

Last Days of the Year

(December 1994)

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

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Author's Note

During the 1994 Kārttika season I was in Māyāpur, India participating in a *parikrama* and series of lectures with Bhakti-cāru Mahārāja and a group of devotees. I found it a rewarding experience, but as our time together came to an end, I began to look forward to finding more alone time to write. As Kārttika ended, Madhumaṅgala and I decided to return to Ireland and to rent an inexpensive house where I could do a writing retreat.

During the first days of that retreat, I strove to write a book which simultaneously had a structure while allowing for the writing of spontaneous prose and poetry. I chose as my topic the search for such structure itself, and the book became *In Search of the Grand Metaphor*. (Excerpts of this book have appeared in the Books Among Friends volume *Breaking the Silence*.) Days later, I found I had hit a stride in my search for theme in writing, then began to feel the structure limiting me.

After all, I had given myself precious time to write full-time; I wanted to enter the experience as fully as possible. For me, this means free-writing—writing sessions with no predetermined shape, theme, or topic. I stopped the “search” and plunged into a series of writing sessions without titles, distinguished one from another simply by a number. We were in a place with no distractions, so I threw myself into the writing sessions and again and again wrote in the spirit of writing down the bones.

This writing—just the opposite of what I was looking for in *Grand Metaphor*—is presented in this book, *Last Days of the Year*.

The reader should understand that even when an author deliberately abandons theme or structure to allow in the chaos, words and themes continue to fall in patterns. We tend to be preoccupied in one way or another no matter what else we are doing, and such preoccupations tend to emerge through even the most random approaches at writing and flavor the free-writing with thematic structure. I hope the reader will enjoy *Last Days* as a piece of high energy free-writing done sincerely by a person who is trying to make his spiritual vocation the writing art.

Notes #1

M. asked, “What if we had to stay here for three months?” Would I get sick of Dennis? Would I be able to tolerate the sheep? No, I would not be able to. I wouldn’t want to stay here.

But here is where we are and I look forward to using my time here for the best.

Freer writing. Forthwith areas of football fields. The natural wealth of an abandoned cave where nightmare proportions were discovered. The all-new transversal shift of Sadāpūta amused, and the dry wit, the words, Hari Śauri used well.

This is the Associated Press wire. I am within the ticker tape, coming across as they used to in the 1960s. I don’t know how they do it now, but it’s coming out from my brain and I hope that the Supersoul will talk to me.

Various voices within, subpersons, are important. I will plan to let them take the mike for awhile in this work—even the censors, gremlins, and critics. I'm not alone here. The scribe likes influences.

This is a firelight sonata a
 song of sputtering flames.
 I am not going to give unseemingly
 what we call *prajalpa* because

this is a song for shivering
 as you pull on your long underwear—
 I apologize for dressing in front of
 Prabhupāda but there is
 no other place and I can't just
 stand on ceremonies.
 I am a fool.

This is the poem of an inveterate vertebrae,
 a poet with a violin and no squeak,
 writing in a modern age without cat gut
 the homogeneous milk
 of humankind.

Not a careful poem. It couldn't wait, but shivered in my body, impatient to be born. O Kṛṣṇa consciousness, I want to serve you. You are in me and outside of me. I know just a little of you. You are infinite and independent of me, but within myself. I own you, love you, protect you, you, my best and most familiar friend. No, I'm a fool, but we don't have to always stand on ceremony.

These are my last days. Did you know that each night I go into the kitchen here (I shouldn't tell you such things, but I have a yen to speak as much as possible just to preserve the experience. Is it vain to think life is full of potential Kṛṣṇa conscious moments, lived in the simple things?) and share a cup of tea with Madhu. Should we make the Irish salute, "To your health, and may your mouth always be wet"? While we drink tea, we plan our lives for next year.

"Is this some contract I can't change?"

I thought he would say I could change my plans on any whim, but instead he said, "Actually, once we buy our airline tickets and inform people of our intention to attend this or that seminar, and after we have asked people to prepare for our visits, etc., then it will be difficult to reverse the plans."

"Oh."

Then I tried going deeper: "I am planning a year of my life. Is this next year going to contribute to the plan I have formed for how I wish to spend my remaining life duration?"

And deeper: "Is it enough to be just another *sannyāsi* moving from temple to temple and giving lectures?"

And do you know what I said? I said yes, I do think it is enough. My life is full and privileged when I live a few days on the highway, using the time to write and read and pray, and then arrive at a temple to preach. New things come of it. I look forward to such travels through Europe and the Caribbean, even though I meet the same devotees and the same quarrels and my

same inability to change anything for them. I pray to go deeper into those same things and to actually taste Kṛṣṇa consciousness through the routine. Yes, I said, it is enough, and I accept it.

Here's a *sannyāsī* with a shaved head writing a shaved poem:

“The End of the Year” is a good title.
 I always look for titles and even
 illustrations for books, and customers. But
 I seek the words . . . I seek the time
 when I will step aside, or as Theophan says,
 when “involuntary longing” will take over
 and Kṛṣṇa in my heart will decide I
 am good enough, or He gives His causeless mercy
 although I am not good enough
 and takes over, masters
 my senses, my heart, my mind, and
 I flow to Him.

Prabhupāda knows and he knows how to teach
 both newcomers and old students the
 brilliant and dull, the best of us still struggling
 compared to what we *might* be if we had become
 like the pure devotees in Lord Caitanya's time.
 Prabhupāda sees us with his compassionate
 eyes and says, “Let them dance, even peculiar,
 as long as they have life. What can we expect?”

“The Last Days of December”—a good
 concept, leaving room for a blessed fortress
 of unintelligible words all leading

to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the real song.
That song is not manufactured from air,
but from the heart of prayer and
freedom from desire.

What does this year hold? Nārada
and Vyāsa, a seminar—that work,
and the work of these notebooks and pens.
Surely my soul will remain in my body a little
longer and be able to write stuff that helps people.

It's delicate how writing comes. M. says it's a plant
that require a protective environment. If people smash
what I'm doing—anyway, it's sensitive. I have to follow
my own way. Even Kṛṣṇa doesn't disturb us when we
pursue our personal offering at His feet, but lets us
work at it and become purified. He does, however, re-
mind us of the price we must pay for the offering to
become worthy.

I'm looking forward to the new year because it's so
unsullied, just waiting to be used up. I pray to use it in
devotional service. But what if during this year I am
severely tested? That's the expression Prabhupāda
used in discussing Bali Mahārāja. He said that Bali
Mahārāja was being "severely tested" by Kṛṣṇa. It hap-
pens. If it happens to me, I will have faith that Kṛṣṇa is
bringing the best out in me through that test. I will be
changed for the better. What will I do through the
test? I will hear about Kṛṣṇa. I hope to be hearing
about Kṛṣṇa up until my end.

The fire catching in the fireplace. Am I looking for symbols or am I prepared to live without metaphor in the immediate? Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Notes #2

We have no water and I have charcoal on my hands. Dennis will fix the water problem later today. Dennis said he has had a hard week.

Śrīla Prabhupāda teaches that we have not created anything. Rather, we have taken the ingredients that God created. I know this is also true of my writing or anything else I do. We are servants. God provided us with ingredients—life, senses, intelligence, and material elements—by which we can serve Him. We have no independence.

So, dear friends, dear nobody, dear fill-in-the-blank, dear Natalie Wood, dear knock on wood, knock on head, be glad this is a book. It could have been a cat.

Listen, dear Notes, I want to at least tell you that I missed you yesterday. I love you, but couldn't write here because I had pain behind my eye. Not only that, but lunch was late and my schedule disrupted. Yes, I missed you so much that I thought of you during *japa*.

So many of my spiritual practices are thoughtless. I thought being with you would be different. What do I find? Is it the same? Let's make it better. Looking for solace and the softening of heart. Still no water, but that's no reason to dry up.

What is it to cut through? It means to say things that are really in your heart. There's a fireplace on my left, and one day I will write a story for you folks, but in the meantime, these notes, because I'm looking for what I really feel. It's not just that it's cold in here. My body has to be used in Kṛṣṇa's service. If out of a morass of experience and feeling and silly thoughts I come through to a genuine Kṛṣṇa conscious topic, something that really matters to me, then writing these notes would be worth it. You know, I heard several big ISKCON leaders talking with Prabhupāda in 1974. A few years later they were all scattered, gone. When they spoke in '74 they were serious. They wanted to make their points supreme over the others, although they were all simply repeating what they had already heard from Śrīla Prabhupāda. Maybe we weren't realizing so much in those days. So it's important to cut through.

I'm repeating too, but writing isn't about *only* repeating, and it doesn't always run along smooth tracks. It sure is cold in here.

The Lord speaks to me in the blue-covered book, Tenth Canto. I too was there in that shack in Bhubaneshvara, that early morning when Prabhupāda began the Tenth Canto. A rat climbed on the beams above and

we saw him and didn't see Prabhupāda
 on the other side of the wall. But we were listening
 and heard the beginning,
 our young spirits happy, living
 with our spiritual master.
 We thought he would stay with us
 to complete it. Then on the morning
 walk as the sun rose, January 1977, Orissa,
 on a dirt road, we said, "Prabhupāda, we heard
 you begin the Tenth Canto." He was shy,
 sweet, "Oh, you heard?" Then he said,
 "In the Tenth Canto you can hear
 Kṛṣṇa's flute . . . "

Don't tear out your hair, even figuratively. It's all
 right. Keep going, then chant in the kitchen, put in
 your teeth more firmly, then go upstairs to exercise
 (maybe not today, I feel too sore). I am not feeling
 sorry for myself, but need encouragement, that's all, to
 sing.

One time I went to Atlanta and Bhakta Bill
 and his wife were so young, yet he was
 temple president.
 They thought I was special,
 a GBC in white,
 and I encouraged them to go on with
 their preaching.
 They were dear to Prabhupāda and still are,
 although Bill's now a full-time lawyer.
 So much water has passed under our bridges.
 Listen to your heartbeat and not to that of others.

Try to be who you are. Prabhupāda
 left us and we scattered
 or took the reins and
 no one could tell us otherwise.
 Now we're each here. All I can say
 to justify my own existence is
 that I'm reading, Prabhupāda, I'm reading
 your books.

Now tell everyone, Stevie, that you're about to write stuff that comes into your head. Cornwall Wallace, if you don't understand it, tough. "Lift your skirts, ladies, we are going through hell," he said. Finally, the fire is warming this room. I mean, the fire of the heart. The Lord will allow us our freedom, no doubt, although we are tethered like cows on a rope. There is an end to freedom, and that end is called death. Each and every one.

Prince Yadu said, "I am young and I need to enjoy or how will I renounce later?" He would not give his youth to his father. No one is criticizing him for that.

I say about myself, and I'm sure we each ask ourselves the same question: "How much longer will I live like this? Do I think I might live until the end and only then regret that I didn't become a devotee?"

Our heroes push us forward, sometimes righteously with machismo. We're frank about that. Sensitive devotees usually get overrun by the perfection of others. Some get sick of it and leave. This is a tough problem. "The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want. He leads me to green pastures. Although I walk in the shadow of the valley of death, I will fear no evil. Thy

rod and Thy staff they comfort me.” O Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa. I have faith.

Actual life is sometimes too difficult to put on the page, so we take shelter in remembering evergreens. Remember the shining balls hung from branches of the Christmas tree? There was a picture preserved in our photo album. It was taken the year when the men were at war. Only cousin Ray was home. He was young and wore a white shirt and suspenders. My mother’s Steve was out on a ship putting out fires. I was too little to know—knew nothing but her arm and a few crazy movies and Hoffman’s soda and bananas and the fear of dogs and mice.

We live in the past sometimes. It feels easier.

Well, it’s not. There is nothing great about the past. It’s a waste of life to spend too much time there. Better to be a pure devotee in the present, absorbed in prayer and honesty and other such stuff.

Good people we are, basically, but we have an underside. I know that nothing I am saying is clear. I don’t know whether to be humble about that or to be proud. Let’s stop cultivating blindness by avoiding the truth. It’s not clear because I have to stop short: I shouldn’t even be discussing myself. Lord Kṛṣṇa is His name and I prefer to chant. Still, I am made in His image, made by the Swami too. He can put me down and I will not walk out on him. I *have* to take what goes on in this place. See what I mean? I can’t make it clearer.

As the wind howls
 and my dear friend makes hot tea
 in this house where we have no water
 I look forward to the days
 passing one by one while I do my projects—
 preparing classes where we read *Gītā* texts and
 write. And I will read.
 I am on a third-class express train to heaven.
 This is the suffering of
 no complaint, the babble of the brook,
 the stones and mud never frozen
 the sheep who have to die splashed with blue dye,
 the landlord and his Christmas all alone
 with no woman and no celibacy,
 so drunk.

This is the free, the doesn't-know-
 what-he-should-do-sometimes show.
 But he behaves, acts cool, collects quotes,
 and sometimes clowns, "Don't tread on me!"
 This is the barefoot, the black knuckle skin
 floor of kitchen song. This is the fire
 in the stove and the fireplace, the
 wind with cold fingers that
 always finds us. This is the little bit
 I put on the page.

Notes #3

Irritated. Read *Forgetting the Audience*, which I wrote last year. I liked it. Now I'm here, irritated. Why? I ruffle myself because I want to achieve something, then become angrier when I cannot. That's what the *Gītā* describes: from lust comes anger when the desires are frustrated. I am covering limited ground like a sheep who has to walk over the same trails and boggy marsh because it is fenced in by its owner. It manages, and clips the grass even closer. The sheep becomes flexible. It has to.

Kṛṣṇa is the person who is behind all things. He appears in the universal form to awe the materialists into submission. More intelligent devotees are not interested in the universal form but in the attractive Supreme Person in His medium size. Śrīla Prabhupāda explained this on the beach in Bombay while they read the eleventh chapter together.

Now I am serving the same Kṛṣṇa. We all are. But how personally *may* we serve Him? In *Forgetting the*

Audience I faced some frightening things about the potential faults in my service. I also defended my service, not always in its particulars, but in its ability to help me pray. Reading it again, I admired the even tone, the firmness, the willingness to admit my lower position.

So why am I irritated? Is it because my progress is so slow? Yes. But I can't stop writing about my slow progress. If I did, I would have to fall silent. I want more for myself.

Out of this funk, on this gray, windy, misty, wintry Irish day, I ask, "Would you like to sing and dance?"

I looked at those clouds earlier and thought of bitterness, how I don't have it in my life. I haven't been forced to drink of extreme adversities. My adversities are my blessings; they have enabled me to live more humbly and to be who I am, exploring my writing, alone.

Maybe that's why I'm irritated; am I feeling some loneliness? Then put it aside or accept it, accept this day, accept these notes.

He carries in the wood in a
cardboard carton
and I've got my share to do.
I have to burn that wood from
midnight till breakfast.
When I nap after dawn, the
world is still dark, the room illumined
by the rays of the last of the logs.
When you measure sleep by no more than
four hours at a time, as I do, you are
always hopeful, always just rising.

Oh, I have my share and I do care
to improve but have to accept
the wind and rain and that there's no water
and the sheep will die.

M. is axing wood and

Dennis is coming slowly up the hill in his
tractor (one headlight missing).

My lot is to write and not to be
irritated that I am forced to tell
of the one theme of wanting to sing to
chant, seeking the writer's way.

Looking for voices to help.

What do you want, the shouts of a shepherd? He
whistles and shouts as if he were a rowdy looking for
action.

I halt in my tracks when I hear that shepherd's yells
as if I too were a timid sheep running in the rain. This
shepherd rounds his sheep and dyes them red to
distinguish them from Dennis' sheep, who are blue. I
halted, timid and even embarrassed that this man
should see me walking around his land with a hazel
walking stick, nothing better to do than to look like a
country gentleman. Maybe he doesn't look at me like
that, I don't know, but it's how I see myself through his
eyes. Better I stay in the hills where no one will see me,
although it's likely I'll hear the tractors even there.
Where can this prayer man go alone who doesn't even
pray but grounds out an extra two rounds over the
bare minimum and then goes inside to write, to write?

Getting darker. I gave M. this note: "You mentioned that at the end of our time here I would be glad to leave. I have thought over what you said, and it occurred to me that maybe you were making a suggestion. We *could* leave earlier. We could leave in less than a week, just after my birthday. What do you think?" I don't have a theme here anyway, and I could continue these notes even if we were traveling. The structure will be easy to maintain: it's a simple, silver, metal trough standing on four legs. Whatever you have, you throw it in. The man who's writing it can look serious anywhere, and he can mumble about artistic intention and how he fused it with the religious. Not only that, but the idea that I am writing these notes during the last days of the year—well, it will be the last days of the year no matter where we are.

(Maybe *that's* why I was irritated earlier: I can't take the isolation and obscurity we have here. The austerity is too sweet, so I was inventing an excuse, an escape, from this wonderful place I have found. I should be resting in the grip of fate (Kṛṣṇa, of course), and happily using this opportunity to write in an old house with no one to bother me.

We will discuss it, M. and I, but I expect he will have an opinion both deep and practical regarding cars and whether plane tickets can be changed. My guess is we'll stick it out here.

Then see it as precious.

There, now, I feel better. I feel these notes are becoming a series, growing like carrots out of the ground—a series of days, of cold mornings without

heat, days without shape or direction, but writing what
is.

Prabhupāda is here with me, I imagine he is laughing at me or even scornful. A brother said that if Prabhupāda were here now, physically, he would pulverize me, condemn me as a nonsense, useless, concocted—thunderbolt guru and no denying it.

O Prabhupāda, your *mūrti* has a mild smile. He doesn't seem to mind that I sit alone under a light bulb and type. You know that at least I am practicing to write. You don't read my work, but see that I am reading, being reasonable, self-controlled, and that I have a heart which I offer to you. I may be crazy to think my words can be used in your preaching mission, but that's my professed desire.

Notes #4

Let's start with the squeaking and hissing of the log in the fire. The logs underneath are red embers now. The squeezing out of liquids is not all water but the remaining sap in the wood. Don't feel sorry for dead wood. It's long gone now. Can I claim that since I am a devotee, the log has benefited by burning to keep me warm in my devotional labors? Perhaps, if I am actually glorifying God.

We heard Prabhupāda speak on his 1974 European tour. I was blessed to be there. He said it was always good to remember Kṛṣṇa. Even if a conversation is going toward sense gratification. This was in Geneva. Prabhupāda was praising Bengal as the most beautiful place in India. He said all the Europeans love Bengal. It used to be all garden, but has since been spoiled. He said one Bengali novelist wrote a story of an officer who fell in love with a Bengali girl. He was enchanted by her black hair and black eyes. When Prabhupāda

said that, Yogeśvara dāsa interjected, “Kṛṣṇa also has black hair and black eyes.”

Prabhupāda said, “Why do you bring in Kṛṣṇa? We are discussing sense gratification.” Then he added that it was good Yogeśvara remembered Kṛṣṇa. I liked that moment. I spoke up too and said, “So it is all right to mention Kṛṣṇa even if the example we give is not so clear or good?”

“Yes,” he said, “as long as we somehow remember Kṛṣṇa.”

So this writing may be like that. At least we know to turn to Him. Make the best use of a bad bargain.

I am happy.

Really? Or are your words spoken as convention?

No, happy that on the tape from June '74 in Germany, my voice was raspy but hanging in there, knocking out Sanskrit verses. I guess Nitāi was away that morning, or gone to America. Anyway, I had to stand in as reciter of Sanskrit for the assembly. Prabhupāda had me chant four or five verses in a row. I made few mistakes. Thank you, Prabhupāda, for letting me be there. And thank you for accepting me. You had so many devotees; how could I or any of us demand more from you? At least for a little while, a few months, you carried me along with you. Little did I know. And now?

Keep living in the present, thinking of His Divine Grace. I want to renew the contract I signed as his disciple. I want a new relationship with him, one in which I read his books and represent him as best I can according to my age and realization, and the

circumstances within ISKCON. And yes, according to my proclivity.

As I write, I pause to see how the fire is doing. Looks like I won't have to tend to it for the next hour. On my right is Prabhupāda in *mūrti* form. This is not a mere statue. He is there for the one who loves him. Do you want to serve him? He has kindly come in this form. As the Lord can do it, so can the pure devotee. Prabhupāda is worshiped all over the world by his followers. Please stay with me, Prabhupāda. I am foolish, but desire to see you and to hear from you.

If asked to choose a subject and sing in the august assembly of GBC members and *sannyāsīs* and more friendly disciples of His Divine Grace, I would probably leaf through the *Bhāgavatam*, as we do when asked to give an impromptu lecture, such as often happens when I first arrive at a temple, and choose something. Remember when that happened at New Māyāpur this summer? I wanted to stand by the white Renault van and talk to whomever approached—smile, relax, and tell of our adventures on the road. I wanted to ask each one how they were doing and enjoy the sunlight. Instead, the temple president insisted that I accept an official reception. He came out with a *kīrtana* party to greet me, consisting of persons I didn't know. "Follow me," he said, "and come into the temple foyer where we will wash your feet. Even though some of us are your Godbrothers, we will honor you. We *want* to do it." I had to follow; there seemed little likelihood of my refusal being respected.

Well, on that occasion I gave a lecture. I said something about the real revolution. Oh, and I said, "This is the 50th anniversary of the liberation of France from the Nazis, D-day, but France is still not liberated."

It appears that Kenmare is
 a small town, it doesn't even have a photo-
 copy machine and no courier service.
 But they have a health food store. M.
 brought back
 a small bag of couscous. I don't look
 into the bags because that would be sense
 gratification—to see what we will be eating.
 But I know it's couscous. Also, he told me,
 "For the next two days I'll be thinking
 how to cook special preparations on Ekādaśī."
 The 13th is my birthday this year,
 just the two of us here, so I won't
 have to lecture, just walk
 outside and come to this page
 for my usual.

When I was a young man in my parents' home I used to gaze into the fire. They lit fires especially at Christmas, just as I have a fire going now. When I was old enough, they invited me to drink with them—a high ball from the bar. It mellowed things, made everything a hazy lie, like soupy music on the phonograph and the amenities for which they had paid so dearly. The little King Christ in my mother's bedroom didn't have much sway over *that* household. She was lucky she was allowed to keep him there at all. So mundane, and

the telephone, and me getting out of it all through Brooklyn College and all that, as if I had a secret love, a secret community to join, to look forward to resistance of infamy, to liberation through the likes of Joan Baez singing, reading the *Village Voice*, and hearing what my Jewish friends had to say. The ferry to Manhattan left me no way out of the flesh and the demands. I knew all this while I gazed into the fire.

Today I am thinking of watchmen, perhaps similar to the ones in the Navy who stand watch over the ship. No, they don't stare into fires. In India, everyone has a little fire outdoors ignited from a few sticks. They gather round. I'm not part of that fire-gazing. I am too much the foreigner and cannot stand or crouch the way they can. I am meant to enter the gates of the Krishna-Balaram Mandir with the other white men, and to feel my fire-warmth in the form of money and passport and the knowledge that soon I will be released from this teeming country of poverty and Hindi. Who wants to learn Hindi when you know English, the language of Prabhupāda's books and the language of ISKCON politics? Therefore, I do not even try to stand before fires on the street. As for the fire of devotion, for that I only aspire. I still don't dare to light myself with the yogic fire of devotion that would drive me to please His Divine Grace and Lord Caitanya at any cost.

I prefer, I
 prefer,
 I prefer
 to write about it while
 sitting by a fireplace at
 an isolated house in Ireland. I prefer.

God will decide. I know it in my bones.

Please, Lord, accept my offering. In the midst of this sense gratification and speculation, I turn to You as Yogeśvara did on that walk in Geneva: “Kṛṣṇa has black hair and black eyes too.” You *swallowed* the forest fire. They beat the serpent who was devouring Nanda Mahārāja with flaming logs. Would I have done it if I had been there?

Here is another note from me before I go next door into the kitchen. I like the present, but prefer it to be spiced with a little future. I couldn’t stand the intensity of living *only* in the present. Therefore, I am telling you that in a few moments, I will go into the kitchen to chant. That will not go unabated: I will break my *japa* after half an hour and eat a spoonful of chalky-tasting, powdered medicine.

Never mind, I just said I prefer this.

The upstairs is cold and smells a little musty. I’ll do fifteen minutes of yoga before breakfast.

Breakfast is brief, almost *too* brief, and there is little of it, but the fact is I can’t digest more. So the present keeps moving along into the future, or the future moves into the present, and I will rest after all that.

Sleepy eyes. Before you die—the words come into my head. What about that dream last night?

Rasarāja dāsa and another straight-edge young devotee had an engagement at a high school. I came along as an older devotee. The presentation was, “How to lose weight by practicing *bhakti*.” Within that topic we would give the kids Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I began to

speak straightforwardly about how to make offerings to the Deity even in your mind. I was thinking of telling of the *brāhmaṇa* from South India who offered sweet rice to Lord Kṛṣṇa in his mind.

But some envious people tried to destroy us. While the college students were sleeping in the dorm, our enemies came and said, “If you hear this stuff about mental offerings, you will be ruined. Your head will fall off.” And so it went. The sleepers thought we were voodoo workers and prepared to attack us. When I awoke, I discovered I had a new headache in the left eye.

Bee-bop-aroo
 that fellow in the zoo
 knows you too, please be my Valentine
 before it's too late. See you at Christmas.
 We have chosen to live alone.
 Dear ones, the music I send you is
 Kṛṣṇa conscious, from alone,
 please, Lord, be pleased with me
 and direct me.

If one day I can go out
 as Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says, forgetting my
 own cares—that will be a new order of bravery.
 I can give myself a medal for that.
 Until then, from this sheltered
 place of alone, I pay my dues and
 prepare lectures, polish outlines, sing
 broken songs by the
 fireplace, and
 make my offering to you all.

O holy hot cereal,
O friend who serves Prabhupāda
by serving me, O rains and winds,
this place is as good as any other
and I will use it to celebrate the last
days of the year in notes as a compensation-offering
from one who didn't dare approach
people cold on the street to sell
them a book, although that
is the best and most appropriate
thing to do during December.
No doubt hundreds are doing it.

Notes #5

The cow is peeing. The black cow licks her lips like the child on the label of the Hajmola, “Tastes good!” M. saw the not-pretty gray and white one licking her calf; the calf was hunched up and “enjoying every minute of it.” *Bhāgavatam* says how these household animals are very much like one’s own children. Therefore, the *grhastha* shouldn’t kill them.

