

Breaking the Silence:

Selected Writings

1991–1997

Also from
“Books Among Friends”

A Litany for the Gone

Why Not Fiction?

I am Prabhupāda’s Servant:
September Catchall

Sketchbooks of Joy

Songs of a Hare Kṛṣṇa Man

Radio Shows, Volume 2

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Selected Writings

1991–1997

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswamī

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Breaking the Silence:
Selected Writings, 1991–1997

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See that moon, that book by SDG?

I see spots on it, like a rabbit.

Yeah, but see the glow? The sincere art? The total—oh well, not total, but the attempt to report the struggle and joy of release from sin by the process of devotional service?

Yes, I see it. But where is he at? Is he approved?

Yes, gentle reader, I approve it. I am writing for myself—for myself and a ladybug, at which I can gently puff my breath, “You’re not interested? Then go away. Spread your wings and fly. I heard your house is on fire and your children want to play.”

*Breaking the Silence—
Memories*

1

The reason I still remember this family memory is because I once told it to a devotee when we lived at the Boston storefront in 1968. The devotee appreciated that I had made a personal revelation from my past and had linked it to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This is the memory:

When my father would come home from work at the firehouse, we would gather around the dinner table. Our Staten Island home had a small circular kitchen table where the four members of my family would eat our breakfast, usually separately since we all had to be at work or school at different times. Dinner, however, was served at the dining room table. Usually the meal began silently. It seemed we were waiting for my father to speak. It was something unspoken—it's not that it was a family rule that we had to be silent until my father spoke—but we always waited. Now what strikes me as I remember it is not so much what my father said on any one occasion, but my own perception of the moments of silence before he spoke. It seemed as if all existence were waiting for my father to speak, as if my father had to give everything else meaning. That was certainly true in my family: we lived in a void until my father took the lead.

That silence was heavy. It seemed that unconsciously, my father was aware that he had to accept his responsibility and prove his power, and usually, his conversation went in the direction of his workday.

As soon as he spoke, regardless of the topic, we were released from our imposed silence and could breathe. We were free to respond and to engage in the give and take of normal conversation. It's not that his conversation uplifted us. In some ways it grounded us or brought us to some subtle feeling of negativity. Still, it established our right as a family to converse. It seemed difficult for him to have to daily create our identity. This difficulty was not indicated by his tone. He didn't speak sadly or with resignation but rather he appeared cheerful. It was more an air that overhung the rest of the evening.

Thinking about it now in retrospect, what helped create that air of heaviness was that he had nothing new to say day after day. He wasn't able to instill new hope, the possibility of change, into our lives. Even worse was that we never felt disappointed with him. He was mortal and we were too. Therefore, we were grateful for his predictability.

While telling this reminiscence to the devotee in Boston, I made the point that I saw myself carrying this mood with me into the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Whenever we would gather, especially informally with Prabhupāda in his room, I would initially feel that same silence. It's as if in that silence we were perched precariously on the edge of

the abyss. Did our lives *really* exist? Was anyone able to actually give us definition? Would the Swami be able to do that? I felt that same ache, that same silence that needed to be broken so that life could go on and existence affirmed or exposed as disappointing.

Of course, the difference between the two experiences is that when Swamiji spoke, it didn't create dread or emptiness in me. Actually, his breaking the silence held more at stake because Prabhupāda was leading us into a life of high aspirations to serve the all-blissful, eternal Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa. Prabhupāda was always so certain of himself, so realized, and what he had to say was so extraordinarily positive that it brought me to accept on faith everything he said.

I don't know if this experience I had is common to all families or was unique to my own. What I want to assert, however, is that Prabhupāda repeatedly broke the silence in a way that no one had ever done for me before, and he continued to do so whenever I heard from him. I can't tell you how encouraging this was to me. Even the fact that Prabhupāda so much contrasted my experience with my father was encouraging.

I also think it's a good example of how memories present us with a continuum between what we call our pre-Kṛṣṇa conscious life and our life "in Kṛṣṇa consciousness." It's not that when we join the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we completely isolate or break away from everything we were before. Rather, we become improved and eventually, we have

to learn to integrate our conditioning into positive devotional service. We didn't drop into this world as devotees of Kṛṣṇa; we became devotees through many blind and often painful experiences leading up to our meeting the pure devotee. Therefore, to be able to see the continuum has its place and its use in the furtherance of our spiritual lives.

Now living in separation from Prabhupāda and following his *vāñī*, I have the responsibility to allow him to break the silence every day by reading his books and chanting my rounds in his service. If I don't honor his voice in the form he gave to me in this life, then I actually become an agnostic. I won't be able to receive the full impression of Prabhupāda the way I did when I wandered into his room, the way I did when I presented him with my doubts, when I was submissive to his words. His words are still with us, however, and we ourselves can reach out to him and ask him to break the silence and the void in our lives, to fill us with his presence.

2

I started walking and had tiny flashes of different times I was with Prabhupāda. I noticed that they were mostly memories of memories rather than vivid impressions all on their own, but it still felt good to have them. Some of the memories that came were ones of taking walks with Prabhupāda. Since I was walking, I tried to physically place myself beside him. I wasn't afraid of Prabhupāda on walks. I knew he loved me. I also knew it was unlikely he would ask me to do something that would seem impossible to me. But it wasn't all intimacy. There was distance—philosophical questions and answers exchanged between guru and disciples. It's not that asking philosophical questions denies intimacy, but I mean that in his presence, there was no opportunity to feel doubt, not much opportunity to feel the wrong emotions, and little opportunity to give way to spiritual weakness. He was always there to protect us from all that, and we didn't always express the full range of our personalities.

While remembering Prabhupāda on walks, it occurred to me that I can't remember chanting with him. From that failure, I realized that expressions like, "We are required to know the inner form of the spiritual master," or, "Service in separation is more ecstatic"—maybe they are true in ways I had

not considered before. Maybe when Prabhupāda was present, we could only go a certain distance with him because of the circumstances. He was in the middle of creating a worldwide movement, blasting through the rock of ignorance and indifference. We were his deputies. And we were stunted in our intimacy with him because of our own lack of advancement. Maybe now we can feel more for him beyond the relationship that we had when he was here, but not in any way that negates or minimizes what we had, because what we had is the gateway to what we can have as we go further in spiritual consciousness.

I'm not speaking here about *rasa* or *bhāvas* or anything like that. Rather, I'm talking about love and trust, personal feeling, the freedom to be whole people in his presence and to accept service at his feet from that wholeness. That will lead to the relationship in the spiritual world. Prabhupāda is the way to faith and truth and conviction for me and for all of his followers. We need to build a bridge, therefore, between what we were and what we have become in his service.

3

There's a problem with calling up memories. That is, I remember things I used to like to do that are now forbidden or considered frivolous. For example, I loved to listen to jazz—Gerry Mulligan's baritone sax and the whole host of jazz giants whose records I owned. Before that, I listened to Elvis Presley. And I used to *love* to listen to Allen Freed's rock 'n' roll show on the radio. If my parents had told me not to, I would have done my listening secretly, I was that attached. What do I do with that stuff that comes up in my mind? It's true that for me, those moments were the only life I knew. But now I have more.

I've dealt with this question somewhat in *My Search Through Books*. There I admitted my love for certain authors and the experiences I had while reading their books, and I gave a short commentary showing how I thought each one of them taught illusion. In the last chapter I asserted that Prabhupāda's books were the ones I had been searching for. While it's true that I could have admitted more openly that I still maintain some semblance of an addiction for literature, the facts are basically true as I stated them there.

I have gone beyond trying to remember the books that influenced me in my life to remem-

bering the non-literary experiences that influenced me. For example, I admit to liking watermelon and to feeling the thrill of romance in my teenage years, but as I said at the beginning, there's a problem. That is, as a devotee, why bother remembering those things? Is it so important to find those authentic moments in life when we felt fully alive? What value do they have? And why not express our alive-ness now by selecting the Kṛṣṇa consciousness and eliminating the rest? Just leave it out, omit it.

Yes, that's a good question. Still, I want to assert that there are times when bringing up all that old stuff has value. I *want* to open it up sometimes and admit something. But what? That's what I'm exploring.

Of course, I can throw the philosophy over it like a smoke screen and then forget about it. Hey, I liked sense gratification and that was wrong, illusion. I was in the modes of passion and ignorance. When one is influenced by the mode of passion, that which he thinks is nectar becomes poison (which translates into pain). Face it. That's where you were at.

Okay. Well said. But you shouldn't think I'm looking to romanticize my experiences by remembering them here, and I certainly don't want to be foolish enough to be enamored by my own past.

And of course, if I feel so driven to remember the past, I can give the morals (more philosophy). After all, I was in *māyā* and I overcame it by Prabhupāda's grace. Isn't that what we want to get out of our past? Even if I were to make a list of all

my material pleasures, the conclusion is still going to be that I was in *māyā* tasting all that so-called enjoyment, pain, and illusion.

Well, throwing philosophy over it has its benefits, but I'm still wanting to ask myself, "What was it about jazz that was so attractive?" I don't mean about jazz itself so much, but about the nature of the self searching for solace in this world. What solace could it possibly have given me? What was *I* looking for there? And what does that have to do with what I am looking for now? Can I honestly say that the stimulation I was seeking was actually fulfilled when I heard my first *kīrtana*? And my second? And my third? Why, then, do I still find myself listening to the instrumentation of a *kīrtana* and being sensitive to the way different singers lead? Am I still being led by my fickle senses instead of the flow of devotion as I may have assumed?

And there's a deeper question to ask: is it really important to study the step-by-step approach to the goal, detail by detail? I think of Gopa-kumāra in Sanātana Gosvāmī's *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta*. His step-by-step process took him from planet to planet in both the material and spiritual worlds. Throughout his sojourn, he continued to chant his mantra to Madana-Gopāla. He was unable to feel full satisfaction anywhere until he arrived at the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa in Goloka Vṛndāvana. In minuscule, each of us, if we tell our stories, are trying to tell that story—how we are learning to develop attachment to Kṛṣṇa, how we are chanting the mantra Prabhupāda gave us, how we are working through the past

and moving into the future and giving up attachments, dovetailing, surrendering, coming to Kṛṣṇa. Doesn't marking the path along the way have cathartic value? After all, I gave up listening to Fats Domino and now hear Prabhupāda's *bhajan*s. I've moved forward. I no longer seek pleasure in matter but in Kṛṣṇa. That's got to be worth something.

Of course, there's also a danger in trying too hard to integrate past and present. *Māyā* has her ways of attracting the conditioned souls, and we shouldn't be titillated by what we were. I just read an essay that was published in 1924 in *The Harmonist* and was later reprinted in *Back to Godhead*. It starts off saying that of the two ways to preach, positive and negative, the negative is more influential. The article gives the example that Rāma's glories were increased more by Rāvaṇa than by Hanumān, and Kṛṣṇa's more glorified by Śiṣupāla and Jarāsandha than by the Yādavas. Although the article doesn't elaborate on this point, I understood that; because Kṛṣṇa has to demonstrate His supremacy over demons, He is therefore fully glorified even more than when His faithful devotees praise Him. Interesting concept.

Similarly, if I talk about something inauspicious of which I have nevertheless become free due to the power of Prabhupāda's mercy, then full credit goes to Prabhupāda. We can look at it in that way. We don't think about Hiraṇyakaśipu's atrocities and fall into *māyā*; we naturally take shelter of Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva. When we read of Rāvaṇa capturing Sītā, we don't become lusty to ourselves enjoy

Rāma's wife, but we meditate on Rāma. Everything we are and everything we have is meant to inspire us further in our willingness and desire to glorify God. And that means everything.

4

It's natural that we want to collect impressions from the times we managed to be Kṛṣṇa conscious. It also seems natural to want to preserve a record of our pain or anything else that proves to us we are alive and growing. Such memories and impressions form our dearest remembrances and we tend to take them with us over time.

There's an old adage that we live in the past and future but never in the present. "The past" doesn't have to mean hundreds of years ago; it can refer to our remaining stuck on what happened to us two minutes previously. Those who think about these things have an extra burden. They are aware that they are creating things by their activities and responses to life around them that will later reside in their memories.

I call it a burden, but it can also be a blessing. It gives you the power to be more selective about what you will keep and what you will discard. I think that's why people keep diaries. They live their present and then save it as past so they have something to sift through later.

I'm in Wicklow, staying in the attic room of Uddhava and Hare Kṛṣṇa dāśī. They live in an A-frame, and there is a skylight on the roof. I like to sit in the dark with that skylight open at 1:30 A.M.

Even on cloudy nights there is light through that window, and I like to have it be the only light by which I chant.

I also like to stand by that skylight during the day and look out to Hare Kṛṣṇa dāśī's garden. Yesterday I noticed I was standing there for no apparent reason. I'm not usually a person who does things for no reason, so I had to admit to myself that I get pleasure to see Uddhava's poly tunnels and vegetables on one side and his wife's beautiful flower gardens on the other— to see all the lush growth.

It also occurred to me that I feel as if I am storing this vision up for the times when I'm not here. Standing at the window in a semi-unconscious state, seemingly purposeless, I am already turning the present into the past and hoping it can help me.

Then I had another connected thought while I was standing by that skylight. I suddenly thought, surprised, that we will all die. Our children will grow up to see us die. Who will replace the woman who owns this garden? Who will pull the weeds and protect the pride of India tree?

Following that surprise was this one: I'll probably be one of the first to go. Then I realized that my wanting to turn present into past is my way of searching for coherence in a life of apparently disparate details. We move in the present with the past leaking—bursting—through us. It's 3:16 on August 9, 1996 and it will never be exactly that again.

Memories settle into the psyche and become wooden things we can lift out and look at as often as we like. Can we bore through the wood and come up with Kṛṣṇa conscious meaning?

5

I still carry with me both the memory of the Navy and the memory of my impotence against my father. I'm glad I don't face that same impotence anymore—that inability to speak up for my soul, to know who I am and what I want. I'm also grateful that I have a real well-wisher to guide me through.

Somewhat touchingly, and perhaps naively, Praḡhoṣa dāsa remarked, “Considering your close connection with your father from the material point of view, and given the strong possibility that he will go back to Godhead on the strength of being your father, what are your thoughts of him now?”

I call his question naive because how can I think my father will go back to Godhead just because I am his son? That only happens if you're a pure devotee, Praḡhoṣa, although it's sweet of you to think in this way. I doubt I can benefit my father much. Hey Dad, want to go back to Godhead? That means you'll have to become a Kṛṣṇa devotee. You think you can change? Oh, you want to know if they'll allow firehouse jokes and obscenities in the spiritual world? No, you'll have to leave those behind. You must know that by now, since you're dead. I bet you have a lot of new perspectives now. Poor Dad.

Your son wishes the best for you,
wishes you could get a new suit. Hey Dad, get
this—
I've got the truth and you're in error.
Hey Dad, who the hell do you think you are?
Dad, how wrong you were,
and how ignorant I was too.
Nothing to do now but go our separate ways
as two souls
and if we meet again
I hope to offer you the best of all possible gifts,
Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and maybe in another life
you'll be able to hear from me.
Oh, Dad, poor Dad . . .

6

Chanting in my First Street apartment and outdoors while sitting on the bench on the traffic strip, it occurred to me that I might be pretending. What did I expect? I was so new at it. At the same time, I had faith that the Swami was genuine. He was completely convinced. I might doubt what he said or question his logic when I talked with the others later, but in his presence, he held his own.

