communications department and send out nifty papers to the media presenting their side. Their presentation is slick.

They are hot and peppers.

What? I don't understand some of the accusations.

Nevermind. Just listen to them. These are the gripes. You want to hear the gripes, don't you?

They don't take part in the Veterans of Foreign Wars parade. They don't support gays or come out against them. They have ornate and complicated scriptures. Once some workmen in the airport, employees of Pacific Airlines, put urine shit on their *Bhagavad-gītās* and they fought back.

This is awful stuff. I didn't think it was going to be like this. I thought it would be polite.

Sorry, ma'am, this *is* polite compared to what we could say.

Ah, they wear money belts loaded with dough to India. They get hit on the head for it and robbed by a band of *gunḍas* bearing sticks. They fight back. They don't fight back. They are ring-around-the-rosy.

They are angels on earth. They think they know better than others. They say Christianity teaches love of God in only a vague way and with awe and reverence, whereas they know sweetness. The Christians I know said that they don't really know Christianity. They just assume everyone is inferior to them. Proud, proud.

They revere their leader. It's called *guru-niṣṭha*. They think because they are preachers, they are better than all *bhajanānandīs*. They collect money. They hide guns. They drink 7-Up and Coke and they think they are smart.

Their girls are good looking and ugly. They have all kinds. They admit blacks and yellows and they are a honkey movement. They're not fair. They support evils like styrofoam, although some of them are trying to clean up the act of Fiskon. I admit that. But it is too slow and not enough. They drink gin.

Are you sure these are accurate accusations? You could be sued for libel if not so.

They play banjos on their knees. If a person wants to join their movement and she is a concert violinist, they will tell her, "What you are doing is worthless; give it up and have babies and make garlands." They discourage education. They quote their spiritual master ruthlessly. They are dogmatists.

They don't let you go to their picnic if you are a meat-eater. Their *sannyāsīs* all stay together in a clique; they don't mix with people, think they will get contaminated. So they are not compassionate. Hypocrites.

They are not hip. They don't know literature or science very well and they don't care. Ditch all Western culture and science in wastebasket as if it doesn't count. Giggle when the T.V. news is on as if miseries around the world were Looney Tunes cartoons as far as they're concerned. They say it's all part of the world of *māyā*.

They are mean to their own members and indifferent to the human race. Don't keep pets. Are against dogs. They say cats and dogs as if that is the worst.

They don't like atheists. They crave for attention. They say whoever criticizes them is just envious. They think they are seated on the right hand of God. I don't trust them.

If you had a million dollars and you wanted to leave it in someone's care for three days, would you leave it with one of them or with a doctor who is not one of them? Anyone sane will say, "I would not leave it with one of them. They would spend it on their cars." They cheat in that way and in many ways.

One of the pilgrims looked up from the reading and said, "If Fiskon is a bear who lives in a cave, then how could all these things be attributed to him? You make it sound like not a mere person is acting, but . . . a whole society or—"

"More than that," said the writer. "Why don't you read on? None of it is false."

The others sipped their tea and took their time reading.

These are testimonies from many people who lived with Fiskon, served him, and knew him. I have incorporated it into my tale.

You might think some of them have unfair gripes and that might be so. It is hard to separate fact from false. But Fiskon claims to be perfect and we are show-

ing that this is not true. You might say in some higher dimension-level, Fiskon is perfect despite the faults. I grant you that. But with so many faults, how could he be perfect? I'm asking you to judge for yourself.

He graced the altar. He put sheep doo-dads on the Deities. He ran away when there was trouble. He was made of flesh and blood and he bled when struck by assailants. His followers fell down when there was temptation. They did not appear so good on T.V. when attacked by malicious sensationalists. They stood the test of time? Not yet. They fabricated lies to prevent being intruded upon, said, "This house is not a temple," or said, "This temple is not a house," just to get around laws, so they could have plenty of guests. But the guests register their own complaints: We were not fed, we were misled. They stole my wife, said one Indian merchant. It's true, she ran away from him who beat her and so she joined Fiskon.

They need to be kinder to their members and more organized. They don't have a good system for doing the laundry. The whole idea of commune is wrong. They need to hear and learn from Scott Peck. They do hear from him. They read too many other books. They don't read anything but their spiritual master's books.