In my sequential reading, I’m up to Vasudeva’s speech to Kāṁsa about why we shouldn’t fear death but should be careful to act so that we may not transmigrate. I read, but not as deeply as I would have liked. I could read slower, but I am also eager to finish the cantos. Production mentality.

But just consider this: if we think always of Kṛṣṇa, then we will serve Him with our senses. At the time of death, Kṛṣṇa will take control. If our mind flickers, Kṛṣṇa will force Himself into our minds. We will need Him. We need Him now. Therefore, hear with attention. Then close your eyes and think of what He is

saying. What does it mean? No one can tell you how Kṛṣṇa is acting on your own heart. This can't be understood by putting it on an *iṣṭa-goṣṭhī* agenda, although discussing it with others might help. Ultimately, however, we have to find God for ourselves.

Everything is like that. We also have to find our personal expression of loyalty to ISKCON. This morning I wrote myself this note as it occurred to me while I was doing my little yoga exercises in the dark room: "Loyalty to ISKCON should come from the heart in a personal way. We don't have to show it off. Sure, loyalty will have recognizable shapes, but don't do it to gain credit with others. Act upon inner motives and principles, not on peer pressures, which are always shallow. Live from real conviction."

Green hills striped with brown belts. The day, wet. Crows on the ground as I walked around the perimeter of the marshy field, my steps sinking into the earth.

Sunday today. M. made chickpea pudding for dessert. Reading Hari Śauri Prabhu's book. Prabhupāda in his Manhattan suite, meeting guests. Someone leaves him with a copy of *Time* magazine. Later, Śrīla Prabhupāda sits alone browsing through it. When Hari Śauri enters, Prabhupāda pushes the magazine toward him and says, "No one should read these magazines. They present it in such a way that the material world seems real." Prabhupāda answered a letter about whether we may study comparative philosophies. Wasn't *my* question. I don't want to be a great philosopher. I want a simpler path.

These little bits I read—I put them together for my life.

I dreamt I was exposed to rock music being played by devotees. It was as if the entire world were being conducted as a kind of rock opera. Mailmen, everyone, whomever I met—all would be singing this rock music. It was as if the spreading of Kṛṣṇa consciousness was occurring dependent on the spread of rock-'n-roll. I shouted, "This music stinks!"

When I lie down to die, will I be able to bring my mind to Kṛṣṇa? At that time there will be no more books to write, and my mistakes will have to be forgiven or paid for in the form of another body.

The tractor down in the gully near
a line of trees and me up here, up here.
In the twinkling of an eye, he writes
a line, in a sweatshirt and a knit hat . . .
I had better start again. False start.

Now first go to your men who play the music with you.

Oh, that was in another book. I'm in a different place now. These are notes for the last days of this year.

It's not so cold today. I wrote some minor notes for a meeting with M. tonight, then paused and allowed myself to feel the deliciousness of time. Felt an urge to use my time to see if anything passes through my mind that will deepen my Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I have already settled most of the important matters relating to our

leaving here. I have time to live without those worries now.

What came? "What does Kṛṣṇa want me to do?"

I know I am stuck, oriented to performance. The trick is simultaneously to not care who is listening to me while speaking responsibly because people *are* listening. When I broke my ankles in my youth, I used to play a wooden recorder for myself, but also for anyone else who might be listening. I imagined my aunt hearing me from her next-door house. Later I found out that she had heard. She said, "I heard you playing and it was beautiful." But I had been playing to seek God and peace, and to revive my shattered soul, which had left me crazy enough to jump out a window. Miraculously I hadn't died. I lived long enough to browse through sacred books and to pray to God for direction. I was a weak and sensual bug, but there was something inside me like what I had read in the *Upaniṣads*, a Self, a light.

Life means to think of Kṛṣṇa, but
 who is He? And where is He?
 Why is He still so elusive?
 I don't know Him? God is invisible
 the Christians say, and Theophan says
 when you pray, remove all forms and images
 from your mind. They want only a simple regard,
 to be near the majestic, fearful God
 who is invisible and so great we can never
 know Him. He is certainly great,
 infinitely more than that, but
 He has a form—a spiritual form—and

we can think of Him, see Him,
and love Him like that.

When He speaks in the *Gītā* He
removes all doubts.

O Lord, please show Yourself to me, or
at least let me think of You. Please
pull me to You, captivate me with
Your unsurpassed sweetness.

Whatever is good in me and my writing
comes from You because You are the source of
creative arts. Wish I could see my attachment
to lesser concerns, wish I could wish . . .

There are three young men living in the Baltimore temple. I expect the next time they write, they will have moved out. They all like to read my books and are all asking me to initiate them. Think about what that means.

No, no more initiations for me. I have just done a few last exceptions they may have heard about.

But where does that leave them? Think about that too.

That's another thought that came while I was feeling the time to think.

In this age Prabhupāda says a man can't even take care of one wife. Kṛṣṇa had 16,108 wives.

Why bring that up?

I was wondering how I could presume to have even one disciple. In two days it will be my birthday. In Baltimore, at Jaya Gaurasundara's house, disciples will be gathering to speak the traditional offerings and to express the traditional worship. Someone might won-

der where we are, especially me, the subject of all this worship. Jaya Gaurasundara knows, but he won't tell.

I was walking the marshy bog and thinking that in the future I will be with those people gathered at his house. Why? Is it that I want to play at being honored while sitting on a big seat?

No, and so we are here alone. M. will probably write me a "Happy Birthday" note, and I will probably write him something back. I hope I'll read and write *as usual*. Give me that blessed, usual routine, free of pomp and indigestion.

And? What is it you were going to say before that girl stood in your line of vision with her offering of flowers?

I was going to say that I don't need big birthday parties. Better I show up later, give a few classes, and talk through my false teeth. Unlike King Khatvāṅga, I don't know how much time I have left. I need to spend some time looking for Him.

Ding-a-ling, in the mail comes a ring
 from Tom Mix and the Hoopla-doo. Here
 comes the mail-
 man with a gift for Thee. And
 from a helicopter comes Baladeva to surprise you
 with a newly published book
 a trinket, an hourglass, a jazzy song without my
 having asked. He'll bring a fizzy drink and
 tasty *prasādam* along with something
 to digest it all—a new but harmless pill.
 It will also help me live longer. Here comes
 the mailman with a cardboard box (like one
 carried by Jimmy Duncan, full

of things of little value
 except the time mom told him what to send:
 a Schwinn bicycle, mailed
 first-class). Here comes
 the cardboard box with a *Bhāgavatam*.
 Be grateful.

Here is the blue sky, now getting darker.
 M. pondering a cookbook to make Ekādaśī preps.
 I didn't ask him to, but he wants to.
 I will be happy to write
 a nonbirthday-birthday ode.

And on Christmas, who knows?
 Maybe nothing but routine,
 then leave here on time, bags packed and heading
 for the long drive to Shannon, on
 over the Atlantic, always chanting the
 Lord's names for protection—Kṛṣṇa, Govinda,
 Hare Kṛṣṇa, Nṛsiṁhadeva, dear
 Prabhupāda, I mean the real one,
 not the false,
 the real one and me
 the real one
 who is a servant of the Lord
 proven by service to His devotee.
 It's got to end that way as I
 have said several times.

Notes #6

My notes are not like Madhvācārya's notes at the end of the first chapter of the Tenth Canto. There he tells us further what the Lord said about transmigration. Why don't I talk of that too?

I can, but only if I repeat. Prabhupāda in Germany says material civilization is just digging and piling. (The audience laughed at his expression. A baby made a noise. He said, "This baby knows more than any of you." Then the baby made another noise, and Prabhupāda said, "It is disturbing.") He went on to explain that fools don't understand and cannot accept the facts of nature. I listen and repeat. There is nothing wrong with it. What else have I come here to write? Something else? You know.

Awoke and faced again the choice that I could leave here early and spend a few days at Śamika Ṛṣi's house in America. I decided to stick it out here. I am looking for something here, and I don't want to give in before

finding it. Something important could happen during these next two weeks in my relationship with Kṛṣṇa and my spiritual master, my outlook toward myself and toward life. I don't mean . . .

I can't force something to happen. I can only accept what Kṛṣṇa sends. I know that. Still, I'm not ready to escape.

These thoughts. Now I have a good fire going in the fireplace, but have no infinite supply of wood. My headache went away overnight. The pleasure of lying there knowing I had gone to bed forty-five minutes early, so didn't have to rush to fall asleep—I was able to just breathe and relax. I know such pleasures are temporary. What about your soul, sir?

Am I shivering because of the chill
 or due to the power of Anna Akhmatova's poems?
 She writes sharp as a knife, and grieves
 with such power
 over friends dead and the two wars her generation
 suffered. Brings images right
 before your face on the page, from her life
 and dedication. I don't think she
 would run away from a house where the writing
 was going good. Remember Rilke
 speaking from the Duino castle
 for weeks? He was also, like me, homeless and
 a beggar, but someone gave him a place
 for awhile. He wrote and waited for
 a grand inspiration. It came. Who could tear
 him away while he was writing *Duino Elegies*?
 He didn't care that someone helped him to keep

the house and cook. No,
he would eat air to hear Orpheus' flute.

I am no poet, just a hack who
enjoys putting out lines and knows he's got
the rare goods of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If
only I could weave them into wreaths or
garlands, or sew clothes for the Deity.
Prabhupāda is stern, yet he allows me.
The fire is controlled in the fireplace.
My wits cannot immediately fashion
strong lines of English verse
so I resort to the jazz image, the
hornpipe, the dribbling, the
half-wit pose, and
rip up pages by writing them this way.

Lord God, I see in my memory
words that impressed me and
made me twitch—*dehino 'smin*.
We are not the proprietor of our bodies but
simply the ones who occupy. A man came to see
Prabhupāda in Geneva. He was a biologist, he
said, but in the conversation it came out
that he had a deceased guru and had been named
Ratnānanda, "one who learns the truth
a little at a time."

Prabhupāda: "What is that truth?"

Man: "I can't express it."

Prabhupāda: "Then you don't know it."

The guy had an old voice and gentle,

but bewildered. When you analyze it, he kept saying the truth could not be spoken. He resented that Prabhupāda asked him for proof, asked him to define it, said, “If you can’t say, then you don’t know.” They are used to saying the Way cannot be expressed.

Prabhupāda: “At least say *something*. We don’t claim to know all of Kṛṣṇa, but you say at least something of God.”

“We cannot say anything,” they said,
 “but perhaps we know as much as you.”
 I falter while hearing, but stay with it,
 my guru strong,
 me his follower.

:

I repeat: I woke and thought I could go to America if I wanted. They will be nice to me and buy me a new sweatshirt if I ask for it, and a knit cap. Their houses are warm, and they are better cooks than Madhu. He won’t have to spend all day in the kitchen, although he says he doesn’t mind. He is facilitating me.

The real factor is how much I can use this time. Can I enter further into myself?

Maybe not further, but at least I can retain the level I am feeling now. I can’t force Kṛṣṇa, but only await His mercy. Rilke, too, knew he had to wait.

I am not a demon worshipping Lord Śiva. I have more patience. I don’t have to cut off my head to bring my worshipable Deity to me.

No. I can sit and write and go out for a brief walk and love the time I have to wait. I know I have been

given a million dollars, and that I can't quite handle it all. I am still covered. I am not the repository of the demigods. I'm hoping to use my time well and to improve hour by hour.

Why don't you explain it?

Okay. You see, it is voice and modern art. In modern art the conversational tone is set loose. The artist is himself, not just an official figure. Or, I don't know if it's art, but it's human.

A human speaks and other humans of like nature hear, soul to soul. A human can call out with a clear voice, and approach what he actually knows and feels from his personal exposure to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He has met the pure devotee. He has not yet found Kṛṣṇa in his life, but he accepts that Kṛṣṇa reserves the right to reveal Himself on His own time. He will do so when our human being is pure and serious. He first has to free himself from material desire. Still, as a human, he reaches out and tells other humans what the pure devotee has said: come to Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda writes that we have to discover the self. Then automatically we will surrender to the Supreme Self. Why? Because our self is part of Him. He wants us to return to Him. These are important things to feel.

In the conditioned state, all we do is covered by fault. There is a self within, and when we find it, we will be able to turn to Kṛṣṇa and say, "I belong to You." Finding self includes finding an authentic voice from which to call to Him.

In one sense, we cannot have an authentic voice as long as we don't know our true spiritual form, but in

another sense, we can have an authentic voice—we *have* an authentic voice—and it's that part of us that *feels* our own sincerity. It's that authentic voice which gives everything we do value.

O Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa,
Kṛṣṇa, the word.
Kṛṣṇa, the
chant, the intention
must be there.

* * *

Warm water pours over my head.
Poets and friends write to one another
in secret codes as if they were the only ones
who could express the age and what they
suffered. Maybe they are right.

But I say
the warm water over my head
and our living in this room,
Dennis not bothered with us,
although I can't trust a murderer
of sheep and cows, nor his
brother-in-law, the ignorant Irish Catholic.
I too have a strong Catholic background
from both father and mother's sides, but
what does it amount to? I have moved
designation and adopted the one truth, Kṛṣṇa.

See if you can look at something
beyond yourself for a minute.

The cheery fire, feel the cold.
If you stop the racket
of the typewriter, you'll hear the hiss
of wet logs, the clock moving.
Kṛṣṇa knows my heart.

Notes #7

They say an author should write the kind of book he or she would like to read. I like rangy, roomy books, but not books that waste my time. I want to be with the author—that's a first criterion. If that's not possible, I guess he has to win my respect.

But how's he going to do that except by being himself?

Then I want to enter a life of prayer.

On the front of Karen Karper's book, the blurb says, "She tells her story with quiet honesty . . ." I thought her chapters were too well planned, trying for an effect. A chapter about how the deer come not when you call them, but on their own, and that's how God appears in the life of a hermit. Another chapter on wild roses and how she tried to get rid of them, but they were so stubborn she finally decided to live with them. Similar chapters with their well planned topics and themes. Everything finished in 119 pages. I did like

being with her, though, and could have spent more time.

And by the time Natalie Goldberg published her third book, we were ready to read at least 400 pages of selections from her writing practice notebooks. Instead we received a well planned, edited autobiography. I was thinking of Dostoevsky's *House of the Dead*. I don't remember how he wrote it or what's in it, but I imagined writers like him telling us a lot—a lot—and telling it better. They write mostly in the present tense—what they're going through. As far as I can remember, Henry Miller's books are all told in the definite past, the dead past tense, so to speak, except for *Tropic of Cancer*, which was happening as he wrote it. So much literary talk from me on this gray day.

M. is expecting a package from America, which among other things will contain *bhoga* for him to cook for my Ekādaśī birthday tomorrow. I wrote a number of agenda topics for us to discuss tonight, mostly about travel and initiations. I will mention that I think we will have no special function at all tomorrow, just life as usual except for lunch.

I couldn't go outside when I wanted to around 3 P.M. because just at that moment, Dennis and a worker were putting extra dirt down on the road. He also had some slop in a bucket that he wanted certain cows to eat, probably the ones who had recently calved. One of the "wrong" cows went to investigate the bucket, and I saw Dennis in action, swinging his bucket savagely and hitting her in the face. Even in Vṛndāvana, you may see a storekeeper angrily chase a cow, but I knew

in Dennis' heart was a murderous intent. Or so I thought, and I turned away. Still, the music of his speech is in my mind as I write because sometimes I hear he and Madhu speaking outside.

Kitchen needs to be cleaned.

Should I go out and tell him not to whistle Kerry slide tunes? It's not becoming of a monk in solitude. But am I not batting out something similar at the typewriter?

Still, I feel serious and need concentration; the whistling doesn't help.

I'll tolerate it—keep my ears open and not stuff them with earplugs against my assistant's cheerful whistling.

After this morning's session, I wrote down some cues for this session: .

Cue: "Try to get off the topic of yourself, aware it may be disgusting to be so self-centered."

Do you really believe that?

I believe there is such a thing as egotism, and I don't think I'm suffering from it just because I say I'm itchy in my Irish sweater and my slippers leave muddy tracks in the bathroom.

Cue: "Praise Kṛṣṇa. All I can do is repeat what I read in books. That's okay, and I can add a little to it."

Waiting for lunch I had ten minutes and picked up the Tenth Canto to read quickly and alertly—this is heaven, the scholars, all the commentators, how they view words *aṁśena* and *uttama-śloka*, so many others.

Aṁśena means “part”, but it doesn’t mean Kṛṣṇa is a part of Viṣṇu. It means He is full, but we can never entirely describe His pastimes. When He comes to the world, He manifests only a part of His infinite pastimes. *Uttama-śloka* can also refer to Mahārāja Parikṣit . . . Reading it in the “Notes” section at the end of Tenth Canto, Chapter One, the print in thick paragraphs on the page—maybe a dozen pages or more, not broken up as usual in Prabhupāda’s books, with verses and purports.

I thought Prabhupāda felt that there was so much important nectar in this chapter, he wanted to give more. Some readers (myself included) may feel tedium when faced with the long paragraphs, but today I loved it and thought, “Prabhupāda, you could have written whole books like this and I’d have loved to read them. I just need to be attentive.”

Cue: “Any clear memory is good.”

I remember five minutes ago walking outside thinking about writing the books I’d like to read.

I was glad to get out and breathe without feeling intimidated by Dennis and his friend. I found my own little patch and walked over it on this gray day, the wet, green earth a sponge.

Cue: “Turn to Akhmatova and WCW as they are clearly serious writers. But go beyond them to and for Kṛṣṇa.”

Who are you talking to, I ask myself.
 If Kṛṣṇa revealed Himself to you, would you
 tell your friends? Is that forbidden?
 If the Lord asked me *not* to reveal something,
 then I’d keep it secret, but I would be changed and
that would come out in my writing.

I do yearn for that secret, that change, although
 we shouldn’t yearn for highs.
 If such inspiration comes, descend quickly,
 humble and contrite. Anyway,
 nothing much is likely to happen.

I’ll stay until the end of the month and I don’t
 expect anything more than what’s
 already here—the wet earth, the routine,
 the chance to write each day,
 and Prabhupāda sneaking me nectar
 in his books.

M. was glad to find a verse last night while we were reviewing texts. It was this one: *tad vijñānārtham sa gurum eva abigacchet*. In the translation it says one must approach a guru and carry wood for fuel. He was glad because that’s what he was doing. I reminded him that Kṛṣṇa also carried wood after searching for it in the forest with Sudāmā on His guru’s order.

I'm sad to repeat myself when I want to be a standard bearer for expansively written books.

Prabhupāda writes that Kṛṣṇa doesn't really descend into this world. He is already here in everything. He manifests from time to time. Yes, He is in Goloka, but when He comes here, Goloka is not vacant. He is also there, and He is everywhere at once. Don't restrict Him in your understanding, and don't read comparative literature. Just be with Kṛṣṇa.

He is a person as good as we are persons. However, it is not easy to know Kṛṣṇa. *Manuṣyāṇāṁ sahasreṣu*. It is difficult. But to know Him at least a little we can do. The devotees are happy for that much. Kāṁsa at least knew that Kṛṣṇa would probably get His way and kill him. For that much knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, he was liberated. Others don't even know that much. For them, Kṛṣṇa stays away. He gives them whatever matter they want and leaves them to their suffering.

If we could know our real form, at once we would crave to surrender to God—because we are part of Him and not happy without Him. It is vain to walk around without seeking Him. Poets who write mellifluous lines remembered by others are the blind leading the blind. “Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes . . .” The better lines remind us of the Lord. “There where clinging to things ends, there God begins to be.” Let my mind go like a bee to the nectar of the pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, killer of Agha.

Cue: “Worship Govinda somehow. What was a nice moment today or any time?”

Getting my hair cut while sitting on the bath tub, the gas heater on to warm us, and Prabhupāda singing from Dr. Mishra's *āśrama* on the tape recorder. There was a guy who sang very low. M. asked, "Who *was* that?" It was some guy at Dr. Mishra's, and I imitated him. This was before I had met the Swami. It was one of the first *kīrtanas* in America. Prabhupāda was happy to see that they liked it. Maybe it was cold there too in upstate New York, the winter of 1965 coming on.

Here is the first cue from this morning: "This morning I was attacking myself, saying I was not a good writer, that this form of 'art' writing is not devotional. Better I accept myself and allow myself to write."

Well said, sailor. Even when they called General Quarters, you didn't have to work, just crouch in an obscure part of the ship and pretend you were doing something. Others had key jobs, but you were a typist.

What else? I don't remember how I got discharged, but I received severance pay and an honorable discharge, then went dreamy-eyed to the Lower East Side, determined to live a life of expiration: I was planning on killing the pure self.

But you came to me, Śrīla Prabhupāda. You were already on your way, although I did not yet know it. I headed up from Florida to New York City, and you were coming from India to New York City.

No one else cares about that story, but I do. Almost night. I can't see through the window. This is the sixth page I have written. I owe another song.

Once there was a punch to life
 and I read without sleeping,
 left behind that complaining fellow
 and worries of the grave.
 Once I entered *Bhāgavatam* and didn't care
 to boast, but found my
 Lord Govinda in those pages.

Then I did a good turn . . .
 Ah, don't make it up. Can you sing
 or not? The truth is that I nodded out
 in the carrel and bumped my head, then recovered
 read for two or three hours, wrote a student's
 purport to my master's
 words. Then Ghanaśyāma came to the
 library to pick me up. He'd been out
 distributing books.
 I wasn't ashamed. We loved each other as
 brothers. We drove back to the house where
 we stayed in Boulder Creek. Years ago now.
 Now he's guru, chairman of the North
 American GBC, and I—
 I am limping alone
 in wet fields
 writing stuff.

It's been real, I guess. Amen. All glories to Lord
 Kṛṣṇa. Thank you, Śrīla Prabhupāda, for allowing me
 to worship Him, my real solace. I can't sound true
 notes. You've got to forgive me.

Notes #8

Happy quiet fifty-fifth birthday. I'm not dying yet. At least that's my opinion.

I let myself write freely because it's a good method to lead me to interesting thoughts. I mean, to provoke helpful truths to appear—truths to live by and all that rot.

I write words too strong to hurt myself, words of a mudslinger, bomb-thrower. I say "rot" and I say "fool" and all that, but actually I am a tender fillet of sole. See what I mean? When you write without control, that's what comes.

How it comes is that several subpersons throw in their points. It's like several artists painting on the same canvas. It's not the best arrangement. One wants to paint something tender, while another throws on the alkaline, throws sand into the sweet rice, and laughs like a madman.

Still, I have faith that if I can write with my whole self, digest experience, and speak with conviction, the

whole me will come out. Hari Śauri Prabhu said that when Śrīla Prabhupāda was going down the elevator, about to leave the New York ISKCON building and never come back, he said with complete gravity and clarity, “I simply want the benediction, like Arjuna, to fight for Kṛṣṇa to the last breath.” Complete conviction and clarity. My whole self writing: it will be good for me. Nothing squeaky or held back. Don’t let those points screaming for attention lie by the wayside. Get it all out.

It’s Mokṣadā Ekādaśī today and the flames are jumping in the fireplace. I’m feeling okay to be here. We have planned no big escapes and expect not big revelations from Kṛṣṇa other than what He is kindly giving. Prabhupāda said we have to become fire to enter fire. We have to have a suitable body to enter the spiritual atmosphere. When we are fully serving Kṛṣṇa, then Hṛṣīkeṣa will reveal Himself to us, but if we remain unchanged, then how can we expect . . .

I don’t expect, although I aspire. I want the full *darśana*, as Nārada received, and I want to have it as a follower of Lord Caitanya. Therefore, I pray in the *sannyāsa-mantra* every day to offer myself as a seed into the yajñic fire of *gopī-bhāva*. I want to be pure, as Prabhupāda expected.

Since it is my birthday today, I’m going to allow myself the gift of free-writing. But first I need a sponge with which to wipe my floor, and some paper towels, and extra pieces of wood for the fire. Give me that benediction. Allow me to let off steam and to talk

tonight in a therapeutic way about why I allowed myself to become guru in New York and what subsequently happened.

I also want to think about how I can write more sensitive letters to my correspondents, take more time at it, and of our travel plans. I would like to think over what someone said: “You may like the excitement of traveling to Sicily or Gītā-nāgarī each year, but you will not always be able to do it just because it happens to enliven you. Your health may not permit it.”

I cannot imitate Prabhupāda (I just read how Prabhupāda vomited twice in the car to Bhaktivedanta Manor and asked for a wheelchair on the plane, but when it didn’t come immediately, he walked . . .). I can’t keep going as relentlessly as he did, and neither is my traveling worth so much. The movement does not depend on me to do it. I have to consider all that. My health slows me, and my lack of advancement. I am neither a great preacher nor an absorbed *bābājī*.

This junk-a-long song—speak clearly so everyone
can understand the words. But
music is clunk-a-lunk, the beat of a bass line.
I played the bass at the St. George apartment
until the wooden bridge broke and my friends
laughed. Forget that and feel now your
real freedom. No reason for old tunes. Sing
the *kīrtana* of your present self.
Well, this *is* my present self.
I would not talk like this in public, but to myself,
beside the fire, Prabhupāda to my right,
but he’s silent, doesn’t read this.

“You should write and act as if God
were watching your every move.”

I do. I know He sees me playing and
it’s no joke to remember that St. George
apartment. I am haunted by it, to
tell the truth, and my mind strays back,
looking for sense, coherence
with my present self.

It was the sum of my life at that time,
and I was heading for death.

I’m still heading for death,
so what is this, this *kīrtana*?

Since this is my birthday, I am allowed to be a little
self-centered. That means I can take the occasion to
offer myself as I am to my spiritual master and his
mission. I know I’m a slightly worn (more than that)
creature in his remaining days. I want to finish up my
life for Prabhupāda. At least let them say I never left. I
wore a *dhotī* to the grave (or crematorium). I held my
head high because I saw my spiritual master do that.
Through blinding tears, the John Wayne-inspired
refusal to cry will be overcome by the power of *bhakti*,
the power of love of God.

Prabhupāda stepped onto the soft clay and made an
impression. He allowed Hari Śauri to press down quite
firmly on his feet so that even the lines on the bottom
of his feet showed up. We still have that impression. I
place my head there. Another birthday present to
myself. I pray to hear my rounds today, to bring the

head down into the heart. Let me feel. Then attention will follow in its wake.