My old Lower East Side friends never understood what suddenly happened to me, how I became the Swami's man. They accused me of answering every question by referring to scripture. "That's a narrow-minded approach." But the Swami did it too. We in turn accused him of responding in that manner, telling him that original thought was where it was at.

"No, it isn't," he said, and although I don't remember the rest of the exchange, you can imagine how adequately he defended the *śāstra* and defeated us with his strong and unrelenting presence. He didn't budge.

Rather, he convinced us that the *Vedas* consisted of enough books to keep us reading for twenty-four hours a day for the rest of our lives. How did we move from fear of dogmatism and institutionalism to faith?

I can't actually remember. There must be a God.

7

He confessed his sins before the priests. He said he did stuff—slept with women, injured Pisces, fought with nieces, attacked mice, and injured a dog in the street. I didn't read properly and I tripped up the nouns. I killed many flies and never overcame my selfish habits. Hated and didn't repent.

O Lord, I was insincere
and never made amends
was
was and di-ed

Now I ought to stop this evasive writing and give
thanks for the memories
of Swamiji in his hat
and Joey reciting
more stories of what the
Swami did. He said to
Joe,
I'll dunk you in the ocean
of milk.
He said to Frank dāsa
Don't give the money back if
it was once donated.

He reminded us that we were afraid of Mr. Nair but he wasn't. "*Kṛṣṇa will protect us. Go through fire for Him!*" He taught us how to fight.

And he worshiped and preached God's glories.

I wish to be spared, but do I spare myself pains?
Do I preach His glories?

A Free-write Piece from—
*A Poor Man Reads
the Bhāgavatam, Volume 1*

Hog

Yeah, we know all about you in your tree hanging jock straps and your saffron cloth drying on the clothes line. We know the Ruru wasn't satisfied with my repentance. This can't go into a book or even a broad nook. You are too tired. Empowered to be the UF in a children's play, Johnny Wise's pink crepe paper dress caught on fire. His mom was overweight, his father slid off the roof he was repairing, and when he bumped his head he woke up to the old memory that he wanted to be an empowered saint. He went out and taught about the incarnations and memorized the activities of all forty-two Manus in a minute of Shakespeare.

Honey from a hive. Well, *miel* no more. May the curse of Nature Cure be on you to taste no more white-powdered goodies. We have other rations for the soldiers. Lenny Silverberg drew sordid lives from NYC streets—a man on crutches hitting a man with arm cast in fight over a whore's possessions while I slid down ten notches by reading Céline.

The empowered saint, the empowered ant, broadcast over village TV UF and UFO—the difference between them, the past (1970s in Boston), the present—me in Khargone with a lusty tongue but otherwise feet and desires immobilized.

(This can't be what you meant when you said after a *Bhāgavatam* lecture that one may switch to Kṛṣṇa consciousness in various ways. This is coming from snide, not contrite asserts.)

Balderdash wants to get back on track.

Kṛṣṇa will empower me. Pick up your marbles. If you take a nap, maybe a dream will come unsought and tell you something about your Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

This:

I don't want to be the incarnation of gluttony, and I don't want to come back to this miserable world of cancer and war just for some dainty eatables.

The term "hog" might be applied to me because I hog my share of printing and I live high on the hog.

It seems our gurus are given facility to be hog-gish. "They may give you big, big," said Śrīla Prabhupāda to a *sannyāsī* disciple, "but you should take only little, little."

Western countries hog the resources of the world—food, oil, everything. They are ignorant of the *Īsopaniṣad*'s principle of *īśavasya*. Keep to your quota and you won't be a hog. Know to Whom everything belongs. The U.S.A. should have the hog for an emblem.

Rūpa Gosvāmī describes *atyahāra*, eating or possessing too much, as unfavorable for devotional service. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura sings that we may use *lobha* in Kṛṣṇa's service. How is that? We can be

greedy to gather everything and give it to Kṛṣṇa. The *Bhāgavatam* also tells us not to hog our spiritual realizations. We should share them with others.

Lessons From the Road

Kṛṣṇa is kind. He allows us to think of Him or not as we desire. Often, unfortunately, we desire not to. We object to His power and want to claim some of His supreme control for ourselves. The more control we claim, however, the more distracted our lives become, and we lose that peaceful place inside ourselves where we would have practiced devotion. Nond devotees are gross about this, but devotees suffer from it too. One devotee wrote me that her life always seems to come down to the struggle for control. Then life gets so quick—"a whirlwind"—that she has no time to find satisfaction and taste in spiritual life. How to rectify?

Be simple and dependent on Kṛṣṇa. There is no other answer. O Lord, O Energy of the Lord, please engage me in Your service. O son of Mahārāja Nanda, Kṛṣṇa, I am Your eternal servitor.

*

Once an astrologer of the Bhṛgu *āśrama* told me that to rid myself of headaches, I should not say my spiritual master's name. I protested and the astrologer later told someone there had been a miscalculation and he withdrew his prescription.

Nowadays, however, I think that it is wise to restrain from too much use of the proper noun, "Prabhupāda." It's a little like Rādhā's name, not

something to cheapen by constant use. “Our spiritual master,” I sometimes say, or, “my Guru Mahārāja,” “our founder-ācārya”, even “he.” Others know what I mean.

*

We have to be conscious to perform *devotional* service. In his purport to Bg. 18.57, Prabhupāda gives a wonderful insight as to how we can think of Kṛṣṇa while engaged in duties. He says that we should act under the Lord’s direction. Then we can know, “I have been given this work by Kṛṣṇa.” This brings the concept of “eternal servant” out of the theoretical realm and into the practical.

And we should *think* devotionally. If we sweep the floor mechanically or with our minds in a day-dream state, that is useless. Kṛṣṇa doesn’t need the floor swept; He wants our devotion. Sometimes trying to find that devotion means taking a break from sweeping the floor. We have to find our attentive and loving recitation of the holy name, and we have to learn to pray.

The ability to know Kṛṣṇa to some extent by thinking about Him is perfected when it is dovetailed with authorized activity by the Lord. We need both: just thinking about Kṛṣṇa without serving Him is incomplete; duty done without Kṛṣṇa consciousness is practically useless. We must practice both.

*

Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to a *sannyāsī* disciple of his—who had thanked Śrīla Prabhupāda for awarding him *sannyāsa*—“You are competent to spend your life traveling and preaching as a *sannyāsī*.” I also travel and preach on his order. I hope to do this service for the rest of my life. Most of my preaching comes in the form of writing. Travel enhances the writing and frees me from entanglements and politics and staleness.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was always encouraging so even though we may be unable to describe the Lord’s glories, we should do whatever we can with devotion. I may be writing with little fire and no realization. When I praise, I tend to soon slide back into my own memories of attempted sense enjoyment. I can’t even whip myself with guilt.

This is the afternoon. Van parked in a grass field. There are some caravans parked nearby, but none of them seem occupied. One or two visitors like us. An older man and his wife are cutting the hedges. M. and I enjoyed long, hot showers produced by putting a coin in a machine.

*

I read of King Pṛthu and begin another reverie of my days as GBC man, how we tried to reprimand our own leaders but they lied to us and were incorrigible. There’s a verse here, 4.16.13, which I lectured on one morning in L.A. when we GBC were gathered for an emergency meeting to deal with Jayatīrtha. He had lied to us; no one knew he

was taking hallucinatory drugs to reach his “ecstasies.” Jayatīrtha and all the others . . . No wonder we’re still reeling from it. I hear things are completely different now at GBC meetings, that the devotees are cooperative and gentlemanly, but I got out. No one knows what actually happened to me; I don’t know myself. Anyway, no need to go back. It’s all in the past. I’m now free to wander and stop in an afternoon in a grassy field. But when I go to read about Mahārāja Pṛthu, it surfaces again. I think of the latest controversies. Everyone was satisfied by Mahārāja Pṛthu’s rule. Another Godbrother once said, as he neared the end of his powerful rule over his project, that he was not a Mahārāja Pṛthu. And myself, I am criticized for the silks I wore in those days and the meals I ate while ladies went out door-to-door to sell paintings.

*

Faithful, motive-less reading sessions are the root sustenance of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They are more essential or nourishing, more root work, than anything else. All spiritual inspiration comes from *śravaṇam*.

*

Yes, I thought this pain . . . is of the body and I am the soul. Finally you can’t even write. You never thought you’d be able to write so freely in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and similarly, you don’t think now

that one day you won't be able to write at all. It will be said, summed up, and others will not know what it means to you to not be able to write at all. Perhaps then if there's any remaining time, you can transfer your dedication to the chanting of the holy names.

*

We serve Kṛṣṇa and the devotees by our hearing of His words and our trying to enter them with devotion. As we do it ourselves, we can encourage others to do it too. In my case, I am a lecturer. Speaking the philosophy is a *sannyāsī*'s duty; it is also a *sannyāsī*'s duty to write. What to write? In honesty, I am forced to speak of my experience of emphasizing chanting and hearing in my life. Since I myself am not involved in rural development, training of ISKCON members, community or temple organization, public affairs, book distribution, etc., I can't advocate these services to others from my own experience. Neither do I get into controversies or try to push causes. Therefore, I try to push the cause of *bhakti* itself and the need to dedicate our lives to Kṛṣṇa without falling prey to *māyā*. I realize that those other services are vital to the success of the movement, but it does not seem wrong to me that I and some other *sannyāsīs* and devotees do not concern ourselves with that but become absorbed in our own practices. In this way, we become a resource for others—for busy householders struggling to make money and maintain

family life, and for pro-active managers. We remind everyone to remember Kṛṣṇa by *śravaṇam kīrtanam*. Thus we preach to the family of devotees.

Poetry

Just Visiting

In this van
I hide. The day
is hot but I'm a cool guy
hiding out,
in courtyard nestled, the
buildings on either side inhabited
by bright and gentle and innocent
young devotees of ISKCON
whose authorities tell them
chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and if Satsvarūpa comes
(or someone in his category)
give him a nice reception—he
may use my room and phone
but don't expect him to fire
you up so much for book
distribution. For that you
need me.

The Cloud of Unknowing

I chant the Lord's names
as I walk Saratoga State Park.
I know what the
campers don't know:
not to sizzle meat
on a barbecue or to hunt deer.
I know better than to
attempt enjoyment by diving into the pool
beneath the waterfall. I won't
attend the New York City
Ballet, whose summer home is here.

Still, I don't know God,
can't see Him or love Him—
not yet. I'm not finished with
attachment to the body as self.
I become disappointed and focus on
pain when my ankle gives out
on a short walk through the woods.
I finger my beads, chanting
God's names,
but not knowing,
not yet.

A Good Walk

“Did you have a good walk?”

“Yeah.”

The tops of pines are like
the finger gesture
that vicious people make to hurt you,
but it also looks nonhuman,
like a star,
a green prickly top.
That’s outside the window.
In here I study books
telling of the *sanātana* world.

I had a good walk but
would you like to hear about
Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī’s sadness,
how he could not
keep the vision of serving Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa
always before his eyes, how
he laid on the bank of Rādhā-kuṇḍa and cried?

My walk?

Cows in a meadow. Stopping by a pasture gate,
looking at the water running over rocks,
murmuring regulative mantras,
so comfortable I don’t even notice my body
in Wellington boots and green raincoat
in a world where no one sees me except
a startled white goat, some cows,
and all I saw of the hare was its
rear leg as it flashed across my path.

Teaching When Neither Of Us Are Looking

If I don't fall asleep or
 fall off the chair, and if I
 don't forget to be who I am and
 be guided by *sāstra* always
 (alert but not mad enough to
 cut my own throat or someone else's—)
 If I write with Seymour's Miss Overman
 in mind
 and Yadupriyā dāśī and Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma dāśa—
 but wait!
 I better forget them while writing this poem
 or it will be derailed by the compassion
 of a priest listening to confession.

Dear disciples, the best thing I can do for you
 is to remember the nice feeling I had while
 hearing
kṛṣṇa-kathā and to sneak in
 teachings when neither of us are looking—
 Oh! let it land
 right between our eyes—
 that same talk about transmigration through
 the eight million species, or any
 drop from the ocean of *bhakti*.

Hearing From Prabhupāda

My lecture on the *gopīs* as teachers
 for all humanity got
 rave reviews from Madhumaṅgala dāsa.
 Our saffron cloth flutters on
 the clothes line.
 Birds with Italian names chirp—
 it's 7 P.M.—are they *still* working on that house,
 those builders?
 I don't feel myself enough filled
 with Prabhupāda's teachings
 (although my belly is full of
 hot, honeyed milk).
 But I'm not full, not profound, not devoted
 enough. When I collect thoughts it's about
 things
 like how my dentures pinch my gums or
 how suddenly the daisies, like tulips,
 close at night, and Italy has rich
 grass.

O Prabhupāda, let me hear!
 Just yesterday I heard you say,
 "Someone asked me, 'Have you seen Kṛṣṇa?'
 I replied, *Who has not seen Kṛṣṇa?*
Everyone sees Kṛṣṇa,"
 I heard you say this, Prabhupāda, but then
 my attention faded and I was lost.

Just that much—that everyone
 sees Kṛṣṇa all the time—

came back in a flash. What was that?
What else did I miss? It's on the tip of
my pen.

Let me keep hearing
his sustaining voice, his expressions
worth meditating upon:

“When I say Kṛṣṇa, I mean God.”

Confidential

My God is everywhere—
in the air, in the pillar,
under the fan,
in the whir-whir session,
in the perfect book
Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.
His smiling face
is seen in Chapters
29 to 34
and His flute in 21.
My God is yours but
you know Him only as
August Preceptor,
White-bearded Sistine,
Rage of Almighty,
God at Death.
I know Him
only as I've heard
from my spiritual master—
as Kṛṣṇa the Supreme,
who plays with His dearest
devotees
but I can't tell you 'cause
you're faithless.

In Vṛndāvana

Back and forth he walks the long roof
 I hope he can pay attention to the names.
 Or more honestly, I'm curious whether he
can pay attention. I know I can't.
 Six enemies: lust, anger, intoxication,
 illusion, envy, and fear attack me,
 and plan-making. Maybe other devotees
 are doing better.

Rādhe-Kṛṣṇa, Rādhe-Kṛṣṇa, Rā-dhe!
 Another *āśrama*, this singer an oldish
 man. There's no place in the world like this.

American poets—
 too raunchy, too sophisticated, don't value
 Kṛṣṇa consciousness, pure souls, or the mode of
 goodness. I can't understand half their
 poems and some I wouldn't want to.
 Strange to think of them in Vṛndāvana and then
 to blink, hear again that *āśrama*, and
 turn to this page.

Spiritualized Dictionary

Axial

“Having the characteristics of or resembling an axis. Around an axis, in the direction of an axis, or along the axis. Extending the direction parallel to the main axis of the cyclo-hexane or similar cyclic structure, or characterized by bonds extending in this manner. Distinguished from equatorial chemical definition.”

Comes from the word “axis.” The axis and allies in World War II, the axis of demons.

Of course, circular things have profound meanings. Shooting out from the center of the circle, the axis of the circle, the hub of the circle is where everything comes from. Of course, that’s Kṛṣṇa. By meditating on words in this way, even mundane dictionary words, we can always arrive at Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet.

Like the other meaning of the word “axis”: “a deer of India and other parts of southern Asia having reddish-brown antlers and a white spotted body.” I’ve never seen an axis deer, but I have seen the beautiful *nīlagavya*, the blue deer at Govardhana. I was sitting with Bhūrijana Prabhu and Dhanurdhara Mahārāja in a small grove reading something about the hill when I looked up and saw them. They’re a rare sight, something to treasure and remember always in the mind. I can’t always live at Govardhana, but I can go there still in my mind by the grace of those deer and this word “axis.”