They speak pigeon English, Indian-English and Spanish-Spanish. They tri-fold the equator with ships, and they are the cause of the Tropic of Cancer being what it is. We can attribute to them the faults of the world in one sense.

But they are just an inconsequential cult, so who cares?

The way they wrong women could fill a book. The way they abuse children could fill an ocean. The way they enhance dirtiness is legend. They wear funny shoes and you would think they were against leather, but now some of them wear leather. They don't protect cows. They say they do, but they don't do it much.

I'm taking risk to speak against them. They are notorious for getting back at people. They will write letters to newspaper editors and threaten you in other ways. Vindictive sort.

They're mild people, actually. Fiskon is a bear and he is not all these things.

But what can we do? The members of Fiskon was to speak out. There are too many newsletters. They don't protect their old members. They have no medical assistance plan. Someone works for them and they don't pay him. They don't give him hospitalization or a wife or husband. They just take.

You may say, "Well, what do you expect, to be carried from the cradle to the grave?" But that was what Fiskon promised. He can't keep his promises.

He is the prime actor in the case. He loses Supreme Court decisions. Wouldn't you rare be with a mainstream winner? This Fiskon has no contingency, just Hindus which is not great. He can raise money but can't manage it. He says he lives as a spiritualist, but

they don't read their own books. When they go to holy *dhāmas*, they waste their time and leave a bad reputation. They don't sit down and talk about Kṛṣṇa and chant together. They are not up to par. They own restaurants but serve grilled cheese sandwiches which are not good for digestion. They use sugar and salt. They punch holes in the walls. They cry, "Kṛṣṇa!" and "Nṛ-siṁha!" too loud and neighbors complain. Neighbors call police and the Fiskon-ites just tolerate it. They should fight back. They are sweet people when you get to know them. Fiskon is a bear.

• Chapter Two

The writer's treatise continues:

They hog the plate. They forget about especially if you bloop. One big guru said, "They never called to hear how I was doing." They bob the plate. They say slang words like "pro-active" and "I am fried, I am this and that." They read books like *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and think it's a big deal like a new Bible. They put down Christians but they themselves are—

"Wait a minute," said one of the pilgrims, a big, assertive one. "This is getting too familiar. I know what you are talking about. This is just a front for you to vent your spleen. I for one am sick of it."

The others, who were prone to go along with things, agreed to stop reading right then and there. The writer was doubly surprised and upset. They began gulping down their herbal tea and excusing themselves. They said they had to go on with their hiking, and they began lacing up their boots. I'm surprised to say as to the sudden turn of events, that they did exit the charming, isolated cottage of the writer, leaving him alone, which is what he claimed he always wanted.

"Yes," he thought, "I like to be alone, but when Providence brings such a nice bunch to your door and you are able to share your beloved writing with them, it seems a shame . . ."

He sat down and read to himself the last few words of the page they had stopped reading from.

"Hmm," he thought, "what was it that urked that guy? If they had just read to this part . . ."

Fiskon is a bear. Fiskon is a hare. Once a crazy guy looked at the marble-like swirls in the linoleum on the temple floor and he said, "Oh, is the hare in Hare Kṛṣṇa?" He saw a figure of a rabbit, a hare. People do all sorts of trips on Fiskon, mock it, put it into the Hollywood movies as offensive jokes. One guy even robbed a bank dressed as a Hare Kṛṣṇa devotee. So you see, my friends, Fiskon is many things to many people. And so we shall go into the millennium with this understanding, that many people see it in one way, yet others see it in many . . .

The writer admitted that this was getting to be bluff and wool gathering, and he put it aside. He stoked his fire in the fireplace and thought what to do next.

Meanwhile, the pilgrims started up the hill. They found a grassy patch with some trees and decided to camp there for the night. They sat around the campfire and read aloud from scriptures. Perhaps because they had just visited a writer, they also felt inclined to write. Some of them kept journals. A twelve-year-old girl wrote this: "He said what is wrong with Fiskon. I say what is right with it. It keeps you out of the material world. It is the best place to praise the pure devotee, Śrīla Prabhupāda, because all people agree in Fiskon

that he is the topmost and should be followed. I like it because all my friends are in it. Maybe someday I will go out and join the material world and then I wouldn't like Fiskon. But for now it seems okay. Some older people in it are puffed up and may exert too much control. I heard my father say that. He said they care too much for law and not for love. I don't know. I hope to get married to a nice devotee and have some children, maybe two boys and two girls, and we could live in a rural community in California and maybe I'll teach in the *gurukula*—unless the war comes and we are wiped out or we go back to Godhead or we run a farm and all the people come as refugees from the city."