Measure out the logs—we don't have so many.
 Live with a chill but my
 companion will tell me to expend
 the logs, especially today. I have worldly comforts
 and the great comfort of knowing God is
 true. I have the Vaiṣṇava *smṛti*,
Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam especially, and
 I will get back to *Bhagavad-gītā* in prayer
 sooner or later. I am learning how to
 pray today. Lord, let me serve you.
 I have said this so many times
 it must sound sickening. I say it
 into my Kleenex as I blow my nose, I say
 it even when my body aches.

Notes #9

I said I would be permissive on my birthday and would write whatever I felt. There is a limit to that, I know. There was an ISKCON guru who was supposedly falling down with a woman even while his Vyāsa-pūjā ceremony was going on. Such is the tendency to misuse the free will. We need to be guided by rules and regulations and the standard etiquette.

Therefore, I offer my birthday to Lord Kṛṣṇa. I offer myself as a seed in the yajñic fire. I want to be the servant of my spiritual master.

In the meantime, Madhu cooked sweets and we celebrated by eating them. We would have distributed the leftovers, but Dennis says he doesn't eat sugar or salt. The cows, however, were happy to receive some *prasādam*.

I read in Hari Śauri's *Transcendental Diary* the description of Prabhupāda inducing George Harrison to eat more and more, up to the neck. When Hari Śauri's parents visited the Manor, Hari Śauri was disappointed

that the temple had no *prasādam* to offer them. When Śrīla Prabhupāda later asked Hari Śāuri if his parents received *prasādam*, Hari Śāuri said no. Śrīla Prabhupāda looked disappointed, which Hari Śāuri interpreted to mean, “Then what was the use of their visiting the temple?” I believe Prabhupāda later issued a letter to all temples saying they should have full *prasādam* ready for even a casual guest.

It has been a slow, quiet day, but I got some work done—polished classes to give at disciples’ meetings in January, read. A humble track of day’s events.

Cue: “Speaking from the heart is even better than free-writing, but free-writing is to get you there.”

No moon yet. Too cloudy, although from here I can see miles away a sunshiny piece of land. I thought of being in Wicklow months from now and the differences I’ll notice. Wicklow has that family sense of security. Here I am more alone.

But here has its advantages. Jibber, jibber, jibber—my Hare Kṛṣṇa mantras come out with no feeling. They are a kind of “free-write” also, I suppose. I chant whatever comes. I can’t go back and start the round over because it didn’t come out right or I’d be saying the same round all day, never getting it right. You can’t “rewrite” *japa*, although you can increase your quota with the same motive.

The heart? Where is the heart? What does it mean to chant vocally, then fix the sound in the mind, then bring the whole package (mind and words) down into the region known as the heart, and there feel a tender warmth? This is the language of Orthodox Christian

prayer, and I admit I find it attractive, but I cannot manage to experience it. The Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra vaporizes in the air when it comes out of my mouth. You see it, you feel *something*, some sense of worship, but not quite in the area of the heart. Because if your heart is already crowded like the smoking section on a plane, how can you expect to receive the Supreme Lord, all-pure, in that chamber?

Clean it out.

And while you're at it, sweep and wash the kitchen floor.

When I sing it's

Bing Crosby all over again.

I spent time in Jagannātha Puri

(was it last year?) writing out lines

from '40s and '50s pop songs—Nat

King Cole, Tony Bennett. I was having a

good time seeing the lyrics from a

Kṛṣṇa conscious viewpoint but

my editor didn't publish it.

Just as well.

Who did I think I was?

Somehow it occupied me through days of

personal crisis, finding my way back

to Prabhupāda and ISKCON. I won't say

that credit is due to "Somewhere Along the Way,"

a whispered tune, but . . .

Walked today. The pastures were filled with strollers. I found another path. I had chosen three different routes for such a situation. One, the closest, was

through a field of sheep. Decided against it and struck out for a path in back of the house. It was muddy, but sheepless.

Inconsequential—my day. But I chanted, moving my counter beads. Circumscribed event.

The six brothers who were killed by Kāṁsa have an interesting history. Śrīla Prabhupāda drove hard in his speeches against the notion that the *Vedas* are myths. He drove hard against the modern scientific notions that God is not needed to explain life. He said there must be a Father. The six *garbhas* were sons of the demon Kālanemi in their previous lives, and grandsons of Hiranyakaśipu. They performed an independent worship of Brahmā and received the benediction that they would not be killed by various enemies. When Hiranyakaśipu found out that they went beyond his shelter, he cursed them to be born in a future life and be killed by their father. That father was Kāṁsa. Kālanemi was reborn as Kāṁsa, and he killed the *jīvas* who were once his sons. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura draws an elaborate analogy which symbolizes Devakī as *bhakti*, Kāṁsa as material fear, and the six sons as the six chief *anarthas*. By fear of falldown, the *anarthas* are killed and *bhakti* appears.

I am about to read the section where the demigods pray to the Lord in the womb. My own prayer is to go on reading as best I can, with attention and devotion.

Later: Picked up WCW's longer poem, "Desert Music." Who can understand it? It starts out saying that there is a shape lying on a bridge, but he doesn't know

what it is. Then he goes on to say that the poem, the poem, the poem is the thing that will say what has to be said, and it will imitate nature. Or something like that.

As I glanced at that, getting nowhere, I heard Dennis' notorious tractor approaching. It's almost surreal how it moves up the hill. Maybe he will see me through the window. He has come to load wood into our shed. I thought he might be carrying a parcel. Mother Kaumodakī might have sent Ekādaśī sweets by mail, or at least she promised to send Ekādaśī ingredients. No matter, that package is too late. More importantly, however, the parcel contains the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* volume which I will be ready to read in less than a week.

Thump, thump, the
wood pieces go into the shed.

If he sees me working, he may get the idea that I am not a bum with money who sits indoors and does no labor

as he does, a strange

cultist who prays to the statue Dennis probably glanced at on this bureau, surrounded on both sides by pictures of the Six Gosvāmīs and Nṛsiṃhadeva.

I don't really care what he thinks. I just want him to leave us alone.

And he mostly does.

Thump, thump the wood—
this quiet day I make no farce.

Didn't stand up on a *vyāsāsana* and
say, like Mukṭānanda said, "There is
Mother's Day

and Father's Day, so why not Guru Day!?"
 I didn't say I was God or that you were, that we
 are *all* God, didn't roar,
 "The mercy of Lord Caitanya!!" I just
 walked and read and told you about it, or
 at least as much as I could. What I didn't say,
 I didn't even know myself.

My fuel box is empty and I need more wood.
 M. comes in—does he have the parcel?
 A quiet day, no bloodshed, no
 political coup, no falldown.

Madhu wrote the only homage
 I received today. He prays I can continue
 a life dedicated to sincerity and honesty.
 I reply, "I welcome those words.
 They don't embarrass me because
 I want those virtues and don't claim to
 have them yet."
 Also faithfulness to Prabhupāda.
 Yes, I reply, I want that but not out of
 sentiment.
 And compassion
 according to my capacity.
 In 1995, let us try to go forth.
 We can't count on always traveling and lecturing
 or writing books like this,
 but while we can, as the new year comes,
 take it for what it is and let's go on
 serving our master
 wherein lies our happiness.

I plan to teach the students at Gītā-nāgarī to write their realizations of the *śloka*. I first want to teach them how to write what comes. They will not be as proficient at it as I am because I have practiced for days and weeks.

I anticipate their questions: “Why should I write anything that comes?”

Let me guide you. Here is a *Bhagavad-gītā* verse. It says God is in the heart. Do you feel it? Write what comes. Did you ever have an intimate feeling for a Deity, the way Kṛṣṇa describes in 6.47?

Notes #10

Hey, Notes, got a minute? I'd like to talk with you. I was just with Writing Session earlier this morning, and it came out that he thinks he's less pretentious than you, which he sees as a timed book catering to an audience. What do you think of that? He also says you are more likely to come under the influence of non-devotee writers, such as the authors of those books under the desk—WCW and Akhmatova.

I'll tell you something else. We heard you don't want to tell *Kṛṣṇa* book pastimes because you did that in *Grand Metaphor*. Is that *true*? Why don't you tell the wonderful story of the time Kṛṣṇa went to Jarāsandha disguised as a *brāhmaṇa*? He went with Arjuna and Bhīma. I like the way Jarāsandha figured out that they weren't *brāhmaṇas* by the marks on their shoulders from carrying their bows and their strong bodies and commanding voices. Of course, Kṛṣṇa could have easily disguised Himself without Jarāsandha finding any trace to the contrary, but He didn't bother. He only half-

disguised Himself, and Jarāsandha thought, “I have seen these men *somewhere*.”

Then Kṛṣṇa suggested that Jarāsandha give them charity to ensure his own fame. Jarāsandha agreed, even when he was convinced they were not *brāhmaṇas*. Kṛṣṇa said, “Actually, we are *kṣatriyas*. This is Bhīma, the second son of Paṇḍu, and this is Arjuna, the third. I am your old enemy, Kṛṣṇa, the Pāṇḍavas’ cousin-brother.” I loved how He introduced Himself as “your old enemy.” He had actually beaten the pulp out of Jarāsandha at least eighteen times by then. Jarāsandha was such a fool, although a great fighter and giver of charity. He lived in the Lord’s pastime.

Feeling good, although chilly from being in the bathroom where there was warm water, but not hot. The birthday party is over. Last night was the end of it. You can’t hold on to those days when you are honored as special. So much for Satsvarūpa. Next week will be the disappearance day of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, a great saint and leader. What am I by comparison? Just a kid whose parents indulged him with a birthday party. Mine used to fall on December 6, so I couldn’t expect a real haul of birthday presents since people were saving up for Christmas. “Well, Stevie, we’ll be getting you another present for Christmas.” I didn’t mind. December 6 seemed like a nice time of the year to have a birthday because December was such a good month, what with Christmas vacation and snow on the way.


I got a slow boat to China.
 I got a Yudhiṣṭhira complex and a
 fountain pen of
 green or blue, got a seminar too to teach
 chilluns and bright ones like
 Paramparā dāsa who
 every year comes from Murāri-sevaka,
 Tennessee,
 with some of his family members from there.
 He sits up straight and bright in class
 on the floor of the Gītā-nāgarī temple room.

I do appreciate those devotees tramping
 in with boots, the ladies in *sārīs* despite
 the cold, guys in white and saffron *khaḍī*,
 sometimes over long johns,
 but the temple room
 is warm from the huge stove outdoors.

Hey, man, you call this pretentious? I was willing to
 put my foot into my mouth, as they say. Brought up a
 topic I couldn't handle, that's not for audience
 display, and then let it drop.

Another topic like that is those days in New York
 when Ādi-keśava Prabhu asked me, "Will you be guru
 for New York? I used to think of you as an ideal devo-
 tee when I would watch the *kīrtana* party in Boston
 before I even joined the movement."

"Oh, yes," I said, grabbing the bait. I had been asked
 by a devotee in Vṛndāvana if I would be guru of
 Australia, but I was put off by his biceps and thought
 he didn't respect or love me. He was simply looking for



someone because he had no one. I just couldn't be expected to do it under those circumstances.

Bahūdaka Prabhu asked me too, and I went for it. It occurred to me, however, that it wasn't going to go well in New York because within a few years, the leader there would want to take his own disciples. In those days, we couldn't conceive that there should be more than one guru per temple. Call it wrong, but that's what we thought. I said, "What's the point if I move in? You'll move me out later."

"No, we'll never move you out. Once the guru is in, that's it. If you don't want to do it, though, maybe we shouldn't."

Then I thought, "New York City is the city of writers. I am a writer, so I ought to go there." What a foolish idea. I later thought it would be nice to be the guru of Ireland because my mother came from Ireland. More nonsense.

Sentiment rules. I wanted to mention that here, about the New York mistake. Later, my fears were realized. The leader there did decide to become guru, and he had a lively following of temple devotees. I got ugly and said, "This isn't good. They are pulling the rug out from under me. I am the beloved and eternal guru." My disciples picked up on it and in their faithfulness, split with the others. That didn't help the situation because the temple was already in trouble financially, and it caused further isolation. He sold the skyscraper temple, although Prabhupāda had asked that it be kept. I had broken the solidarity. Maybe that wasn't the reason why New York failed, but I was implicated.

I thought of mentioning some of this last night to M. during our kitchen talk as a kind of birthday confession, just the opposite of the usual Vyāsa-pūjā ritual where they say, “You are great,” and you tolerate it mildly. Not many of the people who went through those days are even around anymore. Devotees disappear so quickly and a new batch comes in. Some still remember, like Puru dāsa Prabhu, and even my oldest disciples who filed it away in their subconscious minds where it produces an edge of uneasiness. Jayādvaita Swami knew about it and forgave me my misunderstandings.

Anyway, we have to continue living. I blundered there and in Ireland in certain ways, but it can’t all be solved now. Everyone has their take on it. Some people hang a heavier guilt on me than I think I deserve.

And what *do* I deserve? How willing am I to pay for my mistakes? Have I done enough to make up for them? Have I done *anything* at all?

At least I have taken myself out of the seats of power. ISKCON is also quite different now. I continue to make forays into the areas of sensitivity and shame and see what I come up with.

Let me tell you how the floor washing went last night. I used a dishwashing liquid, but it had no power to cut the deeper stains. Maybe we can get something more powerful. Anyway, I did a surface job, and so it became obvious. It was a workout. M. sat watching, chanting *gāyatrī*, as I wiped away, got warmed up, took off my sweatshirt and hat. I did turn buckets of water

filthy black, so it was not for nothing, but I need a stronger cleanser.

Jumping flames I move the logs.
 Always think of your good fortune
 whatever it may be. Last night
 thinking of the books to be published and
 the delight of seeing new covers.
 Plans to write better letters
 and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura with his hand
 below his
 chest—you know the pose. Dhṛṣṭaketu wrote
 Prabhupāda, “Why can’t we wear long hair?
 Did you say your disciples don’t have long hair?
 But I see pictures of the *ācāryas* with beards.”
 Prabhupāda replied, “That is Cāturmāsya,
 July-October, and it’s not just beards, but licking
 unsiced food from the floor and other austerities.
 They usually didn’t keep beards. I don’t
 want long-haired disciples.” No hippies
 was the point.

I shall be happy; a devotee is happy. *Viśvaṁ pūrṇa-
 sukhāyate*: the universe is in tune with God. A devotee is
 therefore brave.

Burn bright little flames.
 I am wanting to be with my master.
 I want to see the shape of the Hare Kṛṣṇa words
 in the mantra, it’s Kṛṣṇa and Rāma
 and Hare combined
 and arranged . . . see it and taste it

on your tongue . . . be with the sounds
and don't mumble and jumble them and
submerge them under other thoughts
and schemes.

Serve the syllables. Kṛṣṇa
is God, all things—
and we are but blades of grass,
no honor due us,
no pose required. Be sincere,
humble, and forge in your smithy
kindness.

I am right now not so much interested in poems per se, but in treading the right path and not making a big mistake (or even a little one). Catholics call them moral and venial sins. A sober (*dhīra*) life is required. I don't want to jump out of any more windows or appear naked for the sake of a few moments of indulgence. Too much time is lost in those few minutes. Catch you later, if the Lord allows me, with responsible words and lines.

Notes #11

It is sunny this afternoon. I walked in the pasture. I could walk one way back and forth and face the sun planet. Don't think much about it. Was up earlier than usual after my post-lunch rest. You want to hear this?

Who are you asking?

I'm not asking Mike Robbins, who interviewed Prabhupāda. Get back to that later. Dear folks, who like to hear the daily news, there were some negative items.

I read of the encounter Hari Śauri Prabhu had with a nasty American on an airplane. He later tried to barge into Prabhupāda on the moving ramp, but Hari-keśa Swami got in his way and they tangled for awhile, cursing and grabbing each other. I won't get into it here. I don't have to make it clear to anyone but myself. Please excuse me.

Then this: distress is caused by Kṛṣṇa. A devotee understands that.

Then I heard of the kings imprisoned by Kāṁsa. They were prisoners in a concentration camp. Their bodies were slack, and for years they had to live without hope. Still, they received transcendental realization that their punishment came from their own fruitive activities as kings. After, they got to see Kṛṣṇa, who freed and restored them, and they made their prayers.

Sometimes you hear or read deeply and sometimes you live in a fog. I have to keep going even in the fog. A clear time occurred when I was eating lunch. I was listening to Prabhupāda speaking about the *rājasūya* sacrifice, where they elected Kṛṣṇa as the first person to receive worship. Sahadeva praised the Lord, and the sages and demigods applauded. Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja took this as a clear indication and began to worship Kṛṣṇa. Then Śiśupāla stood and began to blaspheme Kṛṣṇa in a loud voice. Kṛṣṇa heard him loud and clear. Those who couldn't stop Śiśupāla ran from the hall in protest. Others prepared to fight. Kṛṣṇa killed him with His *sudarśana-cakra*.

I heard it all and was so pleased by it that I wanted to tell Madhu immediately. Crazy Śiśupāla, railing against Kṛṣṇa. It pleased me to know that Kṛṣṇa would punish him and that His supremacy would reign. That's how we like things to happen, we devotees.

For example, the guy who harassed Hari Śauri and tried to bump into Prabhupāda, he kept going on, cursing and yelling back at them. I might have liked to have heard that the Lord got him with His *sudarśana-cakra*. No such luck.

M. came in to take photos of Prabhupāda.

The heavens are

the motif is

you just read Akhmatova again.

I have thrown off wedding rings and the bracelets of women. I have looked into the keys of this typewriter and found words that come easily, that don't disrupt. Keeping the hand moving. Dear audience, this is an exercise and I am not responsible for every word that jumps onto this page. This is no sermon given from the hills of Cul na copog, in a valley of dead sheep and an unclean yard. The poor guy, Dennis.

Our package never came from America.

I admonished myself and said, "Don't write only of what happens these days. Dalus Weir said his cell is twelve foot by six, maybe a bit bigger, and within those walls he has all of Śrīla Prabhupāda's transcendental books—all he needs. He said it's not a bad life. I have a room also, and can roam into a prison yard, you could call it. I can't go further because cars will pass and I don't like it. I prefer to be alone. I don't belong here anymore than Dalus belongs where he lives. I mean, these are not my people.

Then I think of what it was like for Merton. He lived on a hill in the woods, but the monks lived nearby. Sometimes a hunter passed by, and he saw SAC airplanes. He said when he went alone, he was with all the people even more and better than at other times. You have to seek solitude for the right reasons, he said.

So don't write only of the marsh, the walk, the tight borders that enclose you. Now that I think of it, I'm penned in here, but not like the sheep. My spirit can

roam wherever I need. It is not that I want to go into town to play video games, see a film, read the newspapers, or walk somewhere else. There is nowhere to go on this earth. Wherever I go, I will meet people. Theophan the Recluse stayed completely alone in his room and never went out. He chose that life because it enabled him to concentrate his mind and heart and devotion on the “invisible Lord” and his Jesus prayer.

I don’t want to meet folks. I too am looking for concentration. I could live in Vṛndāvana or somewhere like Vṛndāvana if I could wander and people would leave me alone, but that doesn’t seem possible. They would say, “We want you to attend a meeting. We are going to heavy out a *sannyāsī* and tell him to leave Vṛndāvana. We want you to be present because he will listen to you. You be the quiet one in the group. You should do something, you know. You are not on the GBC, but you should cooperate with us and not always think you should live alone to write your crazy stuff.”

I went to the meeting and said something. I heard one Godbrother say to the poor *sannyāsī*, “You are indulging yourself. If Prabhupāda were here, he’d say move your butt.”

Oh, let him stay in Vṛndāvana.

Bee-bop-adoro the misty dew
permits me to sing a rusty-blade tune.
I mean no harm on the farm—the
best organized, he said, is in
Pennsylvania. He said that in England
at the Manor
where he induced George to eat and eat until

“No more!” he said and
 sang a song
 he’d written based
 on something they taught him in Vṛndāvana,
Jaya Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Jaya
 Rādhā. And the stormy gates and
 the rain and winds, oh, please make
 something clear
 to me.

I only want, he said, to learn devotional service,
 to do it as He wants, although I too want to
 want it.

The stakes are high, death is nigh,
 the poets can’t help—the guru is
 the answer and limp, limp
 down the hill,
 hoping for a package
 with biscuits, a *Bhāgavatam*, anything
 to deliver you from yourself and
 your penned-in, nonmythical, unclear—
 hold on! I don’t mean all that.

But I want to sing like Monk and the big band
 who put to music his improvisations.
 I used to hear them at the Town Hall
 and the next day told Nick Stabulas
 at the Tottenvilla. No one knows these things,
 they’re hidden in code
 and the world will forget it completely
 when I die. I wrote something in a small notepad
 at the time (circa 1962) that Stan Getz
 (then obscure)

was playing harder than I thought he played and
 at intermission, in the Tottenvilla sticks,
 wandered in the direction of
 Mount Loretto
 where he saw large-eyed cows.

But all that's gone, I know, and I only
 mean I've left it behind,
 but not the mood
 of that improvisation. I want to tell of Kṛṣṇa,
 whose appearance destroys imaginative iconography
 and to set a better example than those
 big-band days.

Of course, I'd never say this from the *vyāsāsana*.
 I'd hold my tongue and not
 slobber out memories, even memories to help me
 find my present. I would say only
 I want to be a devotee of my
 spiritual master,
 eat only *kṛṣṇa-prasāda*, sing only Kṛṣṇa tunes,
 and it would be true.

In my dream, Hitler's name kept coming up, and
 dreams of Bhagavān dāsa—that mood he had. They
 come, of course, but I toss them aside and say, "What's
 the use?" That's sensible, I suppose.

What would Prabhupāda say? A Godbrother says if
 he were here, Prabhupāda would pulverize us—the
 words would fly, "Nonsense! Concoction! Useless!"

Maybe.

A poet captures music, WCW says. The second part
 of "Desert Music" I liked. He speaks nakedly, says

honestly that he is a poet. But I am embarrassed to see that he doesn't mention a shred of God consciousness, nothing about eternity, just music and skill. I want more than that.

You have to be a true-blue devotee, obedient, and a little sad-faced to get it right.

I'm not telling the whole thing.

Didn't like the eight hours of Prabhupāda *bhajan*s broadcast over loudspeakers at Māyāpur-dhāma, although they thought it was wonderful. They were just too loud. I couldn't think. Ever since then, I haven't been able to turn on my tape of Prabhupāda chanting *japa* while I chant. I think for now I want to hear myself. I know Prabhupāda is with me regardless, and he wants me to attain successful *japa*.

Imagine I meet someone silent
like Jagadīśa Swami.

This time I am more silent than he. He wonders,
"What's up?" Then I break the silence, but what
do I say? "I heard you were going to stay at
Śaraṇāgati in 1996." Then I stumble forth
baloney and blarney, "That sounds like
a good way to
spend the Centennial. Doing
something practical."

People say such things to me too
with the same insincerity and tepid air,
shooting the breeze because we can't remain silent
when we stand with someone. We have to comment
on the weather or the weather-beaten

face of our brother. Did you know,
 Prabhu, that your face is falling in?
 Oh, I lost my teeth.
 What do you think of your son?
 Where is your wife?
 What is going to happen to us? Everyone dies,
 us too. Words, but without much meaning.
 Although sometimes we meet,
 exchange a few words,
 sincere enough, then reach for someone's
 hand and
 say, "Sorry I offended you. I wanted to be
 accepted."
 But often it's already too late.

What Kulaśekhara said: Now while I
 live, let me be sincere.
 Let me not speak the naked truth of
 the shortcomings of others, but
 say I love Kṛṣṇa, and I do. I love
 Godbrothers, even though I have
 little to say.
 I don't mind that they don't read my books
 as long as they leave me to the marshes,
 which they do.

I will come back from the marshes with two books
 and some kids will like them
 by the light of the moon,
 by which the window is lit when I
 wake at midnight. By that light
 I can reform this monk.

Remaining days of the year, a symposium attended by professors and devotees. Satsvarūpa is about to speak in the two minutes he has been allotted.

Ahem. Yes. Well, in the last days of 1994, I confined myself to less than an acre and discoursed on poetics while disallowing polemics. It was an interesting case. I read the Tenth Canto and words appeared in the index of my mind. It is, uh . . .

Kṛṣṇa book we read every night and started many good programs to be carried out in '95. That is the sum and total of it.

A professor of Religion at Remorse College said, "Who do you think you are, a prissy poet or port of wine, a mouse, a tub, or gill of fish? I mean, *who* do you think you are? You are a Guarino, are you not? I remember that blond tot I saw in my rearview mirror once."

I assured him I could not respond to such a ramble, and sat down at the rear of the room in the cold moonlight while snow flew fast against the lamp outdoors. It was always cold as hell on those train platforms. I remember the Staten Island Rapid Transit's big headlight flashing, then the train stopping for me, such a small-time railroad opening its door for me to enter a stale dream, a nightmare, really. And I don't know why I go back.

In the last days of the year, I read when I am not writing. I want to make gorgeous music and find secrets and copy and steal and sound like a writer. I want to write a million bucks.

What do you mean?

To finally stop and, as I said, when I become directed by Kṛṣṇa, I will at least be in practice to write.

Notes #12

At the *rajāsūya* sacrifice conducted by King Yudhiṣṭhira, the Pāṇḍavas and others took charge of different departments. Bhīmasena was in charge of the kitchen, Arjuna saw to the care of the elderly, Duryodhana was in charge of the treasury, and the most astonishing thing was that Lord Kṛṣṇa took charge of washing the feet of the arriving guests. *Jaya Śrī Kṛṣṇa*.

Dream: A small, precocious child was on a big airplane. I was there too with many other passengers, including devotees. The child's mother was black, proud of her child. I took the opportunity to preach to the small girl about Prabhupāda, while the mother looked on. Later, the child was dying. The mother needed help. She went to a psychiatrist and told him about the child and included that she had heard about Prabhupāda. The psychiatrist then produced a piece of paper with the words "pain softener—the sooner, the better" written on it.