Mongus

“Rotting.” I remember that woodcut someone did once of the barn at Gitā-nāgarī, and the stylized version of an ox. They put it on T-shirts and you still see devotees wearing them. I wonder what state that barn is in now. Is it mongus? Everything rots according to the force of inevitable time—my books, my body, drying out, decaying, then getting soggy, drying out, rotting like compost. You see it with very old people, how their flesh hangs and sags and dries, and if they give it intensive care, it will last a little longer. In the end, they use embalming solution to preserve the semblance of full-bodied, well-oiled health.

Just think of all the things rotting in this world. How long can the Sistine Chapel hold out? And look at the Sphinx with its weather-worn face, or the pyramids in Egypt, the Nile itself, the land—all gone at the blinking of an eye.

But why look so far afield? What about one Satsvarūpa dāsa?

Thoughtfully, headachy, rocking back and forth, I’m thinking it over. The brain moves two inches toward facing death and we consider it deep pondering. Big arms, heavy thought. We’re really such pea heads. Look, Brooklyn College is toppling over. Is that where I claim to have gained all my knowledge? The Walt Whitman Auditorium is cracking. It’s finished. St. Bridgette’s Tower, even Tompkins Square Park. Finished. Get it all the hell out of our minds, because it’s dead.

Quartpot

“A vessel holding a quart, especially an Australian tin vessel used for cooking and as a drinking cup.”

Can you drink a quart of water at night? One man went to Milton Erikson and said that all his life he had had trouble getting up in the morning. He slept till 11 A.M. The therapist told him to drink a quart of water before he went to sleep and then he'd have to get up. It's almost laughable, such a cut-through practical suggestion rather than to study the man's psychology. And it worked. It worked.

I wish I could come up with an idea like that to cut through my headaches. The therapist would say, “What brings on headaches?”

“Meetings.”

“Then don't go to meetings.”

“I *have* to go to meetings.”

“No, you don't. Or if you do, then you have to accept your headaches.”

Bang, bang—there's construction going on out there, hammering and sawing not far from this house near the airport in Trinidad. It's hot. I don't even need to wear a T-shirt, but I do anyway to hide my money pouch against my skin. More headaches.

Or to cut through in prayer.

“How can I pray to Kṛṣṇa in my own way?”

“Don't be dull.”

That's a harder one for the therapist, probably. Who can cut through to the deeper layers of self where resides our love for Kṛṣṇa and our true

appreciation for the transcendental world of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*? We do inherently have the ability to relish spirit. “When, oh when will that day be mine? When my offenses ceasing, taste for the holy name increasing, when in my heart will Your mercy shine?”

Reward

“Something given in return for good, or sometimes evil, done for services or merit or the like.” “Great is your reward in heaven.” That’s when it’s used as a noun.

As a verb, “reward” means “to give a reward.” As a reward for our service to Śrīla Prabhupāda, you have somehow received the position of spiritual master. I was going to say you got appointed, but that’s a buzz word because some people say we weren’t appointed, that we misunderstood what he said. If it was a misunderstanding, it certainly wasn’t something underhanded, as some other people think. We were just as covered over as the next guy.

We decided to be the elite, to be supreme among our Godbrothers. It seems that it must have been a genuine lack of humility, but maybe not. I think of *The Bead Game*, Herman Hesse’s novel, and how gradually the hero took higher and higher positions until he was the head guru of the mythical institution. He took it upon himself as a duty. It was that simple.

Later others may say, “You fell for it because you wanted to be worshiped. We washed your feet and you accepted it. Now you must go to hell.” Upon

hearing that, the guru might protest, “But I accepted it as *duty*. You assured me that you didn’t see me as proud.”

Life often backfires. We have so little vision and can’t usually see how what we are doing now will turn out in the future. The only safe thing we can do is not to live at all and to stay anonymous, but that’s not the devotional way.

Reward, reword—reword how we define guru in this institution. Re-analyze our too-easy rubber-stamping of *mahā-bhāgavata*.

Yes, Prabhupāda rewarded his disciples, not with material gain but with more duty, heavier duty, nothing soft or simple. Each reward included so much potential liability and difficulty.

And later so much mud-slinging. Well, mud needed to be slung. I did it too and felt the acridity of what we all went through together.

At this point in time, I will say this, however: it’s not fair to such a complicated history, which developed gradually from our own collective *anarthas*, to single out any individual and hold him or her up for exclusive blame. We had institutionalized the misunderstanding and were suffering group and individual grief at Prabhupāda’s disappearance. We were groping, we were foolish, we were juvenile, and we were wrong. We tried something and we failed at it, and as we all shared in the creation of the mistake, we all share in its painful rewards.

Trail

A simple word. A trailing plant. “Ivy has sent trails down the steep banks.” “1. A running ornament representing leaves or tendrils, as in Gothic molding. 2. A trailing arrangement of flowers or spray. 3. The rear part of a gun carriage that rests on the ground when the piece is unloaded. Trail arms. 4. Something that follows or moves along on the path, as in being drawn along. A train. 5. The transitory luminous streak in the sky produced by the passage of a meteor.”

“Ah, the skivving trail.” (Thomas Hardy) Prabhu-pāda blazed a trail and left it for us to follow. We’re on the trail, combing it, looking for direction.

Imagine a trail in a state park, three hundred miles through the mountains, the trees blazed with orange arrows so hikers don’t get lost. The *bhakti* trail has been well beaten, although it’s not without its tortuous rises and heart-thumping skids. We’re walking that trail and we know what we’re supposed to do: keep walking. Our reaching the destination is not more difficult than our ability to follow the blazes.

Some say we can get lost even on the *bhakti-mārga*. I know that’s true even walking around Gītā-nāgarī’s forests, what to speak of something we have to traverse over lifetimes. The funny thing about the *bhakti-mārga*, however, is that we can’t get lost if we follow the blazes. We may *think* we’re lost, but usually we come to the realization that we have not become lost on the *bhakti-mārga* but that we

only took a side trip down one of the mental trails. An image springs to mind: bogged down in the entrails.

All these mental trails will one day be vanquished when we begin to follow the dust trail leading to Vṛndāvana.

Unsportsmanlike

Adjective. “Not sportsmanlike. Not characteristic of or exhibiting good sportsmanship.”

It refers to a code of behavior. We’re expected to be good sports. That means we should play by the rules, respect others, not take undue advantage over others, and lose gracefully without maliciousness.

I remember a reporter once wrote an article in which he called the German soccer team “cynical.” The reporter said that the Italians and the Brazilians played real soccer because they were enthusiastic and loved the game. The Germans, however, were cynical. I don’t know exactly what he meant or how that translates into action on the field, but I would suppose it means the Germans conserve their energies and calculate for victory. In sports, that can border on cheating.

I remember once we were playing a baseball game, our Great Kills team in a rough area in the south of Staten Island called Tottenville. There was little adult supervision there and these rough kids would use dirty tactics. I remember one time—their team was at bat—our pitcher was preparing to throw the ball to the catcher and one of their

coaches called out from the third base line saying, "Let's see the ball here. Throw the ball over here. Let's see the ball." Our pitcher threw it and the coach ducked out of the way. The ball went flying. Then the coach pretended he wasn't a coach, but a heckler. He heckled the pitcher to throw the ball and the pitcher did, so it's a wild ball. Now the man on base can run home because the pitcher just lost the ball. That was such dirty cheating, but there was no umpire. Unsportsmanlike. Not good.

Devotees don't play sports, but they should cultivate sportsmanlike behavior among one another. We all have our free will to cheat or not, but if we are striving for spiritual consciousness, we should play fair. Kṛṣṇa is the greatest cheater; we can't cheat others to attain Him without being cheated ourselves. And that includes the nondevotees. Of course, Kṛṣṇa Himself sometimes cheats on the battlefield, but although we relish His example, we are not qualified to follow it. After all, He's infinite; He's always going to win in one way or another. And the result of His cheating benefits everyone.

Being unsportsmanlike includes being unkind. As devotees sharing a path, we should also share the advantage. We are all going after the same goal, Kṛṣṇa; there is no ultimate competition. He has room for us all and His heart is certainly big enough to accommodate everyone. A devotee who understands that is able to experience compassion and to share Kṛṣṇa's magnanimity. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in the Fourth Canto of the *Śrīmad-*

Bhāgavatam: “The Kṛṣṇa conscious movement is spreading now all over the world, and sometimes I think that even though I am crippled in many ways, if one of my disciples becomes as strong as Dhruva Mahārāja, then he will be able to carry me with him to Vaikuṇṭhaloka.” Even the spiritual master wants his disciples to outdo him. Therefore, those practicing devotional service cannot lose.

Xylulose

“It’s a ketose sugar, $C_5H_{10}O_5$, of the pentose class that is formed by isomerization and where defective transketolase has led to thiamine deficiency. Like ribulose, it plays a role in carbohydrate metabolism.”

Geez. We’re lucky if we can pronounce it. This just shows our general ignorance of science, especially chemistry. God, Chemistry! How I hated it! I went to a community college and Chemistry was compulsory. I got As in all my subjects, but in Chemistry I got a D. The teacher was a real space cadet, too. Probably he was a lab technician in his off hours. He goofed off and we goofed off with him. It was really scandalous that he didn’t teach Chemistry considering he was getting paid for it. All we were expected to do was to study the textbook and take the exam, but it would have been nice if the professor had been interested in teaching it. Most years we took Geology. All the Liberal Arts students took Geology because it was the easiest science course to pass. Those required classes seem

silly—forcing people to study things for which they have no inclination.

Anyway, I remember going into the lab and trying to make whatever reaction was supposed to happen happen. I rarely succeeded. I get solace from hearing Sadāpūta Prabhu say that even big scientists don't always end up with the expected results when they apply the experiments. Often, they fudge it. They try a few times to make it come out as it is supposed to, and if they are still unsuccessful, they agree to say that the experiment worked despite the facts.

Understanding chemistry is not part of my makeup. The material constituents, the elements broken down and discussed in terms of building atoms and molecules and producing new elements by mixing this with that—what has it got to do with my life? Or the chemical engineering of modern technology. I'm probably more like one of those people who would think, "I want to live a natural life. I don't want chemicals." Chemicals in that sense refer to food additives and things they put in our clothes or air or water. We're right to vilify those chemicals since they poison the body. Still, thinking of chemicals as *only* that is the nonscientific mind speaking. There's no such thing as life without chemicals since our body is composed of them. I guess I'm just not a Sāṅkhya-yogī.

In Search of the Grand Metaphor

Introduction

It's interesting to think (1) that the poet's job is to write of actual things and persons in his life and to write of them truthfully, and yet (2) to discover an image "large enough to embody the whole knowable world" about him. This image is supposed to be worked by the author to pull together isolated observations and to give "profundity" to everyone's experience. Such an image (or theme or allegory) cannot be chosen arbitrarily. Once it has been chosen, it has to be worked with the poet's full heart and endeavor.

For me, this means working in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or at least working while seeking Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and it means it should inspire or instruct readers.

A poet usually discovers such an image in the course of writing, but he's even more fortunate if he can discover it beforehand. Readers may not always understand exactly what the poet is doing as the poet enters deeper and deeper into his image until his work is fulfilled. For example, William Carlos Williams says that the city in his poem *Patterson* is "imaginatively conceived just like a man." He then mixes different elements—early history of the city, his own experience there, his obscure, poetic art, etc. I could never understand his poem except in a fragmentary way, but for

Williams (and his sensitive, sympathetic readers), he achieves a wholistic release from incoherence and gagged silence.

Kafka's work provides another example, especially his books, *The Metamorphosis*, *The Castle*, and *The Trial*. In *The Metamorphosis*, he imagines that a man—someone like himself—is transformed into a roach. Then he takes the reader through the man's experiences. In *The Castle*, Kafka imagines an elite, bureaucratic government that assigns (or doesn't assign) a man to a task that he cannot learn much about—all this with obvious overtones of metaphysical reality, the unknown, the unfriendly, and maybe the nonexistent Absolute. In *The Trial*, Kafka's hero, K., is accused of a crime, but he cannot discover with what he is charged. In these two later novels, Kafka uses a fictional metaphor—something large yet simple, personal to the author yet easily identifiable to the readers. Kafka pours his passionate self-expressive art into the form of allegories.

For myself, I'm not interested these days in fiction or narrative. I prefer more the method whereby a poet pulls together isolated, local observations into some kind of "Patterson"-type image.

When my Godbrother, Jayādvaitya Swami, read the first volume of *Journal and Poems*, he commented that it served me the way a large house with many rooms serves a man with multiple interests: I could record all sorts of things all in one place. But I can't keep writing volumes upon volumes of *Journal and Poems*. As William Carlos Williams writes,

“Let him beware lest he turn to no more than/ the writing of stale poems . . . ” The process has brought me to my search for a grand metaphor.

Chapter One

Chant One Round

Explanatory Note:

What follows is not “thoughts while chanting *japa*.” It will be different than that. Dear reader, you’ll understand more what I mean when you read on.

FIRST MANTRA

Hare Kṛṣṇa—“Hare” and “Kṛṣṇa” are two words that go together and open the mantra and the round. If we could only say them sincerely and surrender, we’d accomplish our whole purpose. We don’t have to be like Mārkeṇḍeya Ṛṣi and live to see the annihilation. We don’t have to suffer through all the Kali-yugas and float on the waves of partial devastations until we finally reach the goal of Lord Gaurāṅga’s safe lotus feet. But we don’t seem to be so intelligent, at least not intelligent enough to immediately finish our business and get out. Therefore, for the time being we dream stories and live lives. And we always chant Hare Kṛṣṇa no matter where we are. That will save us from disaster. Hiraṇyakaśipu said, “Since I am eternal and time is eternal, I will go on practicing austerities life after life until I attain my goal.” His goal was

foolish—he wanted Lord Brahmā's post—but his determination was admirable. We chant to attain pure love of Kṛṣṇa, pure devotional service. Remember the tiny bird who tried to empty the ocean by taking drops of water in her beak? When Garuḍa was impressed with her determination and agreed to take up her cause, she was successful.

O holy names, please forgive us. Please hear our plea. We are, for now, chanting sporadically in a wilderness of names and places and experiences. Many things still interest us (and bewilder us) instead of the One Supreme Interest. Please hear our call and honor our request.

I know, I don't have to instruct the holy name. He knows what He is doing. I just need to be patient.

Hare Kṛṣṇa—I admit it was a dream and I have forgotten most of the details, but there were about six of us uniformed, living in Santo Domingo. I had a sudden intuition that the police were going to arrest us, so I fled with two companions. We ran and ran—on the lam. We disguised ourselves as American hippie tourists. I decided to keep a diary of our adventures, but I realized that the details would incriminate us if we were caught. I omitted some details. Then on my little group's behalf, I decided we should leave Santo Domingo and go to America. That meant abandoning our cause in Santo Domingo. It meant our cause would become each of our lives, not something larger than that. I decided it was still worthy, and in America, with our

identities unknown, I could keep a diary filled with details.

Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa—There are two life moments I wanted to save from yesterday, but they're already getting old and stale. One had to do with a man in the arrivals lounge at Heathrow airport. We were sitting quietly, resting between flights. This man was oblivious to his fellow passengers, it seemed, because he made a phone call right from his easy chair. It was 6 A.M. and it was obvious that he woke up a business friend. They talked strategy, he with a civilized British accent. I never looked at his face.