"Whatcha writing, Bhaktin Susie?" asked her father. But she said it was private. Then they went to their separate tents and prayed for a peaceful night. The men posted a watch to protect their group. They proposed to start at five in the morning after a brief *maṅgala-ārati*.

• Chapter Three

The pilgrims were about to break camp after breakfast when a messenger from the writer in the valley presented them with an envelope. Inside was a cover note: "I know you are all busy and don't want anything more to do with me. But just please read this latest edition I wrote on Fiskon last night."

This is what he wrote:

"I think when you get to see Fiskon, you will realize that each person has their own conception of him. You will only see the Fiskon of your own reality based on your experience, predilection, etc. Others will see a somewhat different Fiskon. Whatever I have written is from a collective consciousness of Fiskon which I was able to tune into because of my inclination for that sort of thing. I've not written lies, but neither is it the truth of only one person. These collective impressions of Fiskon keep coming to me, so I am somewhat helpless to write them down. I didn't mean to impose them on you. If there are any among you who do wish to read more of this, I attach a few pages."

Those few pages began with these:

"Fiskon members perform on basketball courts and in swimming pool races, competing with the nondevotees. These events are reported in its newspaper. It is good and bad and ultimately who cares for this estimation business? Fiskon just is. It is the transcendental

wisdom of the *Vedas* in the present age in the form of Lord Caitanya's *saṅkīrtana*. It consists of devotees living in and out of temples. When we say Fiskon, people think of the mistakes made in the airports or the great good done in the airports. And they think of devotees living in temples who someone said are not attracting newcomers to join because the temple residents are not honest. But say, for the sake of argument, that they are honest. Still, they may not attract because who in this age wants to live as a nun or monk in a monastery? But even if they don't attract as many as are attracted by devotees living outside the temple, still we need renunciats living in the bunker, that is, the monastery.

"So when you say Fiskon, you think of all these things. You think of times in 1969 when you lived in Bury Place temple, London, and sometimes young George Harrison came by for a *kīrtana*. Those who reminisce, say back in those days devotees had an easy rapport, sat around sharing hot milk in the evening, and were able to confess their shortcomings. When the master disappeared, then things went awry. Fiskon means the bad years after that, the break ups and schisms. Fiskon is all the theories of how it should be improved. It includes all the confidential ads such as one asking for "Husband for 45-year-old woman who was left on the shelf when she could no longer collect \$8,000 a month." Or is it not all these things but one simple thing, allegiance to the master or to the bylaws, and what else? You could go crazy trying to figure it

out. Better to live in it somewhere in some recognizable way and form.

“Anyway, I wish you well,” the writer wrote in a penned P.S., “Wish you well on your journey to see the person Fiskon in his cave. I hope he rewards you and that you get the idea of what you wanted and go on with your own service to guru and Kṛṣṇa. For myself, I will continue a kind of *guru-sevā* here, chanting and hearing and making my cottage a preaching center for passerby hikers to whom I serve pizza *prasādam* and hold some classes on *Bhagavad-gītā*. I know it’s not much, but . . .”

The pilgrims climbed up the hill.

• Epilogue

In a future work, I may tell future adventures of the pilgrims, such as a drawing contest in which they draw pictures on a theme, "What's Wrong with Fiskon?" They may also meet some further persons with opinions on the nature and ill of Fiskon, and perhaps the writer at the bottom of the hill will send up some more explanations on his favorite topic.

Finally, the pilgrims will reach the residence of Fiskon and gain an audience with the bear himself. I expect when they do so, they may be somewhat disappointed but at the same time recall that the writer was right—each person finds his own Fiskon. Fiskon is many things to many persons.

Until such time as I may fill out these incidents, I'll leave the reader with this thought: our master wanted us to stay and work within ISKCON, and to prove our sincere love for him in that way. So we may each work in our own lives to improve the overall health of Fiskon and not consider him too contaminated or absorbed to even be worthy of our devotional service.