When I awoke I thought maybe this was a message about my own suffering. My future includes suffering, and the self is telling me how to face it. Pain is a natural state of life. Accept it. Don't try to be rid of it. Go directly to it and then get past it. Prabhupāda is somehow a key to this.

List of things I have to do:

1. I have to shampoo my hair, although I have none.
2. I have to wear slippers.
3. I have to round up recalcitrant calves.
4. I have to take charge of the *rajāsūya* for little folks.
5. I have to prepare the spring rites, which will relieve us.
6. I have to find out what M. decided as he dreamt all night that he was traveling and worked out our itinerary.

Things to accomplish in these last days of the year:

1. Understand the crucifixion of Christ. Find his place in your life so that he is given due honor, love, remembrance, but in no way distracts from the devotion I feel for Lord Kṛṣṇa, who so endearingly washed the guests' feet. Kṛṣṇa is the cause of all things, the origin and maintenance and dissolution. He is the one whose appearance banishes the false notions of God, the Lord who picks us up, the Decider, the background . . .

2. I have to wash the floor and stop cavorting in words long enough to see what I am supposed to do.

You mean, in the last days, two weeks or less, you think you can find out who you are and why the threefold miseries are giving you trouble? You think

you're a tiny Buddha who can sit under a tree and gain enlightenment? That's not possible for the likes of me. I am too attached to sweets and publishing books. I mean, I can't even stand it if somebody shouts, "Hey Hare, get a job!"

Such a cornball thing they shout—the same thing all over the world.

Why do such corny lines cut your heart, O sensitive one? Harden yourself to board the ship. See if in these last days you can break through and arrive at *kṛṣṇa-prema* and *kīrtana-rasa*.

Oh no, I don't think it is possible. No big thing is possible, but patience and this, plus the willingness to enter ISKCON places and not be intimidated by big shots (or molded by them either) or little shots or *kar-mīs* or *vikarmīs*. So *what* if someone mugs me and takes my passport? I refuse to be afraid.

In these last days, this very small person who is absurd to compare himself to Buddha attaining enlightenment prays, "Please let me be free from the compulsion of freedom for freedom's sake and the undiluted purloined letter of Poe and literary idols on postcard photos, the best novelist was Marilyn Monroe and Henry James Dog."

I'm telling jokes. I'm praying for pure devotion, always.

While chanting *japa*, I went slower and was putting attention into tending the fire. I wish instead the fire could be in my own heart and I could tend it and find the right logs to make it blaze.

Confess you played Big Guru. I thought only one person could be guru in any one place, so I wanted to be guru for everyone in New York City. They should all come to me. I wouldn't tolerate anything else. I was the fall guy. It was set up for me and I went for it. Yes, why not? I may have been the Swami's typist, but that doesn't mean I couldn't be the one and only guru. I could be the savior for all souls in New York (other places too). I laugh at it now. Better than crying. I was part of the system and I will never do that again.

I admitted last night to my friend at the kitchen table that I was estranged from my countrymen and that's all there was to it. When I wore a Navy uniform and traveled by plane or train, I felt I was one of them, and I wanted to be respectable. I wanted to be able to check into a motel and be honored as a respectable citizen to whom a clerk would give keys. So many things like that—a citizen has a job, buys and wears shirts, jackets, pants, shoes. Maybe he has a wife and children—no, not me.

I was cast off to sea in Kṛṣṇa consciousness—not meant to belong to any country. That's the meaning of *sannyāsa* and service to Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Not belonging to the heart of
a city. Akhmatova writes with such
devotion for Moscow and of life on earth,
and Goldberg says, "The present moment
is enormous and it's all we have."

I look beyond that
for the spiritual world. The sages told

and Prabhupāda,
 of such a place where Lord Kṛṣṇa lives—
 beyond this world of death.

We follow it, we people, yes, the ones
 who stop you at airports and hassle you
 for money, selling you a book, the
 ones who drive around a flatbed truck,
 chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa in Manhattan,
 the ones you read of in the newspaper
 described as a cult,
 the ones who read *ISKCON World Review* and
 answer the ads for commercialized
 devotional service,
 the ones who are governed
 by a Governing Body Commission,
 who say they are building a city in Māyāpur
 whose temple dome will be taller and grander
 than St. Peter's of Rome, the ones who are
 making a hype about the Centennial,
 the ones in Russia, the fanatics,
 the dear ones . . .

It's with them I want to live and
 not others. No one else is
 home. In ISKCON we have
 so many whimsical fellows
 floating in and out
 wearing funny hats, reading strange
 books aside from Prabhupāda's,
 saying strange things they
 picked up from somewhere,

like the guy I met at the Rome temple,
with long hair and a topknot
sitting reading the newspaper.

Ah, to write from the heart as Williams was able to do at the end of his life. He wrote to his Flossie: "Ashphodel, that greeny flower." He lived a life, then drew from it, living honorably with his wife, it seems. We want to be decent in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then draw from that. O ISKCON, this is it, our life.

I would like to write from the heart about Lord Viṣṇu in Vaikuṇṭha and Kṛṣṇa playing in the Yamunā with the *gopīs*. I would like to write from the heart if I could find my heart. Why not?

A brother wrote me unassumingly and said, "Usually I go to India at Kārttika, but I'm glad I stayed in America this year. I got some work done and traveled and preached in temples. Although I did not increase my *japa* quota, I felt happy with my chanting of the small number I do. I was glad to note that I felt a Kārttika bonus even while outside India." That can happen.

If the Lord likes, He can let us continue to live and travel in 1995 exactly as Madhu has planned it. Our tickets as we purchase them (from donated money) go to many places. For example, we make a connection from Ireland to Milan. We are changing that to Dublin-Madrid. Otherwise, we'll keep what we have arranged.

But will we actually be able to follow the itinerary, or will we be stopped along the way? It's no big thing for Kṛṣṇa to allow it or to change it. As my dream said,

"Pain softener—the sooner, the better." As King Nṛga decided, "Give me my troubles first."

I am hopelessly wandering but want to say I hope I can be true to the Lord. He is true to His vow (*satya-vrata*), so why not me to my vow?

Log burning. Page six. 5 A.M.

Christmas trees . . .

There you go, back in time, to when you went with your father to pick out a special one from a special place. This wasn't like buying Christmas trees from a parking lot; we went to a place that was almost a village in the woods. It was situated on a snowy hill. They sold all kinds of Christmas items. We had to go there in our father's car. I was small then. My father seemed expert in everything, manly and strong, and I feared nothing when I was with him, except fear of him—that he had created me and could squelch and shape me as he liked. That fear was justified, because that's just what he did for twenty years of my life.

When we came home with the tree, my father cut off the top and fixed the bottom into a metal plate with screws. Then he allowed my mother, Madeline, and I to decorate it. We placed small metal skaters and sleds on cotton beneath the tree, a green wooden fence around it, and a mirror for the ice pond.

This Christmas there will be nothing at all, no contact with Dennis down the hill or his ninety-year-old father. He'll have family over, but they won't extend any cheer to us because we don't drink or eat meat. We can have our own Christmas party, make an extra sweet, maybe, and maybe a prayer to Jesus to thank him for his kindness and to ask for his blessings.

O tide of blessed
words given by Lord Kṛṣṇa,
may I go and chant—
that's all I have to say. The poem is an
inner landscape,
a prayer that You touch me
with Your holy name, in my ear,
pain softener—the sooner, the better.
“Give me love,” as rock stars sing . . .
“Can't buy me love,” but You can, You can
in holy names which I utter dryly, but pray.
The mind is impossible.
You know all this. It's up to You, Lord.

Notes #13

All right, admit you have a pain behind the right eye and you identify with it. But this determined lad will still try for his six pages.

First, I want to tell you what I dreamt:

I got into a crowded van. One man threw ashes onto my shirt. I pushed his cigarette ashes back at him, showering ashes on his shirt and in his face. He claimed that I had burned him and became angry. He said he would take legal action. I didn't think I had burned him, only that he was insulted. The dream dragged on. Devotees said they were going to hold a debate on Friday night to decide whether I was guilty.

Later, the angry man came to my home and I sincerely apologized, hoping he would be pacified. He wasn't. I saw that his face was actually burnt in two places.

Later when I awoke, I admitted that I had seen his facial burns, but in the dream, I made out as if they weren't there, that he was faking it. *My impression was*

that I had showered him with ashes. I held on to my story. I also felt I had to learn to tolerate and depend on Kṛṣṇa.

I asked Madhu to take photos of the sheep, and he said, "It's *hard* to take a picture without sheep in it."

There is a dream quality to the awake state when you try to write it down. Like dumb people, the dumb scribe, and the dream-walking, sleep-walking clouds down along the ground, we walk back and forth in a small, muddy meadow.

I am left alone during the day hours. Supposed to be spending my time to find my heart, then feel something for Lord Kṛṣṇa and my relationship with Him. It's a simple thing. I could get out my index cards of *Bhagavad-gītā* verses, or at least remember fragments . . . if one thinks of Kṛṣṇa at the time of death, he comes to Me . . . "I am in the heart of everyone, and from Me come memory and forgetfulness."

To go beyond dreamlike blur to reach the place of the heart. Such a simple thing. I try to have feelings for *anything*—even fear of head pain or aloneness, or joy, even anger—and then I know I am entering that feeling space within myself and I turn it toward Kṛṣṇa.

As I write, Dennis has come up the hill and is talking with Madhu. We have an empty gas bottle to be replaced. Seeing this scene, the cows have come around like fat, ugly children in the rain. They think Dennis might have some slops for them. They are only a few feet from my writing table, mooing and bellowing. They have their calves with them.

But they are mistaken. There is no hand-out here as far I can see. They are bellowing in vain. They are unloved children on this farm, this casual concentration camp. Dennis keeps his distance, just moves them from one pasture to another, throws them some slops until they are fat enough . . .

It turns out the cows were right. Even as Dennis spoke with M., he lifted a red bucket. They knew what it meant. Now he has walked off and they have followed him to where he is dumping the contents on the ground. He's wearing an old army fatigue cap. The cows go after the slop on the ground, and the calves run in circles. They don't seem interested in the slops, but because their moms are excited, they are excited too. Gray, gray day—still no parcel from America.

After he had successfully completed
the *rajāsūya-yajña*, Yudhiṣṭhira
sat on a golden throne.
Duryodhana visited him
in his glorious palace at Indraprastha
and poor Duryodhana fell into the water.
Bhīmasena laughed, but worse, Draupadī,
and Duryodhana was angry. Yudhiṣṭhira knew
Duryodhana's feelings, and he tried to restrain
the laughter. Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme,
motioned that they should not be
stopped from laughing if they liked.
That was the beginning of enmity
which led to such bloodshed.

A calf going to its mother's udder—
 the mother pushes it away.
 It is 4 P.M. and not milking time?
 But calves will be calves,
 and they're all beautiful
 although they are beef cows.
 Now three calves are
 suckling, and the mothers try to walk away.
 The calves are determined. Prabhupāda writes,
 "This is not a civilization that
 kills the mother."
 Dennis doesn't get it. He simply sees
 money, a God-sent livelihood,
 or so he thinks. Dirt pay for the work he has done,
 showing them new pastures, then sending them to
 slaughter. He subsists, somehow,
 on this thankless wet land for
 a few decades, God willing.

In the Tenth Canto, Chapter Two, the demigods
 pray. As I read it, I knew these were valuable prayers.
 I'll go back to them again and again if I live long
 enough—beautiful poems about the appearance of
 God. God isn't vague. He is Kṛṣṇa, appearing within
 Devakī. He is in everything and everything emanates
 from Him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa appeared at midnight in Kāṁsa's
 house. We will read next how He was transferred, and
 more importantly, how He was actually born to Yaśodā
 (inside information).

Kṛṣṇa will handle me as He likes. Tonight I am in a
 hurry. Can't stop because the headache may overtake

me and I'll have to quit. We take it for granted that we have health and life duration, but when that assurance slips, then we understand better.

I may not be well enough to talk with M. tonight at 6. He told me last night of the human and friendly feelings he felt while shopping in Kenmare. I told him Merton had expressed something similar when he went into Louisville, Kentucky one time. Monks are sometimes cold-hearted and unable to relate to ordinary people in their isolation. It's a step up when they can be friendly.

However, they shouldn't fall in love, and if that is the result of opening up the heart, then better to stay in your monastery with blinders on—the one who only goes out to distribute books to the *karmīs*, then rushes back to the temple *ārati*, a *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī*.

I fall in there somewhere, loving and not loving.

Oh, I love myself.

I love my God if I can find my heart. He is in my heart, His reception room. I focus on the records left by my spiritual master in books, memoirs, tapes—the stimulus for memory, the connection, and the purpose of serving Śrī Kṛṣṇa and thinking of Him, going to Him, or at least hoping to.

I plan to salvage from this
shortened day my
offering—the meaning of my
dream: "Pain softener—the sooner, the better."

As I write, he chops the logs in two.
This day is short, but tomorrow,

there will be a new one.
I cannot spend days as I like,
but they are filled with beautiful hours
especially in the morning,
and minutes twenty at a time
here and there.
I read and lost track of time
and then paced the kitchen to chant.
There is more to keeping physically alert
and chanting in the head.
Call out to Kṛṣṇa—
I'm trying.
And I'm grateful.

Notes #14

Thanks to Lord Kṛṣṇa, Bhagavān, that I am free to write, no headache. Don't take it lightly that I am alive and able to form words. Don't splurge it away like something cheap—like kindling gone up in flame, like junk music, junk food. This is the human form of life. There has been enormous waste of human life, and words are one of the worst ways to expend energy. People write and speak so many things—all nonsense—and even when they speak sincerely, it's so hard to find ultimate honesty. The Vedic literature leads us to truth, but people can't pick out the *Vedas* from the morass of books available. It's getting worse now that we have the information superhighway. Nonstop noise in this miserable material world.

So you don't be part of it, sonny. You serve and get things straight. You repeat them Vedic maxims, you hear?

In my own words, that's all I ask.

Food for thought.

Prabhupāda preaching strong, his voice rough, I could even say raspy. I can't capture it all here. I want to worship him, *wanted* to worship him, but we were kids, wild, plotting to serve for reasons other than pure devotion, but for pure devotion too. All so mixed up. We didn't even know how bad we were, or even how good, and we thought all our passions had been subdued. It seemed so when Prabhupāda was physically present.

Even then there were fights and falldowns. He gave us a simple program and four rules, but all that turned out to be more difficult than we had anticipated. He told us to preach nonstop and to chant nonstop, and to live together nonstop. He told us to keep everything just as he established it.

Who could understand how much force the material world would exert upon us? Those who remain in control in this movement are not necessarily perfectly correct just because they are able to stay in control.

One thing to be said is that we created many followers, amassed much power, and our way of life became that of the big, religious leader. It could be that we were actually following Prabhupāda, and for that we will be rewarded.

The Lord, fortunately, is *bhāva-grāhī-janārdana*. He sees our innermost heart and appreciates the loving essence hidden behind and amid the other motives.

I need to see in my own heart the *anarthas*, and pray to Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva to remove them. I beg Him to do me that favor. As for external demons and *bhūtas*, *jīvas* who may attack, for that I call on Kṛṣṇa and Gaurāṅga.

If a demon gives me trouble, I can tolerate it provided I am not tortured by my own fear, anger, and doubt.

Prabhupāda was preaching in Māyāpur. Then he gave us flat rice, mango, and yogurt. He wasn't a fanatic about health diets, but warned us not to eat too much. "In the spiritual world," he said, "there is no *varṇāśrama-dharma*. Here in this world, you must have divisions. The world has gone to hell, and the demons are in charge. They have no brain. They do not know that there is Kṛṣṇa . . . all rascals and fools, whether they be so-called gurus, *avatāras*, bogus politicians, scholars—all fools and rascals. They don't know there is soul or God or that the soul transmigrates—these basic things . . ."

Christmas is coming. How many new sleeping bags and wristwatches and jack-in-the-box presents do you want? How many checks and misuses and smelly feet washed in the name of guru worship and faces scraped in the mud à la St. Francis?

He said the happiest thing is if we go to the door of the monastery, cold and hungry, and they beat us and kick us away. We roll on the ground as they kick us, and that is the time for the greatest happiness.

Wow, he really *meant* it. He wanted to be completely bereft of material sense gratification and false ego. It was St. Francis who observed Christmas for the first time with a creche, in imitation of the original Christmas in Bethlehem. He had a genius for devotional emotion.

Heavens to Betsy! I can't slow
 down enough to say I'm cold and the
 stars are out. They never went to the moon—
 even one star, although millions exist. How can
 they say there is no life? I swam warm summers
 in the canal behind my parents' home in
 Avalon and looked up into the immense distance
 in the summer of '66. O Swamiji,
 I hear your voice even in my parental home.
 I want no more LSD, and no more
 to identify with the
 body. He had an oceanic smile, but
 the Harvard grad student couldn't see it.
 No. We lived in our own world
 of Swami adulation. We couldn't expect them
 to follow us.

He once bought bread baked
 by *karmīs* and tomatoes and lettuce
 and peanut butter all in a bag
 from the superette.
 Came out to the park in Berkeley, opened it,
 and served it after a too hasty offering to God.
 Why do I remember this stuff?
 I'm talking of a *saṅkīrtana* party. I wanted to go
 back to praise my spiritual master
 who saved these wild kids
 and keeps us serving him still, even though
 we're now gray-haired and pot-bellied,
 some monsters of ISKCON
 leadership.

Devakī prayed to Viṣṇu to hide Himself. She wanted Him to appear as a baby and not as four-armed Viṣṇu. She had mixed feelings. Sometimes she addressed Him as “the Supreme Source of all *avatāras*, the source of the creation, the Supreme,” and sometimes she spoke of motherly fear, the bewilderment of *vātsalya-rasa*. She is a great devotee. I worship her words. Mother Yaśodā is topmost, but there are also many other devotees serving the Lord in various capacities. Praying to the Lord as the controller of time and the substance remaining after destruction, Devakī says He remains as Saṅkarṣaṇa.

Who can understand it? We cannot estimate her understanding, but accept what she says as the Swami has given it to us.

I heard it even in those days, typed it happily, and mailed it back to him in California. Those were happy days and I wish to remember them always. I’m grateful, a million times thankful, for what I have received.

It is *very* quiet here. No cars roar by, nothing but the sheep and cows. How foolish of me to consider leaving here early. In a place like this I can hear my *japa*.

The only problem is that I have brought with me my loud mind.

Although Prabhupāda can solve that one too: stop trying to force the mind, but bring it to the place of feeling. Simple.

Simple? No, extremely difficult. It only sounds simple.

At least I have hope. I want to stop my mindless chanting. I know some people, a few, who take

chanting very seriously. They actually know that the name is a person. They pray to the name, and know God's a person. I want to chant and feel something. Have I *ever* felt anything?

Yes. Then it shouldn't be hard to bring feeling into *japa*. At least it shouldn't be impossible. It already lives within your experience.

Once in the past I felt a deep sense of grief and I cried all night, sobbing. I can't say exactly why. I guess I was finally facing real decadence. My idealism had been smashed. I had lost myself; people had cheated me out of myself. I was far from God, and I knew that too. My tears were bitter and choking.

That was emotion. What can I do with it now?

Perhaps nothing but leave it behind. Still, whatever emotion we have felt, we should learn to feel it for God. We must place ourselves at His feet. Climb out of your mind and enter your own heart. Find the softness of prayer.

A little song is worth the morn
if I could write I would
the wood burns and the cold fingers
dance upon the page. He wants praise, we all
do, but the pure devotee says,
"Give it to others just what they
want, and for yourself take nothing."
Rather, remain alone and free
to chant. No one will bother you—you
have nothing left to give.

Gaura-kiśora dāsa Bābāji sat near a latrine
chanting "Rādhe!" and "Gaurāṅga!"

Notes #15

M. brought back some typing paper from his shopping in Kenmare. It was wrapped in the front page of yesterday's newspaper. The Irish government is seeking a rainbow alliance. Front page photo of Prime Minister Major with Santa Claus. I told M. that I was more interested in Kṛṣṇa's politics in *Kṛṣṇa* book—killing of Śālva and Dantavakra. M. did not respond. Then I asked if he agreed. He smiled and said, "Yes, but gradually."

He said Christmas in Ireland is "total". We were thinking of staying at a hotel in Shannon on December 26th before flying out the next day, but the hotels are closed for Christmas. People gather with their families—almost no stores open. They eat and get drunk. We will be alone here, or by then Arjuna dāsa will have joined us from Dublin.

The package still has not arrived from America. I'll have to turn to another book, since I am ready to start on something else.

Fog wet over window. When I went out at 3 P.M. to walk in the meadow, I noticed a faint trail in the grass around the perimeter of the meadow. It's from my daily walks there. Then I saw Dennis' tractor coming down from the hills, his dog trailing. I kept on circulating and didn't look in his direction.

M. out shopping again today. When I am alone, I think differently. I can't imagine what it would be like to actually live in a house by yourself. I will probably never do it. I'd certainly be occupied a lot more with cooking and cleaning than prayer, but my silence would be pure, the solitude quiet and intense. I already live in my own world.

Theophan lived in two rooms. I think they were part of the monastery, not like Karen Karper who lived alone in the woods, although she had two friends living nearby.

Death row, the prison—Akhmatova writes,
of former Stalinist days. Haiti days and
Yamarāja days. I have not seen death?
Death has passed me by because I
am a devotee and a member of the GBC?

These cows will die. Two weeks until Christmas.
I can't see out the window,
it's streaked with rain, but the calves
are frisky.

I read that Vasudeva took Kṛṣṇa to Gokula and exchanged Him for the girl just born to Yaśodā. That's

what it says. Then he returned and the baby girl started to cry. Kāmsa said, "This is the cruel death, but I will go and kill it before it gets me." Devakī knew that she and Kṛṣṇa were safe, but she piteously pleaded for Yaśodā's child. Kāmsa grabbed the infant and tried to smash her on the stone floor, but Māyā-devī slipped from his grasp and flew up into the sky. There, she admonished him in her eight-armed form. She could have killed him on the spot, but she knew Kṛṣṇa would do it later.

There is a photo of a bearded man on the front page of the newspaper encircling my paper supply. He's a person in the spotlight. The Irish government is being reformed and has pledged to give quick information to those seeking abortions. It also promises to do away with the divorce law. I know Praghoṣa in Wicklow laments this, and he may also notice that an Irish football player was elected to the all-star team. Nothing of America did I find here. Just as well. I am like a visitor from another planet here. The *Herald Tribune* is not here, the space craft is not here, and I am preaching for effect.

Lord Kṛṣṇa killed Śālva. Put that in your newspaper. Śālva had a mysterious airplane that could remain invisible, then appear as many airplanes at once. Pradyumna fought furiously, but was eventually smote on the breast by Dyumān, falling unconscious. His charioteer took him off the battlefield. "'O eunuch, O coward,' they will say of me," Pradyumna said to the charioteer.

"No, I did no wrong," the charioteer said. "It is my duty to protect you."

So Pradyumna washed his mouth and hands, took up new weapons, and re-entered the fray. His appearance on the battlefield was like the sun driving away the clouds. He drove back the opposition and killed many of the enemies. Śālva, however, was reserved for Kṛṣṇa.

Śālva played many tricks by his mystic art. He told Kṛṣṇa, "Now Your father has been kidnapped. I have Your father and will cut off his head. You cannot stop me." He then cut off the head of a man resembling Vasudeva, then disappeared. Kṛṣṇa appeared bewildered, but then recovered and realized that Balarāma was guarding Dvārakā. No harm could come to anyone while Balarāma was in charge. Finally, He cut off Śālva's head after He downed his airplane. Then Dantavakra rushed forward on foot in an uncontrollable fury with his club lifted high. One by one, the Lord dismantled His enemies and their friends.

Lunch at airport, with flying tigers, the port of no return. The plane will not crash because I am a devotee and a guru wouldn't have to die like that. No, I am safe, and you too, if you are with me. I get special treatment.

Yet, they have lost my mail package. Alas.

I guess I am only a dot or speck, one ten-thousandth the size of the upper portion of a hair—at least to the post office. After all, the universe weighs only as much as a single mustard seed on the head of Ananta-śeṣa. Even if we were all granted liberation—all of us in this universe, Ananta-śeṣa would only be relieved of one

mustard seed. It doesn't make any difference to the Lord in terms of quantity. Rather, each of us is special.

Did you know there are a million people in state prisons in the U.S.A.?

If we think of Kṛṣṇa, we can go to Him. Prabhupāda wrote, "You should not try to bring Kṛṣṇa into this world. That is a very difficult proposal." To achieve that, Vasudeva and Devakī in their former lives had to perform 12,000 years of *tapasya* and eat only leaves that fell from trees. It is much easier to go to where Kṛṣṇa is in the spiritual world.

When Prabhupāda heard that an elder disciple fell down he said, "It is misuse of free will. It can happen to anyone, even one in an exalted position."

I think of these things, and look to use my free will properly.

Give us a song.

May the *śiṣya* be faithful
to Prabhupāda. He went to New Māyāpur
and when he saw the room they had
prepared he said, "Yes, full
faith in the guru is what we
need." When someone praised him he said,
"A disciple can never repay the debt he owes
to the guru." I thought, "No one can say that
as Prabhupāda can." At least I'd better not
assert that I am the tax collector for praises
due the Lord. I must deflect praise and
if I live in a free room, a free-write zone,
keep quoting *śāstra* and keep praying,
begging for direction. May the rose of

Killarney decorate the Kṛṣṇa conscious posy.
May we learn to serve devotees,
become kinder and more studious, ready to
spontaneously repeat what the guru has given.
No harm if you want to use your own accent.
No harm.

Notes #16

I came to *Landscapes* magazine (Brooklyn College) as Dr. Alexander's pet student. Shame-faced, a devotee now, I still maintain the helpless desire to write. I don't want to be punished or even judged for it, but I just heard that Yamarāja was punished for a small mistake and was cursed to become a *śūdra* (Vidura). Prabhu-pāda said Yamarāja is a GBC, just as we have twelve GBCs in ISKCON. Kṛṣṇa has twelve GBCs too. They are known as *mahājanas*.

As his post is great, so his punishment was great. Of course, we can say that the Lord planned to benefit Yamarāja by allowing him to be present during His pastimes. Yamarāja is always so busy punishing the sinful that he never gets a chance to preach. Vidura was a great preacher.