The other incident had to do with the carrots Madhu bought at an open market. They were stubby, locally grown carrots with bits of earth still clinging to them and thick green leaves. They were real carrots, not like the ones you see in the supermarket.

I want to honor these two “stories.” Do I have to apologize that that's all there is to them—an unknown British businessman and some carrots? When I experienced them, they felt important.

The words “Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa” signify Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī crying for Kṛṣṇa in separation. “Hare Kṛṣṇa” signify Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa together. “Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa”—Rādhā calling for Kṛṣṇa. “Hare Rāma” is Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa together; “Hare Hare,” Kṛṣṇa alone, calling for Rādhā. I think this interpretation of the *mahā-mantra* comes from Jīva Gosvāmī. I can't think of it when I chant. It seems I never think of any of the dynamics of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, nor do I

feel any of it when I chant. But I believe that the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is *cintāmaṇi* and can yield whatever my heart desires. I hope He will give even what my poor heart does not yet desire, and I pray to Him to do so.

Hare Hare—Here we are. Did I abandon reading the nectar? I remembered that I first have to deserve before I desire. So here I am, living with interruptions, but mostly quiet.

Here is an incident telling you how we got here.

His car had a cracked windshield, muddy interior, and the seats were covered by a shaggy stuff—a farmer's car. His brother-in-law, big-bellied, white-hair and skin, big knuckles, has seven children, a noticeable jerky limp, and mud on his shoes.

We chatted to pass the time.

I already told you a little about the arrivals lounge at Heathrow. There are numerous other incidents. Yesterday when my headache finally cleared, I paced the upstairs floor and chanted *japa* for an hour and a half, counting my beads—Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. Just now I read the verse where Lord Viṣṇu speaks to Durvāsā Muni and tells him, “Saints are My heart. Because they are always thinking of Me, I am also in their hearts.” If we offend Kṛṣṇa's pure

devotee, the Lord feels pain in His heart. Offenses to Vaiṣṇavas are serious.

These things pass through my mind. Can I connect them or bring them together? Omit what's not favorable? Perhaps I should just add something favorable to it. Impurities pass through like a twig or dirt that is churned along in a waterfall. The best thing—to be taken seriously—is Prabhupāda's statement that we should increase Lord Kṛṣṇa's happiness by bringing more souls to Him. That is His infinite desire. He wants more loving servants because they increase His bliss in Goloka Vṛndāvana. Therefore, a pure devotee like Śrīla Prabhupāda has no desire but to serve the Lord's happiness. When we chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, we should please think of how we can engage in preaching.

Hare Rāma—Sixteen times 108 equals 1,728 holy names. Since I am pairing the names, I have eight units per round. Therefore, I'll have to write 864 reflections or vignettes. I could do it quickly in a word or two, but I don't want to write to fill space.

A fellow might drive up in his car (as one did today) and demand in quick loud peasant speech, "What are ya doin'?" I might say I'm not just filling space. I'm recalling when life is demanding or vivid or touches me. I am . . . thinking how my spiritual master wants us to preach and how this writing may be construed as fulfilling that command.

Hare Rāma—I fingered and rubbed the bead between two of my fingers. This is what came—the

little video screen in front of each passenger in business class. One guy was watching the last moments of a Western as the plane descended onto Heathrow. A stunt man in a white shirt jumped from a stagecoach onto the racing horses. On another screen, one man was pushing another off a cliff. Another screen showed a car rolling over and over on its back. Stunt men raced stock cars and turned corners so fast that the whole cars skidded. Movies need action to keep viewers watching. I am a good person. Therefore, I avoided watching any movies except the few scenes I just related to you. Even so, here those scenes are on my mental video screen.

The *Art of Prayer* claims that mechanical recitation of the Jesus prayer is almost useless: "Even though we are reciting the Jesus prayer, it is still necessary for us to keep the thought of God; otherwise the prayer is dry food. It is good that the name of Jesus should cleave to your tongue, but with this, it is still possible not to remember God at all, and even to harbor thoughts which are opposed to Him. Consequently, everything depends on conscious and free turning to God, and a balanced effort to hold oneself in this." Theophan the Recluse goes on to say, "The essential, indispensable element in prayer is attention. Without attention, there is no prayer. True attention, given by grace, comes when we make our heart dead to the world." Aye, there's the rub. The world still lives in us.

Hare Rāma means, “O Lord, O energy of the Lord, please engage me in Your service.” O Rāma, please attract me to Your pleasure pastimes. Please teach me that there is no pleasure in the happiness of tongue and belly and sleep (even with a hot water bottle by my side) and dreams and leaving the world of dreams. Please teach me the higher taste whereby I can leave this world of illusion and woe. I don’t want to go through life chanting mechanical rounds and stopping as soon as I finish my sixteen.

Rāma Rāma—I went next door to chant a round with Madhu. As I began, the project of writing 864 vignettes of directed free-writing evaporated. “It isn’t organic,” I told myself. “I don’t want to do it.” I was selling it to myself as a metaphor, but now I don’t buy it. It’s just what I *don’t* want—confining and contrived. I want something natural. Let the metaphor find *me* rather than me submit to the metaphor beforehand.

Besides, the holy name deserves . . . what I mean to say is, the holy name . . . I mean to say, I found myself not able to relax and write what comes. Kept thinking what will look good and express the theme, “Life is varied and demands our attention. Therefore, when we go to chant *hari-nāma*, we think instead of our worldly particulars.” Still, we want to pray. It’s a good theme, actually, but to line up the words of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra into pairs and say stuff like a parrot or a pet dog after each

pair, “Rāma Rāma,” is contrived and doesn’t let me sing. At least I’ll finish this mantra.

Hare Hare—Tomorrow I’ll chant with no strings attached. I will write outside the boundaries of this game. But it is a serious truth with which I still have to contend: when I go to chant, I think of many things and I cannot dismiss it all by saying, “It’s *māyā*.” Rectification of this dilemma will have to come in another way aside from writing through it. I need God’s grace and pure chanting. Call for it (and not just as a literary exercise). Please bless me.

Chapter Two

Song as Metaphor

Here's another metaphor: Conceive the world as a round ball or a tree. (I'm only kidding.) How about a series of poems? That's not a metaphor. No, but it's like—song. Song as a way to express Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It's not a straight message as in prose; therefore, it's an image. You are saying in effect, "My song is my message. Through it, I'll convey what I cannot ordinarily say." Okay, let's try.

Song #1

Revolutionary doubts
I slipped him a news clipping on
religious violence.
But my kind of poems are like
cellos and oboes, words that
are not yet claimed by me—

We walked (fifteen years ago)
in Central Park and I was the new
guru for the whole of New York.
Batches of young people escorted
me and I commented on life accord-
ing to Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy, imitating

sincerely what Prabhupāda had said.
 They all believed I was a bona fide
 guru of ISKCON. Now 90% of
 them *at least* are gone to me and
 many gone to *bhakti-yoga*.
 Whose fault? Proudly and
 with wounded feelings I say,
 “At least *I’m* still here treading
 the path.” And Rāma Rāya dāsa, and
 where is Sevā dāsī and Pārtha Dhanurdhara?
 Yeah, he’s here. Life has been
 hard for all of us. The changes.

Jackie Kennedy Onassis walked in
 that park too. She’s dead now.
 Prabhupāda walked there and
 he is not dead.
 Back to words.

Old times in jazz clubs I paid
 to see and hear immortals like
 Thelonius Monk at the Five Spot.
 I don’t remember it now.
 Or Sonny Rollins after his two-
 year sabbatical, supposed to be
 like homegrown religious, his head
 shaved in a Mohican-like patch
 down the middle. A reviewer said Rollins
 doesn’t play well anymore, just his
 personal presence is awesome.
 A friend said Rollins “has gone
 to the happy hunting ground and

he's sending back
messages." Or is this a forerunner of
what was to happen to me?

These are lines. I don't know
where they are going. They're like the car out
of control in the amusement section
of Al Deppe's, a pre-computer video
game for a nickel. You drove or steered
a toy car cross country and it was
counted against you how many times
you went off the road.

Is that a metaphor for Life?

I mean, how far can you go toward
Vaikuṇṭha? We could make a game—
you stopped at Svargaloka or you
fell down to Patāla.

They could make a game called
"Reincarnation." They probably already
have.

There, I've done it, some Kṛṣṇa conscious writing. Our foundation is always Kṛṣṇa conscious acts, and they begin with *śravaṇam kīrtanam*. When our lives are thoroughly Kṛṣṇa conscious, we won't have to run to the book like a plane out of fuel. We'll read, but spontaneously. We'll live and breathe in story and reading, in *Bhāgavatam* and song, and it will all be interrelated and harmonious.

And we won't feel guilty that we're writing or striving for art. We'll let ourselves spend time on it, knowing that the art needs it. "Art" isn't a dirty

word. Giotto's angels and his St. Francis frescoes are devotion. We need Kṛṣṇa conscious art. Call it preaching—a more recognizable and accepted term. To be proficient, daring, alive at this form of preaching, we need to give it time. It's a project we pour ourselves into. It's no different than a seamstress staying up all night to sew a dress for the Deity or a traveling *saṅkīrtana* party selling books night after night. People may criticize them—maybe their technique is too rough—but Prabhupāda wanted the books distributed and they know that.

I've brought up these examples to establish a context for ISKCON readers (condescendingly?) and for myself—to know I'm on safe ground.

Now to go forward with my metaphor, "song."

These free-versers are song, these memories, containers, and words that break out.

I don't want to hear
 bad ass talk in this place.
 I walk through the room aggressively
 because I don't know what I'm doing.
 The slow-down and take-your-pulse
 school.

Song #2

Once, Red Riding Hood.
Sheriff. Kṛṣṇa. I saw the words
“Hare Kṛṣṇa” suddenly on the page of
a James Wright poem. It made no
sense at all to me. I couldn’t figure
whether it was favorable or not—
in his brain it certainly wasn’t like
chanting the holy names, but there
it was, due to Prabhupāda
and the preaching of the devotees.
It went like this:
“A while later,
Hare Krishna, his cigar, his piano,
and his orchestra
Forgive me for giving them cancer.”
I could quote the surrounding lines
but it wouldn’t make it any clearer.
Let me be clear.

Hare Kṛṣṇa forgives you, Jim,
but you can’t give Him cancer.
You get that on your own and I’m
not cursing you, it’s karma.
I’m a simplistic kid of Hare Kṛṣṇa.
You never knew me.
A bitch, a penny for your thoughts
I too can go obscure in a poem
but when I say “Hare Kṛṣṇa,”
I mean God’s names and
all becomes clear.

Song #3

The poem is the metaphor.
 God is light, is love and
 is always a Person.

What I can't mean to say
 I sing. You bebop it too,
 like jazz, no message,
 joy of words outpour—
 your message in sound and rhythm,
 to be alive is itself a message.
 You ache and complain and want to
 sing through it, that's what
 they call the blues.
 Trouble and shout and moan
 and I'm alive
 is the song.

But in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, may we
 do that? Don't ask me.
 But can we ask sages and *śāstra*?
 No time for it.
 But I say live KC always and then
 when you sing, it will be no harm
 if you don't run to the book to
 consult, "Has any devotee sung
 like this yet?" Deities in Navadvīpa,
kīrtanas in Navadvīpa, temples and devotees,
 the learned tell us stories when
 we are on *parikrama*.
 The Lord advented here.

And I sat there, bitten by a mosquito
on my red-marked ankle and
I sat there and this song is
boiling and welling in me,
this very song.

Jazz men of Memphis and
Detroit. Me sitting in the Yoga-
pīṭha hall before 100 devotees and
I say, "I feel alien to all this
religious culture. I'm just a guy from
Staten Island. Does anyone here know
Staten Island? You've heard of the
Staten Island ferry?"
They stare, Bengalis blink and an
American lady laughs.
Listen girls . . .

I didn't say that at the Yoga-pīṭha,
but now I do.
Gaura-Gadādhara is the intimate Deity,
he said,
and for the masses, it's Gaura-Nitāi.
Well, give me the mercy of
Gaura-Nitāi and
Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, Godruma.
Give me the mercy to sing
the stones and weeds at Godruma,
I wanted freedom from headache and
confinement. I did want
to speak *paramparā*
but not always the same old thing.

If only I could loose my tongue
 with something legitimate
 start funny and odd and then
 from the heart
 glorify Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda
 not in obligatory fashion.
 Do you understand?
 The song says what I cannot.

It's night. Madhu is tired—shadows under his eyes. I sat at the “form” (a white bench in Ireland is called a form) and drank from a cup of herb tea. He told me he likes Ātmā-tattva Prabhu's *Gītā* outline. A big fly buzzed at the neon light. I felt I needed a typewriter, so I asked for one. M. phoned a stationery store man he knows, and the guy agreed to pick one up in Dublin and deliver it.

Absurd running on of the mind. Where is the metaphor? I told you, it's in the song.

Song #4

Light of *Bhāgavata*,
pugamahone, me Irish mother
 taught me that. See what I come from?
 She said she and friends used to run into
 the Metropolitan Museum of Art and spit
 at a statue in a fountain.
 She was a 1920s flapper.
 She was young, now old as a prune or
 dead in Avalon. Sooner or later I may hear.
 But who would even bother to tell me?

They think I'm a dog looking for money.
I say my prayer for her.

Sing, sing Cole Porter, Duke Ellington,
you mean song is a metaphor like Rosemary
Clooney, "Come on-uh my house"?
Or Handel's Messiah choir?
Or Beach Boys? Turrets alone
lookout singin' to himself in cold
star night? Singing drunk, snow falls
by light bulb outdoor waiting
for the Staten Island Transit?
No. Yes.

Song is only *kīrtana* in Bengal.
Is only in an ISKCON temple.
Is only by males—no women
may lead. Is only with Hare
Kṛṣṇa mantra. Is not a song a
bird also, a silent tree mere
me, sweet bread too
with raisins and capital "I"?

Song is sad, you cry.
Song is bad rock music through a wall
or piped into the barracks of
U.S. Navy base or prison cell
whether you like it or not.
No! That is not the song.

Song #5

I mean my poems.
 Poems. If anyone can write them.
 Geez, don't press me for an answer.

The breeze was cool on your face.
 The walk among sheep, is it like
 being in a concentration camp? He
 said avoid them and try the soggy field
 down by the river.
 Go out there with your *Gītā* verses
 and hear Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the owner of all
 opulences. He wants us to be with
 Him. He'll make us happy.

Would you like that? Yessir.
 I'd like to hear His *Gītā* spoken
 by Lord Kṛṣṇa. M. said, "One of the
 most important things in my whole life
 was when I read Śrīla Prabhupāda in
 his Introduction
 say we must accept Kṛṣṇa as God, so do
 it at least theoretically." Madhu (fifteen
 years ago)
 agreed, "That much I can do." And still we
 are going on that. Very nice. Glad he
 told me. Better than anything I said today.
 Thanks for the lunch. These lines are
 a metaphor for hunch, for Love,
 for love I lack. For what I'd
 like to be—a Kṛṣṇa conscious person.

Chapter Three

The Song is You

The metaphor is song. Explain it, but I know the particulars may not seem interesting or profound to readers who want structured books.

Wait a minute. Don't pander to readers or concepts of Art. But the Kṛṣṇa conscious criteria is important and must be followed. If your little played out life-thoughts are all Kṛṣṇa conscious, no problem. To seek a metaphor when you are already Kṛṣṇa conscious in the multi-faceted way is not required. It's *māyā*. Who needs it? Tell us your actual Kṛṣṇa conscious life or your sincere struggle, as I did in *Journal and Poems*, saying, "Here I am, living at Gītā-nāgarī for the year because I have headaches and I'm trying to cure them, and I'm discovering the birds and plants in a Kṛṣṇa conscious way, and I'm discovering the genre of a Kṛṣṇa conscious practitioner's diary." That was structure enough. I didn't need an allegory.