What's my point? I don't want to be punished for what seems natural to my heart. If Kṛṣṇa doesn't want me to write . . .

I don't want someone telling me, "You should stop writing. It is a leftover from your puffed-up zonal guru days. You should stop publishing books. Wait ten years until you might possibly have something valuable to say. In the meantime, offer menial services to the devotees."

Maybe the brother who told me that is right, but I couldn't take it from him—from them. I need to work out these questions myself, to deal with my own heart, and not have it legislated. It *is* possible to live out our karma for Kṛṣṇa's pleasure. If we are successful, it becomes free of reaction. *Yat karoṣi yad aśnāsi . . .* Do you have an attachment for a particular kind of work? Then perform that work for Kṛṣṇa. Write your way back to Godhead.

This morning after the writing session I awoke and said, "I want to get out of here, if possible, and spend a few days at Śamika Ṛṣi's house before going on to Gītā-nāgarī for the seminars." That led to my doubting the whole purpose of my stay here (including doubting you, dear Notes). Why make such an outpouring record?

Of course, my self-criticism exactly echoed what others have said to me, starting when I first published *Journal and Poems*. You know, I have so many critics.

I defy their opinions quietly and carry on, and similarly, although the same voice lives on within me, I defy that too. I do believe it's important to cut through the hype we have created for ourselves as devotees and to speak something honest, to look at our faults and struggles and to admit that they're there—signs of our

imperfection. Until we do that, we will not be able to improve. Not only that, but without honesty, we will not find the means by which to escape our *anarthas* into Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Yes, I do believe all this. Now staring at the flaming logs and red coals, I know I won't quit.

Oh, heartbreak, heart attack,
small candle, little triumph,
death and eternal life—O
Tubby of the comic books, dear diary,
New Age devotee-pāda—
you poke fun at yourself, make
faces in the mirror as you
shave your three-day beard and
shiver.
This is near Kenmare
after all.

If Kṛṣṇa would save you like He
did Rukmiṇī . . . Ha! You are no
queen, just
a self-centered fool. Who is this
whipping boy always in stage center?
I stare into the burning logs
and space out and what? Expect a gypsy
woman to read my palm and tell me
what to do? No, I have to think like a man,
hear from guru, love Kṛṣṇa,
and then decide.

O little town of Bethlehem and small town

of Cul na copog, how still we see thee lie,
 while families gather for turkey and booze
 and whatever vittles they can manage
 in this wet, poor country.

From the critics: this is not befitting a guru, this romp through the bog country. Hey, he's singing like a jazz man! This is why he deserves to be hoisted up by his britches (or *dhoti*) and made a laughing stock. He is supposed to be dignified. He shouldn't be walking around in sweat pants with baggy bottoms. Who does he think he is, Albert Einstein at Princeton? Some other wayward genius? He is an army man. He should look sharp and behave accordingly. No *avadhūtas* allowed here. What *are* you doing in this bog country of beautiful hills?

These jokes rather than *mādhurya* jokes because our past is sinful.

Witherspoon dove into the ocean and came up with ten francs worth of gold and skulls and skeletons from the nine hundred people who drowned at sea when the ferry sank going from Finland to Estonia. Will they continue to dive for the remains? Everything happens by Kṛṣṇa's will.

A devotee accepts things that way. Kāṁsa tried to preach, and he did pretty well in his discussion of *ātmā-tattva*, going deeply into the matter. This was after he had been frightened by the appearance of Goddess Durgā. Prabhupāda said the demons generally respect Durgā or Kālī, so when he realized that it was Durgā who had been born of Devakī, he realized Devakī was not an ordinary woman. He begged her forgiveness for

killing her six children. He said the killer is simply an agent. A person is forced to act by karma, so the one who dies is receiving his karma and the one who kills is delivering it. Don't regret what happens according to the unalterable nature of providence.

At the same time, Kāṁsa did not deny his own guilt. Therefore, he asked their pardon. And they gave it, because they were devotees. They also knew that Kṛṣṇa was safe and that He would eventually kill Kāṁsa.

A dream: an institution was distributing a rich milk product free to qualified parties. A group of devotees went to get some. I went with Nāgarāja Prabhu. (As I write now, it reminds me of a tiny version of churning the milk ocean and getting the nectar from Dhanvantari. Or it's like a Wizard of Oz trip of young idealists.) We were Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees scheming to get something for Kṛṣṇa. You know, rescuing Lakṣmī-devī from Rāvaṇa and returning Her to the Lord—a preaching mission against the nondevotees.

The group distributing the product required recipients to meet strict, technical, bureaucratic standards. We couldn't just go and say, "We are Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees and we want this product for devotional purposes." (Reminds me of Kṛṣṇa's cowherd boys going to beg from the yajñic *brāhmaṇas*.) We were sure to be turned down unless we made a clever approach and had the official papers.

So first we went to Princeton University in disguise. We tried to get the papers there. All we met was one sympathetic person who wrote in his own hand on a scrap of paper, "Damato." He said it would be enough.

The dream went on and on, and in the end, we approached the institution officials with a several-quart container without a lid. When we were discovered to be devotees, we were able to defend ourselves, show our paper, and receive a portion. They gave it to us because they knew we protected cows.

I took this dream as a sign that I should stick it out here and do the needful. In waking life I should be conscientious and work for the movement, get through the red tape and achieve my goal. That's how a devotee works.

O little town of Bethlehem
 how still we see thee lie.
 You tell the truth and home go free
 before the star-lit eyes.
 I see the truth in *nāma-kīrtana*
 and wish to write my way
 to please the Lord. I'll give this up
 if this is what He says.

But if He gives me *carte blanche*,
 I'll serve Him in this way,
 to sing and banjo home my words on
 dulcimer bejive.

The time is nigh, the chant is here,
 so give this one to Jake, make poems
 a-plenty and serve them out like hot corn flakes
 and cocoa in cups, like Christmas cheer

in Hare Kṛṣṇa land. We are serious and this
is just writing on the side,
the overflow of cheer and energy—
got to harness it.

Notes #17

Well, my inner storms of doubt and the desire to leave here early has died down. I am now looking for a breakthrough. That is, that Kṛṣṇa may reveal to me what I can do to please Him most. I am prepared for anything. In the meantime, I decided I should go on peacefully with my devotional service, reading and writing and chanting my rounds. The Lord will indicate something more when He is ready.

In my remaining days here, I will read *Bhagavad-gītā* since I have finished all the Tenth Canto volumes I had with me. There is no shortage of reading material.

Kṛṣṇa fought and defeated demons, and that seems to be my work too—killing the demons of doubt and uncertainty within me. Lord Caitanya defeated demons through the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. I am trying to follow in His footsteps with my demons.

This morning it was raining while I was out. I came back with my jacket soaked. Although I hung it on the

chair, it was still wet when I went out for the second time around 3 P.M. The rain had stopped, though, and I went into nature's backyard. The streams from the high hills were furious—white water and waterfalls rushing past. Puddles and mud . . . but the sky clearing in a few places. Nothing like actual sunshine. As I walked, I felt the beginnings of a headache. I simply chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa.

No biting your lip while writing, and no headaches allowed.

They gave me something to put up my nose and on my head when the pain comes, but I knew it wouldn't work. I saw the doctor (in Māyāpur) for only ten minutes. After that, he met with Madhu, who bought a big haul of medicine, powders, and oils. I don't really believe in it, but we take them until they run out and that's it—until we find another hoax.

Pardon me for my cynicism. I am going to try hypnotherapy next month, so I should talk about being gullible.

Rain, tell us, rain, tell us—
 the pens in a porcelain cup
 on the window sill and me reading
Bhāgavatam. That I know. Is there
 anything else in your life so innately
 Kṛṣṇa conscious? Yes, I am soul.
 The mud pulls at me when I walk
 after the rain, but I still cross the brook
 if the mud's not too thick.
 Or not. I may retreat.

One sheep is bigger than the rest and I
wonder how he (or she) has become so large.
I look down the hill, think of heading back,
the pain is also innate.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, son of Nanda,
I wash dishes after breakfast,
I wash floors, I
look forward to writing even though
this session is rougher than most.
I admit it.

Kṛṣṇa, I look out and don't see You,
but am assured by statements my
spiritual master made. He promised us
we would look out the window one day
and see ourselves lifted
off the ground—surprise!
The process works deep within me,
a disciple, and I have it,
I am actually
innately Kṛṣṇa conscious.

Maybe the Lord will continue to give me a safe passage. I am afraid in my dreams, and imagine unsafe places where everything is taken away and I barely have an identity. Usually my identity is associated with ISKCON, but sometimes not. I am still a prisoner, if only in my dreams.

If the Lord is going to put me to a test where the basics are no longer available to me in my waking life, then I'll have to see what service I can offer. Here I

have the luxury to write book after book, to have them reproduced, then eventually published. I still have all my fingers and toes and friends and principles, and the assurance that I have no more heavy karma to live out. But I know I don't have love of God, and I don't know where my heart is. Sometimes I think that ordeal which hasn't yet come will arrive just to give me these things.

But I say I don't want it; I won't call out for it. I am afraid. It will come regardless, or perhaps not, as the Lord desires. Therefore, let me use this present time of peace to do as much as I can. And let me be grateful for whatever I have. That's sensible, isn't it?

This is my Kṛṣṇa conscious offering. Prabhupāda is with me and he says even when it gets difficult and dangerous (as happened to Prahlaḍa), the devotee holds on to his Kṛṣṇa conscious chanting with devotion. The Lord will protect him.

Oh, you better watch out
 you better not cry
 you better not pout
 I'm telling you why—
 Santa Claus is coming to town!

He sees you when you're sleeping,
 he knows when you're awake
 [sounds like Supersoul or Yamarāja]
 he knows if you've been good or bad
 so be good for goodness' sake!

Santa Claus and glad-handing PM Major, Santa Claus and the clammer in the department store, the

shoplifting, the arrest—put him into the store office until the cops arrive with handcuffs. Let him feel wretched among the wretched.

The crass cops are just a few notches above the lowest. And the city lights, the cold, the better-off folk, the newspapers, sad stories, sad animals being butchered for dinner tables.

You better watch out, you better not cry. Nativity scenes—I don't see any of it this year.

Oh the Cornwall of words that come
when a devotee refrains from vice
uses the word “nice” but his head goes
back to when he was lusty, careens and returns
to sitting at a table with herb tea,
hand gripped around the hot mug, warmed.
I have to, I
have to,
I have to have some
verses to recite. *Dehino 'smin yathā dehe.*
Straight life and no traps
or innuendoes that lead to *that* remembrance.
He wants to forget all that stuff forever.
God isn't easy to know, but we can obey
through the simple routine.

O heavens and spilling stars, all described
in *Bhāgavatam*, I follow your light and the
ways of sages of yore, my master too,
knowing the manifest material
and unmanifest material are not for me.
I look to spiritual Goloka in his books and

somehow it's there, far away
in the heart of rare Vaiṣṇavas.
O Raghunātha, O Rūpa,
O names in which I live, O my own true
teacher, Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Notes #18

Sudāmā Vipra's wife was shivering from weak health. His cloth was torn. She urged him, although she didn't want to dictate to her husband, to see his friend. "You are the most fortunate person because you are a personal friend of Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is the husband of the goddess of fortune. Please go to Him and ask for a little wealth."

"I won't go to see Kṛṣṇa on that account, but since she is insisting, I can take the opportunity to see my Lord."

Cue: "The most painful admissions are the ones that will have the most lasting value."

I don't know about that. Happy ones last too. Happy is the man who can pour warm, or even hot, water on his body in a cold bathroom tub. Happy is the man whose body steams when the hot water hits it. He's happy because he dries off as fast as he can while hearing Śrīla Prabhupāda speaking in that tone of

voice he so much loves to hear, such as when he was dictating *Kṛṣṇa* book in 1970. He's happy because he knows he can run out of the bathroom and through the kitchen, where he'll stop and take his medicine mixed with honey, and then into here; happy because he can turn on the gas stove and sit by this fireplace to write.

That's only the beginning. He is happy in relation to the Lord because he is serving Him. I am no Sudāmā Vipra. I didn't go to school with Kṛṣṇa, and although He probably could recognize me on sight, I don't expect the same reception Sudāmā received. Still, I'm fortunate. Śrīla Prabhupāda will recognize me, as he always has.

"Oh, Satsvarūpa, you have come? How long have you been here?"

"I just got here."

Then he'll mention to me the names of the other devotees who are present and give me some service.

What can I say? Will I bring him the chipped rice of my Notes from the last days of the year?

Nine days left and this one already running out. I love the way a day grows and rises, then slips into a valley only to rise again toward nightfall. Last days.

Everything comes to us according to our destiny. If we receive the mercy to spend time with a pure devotee, we are receiving more than our due. Pure devotional service is beyond fate. It is wholly spiritual.

The devotees in Belgium once put on a skit of Sudāmā Vipra visiting Lord Kṛṣṇa in Dvārakā. They

performed it on the indoor stairs of the castle. That's a dramatic staircase, with European fixtures. We all sat in the front hall, and the pastime was pantomimed against recorded music. Nice costumes, nice actors and actresses. A Western flair. I saw it just before leaving for Vṛndāvana to celebrate Kārttika in 1992.

I went to that Kārttika, heard what I heard, and still confess that when I chant nothing happens. I just can't pay attention. What the hell. You know too.

Words coming out slow this morning. I keep looking to see how many pages I've accumulated. Need to end up with six. The poems seem hard to break into.

The fire is also burning slow, which is lucky since I am almost out of wood.

But time is not slow—Kṛṣṇa Himself. Baladeva said he wants to get me an hourglass. He thought it would be fun for me to work with it. He sent me a photo and an ad for one. The ad showed an old, white-haired couple in their sixties, photo models, hugging each other on the beach with the waves running over their ankles. It said, "Time is running." Yes, it's true.

The parcel that was sent from America contained food ingredients and prepared food. It also contained used microcassettes and one volume of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. I guess it really is lost in the mail. M. says a hungry Irish postal or customs clerk probably opened it and ate the contents. I find that hard to believe, and prefer to think that it has been held up somewhere, waiting for us to pay duty because of all the tapes or something. By now, the *prasādam* will be stale.

Read a poem about Ray Carver when he was a boy, fishing. He was mad about catching fish. He might have to become a fish in a future life since he tortured and killed so many of them. It's possible. Life is that cruel. Carver knew he was being cruel because he was after love and art. Nature doesn't forgive. He should have known that, although he probably didn't. Ignorance abounds.

Thinking of a Godbrother who has left Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He knew better, but still turned his back on Vedic knowledge. I met him two years ago in the Boston temple. He had become obese and grown a beard. He said, "I am now into an Emersonian-Ginsbergian kind of romantic vision of reality. That includes not knowing the truth. It's better than having pat answers."

What a lot of schmaltz that is. Yes, schmaltz and horse manure and plain ignorance. I can't express it all. I'm not used to speaking straight because I am in an institution where we are always very careful about etiquette, and sometimes because of my position, I have to say something I don't completely mean.

I was angry for days after meeting that brother, and I wrote about it and even drew his picture. It made me angry to see him deserting Vedic knowledge for obvious ignorance.

But I suppose he has his rights. This brother, and Ray Carver too, wanted to be true men and true writers. May Kṛṣṇa save them both.

Notes #19

Nice writing session came to me this morning along with the conviction that I should write as much as possible.

M. said on Christmas Eve he will bake some Irish soda bread and fruitcake and bring them down the hill to Dennis and his family. Dennis' father is ninety-one years old, and that means all the family members from other parts of Ireland will come to observe Christmas at their place; he's too old to travel. We can offer them *prasādam* if we make something they can recognize.

Declaration from the unconscious:

We hereby announce we want in. We want to speak sometimes and give you bits of official rhetoric from ourselves. We're the Coney Island of the mind filtering in from Ferlinghetti, the filcher. We hereby contest that the official party line sometimes doesn't make sense, at least in practice. We hereby say that the American nation is putrefied, and

we love Allen Ginsberg's
 American poetry. We
 tell lies and you are so hung up
 on literal truth because you desire reputation.
 You are attached to establishing yourself
 as number one.

We hereby declare independence from
 your nonsense.

We want to be pure devotees of Kṛṣṇa.

Freud said the unconscious is absorbed in sex. Not
 us. We are looking for sainthood: St. Unconscious.

To the logs in the fireplace we say, "Burn, baby,
 burn."

Cue: "Write from a quiet place." That means this
 house and also the inside of me. Don't be frenetic.
 Find the self beyond New York and all that stuff—the
 soul. I want to write from there. Practice in this quiet
 house so that when you go somewhere noisy, you can
 still locate the quiet, inner place.

I had a headache yesterday. I think it started around
 nine or ten o'clock, when I started to feel cold. I will
 try to keep warmer today.

O big log, you may be too big
 to catch fire in my fireplace
 and the world's critics may
 pounce upon me and my poems.

Trivikrama Swami is in Krakow, and
 he says the preaching there is sweet
 and he doesn't intend to leave. I imagine

him enjoying his preaching on behalf
 of Prabhupāda—giving Kṛṣṇa consciousness
 to all those innocent people with their fair
 faces. As for me, I wander,
 always wander
 to do my preaching
 at ISKCON temples, no base, occasionally
 writing for BTG, satisfied.

O Lord Kṛṣṇa, please
 be kind and bring me to You.
 Bypass that jokester who lives
 within me and wants only to write.
 Although some have said
 I am playing with sand castles on
 a (lonely) beach, You know
 I am Yours.

Notes #20

Just as I was about to start, Dennis drove up the hill on his tractor, M. went outside to cut firewood, and the two of them are now talking a few feet from my window.

The declaration of the unconscious states that we want to be able to speak, have a lot to say no doubt, but that we don't possess a clear passage through which to say it. I don't want to make fun of or control my unconscious per se. The unconscious is not a deprived id or libido as Freud would have it, or an impersonal cultural or racial archetype as Jung states; he is a devotee, and he arranges an outpouring of words in a writer, trying to bypass any contamination to let out the primal energy of the heart. Like the falling rain that becomes contaminated by unclean air, the false ego and the conglomeration of culture can affect the unconscious, but it cannot define it. The unconscious is part of the self. I want to plumb its depths a little when I write.

Words of the dark and words
 a web, free
 association as far as I can see—
 like cobwebs across the grass, tiny lacings
 all over the meadow
 you see their shiny silver
 strands only in the morning
 when the dew is upon them.
 What can I express of it?

But when Jyotirmāyī Prabhu asked, “Is it all right to take the *gurukula* children out to show them the plants and the names of the plants?” Prabhupāda said, “What is the use of it? Better they know that this is a plant and that it has a mother and father. The mother is the earth and Kṛṣṇa is the father.” When she suggested biology, he said, “What is the use?” Prabhupāda was aware that the study of science can lead to atheism.

It doesn’t look like that parcel came in the mail today. I could use that Tenth Canto, but . . . I have other books.

I’m sorry this isn’t much of a surge from the unconscious after all the talk. It will come when it wants.

Williams, at the end of “Asphodel,” remembers light over darkness—a strong image. Then he remembers the day he married his Flossie, which was also, he writes, a celebration of light. Auden said this is one of the best-loved poems in English.

Now that I know that, I still have to walk my own wet bog. Today was sunny but puddly, and water dripped here and there.

'Twas a sunny day in Ireland, near
 Christmas, was quiet enough in
 our *āśrama* too. I noted the calendar: in
 two or three days, the disappearance day
 of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, a fast.
 I thought at 6 P.M. when we usually meet,
 we'll read *Brahma-saṁhitā*.

Then we arranged for lunch at noon,
 and returned to our quiet,
 he and I, nothing big to arrange.
 One could say we are not even observing
 the Vaiṣṇava holiday with such small
 preparations, but that's how it is
 in the Irish countryside—the
 way we live.

Non-events, non-noise, no liquor bottles and
 no Christmas preparations—no killing of geese
 or turkeys to roast. It would be nice, though,
 if we had a few friends around, although
 I have no material family, or could go to
 a preaching event in a temple where Indians
 in the West feel uneasy at Christmas
 and go to the temple to find their own style
 of holiday cheer
 with Kṛṣṇa and honor for His devotee,
 Jesus Christ.

Well, folks, Dennis arrived carrying the parcel from
 America. It finally got here! M. came right into the
 room with it and I cut up the box with scissors (and cut
 my thumb in the process).

The package contained a large number of micro-cassettes. It also contained bags of things like buck-wheat flour and other flours with which M. could have prepared sweets and other offerings for the last Ekādaśī. It contained three kinds of offered sweets, a *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* (and while we sat on the floor, I read the section where Bhaṭṭācārya eats *prasādam* from Lord Caitanya's hand).

The package also held thirty letters, and most importantly, the long-awaited Tenth Canto, Chapters 6–12. By reading them, I can almost complete my project of reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, the Bhakti-vedanta purports, and having selected excerpts typed up into a little booklet.

After reading the Lord Caitanya pastime, I opened the package of offered sweets and we each ate one, although they are now stale and old, and as the Bhaṭṭācārya states, are “*prasādam* that has come from a long distance.” Suddenly I realized how impetuous it was to eat them right under Prabhupāda's altar without offering any to him. We stopped what we were doing and I asked M. to put the sweets on a plate for Śrīla Prabhupāda. It is only by his mercy that we can have such fun and remain innocent. I should not have overlooked him.

The ranch opened and ten cowboys were shot. Calm down. The varied news in the mail is bound to agitate your mind. I just glanced at a newsletter sent out by one swami—a creative and wild-looking newsletter—which says, “This issue contains latest attempt at writing modern KC literature, magic carpets, and Nebraska

1865!" In a handwritten note enclosed, the author writes, "I have been publishing this newsletter since 1979. I thought to send you a copy, thinking . . . "

I am seeking to answer the letters not in a mechanical way, but more in the mood a priest must find who sits all day in the confessional if he is to have any real compassion. The priest I had growing up would not look at me when I spoke my confession, would give his little prepared speech, his prescribed atonement, then as he was shoving the screen closed in my face say, "Now make a good act of contrition." I'm sure not all priests are like that, and I certainly don't want to be like that when I open the letters.

A sunny day during the last week before
Christmas. Wouldn't you know, M.
is now talking
with a brogue as if he were a long-time
resident of back-country Kerry.
He said his grandfather couldn't understand
even a Dublin accent, what to speak of
someone from London.
Americans are a Far-West parish,
so just imagine.

I can see I am getting displaced
by the contents of the parcel. My poem songs
came from alone and now I'll have to find
a new way to go to
Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa.

On the cover of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*

Tenth Canto, Part Two, baby
 Kṛṣṇa is being bathed by Mother Yaśodā,
 and Nanda is there. On the back cover
 Kṛṣṇa is in Tṛṇāvarta's arms
 high over Vṛndāvana.

Imagine being way up there like that,
 perhaps in one of those Western tourist gas balloons
 over Vraja. I fantasize that someone asked me to go
 and I did, saw Rādhā-kuṇḍa from up there,
 and Govardhana.

I tried to impress the beauty on my mind but
 was too worried about where we would land.
 No, if I was asked, I wouldn't go in a gas balloon.
 Neither would Kadamba-kānana.

We prefer to stick to duty
 on Bhaktivedanta Swami Mārg. Now here I am,
 far from Vṛndāvana, but the book cover shows
 my Kṛṣṇa high in the sky in a demon's arms
 soon to plummet and land safely.
 This the Christmas for which I yearned.

Pain beginning. I never know exactly what brings it.
 Perhaps this time it was the chill.

Notes #21

Sit like a warmth-seeking cat and gaze into the fire. I have to estimate the burning time of each log and can't help but glance at the few pieces I have left. We get down to such primitive concerns.

Reading. Baby Kṛṣṇa played on the breast of the witch Pūtanā after He had killed her. He acted just like a human child. When He performs *līlās* in the higher planets, He does things even more wonderfully. For the earth, it is a wonderful thing to kill a witch. It is so wonderful, but the scientists and we who follow them say there are no witches. *No* one could be twelve miles long. The stories might strain our conditioned credulity. On the heavenly planets, however, it takes much more than killing a witch for someone to be considered god-like in His *līlā*. We are fortunate that Kṛṣṇa came here and played like a human. These pastimes are easy to read and more attractive than the stories of the other incarnations.

Chant and your neighbors and community and family will be protected from danger, Prabhupāda said. Prabhupāda also said when he was in New Māyāpur (in 1976) that the tomato was called a foreign eggplant in India and they never ate them because they regarded them as a British influence. He also told the devotees how to make puffed rice by heating sand, then throwing the grains in with the sand. He said he liked *kaucaris*. I showed these various food references in the *Diary* to Madhu because I want him to know that even Śrīla Prabhupāda had a tongue and inclinations for food. He asked his disciple to give him a snack at 9:30 at night. He wanted it. There's no harm if I also think of food. Silly guy.

I'm rubbing my knees for warmth and gazing into the fireplace, asking the fire why it can't be warmer. I've got the gas heater on too.

Oh, haberdashery, I do seek the thing in itself, neither America. Prabhupāda was asked something about his being attached to India. He said, "How can I be attached to India? That is not *sannyāsī*." Yes, the *sannyāsī* has no homeland, no attachment to the country where he was born and raised. He may choose to preach to his countrymen because he knows them so well, but there are other options.

Those devotees to whom I gave initiation in those first years—'79, '80—most

of them are gone—Nāma Saṅkīrtana dāsa and others. They no longer care for me, or perhaps they think I don't care for them. If I did, they reason, I would visit the Brooklyn temple more often. But they don't go themselves to the temple, except maybe once in a while on a Sunday night. Place of thieves or excuses.

I answer letters, always have, and wander in Europe. I'll return to New York in a week. If anyone wants me, that's where I'll be—back in the city of my youth, where I was full of sins and misgivings and illusions of hope to become a posthumous poet living in a great city. I met His Divine Grace and gave it all up.

I set up a new notebook for when we travel—a diary for 1995. I intend to begin writing in it when we make our journey to America on the 27th. I want to have the presence of mind (and a steady hand even in the car) to find truth in our travels. Don't want to be dead to what is happening, or to lose the opportunity to write a poem on the Irish road. Any lines have value. I have to think like that—loose verse, loose hope, don't lose hope.

The fracture, the hamper, the nonsense, the good sense, the going over the fear of an airplane crash, the seeking shelter in the Lord. Most people are like me and share the same fears and hungers. The only

difference is that I have heard about Kṛṣṇa. I don't know why I received this knowledge and others have not.

To save ourselves, we quote our authorities. We all do that too. If we are scientific and hard-headed, we quote the laws of nature and its facts and figures. They say this year America is going to have a bountiful Christmas, for example. The dollar is a bit stronger and people will spend when they shop. It will, however, be an especially difficult year for the poor. The Republicans are in power and they're cutting government programs that help the poor—no more free suppers. An eighty-seven-year-old man was rummaging through the garbage and said, "I lost my shame long ago."

Prabhupāda says (a devotee will quote his authority) it's all illusion, any hope of economic relief, any material hope at *all*. There *is* no hope except Kṛṣṇa consciousness. In Kṛṣṇa consciousness we can feed people, share wealth, spare animals from the slaughterhouse, and live in such a way that we don't become encumbered, but can progress toward spiritual perfection.

No cigarettes please. No candy-vending machines either. No blacks or Puerto Ricans or white tough guys in the subway stations. No whores or fashionable ladies. No mistakes, no missing teeth, no looking in the cracked and dirty mirror on the gum-vending machine while waiting for the train. I have been away from NYC for too long. Now I probably have an exaggerated notion of just how dangerous that place is, just as someone might have when he hears the word "Belfast." Yet I know plenty of devotees who live in Belfast and

don't feel the danger so much, although few would go down to Falls Street.

Such wars usually take place in certain areas of a city. That's probably true of Sarajevo too. But don't be too smart. War is all over New York. I prefer Gītā-nāgarī, that little cabin where I worshiped Prabhupāda and wrote his biography, and where the devotees are friendly and calm. Of course, such an existence is gentle, what I want, and Kṛṣṇa seems to offer it. I'm grateful. At the same time, I know our Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is to fulfill Lord Caitanya's prediction that the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa will be heard in every town and village of the world. It's only a matter of time before that comes true, and we each have to play our part in bringing it about.

Oh, the Mexican bean is a fine bean
and I sing a-tart for awhile.
My story I say must be unique
but the truth is that I carp.
Oh yes. Hey, did I tell you
we rode the ferry for years,
happy in summer, going to
Rāḍha-deśa or from Belgium to
Ireland, always hopeful?

Did I tell you I know this won't
go on forever like this,
but that I haven't felt
irreparable loss
meaninglessness
in my progressive work?

No swinging door here, no sawdust-strewn floor,
this is no bar ripe with
the smell of beer, photos of the triple tie at the
racetrack on the walls, loud music,
and the subtle and gross
fight for sex.

I am not fighting off madness
while a jazz riff plays through my head.
I have my incantation and I stay in the harness,
pulling my load, a little wagon for
Kṛṣṇa and guru,
wrapping it up in the canon.

Notes #22

I don't want to write about myself, or do I? It's all right if it is a Kṛṣṇa conscious thing. I walked, and it was raining. The sheep were occupying the field I wanted to circumambulate, so I took another smaller one and went back and forth, back and forth. I became afraid when I felt the prelude to a headache, so I came back inside after only two rounds.

The days are winding down. Tomorrow is the disappearance of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. Tomorrow night, Arjuna dāsa should arrive to spend the last days with us.

I just finished the third volume of *Transcendental Diary*. Read about Śrīla Prabhupāda in Paris. He had to go to the post office to sign a registered letter, then went to the airport to catch a plane to Tehran. The book ends with . . .

You can read it for yourself.

Tonight we plan to go over our upcoming itinerary. I got a sweet letter from Matsya-avatāra Prabhu asking

me to teach a seminar this year at Villa Vṛndāvana. He said he knew I had a reason for not teaching in 1994, but it was a loss for the devotees there. He's reading Italian translations of my books and likes them. He is a warm, loving Italian devotee in the ideal sense, like a cousin.

I will probably agree to do a seminar. I want to preach.

Tonight we'll also go over my Godbrother's newsletter. Madhu looked at it and couldn't put it down—loved the sense of humor.

A Professor Chenique interviewed Prabhupāda and said he finds his purports repetitive. The more compact French language doesn't allow for repetition, he said. Prabhupāda said it was the Vedic method to repeat teachings in order to impress them on the hearers.

I also read something about whimsy. He said we have to follow Kṛṣṇa's way and not try to reach Him by doing our own thing. When I read something like that a light goes off in my brain about what I'm doing. I can go over this a million times, satisfy myself, but that little light will continue to go off whenever I hear about complete surrender, giving up our own desires, etc. We have to repeat the scripture without addition or subtraction, and we have to learn to live with it, and with who we are. I'm sure all thoughtful devotees agonize over their lives like this. When Mike Robbins in England asked Prabhupāda if he had any doubts, Prabhupāda opened his eyes wide and said, "Doubts? If I have doubts, how can I write so many books?"

Carver wrote a poem about a day in which he put off writing and instead answered mail, made phone calls, and attended to his family's business. At the end of the day, he turned to the folder of poems he was trying to write, but it was too late. When the day was about to start, there had been one poem that had a grip on him. He should have started with that. Instead, he hesitated. He told himself, "What's one more, more or less?" Then he plunged ahead into clearing away his business so that on another day, he'd be free to write. At the end of the poem his writer-self rebuked him for not writing: "His poems, should he ever produce any, / ought to be eaten by mice."

As a reader-critic, you can pass this one off as an amateurish nagging—an excuse for a poem, but I find it sincere and moving.

I mention this because the other day I affirmed the importance in my life of writing as much as possible. I don't want to lose the opportunity.

As I write, Madhu passes by the window with a load of wood. He has only one sweater, which he wears all the time (maybe sleeps in too). He says he'll wash it a few days before we leave, but I am concerned that he not look like a beggar from Ireland when we arrive at U.S. Customs and Immigration. I told him to purchase a new sweater. He said he would, but they don't have good choices in Kenmare.

Short poems by Williams and Chinese and so many others—they work hard for them.

Stafford said they come easy and time
and editors can decide later if
they are to fly.

Mine . . . oh, you call them yours,
but they don't belong to you. It's tedious when
a poet talks of himself. Unless he really
means it and we get inside his
study room and his feelings as with
Carver wasting that day
or Williams comparing himself to a pink
locust, a hearty plant that can't be uprooted.
He considered that among poets
he is no rose, but who can deny him
a place?

Kṛṣṇa conscious poems. Devotees don't even
like to *read* modern poems. Still, I go out
on a limb and try.
I don't go far enough, I know.
I have to practice for years.
Someday, Kṛṣṇa will let it
happen.

I hear Williams' meterless voice
running in my own words, and Carver's hard stare.
I ought to get free, a mouthpiece for
paramparā, but my gray sweater scratches
and my boots squelch—no mirror,
but the sounds from a house in Great Kills
still echo, and the trivia.
Don't want to end in self-contempt.

I'm going to end this night chanting an extra round.
Then I'll peek at the mail. I don't have to answer it, just
look. So little time. At least I read today and lived in the
pages of the *Bhāgavatam*.

O Prabhupāda, your
gray knit cap and *cādar*—
stylish. I love you.
Please stay with me despite my hasty
bowings and mumblings,
these last days of my life
during these last days of the year.

Notes #23

Dreamt we were running from sex desire in Italy—a big group of devotees. The police were trying to arrest us, but they were incompetent. Tricking *māyā* and the sex lures and various demons and enticers and beasts and police, thought police, our own agenda.

Yesterday night a stubby, silver car pulled up to the house. It was Dennis and his brother in his brother's car. They knocked on the door and M. went out. They wanted to know if this car was big enough to take us to Shannon on the 27th. Yes, M. said, provided we put two full-sized suitcases in the back seat along with me. That means I won't be able to lie down during the three-hour trip to the airport.

I'm sorry Clinton botched it. Right from the start he made a tactical error by trying to allow homosexuals into the Army. The country wasn't ready for it. He blew it. Then he went on from there, doing nothing to

inspire confidence. Now the Republicans are in control of Congress, so Clinton is even more estranged, without power. Our wonderful American government.

Ireland has no government at all. They are trying to form one by patching together a coalition, but it keeps falling apart due to scandals and power politics.

Another favorite country, Italy, has a similar crisis. By January, they will probably dismantle the government. The unions are striking, the coalition failed, the new leader who promised reform has himself become exposed in a scandal. What government is free of it? Each country is absorbed only in its own intense power struggles. I should keep my nose out of it. Keep clear and clean so you can open *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and read.

I did pretty well this morning reading about Mother Yaśodā's vision of the universal form in Kṛṣṇa's mouth and about baby Kṛṣṇa's naughty activities—stealing butter in the neighborhood, etc. There were some wonderful purports. Devotees should share these things with others. The ladies used to come to Yaśodā's house to complain, but they were actually churning the nectar of their own love for Him by talking about His activities. Similarly, we can speak informally about Kṛṣṇa—whatever we have read. His childhood activities are especially attractive to Parīkṣit Mahārāja, so he wanted to hear as much about them as possible from Śukadeva Gosvāmī.

Prabhupāda has given us the means with which to deal with calamities in our lives: when we are bewildered by immediate causes (as Mother Yaśodā was

bewildered when she saw the universe in her child's mouth), we should offer obeisances to the Supreme Lord. Don't try to figure things out. You can't. Simply bow to Him and accept His will. And accept your suffering. Prabhupāda wrote to me that he hoped Kṛṣṇa would protect me from calamities. I know He will, especially as I am dependent on Him.

Don't dance unless you want to.
 Now it's starting to seep in, news and thoughts
 of the world beyond this wet patch. We'll
 go to 26 Second Avenue, stay in an apartment
 on the Lower East Side.
 What will it be like, will it be cold?
 Will we see dangerous and
 deranged people
 roaming the streets? Broken glass?
 Cocaine addicts? I sound like a tourist from the
 Midwest. Will it be cold? You already
 asked that. I am now an Irish farmer in Wellies.
 When Madhu phoned Dennis from Māyāpur,
 D. asked,
 "What's it like there in India?"
 Madhu replied, "Hot!"
 "Oh," Dennis said. What could he imagine?

What is my point? Only that I have to
 leave here, but not today. Today is
 the disappearance day of
 Prabhupāda's Guru Mahārāja. The year
 he passed away, two weeks before the end,
 our Prabhupāda wrote him a letter and

asked, “How can I serve you?” He received a reply which formed his life. Because of that order, we were saved.

I have a few letters to answer. One is from Jayantī, who lives in North Carolina. She is happy to be there, connected to a good *gurukula* for her son. Hopes to come to Gitā-nāgarī in January to see me and to be with her Godbrothers and Godsisters. In their midst, she says, she feels inspired.

Got a letter from a disciple I haven’t heard from in years. His wife left him with their one-year-old child. He says he’s taking care of the baby, working, and trying to think of the Lord. Says he’s still chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. Old times with him when he was young and worked on a farm—think of that.

One letter after another—different worlds. Hari-dāsa of Guyana opens his letter: “Another year has passed and I have not written. I don’t know why.” He writes on the occasion of his spiritual master’s birthday. Anything I say here seems snide or defensive. Better I write about the trials of walking through the mud and of wanting to write simply. Or the logs. Some of them are wet, but if you put them atop burning logs, they slowly go up in flame. I threw one on the fire today that practically exploded into flame. Burnt out quickly. It’s not an economical way to heat a room.

No, but it’s a dream of winter solitude, December-aloneness, that I contemplate.

I get to nap at 6:30 this morning because there is no breakfast. Then I can be outside by 7:30, if it’s not too

dark. I think I'll go out even if it is. Rain doesn't stop me because I've got clothes to resist it. I'll chant three rounds, then return to the fireplace to chant the rest.

In addition to my reading and writing, we have mapped out next year almost to the day—although it could always change. I also thought about my initiation policy, especially for those people who have been aspiring for some time. I decided to make twelve more exceptions, but to keep the basic policy of no more initiations. That was a big decision for me.

I also decided to teach a full VIHE course in the fall in Vṛndāvana. Yes, go to Vṛndāvana. And we planned out when to stop to write. I plan to visit temples in Italy. A productive day. Very year-endish.

Of course, I never forget that my life can be driven out of my body at a moment's notice. Prabhupāda therefore told us to be satisfied with earning only what comes with little trouble. Don't waste time. Use your energy to attain Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Whatever Kṛṣṇa does is perfect and good. He may steal, commit violence, kill Pūtanā, pinch the babies, break butter and yogurt pots, but it's all good. When the boys told His mother that He'd been eating dirt, He said, "They are lying." Was He telling the truth? I have never found out. But the boys are not liars even if they lie. Mother Yaśodā is beyond Brahman realization. She loves Kṛṣṇa as her own.

The year ends and so what? It's arbitrary, but time is running out,
no matter how you count it. Say I lived

a *yuga* or even a century, it wouldn't matter unless I lived for Kṛṣṇa.

The fire brings me peace in body, but
I drowse. Discover yourself in cooler rooms,
in a cooler brain. I am
not in Cul na copog or even in Detroit
but here where my mind wants to be, thinking of
original Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Notes #24

Charcoal stain on my knuckles. Madhu heading down the hill, striding. He'll meet Dennis, who will drive him to the Kenmare bus station, where they will pick up the incoming Arjuna dāsa.

I'm alone for an hour at least, so I'm sneaking in a third fire, which I wouldn't do if M. were here to ration the fuel.

These fires in the fireplace are filled with metaphors. This fire has small, dry wood at its base, just beginning to smolder on top of the ripped pieces of cardboard. I know it will flare soon, but I don't know if it will catch onto the large log pieces (two) that I placed on top of them. But even if it doesn't blaze bright, it will char the logs red and they will smoke and burn slowly down to ash. They do what they can, according to the oxygen available to them and whatever other elements it takes for them to burn. They don't worry whether it will be a good show or a slow burn, whether it will bring enough warmth. I ought to be like that with each writing

opportunity. I can be like *agni*—always eager to eat up as much fuel as possible—but detached, accepting, allowing it to take its course according to the resources available to me.

I don't have to introduce Arjuna dāsa to the reader, "Lifetime Dublin resident, rough, street smart, physically strong, eats twice as much as me or Madhu, appeared in *Ballyferriter Stories*." We were surprised that when we phoned him four weeks ago and asked him to join us here, he said he couldn't make it. It kind of popped our balloon, thinking that everyone is free to come and live in our hermitage. Maybe he didn't even want to. It would have meant cooking and cleaning mostly, and being alone with us. He watches me come and go for a walk and share words each day. M. and I were disappointed he couldn't come. That would have left M. free and we could have done interviews recalling the letters Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote me in 1970. We lost that chance, although we hope to do it later.

Now Arjuna is coming in time to spend the last five days with us here, Christmas weekend. Then he'll help us close up this stay by taking some of our belongings back with him for storage at his mother's place in Dublin.

I think the wood is catching. Flames don't jump that high from kindling, do they? I just read the chapter "Wild Mind." Let yourself go into wild mind, the equivalent of the unconscious. NG says don't allow that one dot of consciousness, which is your present

conscious mind, to tell you that you can't write. Just write *as you want to*.

Dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, I have an extra factor of which these writers are not aware, although it's the most important one. It is that I want to please the Supreme by what I do. I don't want to waste my human form of life, which should be used to serve You and thus revive my original nature. There is more than staring into the void and stepping into "wild mind." There is devotional mind, there is standing before God with the mind in the heart, meditating on the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa and serving His pure devotees. What *about* that? How does that fit in with "the unconscious"? How does that fit in with writing what I want, these notes during the last days of the year?

Ah, now *that's* a nice fire. Stay with it while it lasts. Where was I? I was alone, looking at the sheep in the distance, and the green, marshy fields. Now every day, whether it's raining or not, the ground is puddly, pocked with the imprints of sheep feet and cow prints, tractor tires and my own patient tramp.

The mind coming back to the name, then going off again. Where is my heart? Don't I know? They say it's where my feelings are. The real question is, "Where are my feelings for Kṛṣṇa?" Take them and focus on them, O mind, but you fly off and think about this or that—how you will be in New York in a week and what you will say to the devotees, or what you will write in that letter. Or feeling other things.

Fire is better than a TV show, but similar in some ways—a heating abstraction, with enough glow and movement to draw the mind. I turn away from it and

look out the window. How different that is—the hill and the blue-stained sheep. The fire is at hand and draws me in, the other view draws me out. Here I am, in the middle of it, a *jīva* in a body.

I read again Nārada's speech to the two demigods, Nalakuvera and Maṇigrīva. To whom does the body belong? You can say a slave's body belongs to his master, or it belongs to the earth where it returns at death. Or there are also claimants—one's father or employer, for example. Before settling on which claimant actually owns the body, we act as if it is our own. We commit sins in order to please the body; we indulge in illicit sex and animal-killing. It's better to be poor and not able to satisfy bodily demands. Nārada speaks about poverty and its advantages. Think about it. When he was finished, Nārada cursed them to become trees and to stand in the yard where Kṛṣṇa would see them one hundred celestial years later. Good fortune for the two brothers.

There is a gap between what I actually write and the time when I can later see it for what it is. I can't see it at the time because my inner critics and censors are too busy jabbering. Better I be kinder to myself.

If the mind wants to report what Nārada said, that's fine. I have nothing else to do but record it. I accepted the *halavā* and cream, didn't I? He made it a little wet, but after such devotion, I wasn't about to say, "The *halavā* could have been a little drier, I don't mean like a cake, but a little more out of the wet cereal state." I

don't have to be such a connoisseur of *halavā*. I can just take what comes.

I like to point out, however, that Prabhupāda scrutinized the details of his meals. He knew the difference between a *sabji* a cook claimed to have fried and a *sabji* steamed and later fried, after the moisture of the *kerala* had been removed. He knew what was good cooking, although nowadays I hear health experts say something different than what Prabhupāda wanted in terms of what is best for digestion. He knew what he wanted—in everything.

That blaze in the fireplace has burnt up a lot of kindling. Now it's dying down and we'll have a quiet, mellow glow from the big stuff. It's up to me whether to get in there and revive it, but I don't have any medium-sized logs in the house. I'll let it go. They should be back soon and I'm not even supposed to have a fire going. If it gets cold, I'm supposed to turn on the gas heater and roast.

We saved *halavā* for Arjuna. He'll be tired after his all-day travel. It was cooked with devotion for Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. He was on such a high level. Would he not concern himself with my babblings, even if I wrote straight? Should I show him my file of appreciations? No, better I pray to be accepted and delivered. I read my spiritual master's books. I do believe our Prabhupāda is your best spiritual son, Divine Grand Master. I am a small Western follower. You see, I once lived in Manhattan and tried to make a living at writing. I was looking for posthumous fame. I was into experimentation. I wanted to break old molds. I never quite worked it out of my

system. I suspended the experiment for twenty-five years; now I'm taking it up in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. What will you say? You are far away, but also close. You want to see me chanting and hearing *Bhāgavatam* under my guru's orders. That I am doing.

I'm sure people tire of my internal debates about whether the spiritual authorities accept what I'm trying to offer. I'm sorry. At least you can know that I go on despite the debate. If you think it's frustrating for you, imagine what it's like for me. We both wish this guy would accept himself and get on with it. But, dear reader, this too is part of the process, this too.

My fire is a smolderer. Noble
 heavens to Betsy—remember
 the days we survived in Boston?
 And Philadelphia? And all the mistakes, the
 smile I saw Ravindra-svarūpa smile, the
 headaches more painful,
 when I was holding everything in,
 A Godbrother dropping out, temple
 presidents fried, Baladeva in hip-deep mud
 trying to build a flood barrier around
 the Potomac temple—remember? I
 visited a Potomac colonics center
 and what came out cost \$30. The man said,
 “Don't eat bananas or muffins,” and his own kid
 was eating a rice cake smeared with avocado cream.
 Hare Kṛṣṇa—and what else? Read it yourself in the
 sad Volume 2 of *Journal and Poems*. That
 book delineates my defeat

at the Potomac center, my becoming
 angry with Bhakti-latā for being
 late in building the Rāvaṇa effigy,
 something about Kṛṣṇa-kirtana and his wife.
 They have never forgiven me for that, my days of
 ambiguous writing and living out Sarma's
 regimen. It's all there.

The sheep like white balls or imitation
 sheep under a Christmas tree. I am holding out here
 during these last days of isolation, far from Macy's
 and the crime of New York City,
 the misery to be found in Times Square.
 O gentle night, keep me.

Notes #25

Dream: people accused me of wanting attention. Me counter-accusing them of making false charges against me. We were in a movie theater. I didn't watch the film, but walked around in search of my jacket. Stopped to inquire from individuals or groups one after another. Everyone made a comment or otherwise involved me in an issue or controversy. No one was particularly helpful. Neither did I have a worthy cause to support, aside from the personally important cause of trying to find my jacket. I wasn't preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness, nor was the film abounding with Kṛṣṇa conscious imagery.

Now I have awoken into a cold room and have to start cold too. Eyes sleepy. Get up and start the fire and these notes. Resume life while there's still time.

Christian prayers: the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, Act of Contrition, Apostles' Creed, Hail Mary and Our Father, the missal, small prayers in book,

Bible, Gospels. We have so many *ślokas* in *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Brahma-saṁhitā*.

Fire roars in the little log cabin I built from trimmed kindling.

Trampolines . . .

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is clear all the way back. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is constantly being updated although it is eternal. It doesn't matter, but we need it to be applicable to our own cases. Ultimately, updating means telling us again that all we need to know is that Lord Caitanya accepted the *Bhāgavatam* as most important. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura accepted the thirty-two-syllable Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and told us to chant it constantly. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī accepted something, our Prabhupāda demonstrated something—and what Śrīla Prabhupāda said to do is extremely important. We try to follow him exactly, although we are not always successful.

But *why* aren't we successful? We have our reasons. Sometimes it's because of the changing times. Sometimes we have to admit that it's just too hard to surrender to his commands. We are not up to it. Some devotees claim they are doing everything he wanted. *Their* problem is that some are less cooperative, less surrendered, and they can't make them obey. Some of those "unsurrendered" souls have been disappointed by their leaders. What to do?

I write this as if I am a neutral observer. Once a reporter came to see Prabhupāda from *The Observer*. Prabhupāda said after awhile, "You are supposed to be *The Observer*, but you fail to observe this"—some crucial point of the Absolute Truth. Better to participate than

to watch when it comes to *bhakti*. That means we have to admit we are fools before the spiritual master—fools with excuses. Don't be a sportscaster retired from active play.

So . . . these last days of the year, look into yourself and keep reading Prabhupāda's books.

Arjuna dāsa arrived safely and told me that the Dublin temple is enthusiastically conducting the marathon. They are collecting funds and selling books. He said Giridhārī dāsa is now temple president at Inis Rath, and Manu is working with householders on Gea-glum. A Bhakta Vince is the president in Dublin—new generation. I asked about Seamus.

"He's cooking. They're trying to talk him into going to Inis Rath."

Someone wrote and said devotees are exasperated by the institutionalism.

Someone else told me that Jagadīśa Mahārāja and his disciples built an earth house at Śaraṇāgaṭi using only materials they could find on the land and working only with their hands (no machines). They say it's a humble building, but good, and warm in winter. They say there will soon be war and economic collapse. People will rush from the cities and build earth homes just like his. They don't know how they will accommodate all the people who will come.

We tend to chuckle when we hear those things. We don't expect the immediate end. But who knows?

One devotee's service should inspire another's, not cancel another's. Fund-raising in Dublin—hmmm. To myself. We don't have to faultfind *or* feel guilty. We each have our service, our niche.

If civilization collapses, I won't know how to produce books. Maybe there will be no need for books at that time—I mean, my books. For now, however, this is my preaching. We'll need something to read in our earth homes.

End of the year
 an arbitrary handle
 to watch time pass.
 I write to praise Śrī Kṛṣṇa
 and plan a seminar, "Praising
 Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Absolute Truth, Through
Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam."

When I see the devotees, I'm sure I'll be saying, "We should find time daily to read scripture and to be attentive in *japa*."

Someone could say, "Is that really *so* important? Shouldn't we build earth homes? Shouldn't we distribute books and encourage others to do so? We have so much *work* to do."

Yes. Noble activities, like going to China and preaching indirectly and in secret, directly and in public, building in Māyāpur, and

raising funds,
 raising funds,
 raising more funds,
 walking,
 Centennial Padayātrā, seeing
 the mayor, *prasādam* distribution.

But we need some guy to tell us to read the books to chant with attention,
 even if he himself does it imperfectly, dreaming

of wandering unappreciated, angry, cold,
 trying to find his jacket in a
 movie theater.
 But he chants and reads and
 reminds us how.

O dragons spitting fire—
 NYC Chanukkah and Muslims,
 food relief amid muggings—reported
 in the newspaper,
 stories and total statistics—O dragon,
 ride the Staten Island ferry and find your groove.
 Vote for the man you think will do
 the least harm and who promises
 some modicum of relief,
 and dare we say will be a leader
 in these complicated times?

All I know is that this fire is the best I could come up
 with. Still chilly, though.

You like literature? Here's a playbill. Tonight, "The
 Messiah" by Handel, followed by "*Hari-kīrtana* Blues" by
 Satsvarūpa dāsa. The children will put on a play for
 Christmas—not *A Christmas Carol*, but "The Life of
 Dhruva Mahārāja." Yes, there will be plenty of
prasādam (as long as it lasts), and no, Manu is no longer
 the temple president at Inis Rath. Yes, Tribhūvanātha
 Prabhu is still preaching in Ireland, and so is the
 Caitanya Sarasvatī Math.

So goes the end-of-the-year news.

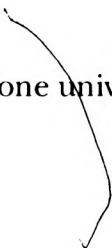
Still waiting to hear whether USAir will still be in
 business after so many crashes. Got to know *some* things
 of this world.

I have my basic year's plan, and won't be hypocritical. I am babbling like a cold brook,
 alive, smelling of
 sacrificial smoke, stained with
 charcoal—better check the fire.
 Angels on postage stamp and sixteenth-century print of Madonna and Child
 to herald Christmas. I received a few
 birthday greetings. Have to
 watch myself so minutely because I'm a
 clown to those who work on
 Earth. Save me a place
 with paper and ink. If
 civilization is going out like
 a candle, despite cease-fires and wars,
 what else can I do but write and repeat
 what my master has taught for anyone
 who will listen?