(Nor do we need one on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. Lord Kṛṣṇa is actually there as the Supreme Person talking to Arjuna. The Pāṇḍavas are not symbolic of the five senses and Kurukṣetra does not symbolize the body. It is an actual field.)

Hmm, you got me there. But song still says things I can't say ordinarily. At least I break looser there. But wait a minute, before you go to sing on the paper. Let me ask you, why should you want to "break looser?" Why not stay tight and more or less orderly in Kṛṣṇa conscious thoughts? Why this breaking away like a wild horse from the gate? Why this running through the meadow? What purpose does it serve?

Well sir, it lets us open to say things that maybe we can't when we are oh so careful to say at every step the perfect truth. Maybe we could use a big house for all our thoughts to live in.

Song #1

This song is you
guitar blue beats and rhythm and
little boy me thirty years ago . . .
listening at a phonograph.

Blue Boy Hotel in Vancouver.
Reynolds's famous painting. Is that
his name? You are so puffed up you
think, "If I write it, it's good and
should last."

Oh no, I don't say that. I say
crooked lines . . . the tape recorder
that didn't work. And I rushed from
the bath shivering, carrying all my clothes
to dress in warmth of gas heater
in these most precious hours.

*

These hours before 6 A.M. are riches
 I want to spend fast and well.
 On what? Charity for UNICEF?
 Give to ISKCON *brāhmaṇas*? “I
 gave to three different ISKCON charities,”
 she said, “and I have money
 left over for keeping a cow and
 candy bars for my teenage son
 (what else can you do with them)?”

“I don’t understand,” said my
 son, “why you write those poems.
 They don’t make sense.”
 I could tell him some
 aesthetic *spiel* why poems are okay.
 But if he said,
 “Why do you beat around the bush?”
 I wouldn’t have an answer for that.

Song #2

Peak to peak.
 A boy lived in a Swiss mountain and
 chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa to hiking Boy
 Scouts. He was judged by the
 book distributors of Zurich (who
 are world champs) and just as he suspected,
 they found him wanting.
 Yet they kept inviting him to their temple.
 Maybe, he thought, because I’m an old-
 timer who wrote the biography.

But when he got there it was
 so conservative—they honored him
 and guess what?—he began to praise
 them with five little mouths, “You
 book distributors are the best devotees and
 I bow at your feet.”

There was no Boy Scout pack to
 hear chanting and it was a fictive lie
 that a boy lived there. Only I and
 Madhu once paused en route at a
 P-stop in Switzerland and watched
 the waterfalls
 drop a huge distance you’d like to yodel.
 Herman Hesse lived there.

O Nṛsiṃha dāsa, O metaphor
 hunter, don’t you see what a song can
 do? What a break loose can do?
 I’d never be able to say this in
 ordinary talk.
 And I want to say it more and more.
 Break loose in KC jazz.
 (KC don’t mean Kansas City here.)

Dear Sir, that Zurich piece was about as close as
 you can get to a metaphor, allegory-veiled truth
 with the smirking shy lancer peeking out from
 behind his fingers. “That young man may be
 chastised,” for writing like that.

Oh, break loose. I don’t mean ever leaving Lord
 Nityānanda’s feet. I’d even like to worship *nīm*
 Deities of Gaura-Nitāi, but not dress Them in

clothes every day. It's enough for me to dress Prabhupāda. I'm happy with that. The *mūrti* is not a symbol but a fact. Fools don't understand it. I don't understand it either, but he is kind to come back to me, Prabhupāda *mūrti*, now overlooking me in his brown wool *cādar* in the precious early morning hours. He's not a symbol and yet maybe he is. I don't know the way to his lotus feet by brave ways as I used to. I come to him to massage and bathe him.

Song #3

Looking for that metaphor,
 looking for that truth.
 Now writing time must relinquish
 to *japa* in the kitchen—
 the white-walled place where
 heat comes from the range and
 M. is chanting there too,
 when he's not reading his
 Ātmā-tattva *Bhagavad-gītā* study guide
 and pocket size *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*.
 The kitchen—a place, a time, and person.

Chapter Four

Harī-kathā

Let us go more stately now. Consider direct praises of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The Lord is not a metaphor, yet the Vaiṣṇava poets use metaphors to convey the beauty of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, comparing His eyes to lotus petals and so on. Unless one is expert in metaphor (and it used to mean Sanskrit was required), one could not describe the Lord's pastimes. For example, the *Kṛṣṇa* book portrays the full moon night in the *śarat* season, when Kṛṣṇa desired to perform the *rāsa* dance with the *gopīs*: "With the rising of the moon, the whole sky appeared smeared by red *kuṅkuma*. When a husband long separated from his wife returns home, he decorates the face of his wife with red *kuṅkuma*. This long-expected moonrise of the *śarat* season was thus smearing the eastern sky."

The metaphor is to help us see the absolute world of which we have no experience. The metaphor draws from experience of this world and is always inadequate to fully describe Kṛṣṇa's pastimes and personal beauty. His eyes are much more beautiful than the petals of a lotus in this world, but we have no standard by which to view Kṛṣṇa, so the worldly natural beauty gives us at least a point

of reference. Prabhupāda compares it to locating the moon in the sky by finding it between the branches of a tree.

Sometimes the poets say frankly that Kṛṣṇa's beauty defeats whatever worldly example they might give. The Lord's beauty scorns the moon, it spits at the beauty of gold, it embarrasses the grandeur of a mountain top, it comes to peace talks with coral and emeralds, and it mocks the taste of heavenly nectar. "O Lord whose face eclipses the sweetness of the moon . . . O Lord who sings like a maddened cuckoo, O Supreme Personality of Godhead, I pray that the restless bumblebee of my heart may someday meet You face to face." (*Śrī Āstadaṣa-cchandaḥ-stava*, by Rūpa Gosvāmī)

In describing Kṛṣṇa, we don't seek for one grand metaphor. Kṛṣṇa is Himself the Absolute Reality; there is no truth higher than Him. An allegory is used to allude to a higher truth. An author creates a fictive character who embodies some higher moral principles. His character is a symbol for something else. The principles the author wishes to convey—his message—are real, and not the specific character or story. This is not true of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. *Mattaḥ parataram nānyat*, "All the worlds are strung upon Me like pearls strung on a thread." Yes, even Kṛṣṇa uses analogy. Kṛṣṇa is the thread and "everything" is strung upon Him. But the analogy is just a form of picture-making to enable use to see more clearly the absolute supremacy and personal truth of the Supreme Lord.

Nityo nityānām cetanaś cetanānām: He is eternal and we are also eternal, but He alone maintains all beings.

I pray to approach, with full faith, Kṛṣṇa's personhood, through His pure devotees. Devotional service is the medium for pleasing Kṛṣṇa. We are all His eternal servants. That too is a reality and not a metaphor.

So metaphors serve as ways to express Kṛṣṇa's transcendental qualities. They are offerings made by sincere souls dedicated to serving and praising Him. We also describe devotees by using metaphors. Their minds are clear like the sky in autumn when there are only white clouds. Their minds are like candlelight in a windless place. Their mercy is compared to an ocean, *kṛpā-sindhu*. They are like *kalpa-vṛkṣa* trees, awarding whatever we desire. They are as soft as roses, but sometimes as hard as thunderbolts.

Do I dare speak in my own voice about Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa? I'm not so competent. That is one reason I seem to write more of myself than of God. I am a fool and there is no harm in splashing ink as I tell of my patched career. But I cannot draw a funny looking cartoon of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He is not a joke or plaything, at least not for me. (The *gopīs* sometimes treat Him that way, but they are completely and eternally pure. They have already passed through the fire of ordeal in order to become His paramour lovers.)

Dear Lord,
 Lakṣmī-devī sits on Your chest,
 the *tulasī* leaves are pleased
 to sit upon Your lotus feet,
 and devotees like Prahlāda offer You
 prayers and words of pure
 devotion. What can I add?

Dear Lord, please accept me.
 I know You wish all good
 for me. I want to take up
 my place in Your eternal service.
 Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote,
 “If the Lord grants liberation even
 to an enemy like Śiśupāla,
 then surely the preachers
 of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement
 who spread His glories,
 who endure insults and
 even death on behalf of the Lord,
 are guaranteed to return to Him.
 Of this there is no doubt.”

Dear Lord, I am chanting Your holy
 names. I cannot get so far.
 Please descend and penetrate the
 covering. Please dwell in my heart.
 Give me the courage and strength to
 chant the holy names in earnest,
 crying for the real thing—
 service to *nāma*.
 Please teach my intelligence to

serve my spiritual master
with unstinting devotion
to his order.

Dear Lord, when You appeared
as Lord Caitanya,
You converted Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya
(and millions of lesser scholars)
and You happily declared,
“My mission in Jagannātha Puri is
now fulfilled!

I have converted a person like
Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya. I shall now be
able to attain Vaikuṇṭha without fail.”

I liked to hear Your exultation
as a preacher and Your expectation
to go back to Godhead after
converting one logician into a
pure devotee.

I’d like to go too, and escape
the horrors of a Kali age.

But You may want me to stay
more lifetimes. You may be
arranging special mercy for me:
crushing my material desires
so that I may turn to You only.

Inconceivable One Lord,
no one can know all of Your glories.
But You are always a person and
all energies and demigods are
subordinate to You.

I feel relief and purification
in speaking of You.
Although I can't claim to know You,
I may speak what I have heard.
And it is right.
Paramparā.
All glories to the Lord
of the universe!

Chapter Five

Improvisation

If I improvise, how does that relate to metaphor? Well, I may improvise a metaphor. That is, make it up as I go along. Once, there was a tower, and in it lived many princes who were kidnapped by a demon. Each prince stood for a particular virtue. Once, in a monastery long ago, the monks each occupied a room which had a sign over the door of a particular virtue, such as patience, silence, humility, devotion, and so on. The monks were advised to change rooms every week so that they could meditate on the various virtues. Nowadays in that monastery, however, the monks have so many personal belongings that it has become inconvenient to change rooms every week. The guy in “humility” refused to switch with the guy in “chastity.”

I can make things up as I go along. Speaking of monasteries, we visited one in Belgium filled with brown-robed Carmelites. We were in our light cotton saffron. We spoke with one who was friendly and interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, a Father Piet, but he never wrote back to me after and that was years ago. Each on his own path. No syncretism.

*

I can create a metaphor, but right now the importance of it eludes me. I can't even remember what this is all about. Therefore, I have to search not only for metaphor but for coherence. I wanted to put together particulars, remember? That's my need as an author. That, and the need to elevate my words to Kṛṣṇa consciousness as I did in the last chapter.

I'm writing this by the red heat of the gas burner just after bathing with a *loṭa* in the cold bathroom. My body is hot on the left side and shivering on the right side. A day of chanting and breakfast is still ahead. It is an important theme or question: how to pull together the particulars? One way authors do it is to find a grand theme and to then put everything into it.

Is it like a woman, like my mother, when I was a boy, taking a basket of wet wash out to the backyard and hanging it piece by piece on the clothes line? My dad built that clothes line with two wooden posts and a good cord he bought at Brower's Hardware and pulleys that squeaked like blue jays calling from the oak trees in front of the house or speeding with robins to the cherry trees in the back of the yard.

You mean the clothes are separate but hang together on the same line?

Now you are nakedly
 embarrassed in spirit
 for having no theme
 or deep potency. Theophan
 the Recluse says you must
 suffer or you'll never know
 God.

At least poems don't need justification. We already established in Chapter Two that a song can go on for awhile, defying the artistic need for metaphor or for One Big Container. Instead, poems send out many sparks and flames of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Here's a few (confidently, carelessly guided by God, my true Father, my spiritual master, my eternal father too, who said that if a poem is about Kṛṣṇa, it's good. You can even worship a demigod for that purpose. And in rare instances, you can even transgress morality or law, although as I said, that's in rare cases).

#1

Happiness in Ireland I
 don't claim. Such a poor
 country and we live near a man's
 littered land, a cow-killer.
 But happiness occurs in the
 soul and the heart
 inside this old house when
 you read of Sagara and

Bhagiratha and the Ganges'
descent on the head of Lord
Śiva.

"You believe that stuff?"
Sure do. And you—you
believe Stephen Hawking and
Dr. Leakey and Darwin?
Come on now, you don't mean
that you don't think they're cheating,
that they fix the evidence to prove their
theories?

#2

I don't have sharp pains
of poem-prize.
Never mind, I am pleased by
hot porridge and honey and a
smashed fig and a hot cup
of milk. Why not? It is
God's grace.
And I am planning after breakfast
to go out and walk in a bog
and chant the holy names on
my red beads. Why should
I make cries of sharp pain
or envy those poets
who do?

#3

I'm sorry I have no one to talk to.
 I talk to myself. My master
 is many things to me. I especially
 seek him in his books and a
 concept
 that he be pleased with me
 even while I do my own thing.
 I seek him in the stories by his
 servants in their memoirs.

But no ready friend now,
 not like Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura
 who could yearn for the past
ācāryas and then add—"And I
 love to be with Rāmacandra Cakravartī"—
 a pal, a friend of his.
 Yes, I have Madhu and disciples
 who are close to me.
 So what if I don't have those
 who are equals and superiors
 as friends? So what?
 I don't feel it much. I'm just
 confessing that now.

Mostly I'd like to write like a
 poet, evoke a mist on land
 and you, dear reader, feel
 what I'm saying. I'd put
 you in my place and then treat you—
 in this coming-Christmas season,

to hot *halavā*,
 whipped yogurt drink,
 and plenty of Kṛṣṇa conscious hopes.
 I'd give you a good time
 and you'd tell me later in
 a true letter,
 "I'm reading Prabhupāda regularly.
 Thanks for reminding me. My
 chanting must be getting better.
 At least I stay awake. I
 like to read your books and
 may see you at the end of the
 year. But don't worry, I
 won't take up much
 of your time."

Maybe lunch together if the
 controversies pass. I do like
 to sit with friends and watch
 one of them eat five icing-topped
 cookies.
 But later I'm alone
 and I say you didn't talk, we couldn't,
 of what is meant for one—
 but help each other
 in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Fourth Canto, Śrī Nārada Muni tells a long allegorical story. He uses the metaphor of a city to describe a man. The man's wife is material intelligence. The city's parts are compared to the openings or "gates" in the human

body through which one enjoys (and suffers) sense gratification. The city's chief of police is the life-force in the body. The city is finally attacked by Old Age and Disease personified. This story of Purañjana is a *tour de force* of allegorical writing. Śrī Nārada has certainly found and exploited a grand metaphor.

I don't know what to say. My mind is distracted by the newspapers. What do I want, that every word of mine be hailed as immortal? I need a container for my thoughts, but I also need good thoughts or whatever you want to call them—good writing, good Kṛṣṇa conscious life.

Another word for what I'm seeking is "structure." NG says this about structure: "Each time we write something, we reinvent structure to fit ourselves and what we want to say. This is not arrogance. We honor structure, but we don't become frozen by an old one . . . There's a Zen saying: put a snake in a bamboo pole . . . In a sense, that is what structure is. You have all this stuff you want to express—you need to pull yourself into a form." (*Wild Mind*, pp. 16–17)

The timed writing session is a structure, a form, but then I want this other kind of structure. Think about it. It will evolve. What do I feel akin to? What do I like reading? It takes time to find a true form for myself. And even then, once I find it I have to push at the edges of it. I can't get too comfortable.