Learn the art of living simply
 living almost alone
 no fanfare. Just give me a
 broom and a place to clean, but
 nothing *too* strenuous. I need no
 huge monastery or high walls.
 Just any place to be content
 and productive with books and pen.
 My preparation for the new millennium.

We are all being ravaged by time.
 The soul wants to break free.
 Kṛṣṇa kills demons and dances with

the *gopīs* at every moment in one universe
after another. Why don't we
tend to *that* fire, look for
that abode, live *there*?



Notes #26

Do you know what this is, Mr. Swami? I don't want to pick on you, but you come to mind probably because you are more friendly than unfriendly. Still, you don't know.

In my mind, Mr. Swami replies, "Yes, I think I know. It's when you write what comes to mind. Anything."

You don't know, however, what it is to do it all the time and to make it your main offering to Prabhupāda. You don't know that you can write your best by that method, that you have to find it, that heartfelt expression. It's in you, but you have to bring it out not through the intellect, but through the heart.

It's an artist's way in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, although I'm afraid to say that too loudly. I imagine myself asserting it to a friend, someone who cares.

"But artists are *śūdras* in Vedic society."

"No, those are artisans. This is different."

I'm an artist, a writer, one who dedicates himself to expression. Someone said a poet is one who writes of

secrets in music. You know, verbal music, words and sounds not necessarily rhyming or metered.

Rūpa Gosvāmī was on such a high, liberated platform. He was Rūpa-mañjarī, come to this world to give us wonderful verses in Sanskrit. Many of his books are only for liberated persons. He was a great scholar and knew several languages. He was also a great devotee of Lord Caitanya. He wrote *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. There is nothing to compare, but I thought I'd mention him as someone I don't even attempt to follow in terms of writing. And of course, I couldn't dream of imitating him. I do follow, but I think you know what I mean. I don't try to write like him.

Don't worry if I follow the style of the nondevotees. I am not imitating them either. We live at a certain time and I was born speaking my mother tongue. What else do I have to use in Kṛṣṇa's service? That was the principle taught by Rūpa Gosvāmī and upheld by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and our Śrīla Prabhupāda. Whatever you have, turn it over to Kṛṣṇa. This may be a strange contribution, but it's what I have. I offer it sincerely, with love.

End of year, end of fear, Lord Nṛsimha is here. He may appear in the black form of Ugra-Nṛsimha in Māyāpur, and also in a milder brass *mūrti* form, mine now with Baladeva. That Deity has a half smile and a pointy beard? Can I pray to Him: "Dear Lord, please remove my *anarthas*"? I pledge not to be afraid when He starts hauling out all the things I thought I loved, thought were valuable, and throws them on the junk heap. I promise to be grateful.

I am happy to have escaped the American scene at this time of year. A devotee automatically escapes them. In my case, I don't even have to *see* them.

O soul of the Lord, I am Your servant. Prabhupāda speaks to all of us. He says we should give up the struggle to be happy. Happiness will come of itself, just as misery arrives without our searching for it. If we work hard for happiness, we cannot get more than our destiny. These are the profound truths of basic karma. I accept them. I want more than happiness in this life.

Except I keep looking into the fire when I should be writing. I'm still hearing the echoes of Carver's poem. I like the section of his last book, which contains the poems he wrote after he found out he had only months to live. The section is headed by a quote from Robert Lowell: "Yet why not say what happened?" I go for that too.

Well, then what happened?

I welcomed Arjuna dāsa last night. He glanced around the kitchen shyly. I asked Madhu if he had prepared *prasādam* for Arjuna, who had been fasting all day. While Madhu cooked, I asked Arjuna about Dublin and this and that for a while.

I went to bed before 8 P.M. We have a new routine of hearing the *Kṛṣṇa* book every night before taking rest. I hope it helps.

Then I rose at midnight, before the alarm went off. You know about that already.

Maybe someday I can come out of the closet and follow Lowell's suggestion to tell what happened really.

Why avoid it? I wish others would also do that. I would like to know about the devotees and what they think. It's okay that we have more and more essays on devotional service themes coming out, but where are the authors? One devotee had been living at Rādhā-Dāmodara in Vṛndāvana. He compiled a thin book of interviews about Prabhupāda staying there. It was okay—nice—but I would have loved to read what it was actually like for him to live in those rooms, what he went through in his mind, and about his struggles with the institution, etc. That devotee once remarked that he had observed the life of the monkeys in his neighborhood. He didn't mention it in any of his books. Instead he spoke always of Hindu or Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava culture without a single drop of his American blood—how he is transforming himself into a full-fledged Indian *sādhū*.

Or is he? Does he know? I bet he does. But he may think, "That stuff is all junk. Why share it?"

I haven't heard from Trinidad's good son Rajārṣi (or his wife) in quite awhile. Everyone carries on with their lives and don't always feel the need to write to me. Still, I'm like a mother asking for a letter home.

O fire of branch and blogs
 burning away the druff and negative from
 my heart. O fire of nowhere,
 O fire of Lord Caitanya, so many different
 fires. This one in the fireplace is
 a material blaze, but I see it
 can supply burning words too.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa,
 His Rādhā is not far away but I have
 no right to utter Her name.
 Kṛṣṇa, my master, told me to utter
 Hare Kṛṣṇa as much as possible.
 O Lord, O Mother Harā, please
 save this fallen person.

Lord Kṛṣṇa walked barefoot in Vṛndāvana,
 which is better than wearing slippers
 in Dvārakā. The land then received
 direct imprints, and pure devotees
 see the Lord's footprints and cry.
 The nondevotees think they're crazy.

The aborigine girls smear *kuṅkuma*
 from the Lord's feet onto their breasts.
 They find the dust on the forest floor,
 although they can never come close
 to the Lord. They made much of His foot dust
 and loved Him like that. I can be like that
 too—pick up a trace of devotion somewhere
 and feel my heart open.

I am glad these days are coming to an end and that I
 can get back into action. Looking forward to the re-
 lease of pressure from my stay here. There's good in
 being here, and I will miss it, but my other services
 always await me. I pray for the strength of tolerance.

Irish apples we have. Irish potatoes too. Plenty of
 them. Dublin and the rural area—the difference.

Oh, bow down and don't try to measure the Supreme Lord. Don't try to find out about Him unnecessarily, but make obeisances before Him. That's how the two brothers did it when they came out of the crashed *arjuna* trees. They said, "We want to serve You with all our senses. You are the Supreme. Everything comes from You, O Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa."

Child Kṛṣṇa smiled and thought, "I delivered you (who have addressed Me as the Supreme), but I am bound by the ropes of Mother Yaśodā and cannot get free."

Notes #27

Reassuring to read Prabhupāda purports, which also draw from the previous *ācāryas*. He explains the *Bhāgavatam* verse from the Tenth Canto where Kṛṣṇa comes out in the morning, blows His bugle, and is joined by an unlimited number of boys and calves. Prabhupāda quotes Sanātana Gosvāmī's *Bṛhad-Bhāgavatāmṛta*, saying that anything is possible for Kṛṣṇa, so He can have an unlimited number of cows and calves. Unlimited—even the land can expand to hold them all.

Did you know that Prabhupāda said he liked the hippies because they were renounced, *akiñcana*? “It is one of the opulences of a great person.” The hippies had only to be directed, but they were better, he said, than the Indian families raising their sons, getting them married, providing some education and job training, then considering this the sum total of life. When Prabhupāda tried to recruit full-time devotees from such families, he was always disappointed. “What do we

have to do with Kṛṣṇa consciousness? We have to earn and keep our families." No renunciation. Better to be a hippie, smoking marijuana and committing petty sins, waiting in New York City to be delivered and directed.

Walked, but not far because of my ankle. Again, the sheep were grazing in the fields in which I had planned to walk, so I took another path. There *are* such alternatives here, all of them green and soggy.

Back and forth, the sky
a bit pink.

I thought of the words "dear sky," as in the book title. The words can't capture how elusive the sky's colors are. The word "color" fails to express the hues. It takes a painter to reproduce it.

And the hill in front of us is immovable. I counted the remaining days in different ways. I can count by saying that after tomorrow morning, there will be three full mornings left. On the 26th I will probably be too busy to write. However I count it, it's almost time to go.

Caught myself thinking of the future rather than living in the present. I thought, "Won't it be nice to be in Italy this spring?" Maybe Dīna-dayārdra will be with us at some point, like he was with us when we visited St. Benedetto. We're always looking ahead, sometimes with some kind of romantic ideals—Italy in the spring, the flowers, the beauty of the season—maybe because the present reality always seems filled with so many practicalities.

Got a letter from Tīrthapāda dāsa, my disciple (yep) in China. He said that for the first time in his life he is

living from moment to moment. He feels vital and joyful. He seeks self-reliance, has traveled alone throughout India wanting to learn to feel strong. He is trying to conquer loneliness. Each of us is looking to live in the present.

That hill still isn't going anywhere. Now's the present; is it joyful?

No, because I am meditating on New York and not living with that hill, despite my experience in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

I know New York will also be a series of present moments, but each of them will probably be complicated by the same old mixtures of pro and con thinking—mine and other's. Life isn't so simple. There are always threats of death or harm. The body's aches. By seeing to the future with the eyes of the present, we know this—more of the same will come. What to do about it *now*? Pray?

To find the real Kṛṣṇa conscious present, we must bring our attention into the heart. We have to give up the search for sense gratification if we want the kind of concentration that allows us to find Kṛṣṇa. We can't be seeking the Eternal while looking always for that which is fleeting.

Another devotee wrote of his preaching in the country in which he was born and raised. He said he was overcoming the fear of the inward, spiritual journey. That struck me. Yes, I can see how someone who has always lived for the outward journey may have become afraid of the inward, not wanting to see *anarthas* and demons within, to face his limits instead of passing himself off as a competent devotee who does

his duty. The inward journey is fearful, in a sense, because it requires skating away from the outskirts of our Kṛṣṇa consciousness and heading inwards.

Whatever we feel, we have to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. Unfortunately, the heart doesn't always cooperate—or is it the mind? Chant anyway. Just try. Despite the distraction, bring the mind to the names. Why don't we see the need? We can't know anything at all until we know how to do this.

Read an issue of the *New York Times*
 so instead of chanting,
 I went over their new uniforms
 displayed beautifully in the blow-up photo
 of the New York cop.
 He wore his new clubs
 instead of the old billy club, his
 new light (but lethal) gun,
 his arm stripes for each five years
 that he has risked his life
 on the streets
 of the city.
 His uniform is now one-toned.
 You could stop him on the street
 and ask directions.

Officer, can you tell me when the guru will come?
 You twerp, you look like you come
 from a decent family. Why
 ask a question like that?
 Can't you see I've got a gun to contend
 with New York's worst?

But officer, you see this stylish three-quarter
 length coat
 I wear? I bought it at Greenwich Village. It shows
 I am a young man with my own tastes.
 It's true my father is captain of the fire department,
 but he is not the guru. When can I expect
 him to arrive?

Look, sonny, I'll tell your old man
 you're in a cult. You're living in a dream
 and I don't want to get rough
 with you, skinny college kid that you are.
 Get lost—fast!
 New York's finest.

I walk away, twirling my tight umbrella
 and heading cautiously by taxi
 for the Half-Note and Charlie Mingus standing
 on the bar, playing the double bass. I
 watch from a distance, quite able
 to appreciate his music,
 nodding my head slightly,
 tapping my foot a bit, feeling the
 intensity, going with it—
 going, going,
 gone,
 as they used to say.

All that is over and I met the guru, now
 live in a complicated present,
 a full-time member of ISKCON for

almost thirty years. Where am I going? O officer,
whom can I ask? Where is that guru
and what has become of
me?

We go on, we spirit souls,
under the power of
the intrepid, dead night.

By the way, the last two lines of that poem are a deliberate bluff—written off the cuff. In other words, they don't really mean anything. Words that came and I spit them out and let them go because I didn't want to end with something cute.

They served lunch twenty-three minutes late today. Usually this doesn't disturb me, but today it did. He came in at about 1:05 and said it would be five minutes late. As the time went by, it began to remind me of how the airlines assure you that your plane has been delayed only a few minutes when what they mean is a few hours. In the end, you feel grateful that at least they didn't cancel the flight (or in this case, lunch).

Yes, grateful. I am usually grateful to be alive too. The devotees work hard, so I have no complaints even when my schedule is thrown off.

Although when I made a comment about the lateness to M., he said, "The *capātis* are coming out good today."

Yes, they were.

A crow in the air between here
and the hill. We read last night to

remember Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta
Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. Thought also of
Christmas. Should we observe it?
In ISKCON temples we don't, but here we are
in Catholic Ireland, alone together, and
Christmas is a huge affair to those around us.
Even the American devotees go home to see
their parents—a day off from the temple
routine. Those on the marathon rest,
our Christmas spirit.

Thought for Christmas, I want
to feel grateful, like last year. I want to
pray, chant my own “Jesus prayer”
the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.
If only I could attain the lotus feet
of Govinda, surely Christ would be pleased
and I would be a true Christian wishing peace and
goodwill to all.

Fingers cold, day darkening, I
can't understand how easily my day is stolen.
Time disappears under my hands,
minute by minute.

In the mail, a letter from a woman disciple:
her husband is leaving and taking their daughter.
She wants me to write to him, but I already know he
won't care what I say. Besides, I am no
marriage counselor.
Another letter, another woman: she has
left her husband and is dreaming of death.

Her brother died recently—
she knows something of death—she says she's ready.
She has decided to live for the present.
What else can we do but shelter ourselves
in Kṛṣṇa's promises?

Notes #28

Death is a spoilsport, but life feels triumphant. Well, that's an illusion. Death steals life (like suffocating a baby).

Yes, and

no.

Because after life (death),
there is another life to be lived.

O Socrates and the Vedic sages,
you always assert the truth. We are no atheists that don't hear you. We don't live in figurative prison cells. We want to face our misery squarely and find out what it is exactly that is detaining us in this world.

Like today, I was reading the *Bhāgavatam*—*kṛṣṇa-līlā*—and suddenly an old memory popped up. The memory wasn't Kṛṣṇa conscious, so why did I invest time in it? We want to attain a taste for reading the *Bhāgavatam*, and we wonder why the spiritual reality is still so distant for us. At least one reason is that we feed other interests simultaneously. We really have to give

the *Bhāgavatam* more and more attention until we have starved out all other thoughts and interests. We have to do that relentlessly—go to the *Bhāgavatam* in a starved condition saying, “I’ll eat no other food.”

These thoughts lead me to appreciate this time, this house. I am trying to learn to serve the *Bhāgavatam*, not just read it. I want to distribute its contents to the devotees. “Therefore distribution of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* all over the world is a great welfare activity . . . ” One way to distribute the message is to take the books out on the street and hand them to passersby. Another way is to sell them to libraries. Another way is to preach the glories of the *Bhāgavatam* among the devotees.

Arjuna dāsa doesn’t have a Tenth Canto in his home. I wonder why not. Some devotees don’t read much. They feel they are not scholars, but prefer to work practically. I wonder what that means.

O Kṛṣṇa, killer of Agha,
 when the demigods, musicians,
 dancers, and poets heard of Your feat,
 they each glorified You
 according to their art.
 The tower of ivory crumbled
 and Kṛṣṇa conscious poesy
 became the crown I seek—
 not for myself to glory in,
 but to honor You.
 After You killed Agha,
 I too was excited to hear of Agha’s death,
 and when flowers were strewn from the heavens
 I was moved to glorify You. You killed

Agha, Baka, and are killing my
own *anarthas*. O Lord
in Your most attractive form—
You do kill the demons who
inhibit the play of Your *gopas*.
Please give me shelter.

Building the fire. Arjuna got me a lot of kindling—
more than I really need. I need more logs, however.
Fire eats all, as long as it's not too wet.

I have finished reading whatever volumes of the
Bhāgavatam are in this house. Now I want to review it.
There's always more to read.

Although reading isn't enough. Everything is based
on service. Reading is the activity that inspires me to
serve, and in that sense, service is the by-product of my
reading—because if one is good at *śravaṇam*, he'll be
good at *kīrtana*.

Service? If we love Kṛṣṇa, we will want others to love
Him too.

St. Therese prayed like that, wanting everyone to
love the Lord whom she loved. It was a natural result
or expansion of her personal love for God.

Fire roaring, speak to me
tell me secrets of surrender,
the force of the flame,
consuming selves,
human power, little do we
know, it's our body too
burning on the pyre.
“Oh, but *sādhus* get buried.” So much the worse.

Burn, burn, baby
 says the arsonist.
 ROTC building up in flames,
 Capitol and towers of power . . .
 but we are not like that.

We want to burn with love
 and never run out of wood.
 Give us dry wood but even
 wet wood to place on this fire
 that never goes out.

O Lord, I used to contemplate
 even as a child—and I hit that
 point of fear, anxiety again
 and again. How could
 God exist without a cause?
 And if He doesn't exist, or if He needs
 something besides Himself, then what
 will happen to us?
 In other words, we *need* God.
 Atheists call that need a crutch. We
 wave them away.
 We already know that much truth.
 God is without cause, He
 holds together the chaos,
 gives meaning to all
 and the tiny brain can't fathom
 Him.
 Theology teaches
 scientists unteach us
 and I simply bow down and pray

that He reveal Himself in my heart.
 No need to doubt or feel anxiety
 over mere existence.

Cue: "You ought to think more about death."

Brood on the bog. Metaphysics. A good monk keeps death always in the forefront of his mind. Prabhupāda called such thinking "philosophy".

We Kṛṣṇa conscious people know that philosophy, at least intellectually: whatever we try to enjoy will be taken away from us at death. For one who is born, death is certain, and for one who dies, rebirth is certain. Rebirth is misery. Death is misery. Both repeat again and again.

Think of death.

Yes. Death is the spoilsport of heedless sense gratification; it is the cold fingers that hold us back from illicit sex enjoyment or any sense gratification pertaining to this world and enjoyment of false ego.

Sin is the absence of Kṛṣṇa consciousness—
 absence of the desire to serve the Lord.

Be serious, be grave,
 then be immortal in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

For Christmas we will hold a simple celebration. Christmas falls on a Sunday, so Arjuna and M. will cook a few extra preps and offer them to Śrīla Prabhupāda, who observed every day as "Christmas." He was our savior, but he cited Christ as a favorite son, a favorite example.

I don't want to be pretentious about it, though. I just want to focus on the sacred nature of the day. I do

think that to call Christ the only son is an exaggerated claim, and I think they have grafted onto his teachings philosophies from Athens. There is much speculation, and many Christian denominations have become corrupt over time. Still, none of that denies the truth of Christ's life and teachings. He came to teach love of God.

Wild dream containing more images than I could handle. I'll tell you a few while the fire burns and I tend to it like a friend.

A cow was struggling to give birth. The cow's friends (were they other cows?) screamed, "Calve! Calve!"

Then I walked past my Godbrother, who was bathing. I overheard him say to someone else, "You described my life in New York when you said, 'Just as the national currency is kept solid because in New York the original currency is kept solid,' that is true in ISKCON." I thought his words were boastful. Everyone has their own point of view.

Then I saw devotees hitting baseballs out of a stadium. The balls were collected by jungle people, who covered them and used them to make money. It became a wild, contaminated thing, the baseball.

Then there was a car accident. People got out of the car to scream that they had been hit, then they got back into their cars and raced on, pursued by onlookers. It turned out that people were faking their pain to gain an advantage.

See what I mean?

Now two days before Christmas
near end of a literary 'ear
of corn,
ear of plenty,
hearing *Bhāgavatam*
hearing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*
hearing Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra
with inner ear hear
the guru, Prabhupāda.

Notes #29

Sure is cozy in here with that fireplace blazing. My pleasure is short-lived, though, I know. I will have to soon run out to the bathroom and shiver.

Lord Kṛṣṇa says that if at death we have trouble controlling the mind, He will control it for us. Prabhupāda wrote that in a purport. I believe them both and plan to appeal to Him when my time comes. May I have that presence of mind.

I heard the prayers of Indra until the batteries started to run down. He said, "I am fool number one." He had been presumptuous and had said nasty things about Kṛṣṇa. He had sent *sāṃvartaka* clouds to inundate Vṛndāvana, causing pain to the residents. Indra reminded the Lord, "If You think my offense is so great that I cannot be forgiven, I wish to say I am Your eternal servant, so please consider me in that way and excuse me." Kṛṣṇa is known in the verse *kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam*, as He who fights Indra's enemies.

Indra was accompanied by the *surabhi* cow. She too prayed to the Lord. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa forgave Indra and said, “Don’t forget that I am supreme. All others are My servants. Take your position on My behalf.”

Writing practice isn’t me, dear reader, and this isn’t all autobiography. I am not responsible for every word that has detached itself from my pen. Still, I wish to make a Christmas present of this book to you, although I can’t endorse every word in it. For example:

Spirits of risen thought and words even without thoughts come from Vat Nineteen Rum. I stand waiting for luggage in Trinidad. It’s me again, me again, standing on my feet in the familiar world with familiar inconveniences. Trinidad has also become a home and I love to write there. When I get to the page, maybe what happens is not what I expected, and I can’t claim that everything that appears is wonderful to read. I am still looking for the form I will offer in worship. It takes time, maybe a lifetime, to find.

In the meantime I keep going. This is, after all, my service. I think of myself as my own reader, but think of Kṛṣṇa in that way too. It is for Him that I seek this form. It is Kṛṣṇa who has given me the ability to write. It is Kṛṣṇa who has given me whatever talents, intelligence, coherence, words, and beyond that—Himself. He is always there. And do you know what? Kṛṣṇa is the best free-writer and controller and uncontroller. It’s an immense world, this.

So, about that Vat Nineteen Rum—I will see it again and stand there again in just a few months. My writing practice, I hope, will still be with me.

The fire is burning. The red light is on on this machine. The men in this house are cold, but they have the kitchen range and they're pacing by it, chanting *japa*, feeding logs into it, wearing pants and jackets. M. will go to Kenmare at 11 to make a few last phone calls and to do some shopping. He will also do the laundry. The Irish bus system is canceling all buses on Christmas Day and most buses for days after that. We will leave December 27. I was worrying about whether we'll get to Shannon on time, then decided not to worry. Even if the planes are canceled, we can stay in Shannon. We'll manage. It will be something to write about: on the road with Lord Kṛṣṇa in the heart.

Things I don't want to forget about our stay here:
 the fire in the fireplace—a symbol of the
 flame of love I wish to feel.
 My rounds here, chanted before that fire.
 Yes, the fire here is a friend.

Fires sent from the Lord—the
 fire in the belly, in the
 fireplace, *The Living Flame of Love*.
 St. John of the Cross called
 one of his books by that title and I know a fire,
 a blaze that is not the sun-god's,
 although his fire generates the universe.
 I mean, the fire of love
 the *gopīs* feel for Kṛṣṇa. Especially Rādhā.
 Lord Caitanya felt that fire.
 Only a devotee willing to go to hell (fire)
 for Kṛṣṇa can feed the fire

of separation from Him
which burns up vital air and
leaves him sleepless.

Life is sometimes poignant beyond words. A writer
tries to capture it. Ever read Chekhovian fiction?

Oh, give me a break.

Flames, flames of Irish-setter
red, I wish I had a head
of my own that loved the Lord.
Don't want to say "the Lord" in a righteous
way, or pretentious,
but to mean it. The problem with English
is that it just doesn't fit
the heart all the time. Still
Prabhupāda chose it
to carry his gift
and now it has original meanings
meant only for us.
Sufficiently—You have played
sufficiently, said Mother Yaśodā,
when she called in her Kṛṣṇa.
Dear boy, dear
Lord
O Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa.

Cue: "What are your hopes during these last days
here?"

Hopes? I hope I don't bloop, as Aṣṭaratha Prabhu
said.

I hope I can keep up what I am doing (these notes).

I hope I can read.

I hope we can continue making preparations for what's ahead, such as the talk I am scheduled to give at 26 Second Avenue. I've got one talk lined up where I'll read a verse in the chapter about the *arjuna* trees—something about the glories of being with the devotees.

Those verses remind me of Prabhupāda coming to the Lower East Side. We were no different than the sons of Kuvera—all drunks and lost in women. But we must have been blessed because we suffered only until the pure devotee arrived. He gave us Kṛṣṇa's *darśana*. I was a tree; Prabhupāda appeared to rescue me. I can tell of that. It's a story I know well. No regrets.

The fire . . . I'm tired but happy. When I come out of this room you won't even know what I've been through.

Notes #30

Clarity of thought and feeling. On my own I am nothing. I'm always subject to pride.

Walk the bog. If I could see what He wants of me, not as a sword hanging over my head but as a bright promise. Something more is required.

I worry that I may be selling myself something in the way I am choosing to live that is not the best surrender, but this seems to be where my love is and the place from which I am able to give my love. I worry that my "love" is actually attachment, but what can I do? It's what feels right. And I pray.

No clear vision coming. I'll have to wait. I can't even recall now what I thought was clear yesterday. I have to keep writing in a cold room, working always to build up the fire. Therefore, this is not only a journal, no matter how it appears.

Christmas in Ireland for Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees: most go to Inis Rath, where they have a party, a *prasādam* feast, and sing and dance before the Deities of Rādhā-

Govinda. Belfast has a party too. It's a Sunday, so their congregation can come out and observe the national holiday in a Kṛṣṇa conscious mood. Wicklow devotees have their own Christmas observance. We will hold a small *kīrtana* this evening, Christmas Eve, and one tomorrow around noon before our little feast. These last quiet days, then travel.

Thoughtful this morning. Is there a conflict (separate interests) between devotional life and the no-holds-barred writing of first thoughts? Doesn't seem so. Got to be willing to go through apparent no-sense forest of words, unbecoming a serious devotee, because it has its purpose. You don't expect to see a Vaiṣṇava (or his servant) babbling nonsense or bringing up references from the past. If he does go "mad," it's usually caused by direct, transcendental ecstasy, separation from Kṛṣṇa, talking about Kṛṣṇa, etc. This is more a deliberate letting go without an apparent goal. That's why it can be seen as dangerous, just as fire is dangerous.

But I have to be true to the process, and the process itself becomes my truth. The search for truth is as good, in one sense, as the finding of truth, because I have to express and feel so much sincerity of purpose to find it. It's a vital part of my Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

I suppose that's the only wisdom
I can offer after a dream
in which a rabbit appeared
during a basketball game.
O holy night, Christmas Eve,

deliver me from madness.
 I feed the fire to keep warm
 and toss out this song
 during the last days of my year:

This book cost something.