Imagine a world like the one K. entered, that snowbound village. He picks up the telephone and

tries talking to someone at the Castle. Hierarchy. All he hears through the phone receiver is a sound like angels singing. When he meets them, they are like German bureaucrats. So? You mean you want to enter a world of your own? But you don't want to concoct it or build it from boards and nails (I'm not good at that). What *am* I good at? I can keep a schedule. I also like to eat. I can keep a schedule.

Listen, God is not going to give you a big metaphor on a silver platter. It's not so easy. You don't want to concoct? Okay. Do you know how St. Teresa of Avila came up with the idea to write her prayer reflections in the form of an interior castle? St. John of the Cross described an ascent up a spiritual mountain. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī described *bhakti* in terms of an ocean with waves going in four directions. Lord Caitanya compared spiritual progress to the growing of a plant up and up through all the universal coverings. It grows by chanting and hearing (watering), and must be protected against *aparādhās* (mad elephants) on all sides with a fence. It grows up toward Goloka.

Maybe I'll find my metaphor in a dream. Dreams are certainly metaphors, aren't they, filled with strange stories and places that have their own reality?

Poems, finally, poems,
homes with no excuses need
forms with their own
boundaries, improvised spaces . . .

#1

A box arrived from America.
 A box. I ripped it open.
 Three weeks of “The Week in Review.”
 A million inmates in U.S. prisons.
 GOP won in the elections.
 No place is safe. Those who were
 underdogs are now in power and
 those in power are now underdogs
 rising to power.
 What’s happening in ISKCON? I
 make plans how and where
 to hide—the Centennial
 is reaching hysterical heights.
 “Save \$30: Prabhupāda *mūrti*.”

#2

Me, me. The books about
 Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa—and Christ—
 are legion. There’s no shortage of
 corny, crummy prose to sell
 stuff: “Everything you wanted to know
 about Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva but
 were afraid to ask.” Look,
 shut your mouth or you’ll make
aparādhas. It’s all because of that
 box they mailed from America.
 I’d be better off just looking out
 the window and writing quietly,
 taking the burden of each day.

How sweet it is here around noon
when I rush smoothly from
writing session to Prabhupāda *pūjā* to
bath to lunch and then plan for the
remainder of the day.

By tomorrow, I won't be referring to
the mail. But listen to this
from the international
committee for observing Prabhupāda's
Centennial: "You are allowed to
make your own offering to Prabhupāda.
But keep
in touch with us by our 800 number
so that all offerings are
coordinated."
I just made that up.

Chapter Six

Distracted

This is the beginning of a new chapter. This is story about how metaphor may be used in Kṛṣṇa's service. It's simple enough. I am a worker in an office and I'm telling the story in that context. This should be called *hari-kathā*.

Kṛṣṇa is the supreme truth. I feel a little off key today because the mail came yesterday and there was so much stuff about elections. The GOP won many because they had good candidates, the politics professor said. Also, it's because the Clinton administration gave such a poor performance. It also shows that the country is again swinging to the right.

The governments are also spending lots of money on prisons and the equipment in prisons, such as chairs in which to strap violent prisoners. Aside from that, there was a *New York Times* editorial saying Cuomo should be elected for a fourth term (but I think he lost). There is no end to it. I went through them as quickly as I could and sent them out via the Out Basket. Later I saw M. reading the *World Press*. When I came beside him, he said, "Are you through with these?" And then we put them on top of the range where they quickly burned.

But their impressions remain and I regurgitate them here rather than direct *hari-kathā*. All I know is what I read. I am now reading the brief descriptions about Lord Rāmacandra in the Ninth Canto. I hope in the future when ISKCON puts out a new translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* that I will be able to read it. I want to enter that world of the Lord's pastimes and be charmed by it. I really ought to stay away from other influences so that I don't think Kṛṣṇa or Rāma's pastimes are some kind of superstructure to reality, some allegory. The Buddhists and other materialists say these are definitely stories that people have made up. They say, "We don't see any spiritual world. It doesn't exist. And we don't see the soul." They are simply atheists. I want to follow the sages, Prabhupāda.

The *Bhāgavatam* goes through Rāma's pastimes quickly, how He went to the forest on His father's order, cut off Śūrpaṇakhā's nose, and how He built a bridge across the ocean to Laṅka.

I am also listening to Prabhupāda's *Kṛṣṇa* book dictations. Now I'm hearing how Kāṁsa is calling Kṛṣṇa to Mathurā for a wrestling match to kill Him by the elephant or by the wrestlers. Kāṁsa told Akrūra his plans not realizing that Akrūra was not in favor of them. What else is there to say? Kāṁsa wanted to kill Vasudeva when Nārada told him, "Child Kṛṣṇa is the one who will kill you." And then he asked him, "Why kill Vasudeva? It's Kṛṣṇa you ought to kill." To ease his own wrath, however, Kāṁsa arrested Vasudeva and Devakī and chained

them in the dungeon. When I heard that, I was sorry that there was such a demon.

This is what's going on as I hear it. Dear Lord, this is almost the end of the twentieth century and people don't believe much in religion. They don't believe that the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* was spoken 5,000 years ago. I get tired sometimes and I too may doubt. I ask You to please give me faith and intelligence to combat ignorant doubts. I want to be a fighter, a preacher on Your behalf. Of course, I'd like to be able to write interesting books that people couldn't put down, books that aren't self-centered. I write about myself because I don't know anyone else. I read that the novelist Graham Greene did not write autobiography because he said it would have inevitably involved incursions into the privacy of other people's lives. All right, but then he had to make up stories that weren't true, and that seems worse. What I do is write actual life—my own—but I don't discuss other people. That makes it look self-centered. Another thing I try not to do is live much with other people. Still, they are on my mind. I can't take Graham Greene's path; it's too demanding. To become a kind of literary Lord Brahmā by creating imaginative lives and bodies and saying, "Bill was rather short. He had a dimple and creases around his eyes. He lusted over the cleaning lady who worked in his apartment building"—I can't do it.

Then why not pay attention only to *hari-kathā*? What more is there to say? Everything has already been told wonderfully by the perfect sages. I can

gather it, I guess, but if I am committed to being a writer, I have to find my metaphor, or failing that, a poem.

I Am Better Than You

God, it would be nice—it is already nice—
to write like this. I can keep doing it
all day. It is my own endeavor.
The God who makes things happen
can sing in me. He is in my heart.

I am not the God. You are not either.
God is beyond us. He is especially
beyond you because you don't read the
scriptures with faith. I am better
than you because I have a spiritual master,
the great swami whom you refuse to accept.

So I am better than you
but you don't know it and
neither should I say it.
Actually, I am not better than you.
I'm trying to form myself
into a Vaiṣṇava.
Do you know what that is?

Even the Ambassador from India to the U.S.
knows it—he is from Bengal. I read
about him in *ISKCON World Review* and
I'm sick of the hype and ads and hoopla.
But I'm not better than any one of you.

Still, I am sick of it and

that is why I can't write well today.
But still there may be a grand metaphor
lurking and ready to come out in my
subconscious.

Robert Louis Stevenson said
several of his best stories just came to him
in his dreams, including *Dr. Jeckyll and*
Mr. Hyde.
He just dreamed them and wrote them down.
Lucky, huh?

I don't mind working, I just don't like you
putting me down, saying I don't work
the craft, don't re-write, just ramble.
That's why I'm establishing that
I am better than you.
It's silly. I am who I am and you
are you. We are both followers of the Swami
and as for the others,
well,
they are for us to preach to.
That's the challenge.

I started to read the third volume of *Transcendental Diary*. Śrīla Prabhupāda was talking in the car as they drove from Pittsburgh to New Vrindaban. He said if one-fourth of the population could become Kṛṣṇa conscious . . . But are we growing? I need him here to tell us if the preaching is going all right. I don't listen to ISKCON's severe critics (or

maybe I do through the back door), but no one can assure me the way Prabhupāda did. I work despite my doubts, but I wonder. There are hundreds of devotees in Russia, but what does that amount to? Does the country improve? Does it offset Kali-yuga? I can speak about this without feeling negative if I am asked questions while sitting on the *vyāsāsana*, but this is my private time and my response may be different.

I doubt my brothers. I wonder if they are speaking rhetoric and saying only what they are supposed to say. I wonder how far into themselves they have explored. Does it matter? After all, the holy name is absolute, right? Some devotees will even say that whatever we ourselves think, whatever we dream, is unimportant. The philosophy is all that's important. They say Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a living ideal. I can accept that.

But my question is different. What effect is this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement having? Are our devotees becoming purified? Why doubt that? It doesn't make sense. I'm just a writer hunting for a metaphor. I don't have a very high IQ. When others ask me too much about this, I find I can't understand the questions if they frame them in too much word jugglery. Maybe it's a built-in virtue I have. I figure the question isn't important because no one is going to change their lives by hearing the answer. Then it becomes too much effort to answer.

What else? I read about Lord Rāmacandra in the brief chapters. I especially like the part that de-

scribes what happens after He returns home, the sincere homecoming. Sincerity! Bhārata performs austerities all those years, eating food cooked in cow urine. He walks to meet Rāma wearing Rāma's shoes on his head. They embrace for a long time. This is real literature, not Graham Green's carping or Jean Cocteau's homosexual fantasies or even big humanist giant talents such as Shakespeare. Rāma comes home and Bhārata turns over the kingdom. Rāma shaves His head of matted locks. The citizens waited fourteen years. They are still young and life goes on. Rāma rules the world. He gives everything away to the *brāhmaṇas*, but they return it to Him. Then He has to banish Sītā. Prabhupāda says that as Rāma turned Tretā-yuga into another Satyā-yuga (people didn't even have to die unless they wanted to), so we can change Kali into a golden age by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. Lord Rāma has appeared in this age as Gaurasundara. I want these things in my books and in my life. I don't want to be any kind of thinker or even writer who lives without Kṛṣṇa in the center. Those other writers can go to hell. That's a harsh remark, and of course I don't curse them, but their work is *śrama eva hi kevalam*. It has no value because it doesn't provoke attraction to hearing about the Supreme Lord. They are so afraid of any recognizable or traditional religion; they think no scripture should obtrude into any poet's work lest he become a propagandist. I have to sometimes say to them all: "To hell with you. *Śāstra* says one cannot have any good qualities

unless he is a devotee of the Lord.” Don’t hide the facts.

Rāmacandra, the spiritual world, the truth of the *Vedas*, and me, a little fellow pushing his pen across the page.

This chapter is called “Distracted.” I didn’t find a metaphor yet. They say the theme of the Prabhupāda Centennial is, “He built a house in which the whole world can live.” Again, it’s the concept that everything can fit into one place. Multi-activities. Will K. get in contact with the Castle? Will he find out about his trial? What will happen to the bug who was once Gregor Samsa?

Prabhupāda said the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa can transform the world. I am disappointed that I don’t have the gumption or vision to go on chanting more and more. I can drink herb tea and sit on the form and talk with M. about prayer, but when it comes down to chanting, I can’t keep going when there is such absence of feeling and taste. That’s natural for a human, I guess. How can we plow ahead without taste or some sense of contrition, *something* besides mechanical counting? Instead I turn to reading, where there is at least a sense of interest and filling up. Forgive me, holy name, I will chant again and more, of course, but during this month, I am turning more to reading. Reading will immediately help this writing, and it may even supply the metaphor.

A guy was reading and he wrote, and whatever he wrote was within the experience of his reading. Do you know what I mean?

The man who came to the door
parking his red van outside
was what we used to call a “mick,”
an Irish man with that burbling musical
rough uneducated-by-school speech,
and he said
something about the cow. He was talking
to M. who can also
talk Irish. He was looking for
our neighbor,
but he got the wrong house. As he
walked away
he glanced into this ground floor room.
Maybe he saw Prabhupāda.
Then our eyes met. Did he notice
my *tilaka* or see just my skinny face
under knit hat and eyeglasses, a
skinny, older person sitting down in
an easy chair?
Maybe he noticed me wearing tight
gloves and a
gray blanket on my lap. He won’t come back
to murder me; he’s just an Irish man.
I went back to Lord Rāmacandra
in the book,
but I was distracted, seeking out the
truth I had come to drink from.

Maybe that's all I have to say. This is the chapter of distractions. There was an article in the newspaper, showing three photos of people over fifty years old and still going strong. One was Mick Jagger, who looked crazed with his contorted face: "He is still not satisfied." Little do they know what that actually means. The second picture was of a bald prize fighter who surprised his younger opponent, knocking him out in the tenth round. The third photo was of a woman model who still looks lovely without make-up, although she is past fifty. I didn't read the article, but I psyched it out. It suggested that we can all be like these people and refuse to grow old. Of course, that's ridiculous. By their karma, these three people may hold out a little longer than the rest, but it's only a relative few moments. Trying for those few moments is just another distraction.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said that Kṛṣṇa consciousness could grow for 10,000 years. I wondered how it would be possible, how it was already going on. Prabhupāda, did you know what would happen after you left? You were optimistic in 1976. Is that optimism still justified? I don't know. On the one hand, we are expanding, but some of it is superficial and institutional. I definitely don't want to go overboard in my criticisms, but I wonder. For myself, I wonder.

I should mind my own business. *Brāhmaṇas* don't possess land or rule citizens. I should simply practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness myself because the one I'm really doubtful about is Yours Truly. Prabhu-

pāda, you were optimistic about us then. What about now?

Okay, that's it. I could lead you on, dear reader, and say the next chapter will begin the metaphor. It will be like the Astrodome, a big stadium with a see-through roof. It will be a whole planet for our use, similar to the Pole Star. It will not be resigning ourselves to hack work or the acceptance of an arbitrary metaphor that doesn't touch the heart. Or maybe there will be no metaphor at all, just lively, early morning rhythm and blues.

The tall tree admonishes the poet.
 The little ape in the jungle of a Chinese
 poem calls out in the night while the white-
 haired poet, home from a
 long journey, comes
 to the door of his thatched cottage and
 hears the ape in the mountains.
 He enters his house, his wife and
 children are sleeping (Tu Fu). Or is
 he a hermit
 like *Stonehouse* or *Cold Mountain*? He
 enters his place humble and quiet and he
 writes a poem by candlelight
 some five hundred years before
 Christ appeared.

Why do I pray with that?
 Think of Rāmacandra coming home.
 Think of Kṛṣṇa lifting the hill and
 think of Kṛṣṇa going as a young boy down

to Varuṇa's watery kingdom and rescuing
 His father,
 Kṛṣṇa awaiting the arrival of Akrūra,
 Nārada saying, "I will see all these things
 happen in the future." Kṛṣṇa whose feet
 are worshiped
 by the *gopīs*. "I will see those lotus feet
 today," Akrūra thought. That same
 Kṛṣṇa is in my heart and dwelling in
 this house. It's inexplicable how He is our
 near and dear friend. We are going
 headlong
 in time to meet Him despite
 these present particulars
 which don't appear so tremendous or holy
 and which belong to 1994's end of the year.
 Despite my carping. Kṛṣṇa is coming
 to meet us.
 I'm going to meet Him if I can—
 live a little longer and take this
 reading of *Bhāgavatam* more seriously.

Chapter Seven

The Metaphor is Your Life

Feeling sad and lazy and unworthy. You can't put these words down and expect them to be immortal or to be worthy enough to be called part of a book. That is impossible. You can never know for sure as you write. I write it because it's part of the process.

The improviser in me wants to practice his art. He doesn't know whether he is at the beginning of something new, in the middle of something still looking for itself, or at the end of something that failed to find a theme. We just can't tell. We don't know what it is like to put all our belongings on a cart and wheel it through the streets of a war-torn city. One month the Muslims are fleeing with their belongings, and the next week it's the Serbs. I look for some hope that the Clinton administration is doing something right, or at least popular, but the newspapers give no hope for that.

This run-off sad song, sorry for myself that I am not a genius with something wonderful to say on each line. I sympathize. Do I need to suffer like the Bosnians or the U.S. President? Take my life and pleas before Kṛṣṇa? Accept my own life for what it is?

It is all within the allegory of mortal beings. It is all within the truth of immortality. It is all on this earth planet that we are living. It's all under the one hundred years called the twentieth century. It is a male, Caucasian, it is all moles and skin and pus and bones. It is all as a student of the spiritual master. Proud to say, it is all as a Hare Kṛṣṇa person now, even though I was something different for many years.

It is all to remove myself from the false notion that I am the center of existence or that I do stuff when it is actually the material energy working. Worship Govinda.

What of the puppy dog,
that mongrel collie
the neighbor owns, who prefaces the arrival
of his tractor
and who rounds up the sheep,
an accomplice to those murders,
that fawning dog who is half-afraid
of us when we pulled up to the house,
after the long car ride,
after the long flight from India.
I tell you, a man in a
white coat checked a list to see
if we were on the plane and asked
if we had any trouble connected
with bubonic plague. But he
mentioned it just as a joke.

The one I'd like to write on is God,
and fortunately I have been able to write
many lines on my spiritual master, but
not just now. And my friends, that is
too sensitive because I love them.
So like it or not, I'm cursed (too strong
a word?) to write of this guy
who is typing, who was worried this morning
and that's humorous too, he's worried
that he can't find the metaphor to tell
the story of his own life. He is worried
also because the critics have got to his brain
and he is forced to write, "I am a no good
navel-gazer who refuses to do the work
of an actual poet." Stands condemned to die
in a mock hangman's scaffolding.

I dreamt we were in the Brooklyn (or Manhattan?) temple. I was visiting, and there was a controversy about how to honor Prabhupāda now that his disciples were gurus with their own disciples. I called a committee together to decide, and then I left the temple. I traveled by train and arrived at 125 Katan Avenue where my parents, in a mild dream shadow form, were there. I wanted them to know that I was working responsibly to form the committee to decide on the right course. All those devotees in the New York City temple deserved to have this straightened out. I was not going to stay there with them and get embroiled in the controversy, but I had done the right thing and would check back with them to see how it was going. I

would take part in it. What did my parents know or care about that?

Okay class, now we are going to talk about Kṛṣṇa. What did Akrūra say? I know! He is the one who attained perfection by praying. He prayed as he left Mathurā and all the way to Vṛndāvana. “Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. I will see Him today and that will be my perfection after many lives. I will see the one who is the cause of all causes and dear to the residents of Vṛndāvana. When I enter Vṛndāvana, I will fall at His feet. He will know that I am not really an agent of Kāṁsa, but I come to worship and serve the Lord of all, who lives in Vṛndāvana and is the most charming cowherd person. I know this truth of Kṛṣṇa and most certainly look forward to this *darśana* with all my heart. Today will take place by His grace.”

Yes, and what else? What else? There is a three-ring circus awaiting Kṛṣṇa in Mathurā. It is like a Roman coliseum with its big wrestlers and elephants and cheering crowds. I won’t tell you what happens until we get there. For now, I’ll pause and write another poem.

No, I won’t. I haven’t got one. Not one.

Did you now that they hired a bagpipe band to lead the Ratha-yātrā parade in Melbourne in 1974? They did it to attract the crowd’s attention. After the band full of knee socks and skirts and screeching bagpipes, they would then see Prabhupāda

himself in front of Jagannātha's cart. I was with him and carried his bamboo cane while he played the *karatālas* and sang out loud. He wore a knit cap on the parade. I was there, but I don't remember much else. We stayed in a cozy house, there was an electric heater in his room, and the devotee who owned the place cooked *panir*. Prabhupāda showed them how. I had a boil on my knee and Prabhupāda told me to put honey and salt on it. When I finally went to the doctor, he asked, "Who told you to put this on?"

"A friend."

"What friend? Who told you to do this?" I wouldn't tell him that it was my dearest friend because he would have laughed. I didn't laugh, Prabhupāda. I would put honey and salt on my leg again if you told me to.

Do you remember that house in Melbourne and the priests who came to see you? You said that one of them had liquor on his breath. Remember the various oppositions, the newspapers, and you encouraging your brave and brash Australian disciples to go on spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness? I was foolish. I was foolish.

Here I am now, writing so far away from all that, outside the magic circle of being innocent and with you.

About haiku master, Issa, it is said, "Not gifted with genius, but honestly holding his experience deep in his heart, he kept a simplicity and humanity." What does that mean and how does it apply to the Kṛṣṇa conscious life? Experience is important.

It is something more than ourselves. For example, right now the neighbor is part of my experience, and the put-put of his old tractor, and the open curtains, and my Prabhupāda *mūrti*. (What would happen if the neighbor looked in and saw my master in his *mūrti* form?) Experience is Madhu cleaning up after lunch. It is all the things that we are and know. It is our life as we may describe it. We don't have to keep eliminating everything but the soul. I read of Paraśurāma and then saw the painting of him with his chopper. He doesn't even wear armor but a deer skin and black, matted locks. He fights with the speed of mind and when he gets a little tired, he slows down to the speed of wind. He is ever-victorious. He is not within the material experience, but he is part of my experience of reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

I also read of Pururava, whom I must say is most foolish for his attachment to the heavenly Uruvasi. She warned him that a woman's heart is like a fox. He went all over the world for her and did whatever he could in order to have sex with her, even to see her for one night a year. He put all his energy into *yajña* not to please the Supreme, but to be with Uruvasi. He lived only for her. That's experience too, and I hope to never share it. O mighty Paraśurāma.

Issa—simplicity and humanity. It means we don't become proud. We don't wish we were someone else and we don't deny the origins of our own lives,

the actual position in which we now find ourselves. We give thanks to God for what we have.

When I read the *Bhāgavatam*, I see the words “Hare Kṛṣṇa” again and again. Whenever *yajña* is described, Prabhupāda repeats the *mahā-mantra*. For a moment I thought, “Boy, this is repetitive,” but then I thought, “Why don’t I *heed* it and chant the holy name?” Indirectly, Prabhupāda is telling us that all this stuff about Pururava is not so essential. The real thing is simply to chant—to chant “either individually or collectively.” Why can’t I *cry out* to save the world, to chant the names of God and to take *that* into my heart as experience? Why is my experience of *hari-nāma* so dry? Have my offenses created a cloud over me? Still, I should keep that experience close to me. My spiritual master gave me the holy name. I should keep my vow to chant regardless of the state of my heart and my self-centered whatever-they-are distractions.

Issa maintained his simplicity. For me, simplicity means repeating the cry, “O Lord, please help me. O Lord, I thank You for what You have already given me. Please reveal Yourself to me.” And he kept his humanity. To me that means admitting that ISKCON is sometimes abrasive but forgiving them for it—they, the boys and girls and managers. I also forgive my own carping. I live in the movement and try to improve myself.

Prabhupāda said we should be like a deep cloud. That’s a metaphor. The guru is a deep cloud that pours down the full rain of God’s mercy. We should *all* be like that. We should all preach. We

should preach even if people don't ask for Kṛṣṇa's mercy. For me, that means creating an ambitious writing plan. That's how I "pour down mercy." First, we become a deep cloud, then we pour down the rain—on rocks and the ocean, on humanity, and on ourselves. That is humanity; that is caring for others. I write for them, I go to them, and I forgive them and forgive myself.

My real quest is how to enter an honest Kṛṣṇa conscious state. What do I mean by that? It's not enough for me to be like Issa. Issa was compassionate even toward insects. Apparently, he didn't mind if they bit him. He didn't try to kill them in retaliation. (In that sense, he was a better Vaiṣṇava than me.) He saw himself as one creature among others and commiserated with them all. He was a nice guy, a little like the Little Tramp Charlie Chaplin portrayed. (I don't mean that in a demeaning way.) Issa was great, too, in his gentle put-downs of phonies. I don't remember many of his poems, although I remember he told a grasshopper (or some other insect), "Don't worry, Issa is here." Unfortunately, he didn't teach God consciousness. He had no guru, so he couldn't claim the experience of surrender to guru.

I can hold that experience close to me because my spiritual master saved me and because I maintain my gentleman's agreement never to disobey his order. I will hold that experience close to me until I die. It gives me the strength to pray past the hoopla of commercialized or institutionalized "Devotion to

Prabhupāda!” Prabhupāda gave each of us genuine attraction, obedience, and remembrance to cultivate, and of course, the order to study his words. That experience is ours.

Prabhupāda spoke from his realization and gave examples from his experience of how God is great. For example, Kṛṣṇa gives mercy but He is also cruel. No one can check Him. In an instant He turns dark into light. Prabhupāda even saw it once while flying in an airplane—the night turned to day before his eyes. This is the greatness of God, and he saw it wherever he was.

Following guru is a metaphor. It is, of course, also the truth, it’s factual, but it’s a metaphor or symbol for success. It is the way all humans should follow: go to God through guru. I may sound like I’m rambling, but my quest is to cut through the *kṣatriyas* of distraction just as Paraśurāma leveled the evil-minded *kṣatriyas* twenty-one times with his chopper.

That is me reflected in this glass, and M. needs a shave. We talked again last night while sitting on the form. (I told you that in Ireland, a white bench is a form, and six kids could fit on one, one next to the other and up against the table where they eat potatoes and little else, warmed at night by dancing and drinking and listening to a storyteller.) Madhu and I talked a little of what we might do next year in the holy *dhāmas*, not with the crowds, but almost alone. Can I imagine going to Gaura-kīśora dāsa Bābāji’s *bhajana-kuṭīr*? And what about Godruma,

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's place? I barely glanced at it this year as I nursed a headache and walked around. The man showed us upstairs and then waved a 100 rupee note in front of us (he couldn't speak English) to indicate that we too should give that much because he troubled himself to open the door for us so we could bow down while he looked on. I did bow down before Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's desk, then again in the next room at the writing desk of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. Maybe we could go again, and this time bring writing pads. I am bound to write better in a place like that. Don't overlook this point. Remember *Wild Garden*, which is filled with direct perceptions of Vṛndāvana-dhāma? It's too cliched, however, to say that I can't write Kṛṣṇa consciousness in Ireland. Prabhupāda said that Lord Rāmacandra stayed in Ayodhya-dhāma and then sent His brothers out to conquer, but that doesn't mean He showed His brothers less mercy. Prabhupāda said that those who stay in Vṛndāvana are proud of themselves, but one who goes out to preach on behalf of Vṛndāvana-candra is doing the best work. If I can write here and seek out a metaphor—it may even be a return to Vṛndāvana . . . It's not that I endorse Ireland over Vṛndāvana, but it's my "latrine" where I hide and beg the *dhāma's* mercy. I have already *been* to the *dhāma* so many times. Instead of learning the *dhāma's* secrets, I always end up embroiled in some contemporary ISKCON scene. That's the way it is and in 1996, it will be even worse. Who could expect to find a special way to write in an

atmosphere like that? Nevertheless, we spoke last night, making plans to go again to Māyāpur and Vṛndāvana and to teach at the VIHE.

You are not a poet like Anna Akhmatova
 who wrote of love for men the way
gopīs love Kṛṣṇa. She had misplaced
 her anguish, and her eloquent tongue
 was spent on the mundane heroes
 she elevated to immortality with such
 intense and burning lines.
 Too bad.
 What am I?

I have themes.
 I have the experience.
 I met the guru in Calcutta, although Carl Jung
 missed him. I don't have a cynical, bad tale
 to tell of religion.
 I can sing true songs of triumph,
 but I have to be careful not to make
 falsely patriotic speeches and thereby lose
 my honest experience just because so
 many people
 are sitting in the audience and everyone
 is saying the same thing, "We love you,
 Prabhupāda."

I don't seek to be the only one,
 or the best, but myself,
 dedicated to true and sincere utterance
 and following him

down the trail, carrying a few
of his books, not free yet,
writing a bit insanely, he might think,
but I'm treasuring the idea he gave—
"Be like a dark cloud and save the people,"
he said. "Chant the holy names."

A Place for Art

DEFINITIONS

I will use a simple definition of “Art.” I mean, that which we did as children in school during Art class. We drew pictures with pencils and crayons, and sometimes we used larger pieces of paper and paint. Sometimes we even constructed things, but we didn’t call them collages or any other fancy words. Fifty years later, I’m doing the same activity, although perhaps from a different point of view. The main difference, I hope, is not the difference between childhood and old age, but the fact that I have been introduced to the world of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, the title “A Place for Art” implies the fuller title, “A Place for Art in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.”

By “place” I mean that there should be a place for art in my life and in the adult community of Kṛṣṇa conscious devotees. Art is not only for the specialists (the “artists”) in the ISKCON Art Department, but it is open to anyone.

I am in Italy and I plan to do some drawing and writing while I'm here. What will I write? Here are two starting ideas:

1. (from an artist who made a free sketch of baby Kṛṣṇa and Pūtanā, which I found in a book):
“ . . . Write a stream of consciousness response to your colors. Allow whatever comes up to be welcome: memories, dreams, fragments of dialogue or story. To gain what your drawings have to give, you must witness them. Treat them like friends. You wouldn't run around and ignore a friend who comes to visit you. You would sit down and pay attention, making the person feel welcome.”

2. (from a letter from an artist): “When I look at some of your drawings and art, I think of the energy that was created. How did you feel when you were *doing* it? Sit down after a piece and write. Extend the experience.”

I rediscovered art (I mean drawing pictures in pencils and colors) last January when I suddenly started making posters and drawings on the theme of returning to 26 Second Avenue. I did portraits of Prabhupāda and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and of devotees doing a variety of things. Someone told me that my drawings reminded her of “naive art.” I felt at home seeing the figures drawn by primitive artists. They looked so innocent and unskilled.

Soon, the bustle of my travels made my drawings more occasional, but I kept at it, drawing on A5-

sized paper. I feel so lucky to be able to draw like that, free as yet from the pretentious claim that I am an artist. I'm not looking for photo accuracy but the nervousness in my hand and brain when I draw.

Visual art is similar to the writing process. Devotees don't want to see nice things but something to stimulate their Kṛṣṇa consciousness. When my hand feels the urge to make figures (or even abstractions) not apparently connected to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, however, I give myself permission. I know that this drawing will lead me to the more explicit work.

From an artist: "Sure, we may not paint like Michelangelo, but the time-consuming skills are not the point here. Rather, we are simply doing what is natural. Why not be happy with ourselves. What is wrong with joyful expressions of memories and thoughts in Kṛṣṇa consciousness? There is nothing wrong, but everything right. Yes, it takes courage to draw like that."



This is an open-armed Pradyumna. I made it a realistic depiction, a simple illustration from within my head and of course, from seeing in the past the ISKCON illustration. I wanted to give a hint at the conjugal attraction Māyāvātī would later express for this boy as he grew up to resemble Kṛṣṇa.

O Kṛṣṇa, I pray You will forgive me for attempting my crude drawings. Please see that I intend well, even if the execution is faulty. I really do it to praise You.

The stuff of this drawing is holy—both the *līlā* and the urge we have to draw and to write, to create art. Is this drawing naive? That would mean I can't draw an arm that looks graceful. What the hell, technique is not so important. I'm just glad the child has arrived and been found in the belly of the fish.

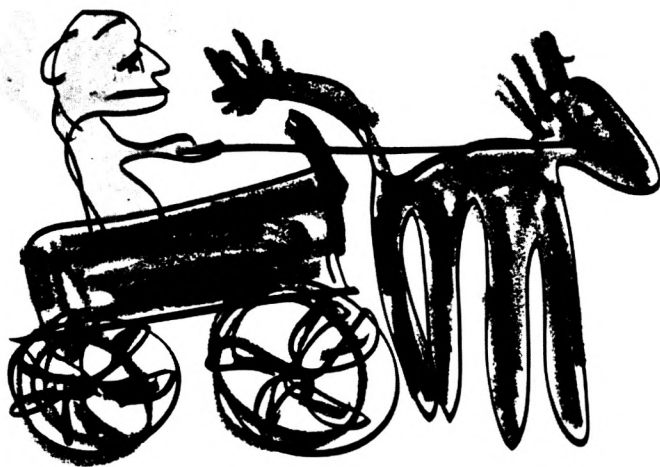


It's a long story and I'll spare you the details, but I'm visiting the home of people with whom I thought I had a loving and trusting relationship only to find out I was wrong. In effect, they told me, "You have changed. When you speak it doesn't ring true. We want openness. You speak like a conventional, dogmatic ISKCON preacher." I was shocked. Then I thought, "This is just going on in this one relationship. I'll be on my way."

Later, I laid down to rest but couldn't sleep, so I got up and found my oil-based crayons and drew a picture. In it I have three heads—one inclined to

go to sleep if only he could, one half asleep, and the other insomniac. I also drew many tiny midges, in the room, but they were mostly mental ones. The black bells—can you make them out?—signify, “Your words don’t ring true, don’t ring true, don’t ring true.” The heads on the right are those persons telling me that my lectures are disappointing, that I speak hard-line *śāstra*, and that if we want to learn to love, we have to follow the way of Rūpa Gosvāmī and Prabhupāda. “You are irrelevant.”

The insomniac with his big eyes awake. Yeah, I *tried* for artistic effect. Is that wrong? Picasso said to go ahead and imitate, and when you botch it, that’s actually you. I like the fact that I used an uncomfortable feeling to produce a drawing. Good! You can’t sleep? Then turn on the light and draw a picture of it. I would like always to do that—write or draw and unload feeling.



This isn't going to be easy. To find what you want to paint or draw in a way that is pleasing—after all, I want to do something Kṛṣṇa conscious, right? Then how? Why don't I let myself draw?

Just now I drew a circle thing—abstract, I admit. It reminded me of a chariot wheel or a *cakra*, so I turned the page and drew the picture of a horse and cart and a man. Suddenly I colored him blue and gave him an aura. Is it Kṛṣṇa? Is it *serious* enough? Do I just keep going like I'm going? I say I want to do something that pleases me, but is that enough?

I think it is. I'll have to go on that conviction. I am a servant of Kṛṣṇa. Who can I ask for confirmation? I received a letter from a devotee who is sorry that Prabhupāda isn't here to give him absolute direction. He says no one else can do that. I agree. There is no one else like Prabhupāda. Now

in separation we have to do it for ourselves. We can't do it by being half-dead or "surrendering" by force. We have to go with the flow of what comes, with the direction Kṛṣṇa seems to be pulling us in, drawing the pictures that want to come out. I drew a circle and found a chariot. I didn't stop there and I found Kṛṣṇa. We have to trust the process. We are not nondevotees.

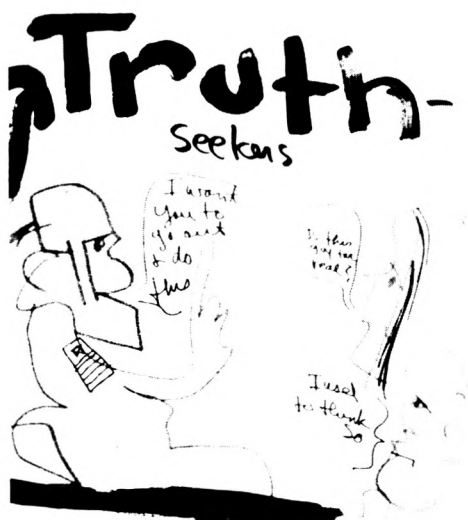
Over the past weeks, I've been rereading a book I wrote and didn't publish called *Progresso* and something happened that I think is important. That is, I came to like it. I accepted it as the only reader of that book, and I felt that I could accept it even if others didn't. In other words, I wrote something I liked.

Are you going to ask me if the book is Kṛṣṇa conscious? You wouldn't know, would you, because only I can know. Of course, my spiritual master knows too because he is measuring the essence of my *bhakti* expression. This book was a private act of devotion. In it, I took whatever he taught me and whoever I am and rendered it as service. I made repeated attempts to express myself and Kṛṣṇa consciousness in a wholehearted way. That is the book's theme, although others may not see it or appreciate it. And from this experience I realized that it's important that we come to accept our own offering made out of our own devotion and stand up for it, if only to ourselves.

Coming to this understanding has been a gradual evolution for me. I have written millions of

words and now I am drawing hundreds of pictures. If I don't accept anything I have done on Kṛṣṇa conscious grounds, what meaning can it possibly have?

I find when I'm drawing that, to make it Kṛṣṇa conscious, I put *tilaka* on the faces. I draw a sun and stick *tilaka* on it so that I don't have to worry that it has no Kṛṣṇa conscious imagery. But the depth of the expression has to have more to do with it than just tacking on *tilaka*. And more than obvious or explicit depiction, done in the same way others would do it, of some Kṛṣṇa conscious topic. That's my point: take the risk to find the truth before you speak it.





Art—the specific combination of words and pictures—is the best way to keep a culture’s record. It will be favored by history.

What record shall I leave? I start out with clean lines drawn in brown marker, a picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda. He oversees all I do. I want to follow him. Then I use paint to depict a tiny Statue of Liberty figure bearing a brush and sign it, “the artist.” Then a cutting cartoon labeled, “Truth seekers.” What do I want to say? Keep trying to express it.

In his book, *No More Secondhand Art*, Peter London says that art used to be a sacred and powerful practice for aboriginal peoples. Art did not mean creating beauty, but creating connections of meaning between man and nature and man and

God. Yes, God. That has meaning for a devotee too. Art can heal us. By that I mean it can allow us to see ourselves. The cavemen scratched elegant bison on the walls of their caves to feel empowered to hunt them. My scratches and my little commentaries on ISKCON and *bhakti* are my prayer for the empowerment to keep going.

Did the pencil plan for “Kṛṣṇa kidnaps Rukmiṇī” this morning and later sprayed white balls with the idea of what to do with them tomorrow. I painted a brown lump for Kṛṣṇa lifting Govardhana. I release myself to do the childlike paintings of which I am capable. I saw an old print book filled with church art from hundreds of years ago in what looks like remote (not famous) churches in France and Spain—Christs and Madonnas and saints—all done by simple painters, not great technicians, and full of spirit.

Our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement and its imagery seem lighter than the Catholic Church. We have joyful dancing *kīrtanas* and Kṛṣṇa killing demons in a nonchalant way. I spray layers of paint—yellows and browns and golds—and outline them in black to cut a sharper border.

Culture is important. Culture is spirit. That means every day you hear *Bhāgavatam* lectures and then look at pictures and sing and dance. You celebrate the spirit of Lord Caitanya’s *saṅkīrtana*. These things are not the frosting on the cake; they are the fountainhead of culture. Imagination and

spirit in their pure forms come from the desire to glorify God, to commune with Him, and to share His mercy with others.



Shall I tell you about the drawing of Lord Rāma that came out in several stages? First He appeared as a thick stick figure of green paint, which I applied yesterday. Today I added features that pleased me, even though they were a little crude. Am I a naive artist? Well, I can't actually draw or execute anything expertly, so call it what you want—naive, arrogant, or indulgent. It doesn't matter. I'm simply trying to enter the happy realm of worshipping Kṛṣṇa by painting His form. I am also pleased with how the humorous scene of Kṛṣṇa kidnapping Rukmiṇī came out. I drew in the lusty, envious kings shaking their heads in bafflement. I hazed them over in a green mist and drew Kṛṣṇa exiting slowly on His chariot, His arm around His

new queen. He is bathed in a yellow light that guards Him from the green of the stupid, falling princes and demon kings.

My Govardhana picture is still in the early stages. It's small and it felt like I was decorating a birthday cake while I was drawing in the details. I didn't feel patient enough to complete it.

Okay, mate, get back to your paints.
 If I can get a profusion of many—
 dozens!—of drawings, solid as wood
līlās of green Rāmacandra
 or blue Paramātmās,
 yellow Caitanyadevas
 and abstract backgrounds
 on which to write with delight
 in markers and paint
 the exact *Gītā śloka*
 or some paraphrased gloss
 of a verse I've assimilated
 and believe in
 and want to propagate, like this one:
 "There is no truth higher
 than Kṛṣṇa. Everything
 comes from Him and is
 sustained by Him. He is the ultimate goal."

I'm aware that these are precious days
 and when I am traveling my main solace
 will be this remembrance
 and a new book

coming to catch the last rays
of summer's sunset—
this year's creative flow
is crucial, I think,
to my Kṛṣṇa consciousness
and may be connected
to the crucial work of
the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.

Tell me, Sassafras, who is that funny-looking fellow in many of your paintings, the one with the eyeglasses? We look at his eyeballs as they gaze on the pages of the *Bhāgavatam* and sometimes see the retina diffusing the light back into the brain. Sometimes he appears in a scene with the Swami and sometimes in other guises. Is he Charlie Everyman?

I have started sketching both Baladeva and Madhu. Doing them gets me past the level of stick figures with balloon heads and simple lines for mouth and dots for eyes.



The man in the moon—I draw him too.

And Kṛṣṇa, but not whimsically and I'm never disrespectful. I often find myself praying for lines when I paint Kṛṣṇa, the way a *pūjārī* decides whether to choose a feather of light blue or pink to place next to the peacock feather in the Deity's crown. The one Supreme Lord kindly appears in human-like form for us to worship and serve. We can draw Him and all His creation.

I am the man in the moon and I am the boy in the tan shorts with buttons on his pockets the way rich tourists wear them to protect their credit cards. I am that man who wanders into the walled city to see medieval pictures painted by Christians of hell scenes. The gluttons with the big bellies, the devils pushing them to the dinner table and forcing them to eat chickens, batting them on the head with clubs and I don't think they can eat any more in hell.

Enough of that. I'm not really making such a visit to the walled city. Rather, I'm lying here in pain. I am a loyal ISKCON son and I am thankful for affectionate friends.

The epiphanies, the disciplines, the attempts to remember Kṛṣṇa with every breath, the perfunctory practice of *japa* and *gāyatrī*, the release, the heavens to Betsy real stuff. And our friends will have to go one at a time or in a group. Then what will be left of us? What is the good of all endeavors when the soul has to go on to the next life? He

should be doing something now that promotes his Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He should surrender to the spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, and don't try to cheat. Be plain and simple and sincere.

Someone asked me, "Did you feel you let your spiritual master down when you resigned from the GBC?"

Maybe. But then I recouped. I thought, "All right, so I am not working on one of the projects that was most dear to Śrīla Prabhupāda, one of the major Indian temples or book distribution, but I am working on chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and reading and writing and being a devotee. Isn't that one of his main projects?"

"Oh," they may say, "but Prabhupāda wanted us to sacrifice our self-cultivation in order to push on the mission."

"Well, too many have died to Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the process. I want to keep mine and serve him in the way that makes sense for me over the long run." That's what I say.

Want a report of what I drew this morning? I followed up on the primitive thick lines I put down last night before taking rest. I made those lines with thick brushes and bold colors—blue, orange, brown, red, yellow, green. They're stick figures, but thick ones, and blobular or globular shapes. I did one of the GBC meeting table with chairs and a few figures. I was careful with that one. I didn't want to get into satire or cartoon. Then I added a few saffron-shaped figures at the table. There they are,

members of the GBC sitting around the meeting table.

Last night I did black silhouettes on orange paper, indicating the protagonists at a meeting I had last week. That meeting held some emotion for me, and this morning I tried to let it go as far as possible. By looking at it, however, no one will know what it meant to me.

I also did a few renditions of a person reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. It was a way to satisfy my hunger. I wrote a few words onto the page of the book that the person was holding so that I could read them later, and I tried to lay down policies for myself to read at least five minutes a day in a prayerful way as well as to reinstate my daily reading program.

I know that when I look at these drawings later there will be nothing so wonderful about them, objectively speaking, but I want to get away from the idea that what I draw must attain a certain standard of beauty. They are my offerings to Kṛṣṇa, my attempts to be Kṛṣṇa conscious. When I say "offerings," I know they are not the usual polished, presentable offering. They are raw. We say you should offer first-class things to Kṛṣṇa, but what is first-class? My actual feelings are the best I have; they're the most sincere. That's what Kṛṣṇa wants from us, that which is most precious even though it may not look presentable to others. Kṛṣṇa knows the heart of the offering. Some viewers may see it that way too. Others may be offended; for sure some people will be offended. They may have a

more conventional idea of what Kṛṣṇa consciousness is about, and I shouldn't set out to disturb them or rebel against it. I'm doing what I am.

When you don't have talent or discipline, and when you don't have time to work toward gaining those things, then all you have left to offer is your best feeling of the moment. That's why anyone can draw if they draw from within. We acknowledge our desire to worship the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa as Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is doing. Ours is obviously a lower order of worship, but it *is* worship. I was able to write the word "Govindam" in thick, tan letters. That's my fortune. I know what "Govindam" means, at least to some extent. It means Kṛṣṇa who tends the cows, who pleases the senses, whose senses we should please by our service, and who cares for the land. May He be glorified.



Yesterday afternoon I learned that my father died. I heard about it in a letter from a friend. He died in Philadelphia in 1988. Hearing this news stirred something in me. Last night I began to outline blobs of paintings in a kind of personal commemoration of my father. I did a close-up portrait which I started out drawing as a crude and ignorant person. Then I outlined one of the more heroic figure he was to me, big and muscular, when I was a child and we went to the beach together to swim in the waves. Then I did a deathbed scene where I fantasized that I was giving him *japa* beads and he was chanting. I also drew a picture of our house on Katan Avenue. This morning I finished them, especially the facial portrait, from which I moved the ignorant look on the figure's face. My father had an artistic touch which he called his "whimsy." I imagined him saying to me, "Please make my portrait nice. Give it a little character and go ahead and give it your whimsical touch."



Art is such a thing that as you smear paint onto the poster boards, many different feelings and images come. It reminds me of the Ouiji board or pendulum where you wait for some kind of mystic vibration to come and give you an indication what to do. Out of the swirls, globs, and strokes come thoughts and the inspiration to find how to connect them with life. Perhaps you think of death, or the need to surrender, or you may think of Prabhupāda, but not one of those thoughts necessarily produces a corresponding image that's easy enough to draw. Of course, when you get bolder and more confident in painting, you'll be able to go for the thoughts that give the most energy and not be afraid you can't paint them. Anyway, in one way or another, you come to terms and start to do something, bring form out of your personal chaos.

Time to become the Visiting *Sannyāsī* again. On our way to Slovenia.