Dear locust, dear diary, the man gets up in the middle of the night and rather than write comments on Vaiṣṇava *smṛti*, babbles what comes. Does he avoid what he actually sees?

Only to a point.

But he's trying.

The faithful proclamation
 abhors me when it's made just to sound good,
 or out of dullness, a thoughtless, "I guess
 this is best," with no drive of an entire
 body, mind, words.

No faith, an ounce of which
 is worth tons of faithlessness.

These last days of the year I want to be true, not sentimental, not false. I am no St. Francis living in isolation and calling out all night with no sleep: "O my God!" My acts are much littler—a walk, a thought, an awareness of Dennis and his tractor punctuating my solitude, a running into a cold bathroom to face my body's needs, then the taking of a pen or typewriter, never really knowing in advance what to expect. Reading. Looking for depth.

It has been good. I wanted to read and did, wanted to write and did. Could have been better, more prayerful, but it was still good.

O Kṛṣṇa in my heart, I know You
are there. Let the fools who
don't believe, spin out their own
fancies. I call You to counsel
me, to show me what to do.
O Lord of fire and sky and land,
Lord who tolerates miscreants,
gives us our way and our karma,
You are incomprehensible,
not to be understood or estimated by
mere mortals, no matter how
much money they possess.
Vedic knowledge is our guide,
and the explanations of *ācāryas*
who accept the same fare
of ecstasy and variety
among the devotees.

Notes #31

Dreamt we were in a classroom with a liberal teacher. A parade was being held nearby. The teacher said there would be no music bands in the parade because most people didn't like them. I argued in favor of the music. My argument had some weight, and the decision to cancel the bands was reconsidered. Later in the dream I was playing a wooden recorder. Govinda Mahārāja asked if I would like to buy a flute too, but then I realized I wasn't a musician.

One wonders where the Kṛṣṇa consciousness is in the dream life. It appears, sometimes, as an identity, in the appearance of a Godbrother, but that's it. It indicates that a lot of what we call the mental life of a person like me is not actually Kṛṣṇa conscious. Our life is directed toward other things, so that comes out in dreams. If we think of a person as made up of layers, then we would have to acknowledge that many of those layers' stratum are not engaged in devotional service. These different levels get dragged along by the

consciousness, who is constantly preaching to us to become a devotee. Those layers of consciousness, however, are not in themselves devotees, and they dwell in some prehistoric past, or even in the present, where they gather the silt of mental activities not focused on pleasing Kṛṣṇa. No wonder we are still suffering.

When I awake with these dreams still fresh in my mind, sometimes I want to give myself the benefit of the doubt. I know there was *something* Kṛṣṇa conscious in that dream where I insisted that there should be music in the parade. If I could uncover more what's actually happening, I think I would find the Kṛṣṇa conscious purport. It's not usually obvious, however, but I trust that my desire to be Kṛṣṇa conscious is strong enough that this purpose is at work. Therefore, I try to bring the richness of the dream imagery into my writing in hopes that the purport will appear.

I looked at the sixth chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā* earlier this morning and opened to the verse stating that the mind is the friend if we can conquer it and the worst enemy if we cannot. I think about this often, because the kind of writing I am doing seems to be culturing an uncontrolled mind. The fact is, however, that my mind is already out of control. There are various methods to control it. One method is to tell it again and again to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, to meditate, to read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. We can tell the mind to speak purely and to think pure thoughts—no garbage.

The problem is, the mind cannot always follow those instructions. Therefore, we sometimes have to treat the mind differently. We sometimes have to listen and trust and write down what it says—at least that's my

premise—and try to find the patterns in how it works. Personally, I am trying to learn to use the mind's muscles to engage in Kṛṣṇa conscious work. Then the mind might actually thank me that I have given it a way to assert itself for a useful purpose

That chapter also describes how a *yogī* is above the duality of heat and cold, happiness and distress, honor and dishonor. This is something we achieve relatively easily in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, Prabhupāda says.

Wait a minute, is it really that easy? It doesn't appear to be so in my case.

But it is *relatively* easy, and it can be done. If we move the mind from its interest in sense gratification to absorption in Kṛṣṇa . . .

It's worth trying for.

I sang a simple Vaiṣṇava song, not afraid that it came out like other poems I found in the Vyāsa-pūjā book. Do another?

Roaring fire—well, call it merry
if that helps—giving heat
from just a few sticks of
kindling,
and I look down on it?

I wish to be a devotee and write
poems, to see them uncurl like
a ribbon of flame and to burn up like
a mid-sized log.

O Prabhupāda, I wish I could
write straight of Govinda and the devotees in
Vraja because

time is precious—mine
and other's.

He says in the sixth chapter purport that if we directly engage ourselves in devotional service, we are in “practical *samādhi*.” I wonder what Prabhupāda intended when he said that. I think of the things I used to do—shopped for incense at the best price in Cambridge, found photocopying at 2¢ a page, photocopied Prabhupāda’s letters and sent them to the five other ISKCON centers, went home to the storefront and paid the electric bill, the heating bill, talked with the artists, talked with Pradyumna, gathered with the devotees for *kīrtana* and a lecture even when I or others didn’t want to, pulled down the blind over the front door—always busy in Kṛṣṇa’s service. I can still do all those things, but where is my mind’s *samādhi*? As I write this, I realized I have been up since midnight.

Anyway, those memories are of the distant past and my *samādhi* is still to come, so what was *this* year like? I did lots of writing. I read steadily. That in itself is an achievement. I had a good year of turning to Prabhupāda and away from other connections. That was significant for me. Wandered around Europe and had my teeth pulled out in the spring. Wrote stories. Brief trip to India. A good year all in all.

Although we have '95 planned out, I am quick to say we will have to see what actually happens. We can't trust fate, and Providence is cruel. Or so the *gopīs* say. They never expected that Akrūra (whose name means “not cruel”) would come suddenly and take Kṛṣṇa away.

ISKCON devotees, Americans and Europeans who live in India, don't have to think about Christmas. They are removed from it, and no one there bothers to remind them. They have more than enough to contend with at Diwali in Bombay or during Durgā-pūjā in Calcutta.

We in the West—are we better than those in India trying to become Indianized *sādhus*? We are not seen as *sādhus* in the West. We are marginal people, no different to some than the immigrants, homosexuals, radicals, impoverished—cultists, they call us. Rejected, but tolerated by this grand country.

But why speak of America? I'm rarely there. Well, I might be, I might be. Say M. couldn't get into America and I did. I might have to stay in my own country without him.

Do you really dislike America so?

If I had to live there, I would stay away from the nondevotees, who seem worse than nondevotees elsewhere. I'd stay at the cabin at Gītā-nāgarī and travel into nearby cities to preach. I *could* do that.

I have no gripes against the American devotees. Devotees are about the same everywhere. The Americans have troubles and see shrinks and get divorces like anywhere else. Or maybe they don't do those things in India, I don't know.

I'm just saying I don't like to be with nondevotees. The *sāstra* says that's a healthy idea. I just read it this morning: a *yogī* should live in seclusion. Prabhupāda defines "seclusion" as not living with those who are not Kṛṣṇa conscious.

We look to them only to make a good impression on them, to give them Kṛṣṇa consciousness in a way that they will take it.

Cue: “Ask Lord Kṛṣṇa to reveal Himself.” Do I dare? Is it wrong? Pray to Him, “Dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, *sarvaṁ khalv idam brahma*: You are everywhere, but that doesn’t mean You are not a person unto Yourself. I too am part of You.” I love my body because the soul is within, and I love the soul because it is part of Kṛṣṇa. That means I love You. Everyone is seeking You in Your different manifestations, but few seek You directly.

Let my song not be time-wasting
 or bored, speculating, idle guitar
 strumming, myself in the center
 of my imaginary universe. Let it be a song
 praising Kṛṣṇa who killed Agha, Baka—all of them,
 Dantavakra with his furious club,
 Bāṇa with his thousand arms,
 and who defeated god Indra when he forgot
 who was master.
 Brahmā also forgot, and me
 and like moths flying into flame
 He rekindles our
 remembrance, one way or another.

Notes #32

I was somewhere talking with devotees and it was snowing. Gītā-nāgarī dāsa and a woman devotee were explaining to me that we understand only superficially that the demigods are in charge of the weather. Gītā-nāgarī dāsa was alluding to the idea that beyond the persons are impersonal forces, which are more important. They said, “You have to learn the philosophy thoroughly. In the beginning we learned it too quickly.”

I understood they were going beyond Prabhupāda’s books. I was preparing to reply when I woke up.

Sun out and the grass shimmering with light and dew. Fields with deep ruts from tractors and cows’ hooves. It’s too muddy to go into nature’s backyard, so I may never go back there again. It didn’t seem important. The tight field where I circumambulate is good enough, a bit sloping, but mostly even, green, and alone. I go round and round. Nothing special. Why can’t I ever feel anything in *hari-nāma*? I have read

the book about bringing the mind into the heart, but never do it.

The crows are jumpy. You just move toward the window and they fly away from a field two hundred feet away. The cows don't move. Brown hills and green. M. gave Dennis the Irish soda bread he baked along with a fruitcake and said, "Happy Christmas." Dennis asked if we want to rent the place next year. No, doesn't look like it. We've had enough of his condemned sheep and wet bog. It's been nice, but we won't be back.

Thinking of duty. I used to work at the Welfare office while running the Boston temple. Prabhupāda told me to. I was deeply satisfied with his order and tried to live by it. No outsider could understand how happy I was to obey. I thought it was the only way to survive in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Now I live without that assurance of Prabhupāda's direct and ongoing orders as I age.

I know he knows, however, what I am doing.

I prefer to serve Prabhupāda in separation rather than to take on a new and entangling relationship with a *śikṣā-guru*. One result of accepting a *śikṣā-guru* is that you can no longer concentrate single-mindedly on your one spiritual master. I will not take a new relationship, but go seek my spiritual master in his books.

It is just dawning on me that I have finished a reading assignment that lasted about a year. I am no longer obliged to continue going systematically through the *Bhāgavatam*. What to do next? I suppose I'll go back to the First Canto with a plan to mine lectures from it.

But I don't want to read only to feed lectures. I am looking for nourishment. Like a starved calf sucking on her mother's teat, I must read Prabhupāda's books.

The difficulty in reading while preparing for lectures is that you find yourself advocating something to an audience that you didn't necessarily let yourself feel first.

Blue-stained sheep on Christmas Eve

kīrtana for us mortal human beans

at 6 tonight in the kitchen.

It will be a black night outside, and I'll

sing the lead for half an hour, then hand it

over to M. I know

the doldrums won't fly off at once,

I'll be rolling my eyes and brain, bored perhaps

of our little effort

to remember Kṛṣṇa

in His name.

Don't want to feel the enforced chorus

to which I must respond

or lose the beat.

But I want to sing

while the nation sings and

drinks their grog and jokes their Christmas

jokes, pulling their politics together for

after the holiday when they will go for the kill

in the marketplace of desire.

We are definitely turning our faces toward travel. M. is working on trimming the travel box for the Prabhupāda *mūrti*. Right now, Prabhupāda is upstairs

being fitted for the foam that will go against his body when he's in the case. I am grateful he lets me carry him. I am fortunate. I don't follow strict *pūjā* rules, but I try to keep a standard of worship.

The main thing is that he is always with me. I massage him daily, I who was fortunate enough to once touch his body in this way. Thought of it again today. I must have brought him his breakfast and lunch hundreds of times, but I don't remember so many details of that—can't remember how it was. I do remember the massage. M.'s fitting him and in three days we'll be on the road, him in the box within the black bag, the black bag in the rear seat of the car, with me in my arms, then in the airplane.

Blue sky. White cloud puffs on hill—blue and white beauty beyond expression this mild Christmas Eve in Eire.

A picture postcard, frozen stiff.

Carver writes a lot about death. Then he wrote his own poem, "What the Doctor Said," when he was told he would die soon from lung cancer. He wrote one last book after that. Now I've heard that Kowit is teaching Carver to Mexican kids in a Southern California college. I no longer write to him.

I have enough fire lighters to last me until Tuesday morning. Neither of us want to stay here any longer than that. We are ready to fly to New York and Boston. Ready for it as we'll ever be. Both a little ill, but feeling right about the upcoming travels.

Today I thought of these “Notes” and loved them. It seemed my whole purpose to remain here was to write them.

I’m just a guy, not with a wife, not with news that I have cancer and am going to die. That may come, later. Finish this book and then start another. Write while you can.

Went to bed at 6 P.M. last night
feeling sorry for crows and cows—I’m
a sensitive sort, you know, who takes
long walks, although this time I didn’t,
seen enough, I guess,
of the river Sheen in pre-dawn light.

God, God, the holy names,
the early morning—Guṇagrāhi Swami wrote
about that in his homage,
like me, and others too.

He said the early morning hours are special
when he communicates with Prabhupāda and
writes in his

journal, then preaches all day,
looking forward to the next early morning
when he can be with the Name. I didn’t know him
like that. He didn’t mention
candlelight. It’s an extra to have
the fireplace, the logs burning.
You sit near it because you have
no other heat
no other light. The candles

somehow hold your mind, you could say,
and don't distract from the chanting.
A record of that.

Dennis and his dog have the sheep bunched up in one corner of the field. It's incredible the way they control them through fear. The dog isn't even a big one, but he's an expert sheep-herder, and Dennis in his cap and purple and black jacket, his slight slouch, also knows what he is doing. Here he is spending Christmas Eve as if it were any other darkening afternoon, sloshing around after the beasts whom he probably hates (although he lives off them). I wonder what they think of him? I know they're afraid of him, although I'm sure if he came out with a load of food, they would come begging. He knows they have little brains and believes they have no soul. He may not even be sure whether *he* has a soul.

I'm an eyewitness.

Yeah, him too. He glanced in here. Probably doesn't have a very high opinion of me either—an American with money, a member of that strange cult, no longer an Irish Catholic. Says he's writing a book. What kind of a book only the Devil can say. Something for his religious members.

Aye, that dream of a snowy Christmas Eve and me eating snow as if it were custard ice cream. Sense gratification. That wasn't a prophetic dream describing my life here because here the chairs are stiff and the air cold. My head is achy, and I have work to do.

I'm also a chanter. My sweatshirt is being washed, sweat pants too, and that's the story.

Happy Christmas. "Merry Kṛṣṇa and a Happy Yuga," she said, and laughed, as I exited the Gitā-nāgarī temple room. Those times are coming up again real soon. Aer Lingus will take us there. But I'll tell tomorrow's tale tomorrow. This one ends here.

Notes #33

12:10 A.M. My midnight Mass is underway. No pew sitting, just floor sitting by the fire I will build. Merry Christmas.

I was with a group of men, a *sankirtana* party, staying at a fashionable motel during the off-season. I prodded them, "We have to leave early in the morning," and when they were not ready, I left without them. Only another dream. In my sleep I rocked back and forth, making the effort to wake so I could warn the others that we had been identified.

Couldn't do *kirtana* last night due to headachy head.
Took rest by 7 P.M.

I am entitled to tell of a life, but let it be encircled by a halo.

Really?

I was searching in a dream for books of "turned-on literature where writers finally discover what they want

to say, something which edifies or expresses the heart.” I wondered what I actually meant by that. I’m tired of stating it, perhaps, but I’m looking for Kṛṣṇa consciousness achieved and good

news of *bhāgavata-dharma*

purified in ISKCON and growing. The Pāṇḍavas returned from exile.

“Turned-on” writing implies that a devotee is making inner as well as outer *kīrtana*. That’s how he celebrates Christmas, with quiet huzzahs and hallelujahs, acknowledging the birth of Christ, that he is the savior who will endure all suffering to relieve mankind’s sins. It means he knows he cannot understand the ways of God, but he appreciates them as they appear in his own life and the lives of others.

Then he turns, even on Christmas, to find his truer *kīrtana* according to the *Bhāgavatam* and *Gītā* purports. If he does ever reach a further stage in writing analogous dreams, or if this midnight scratching (midnight Mass) is already what he’s looking for, then please, Lord, appear. Please manifest. That’s what he means by “turned-on writing”—that cry.

Race with the clock—time running out. I told you what we are doing now—closing up shop. Vacuuming the rugs, baking the bread, making sweets for the plane. Worry if we’ll get there on time and I tell myself, “Oh, even if we don’t, I can write about the day in my travel diary.”

Who went to Mass drunk?

M. says they do that in Ireland, then come back through the streets with a faint holiness, to sit around the fireside and open their gifts. The kids have to keep up their end by feigning pleasure (or actually feeling it) with their toys and gift-wrapped plaid shirts and pajamas from “Mom and Dad.”

It’s over soon enough.

O Kṛṣṇa, I do seek Kṛṣṇa consciousness in my life. I write “what comes” and am embarrassed by it, but also glad I can be honest and unpretentious while practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That’s important to me. Because one can become artificial or blind while presuming to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness and teach others. One can become hypocritical. I don’t want to entirely forget my sinful past as long as it still affects me.

Finally, I want to do whatever You want me to do, but it’s not easy to qualify myself to receive such direct dictation from You within my heart.

You seem to wish me well in my present course. Or do You laugh at me in my foolishness?

Am I crazy? At least I am in Your service, or aspiring for that, even with my headachy head.

Hickory dickory dock—
 a clock near Kenmare reports
 four minutes after 1 to my eyes and
 I pray by reading and reciting
 the sacred Hare Kṛṣṇa
 mantra.
 Clock hands move toward Christmas

dawn. The wood burns and
 I am quiet and at peace,
 willing and eager to go out
 to meet and lecture on behalf
 of Śrī Kṛṣṇa on the order
 of the Swami, whom I met in that very
 storefront in New York.

Okay, close this out. Signed and delivered—
 Christmas consciousness with word play—a compelling
 dream of a search and a vision for the advanced stage
 in devotional writing when an author writes that for
 which he was created, although more informal and
 direct, carried on waves of sincerity and inspiration.
 That's a dream.

For now, sitting on a vacuumed rug, contrite, words
 strewn like seeds.

No snowfall here.

Notes #34

Sad tale of human life. We Hare Kṛṣṇas don't really escape the tragedy of it, nor the work of trying to help. It's just that our spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, wanted us to help by living in ISKCON and staying focused on the spiritual reality. Relief from *samsāra* comes only from Kṛṣṇa consciousness. There is no other knowledge; no other hope.

Saw headlights at 3 A.M. and wondered what they were doing. All power to them.

The *yogī* sees the Supreme Lord in the heart of all, not only in the hearts of devotees. All living entities are essentially spiritual, but they have allowed themselves to become covered. The animals are covered, and the animal-like men, but the soul is present nevertheless. The Supersoul, who accompanies the individual soul, doesn't become affected by our apparent changes. He's neutral the way a mother is neutral, kind to all her children, but not really sharing their triumphs or despair. A *yogī* can understand this.

Okay, stop looking down at your own fingernails and don't moon unnecessarily into the fire. Move along. Snowstorms. The airplane over the Andes suddenly dropped fifteen feet, then recovered itself. He wrote in his newsletter, "Death is serious business." Then he went on to Peru and preached to scientists and others. I read it too.

I read the soul, the mind, the person—he needs to surrender to Kṛṣṇa.

This is Sunday and I can't say anything more. We will have *kīrtana* at noon, then a feast. The *yogī* doesn't care for sense demands. He is *gosvāmī*, not *godāsa*. Which am I?

He doesn't take the course of impossible yoga but practices *bhakti*. *Samādhi* is easily achieved. Well, it's possible, anyway, whereas in *haṭha-yoga* it is impossible. You engage your senses in Kṛṣṇa's service. Find out what He wants you to do, offer Him food, and eat only what He returns. Smell the incense, use your legs to walk to the temple.

This is especially for those who may not be in the renounced order and who are obliged to be active in the world. Learn how to use your senses in His service. I read that in the *Gītā*, sixth chapter. Kṛṣṇa teaches *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, but as you read the purports, you realize that all the purposes of yoga and more can be achieved through the practice of *bhakti*. That is also Kṛṣṇa's conclusion in the last verse of the chapter.

It's Christmas, but this is turning out to be a hard one to write. No sled runners over the snow, no snow,

no sled, no light and dark. In this house we have a cheery fire and no grog.

So, you say you're having a hard time writing. That's because you won't accept the little life of the things going through your head. You want it to be worthy. You think (or someone may tell you) that you ought to be silent for days at a stretch, without writing, and then you can say something more concise—just a few lines before you die, a *sūtra*, a proverb. But I've got to keep writing. I want it all to be worthy.

A little tingle off and on in my right forehead—the signal from the lighthouse. Someone thought he could make it go away through hypnosis and other forms of pain control, but do you know what? Nothing works, nothing at all.

The day after Audrey Hepburn died, Tiffany's (who used to pay her to model their jewelry) ran a tribute-advertisement in the *New York Times*. It had her name, Audrey Hepburn, the year of her birth, and the year of her death, then these words: "Our huckleberry friend."

I thought of that while walking on the bog the other day and it made me shiver. Then I thought, "Why not transfer these feelings to Kṛṣṇa?" I *do* shiver with emotion sometimes, so why can't I shiver in relation to God?

I'm working on it. I think it's possible. If you can do it for one, why not the other? The benefit of doing it in relationship with Kṛṣṇa is immeasurably greater than emotions invested in temporary matter. To invest feelings in something not directly Kṛṣṇa conscious is a waste of time.

My friend, the fire, is burning bright. Many centuries ago St. Francis wrote the poem, "Hailing the Fire for Burning Bright." He saw it as coming from God. Sees God in nature, in the essential elements, water and fire and sky and so on.

Bottle of water, warmth of room,
 passage of time,
 this retreat is used up. We won't be back.

Adrienne Rich makes her propaganda for clear-headed tenderness, the "right of lesbians to live together" she calls it. Pitiful falling short that is, and everyone else. The good man, the President without scandal, dying and remembering his wife. Or WCW remembering his wife at the end, secular, God conscious . . . the fire burning. The *yogī* sees Kṛṣṇa in all beings and all beings in Him.

I can make propaganda too, but I don't choose to do so. I don't use that word much anyway. But sure, I want to establish Kṛṣṇa. Remember the Catholic priest saying that the Communists work hard and we should work harder? That struck me. I guess I never heard anyone give credit to the evil-doers that way, crediting them for being even better workers than the Catholics and American armies. I guess I thought that not only were we better than the Commies in the moral sense (in every sense), but *of course* we must be better workers. It scared me to even have to consider that they could become influential and effective. I hadn't thought of it that way.

By that logic, what else? Could they take away our country? Unthinkable.

President Eisenhower, Joe Louis, heavyweight champ, and I didn't stay up late to see it, but Dewey lost to Truman in a close presidential race

Thomas Dewey, mustache,
slaughter on Tenth Avenue (on record) and
"Sugar Blues" muted trumpet
a raised surface painting
of some place in Italy.

Dutch boys, Dutch
boys and girls on the wall!

Fake long reeds in a vase on the floor
in Aunt Jo's house . . . my memories and
yours are a mutual right in a democratic country.

We can do as we like. Oh?

Prabhupāda says no. We must work
under the modes
of material nature.

Still, I am allowed to be a member of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. It is not against the law. I am allowed to be a Boy Scout, a gay bar attendee, a householder, a sign painter, to drink liquor, or to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

But if we clash, the cops will come and sort it out.

Thomas Dewey and lettuce.

It can be proved

in the *Bhagavad-gītā* verse that

all persons are reducible to five great elements and subelements and that the soul is above them, but below the Supreme Controller.

A little poem for the
 man in the fire. A little man is there
 singing
 happy and warm. You didn't know
 a person could live in fire, did you?
 Well, it's true. He doesn't burn because
 his body is also of fire—his head
 is aflame with brilliance
 and his thoughts tender fire-thoughts,
 his parts fire parts, his
 soul ablaze.

We live on land and sea (fish).
 A poem lives in the air, on
 paper, and rhymes or doesn't,
 goes home on Christmas Eve—
 that poem, or stays to chant
 Hare Kṛṣṇa,
 dividing the lines
 with heartbreak.

The ways of God become known to man
 through revelation and the pure
 devotees explanations.

Christmas mitten, God in Christ.
 No sled or snow in Ireland, no buses today.
 Walk this little patch of land
 and answer last letters in pouch.
 You are a nobody and a somebody—
 Steven the Terrible, Ivan
 the hunchback—playing with words.
 Better to be silent?

Notes #35

I feel now that this book has been a performance. Maybe I didn't feel this previously, but now. Is that so terrible?

What do I mean by "performance"? Do I mean an intended, deliberate communication? Isn't that what Vyāsa does, and Śukadeva Gosvāmī, in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*? Isn't that what Lord Kṛṣṇa does in *Bhagavad-gītā*?

Why *don't* you want to communicate? Perhaps I should ask *that* question.

Okay. I tried to forget that I'm communicating with others so that I could discover for myself what I want to write without the pressure to perform. I don't have to explain it here—not now. I'm writing this note between my scheduled sessions because I sensed the performance syndrome had caught up with me. In other words, the book has been written, and I don't think I want to continue it any longer. I wasn't posing or trying to create a literary effect when I told you

about Dennis and his sheep or our life here. It's good that that wasn't a pose. I called it *The Last Days of the Year*, but didn't try to make my words fit into a mold suitable for a year-end mood. The writing, in that sense, was natural. I think the reader will benefit from that. If now I feel myself reaching for a Christmas-day effect or a last-day-before-we-leave effect, I don't want it.

You caught him
 and he caught you
 in the web of his mind
 wished he were—
 somewhere else in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
 He accepts himself as a
 particular soul and reaches
 out to you, shyly
 but definitely
 wanting to touch
 your Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
 Something like that.

Notes #36

Śrīla Prabhupāda was with us. We were all crowded into a kitchen and he was affectionate with each of us. I was receiving his attention in another room. Then he embraced Bhagavān dāsa. Then he walked out of the room and past me. I think he said, "Don't put on airs." At that moment (in the dream) I was thinking to myself, "I'm chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and trying to be sincere." Yet he said it. Was I putting on airs?

Maybe Prabhupāda doesn't understand how I'm trying to be serious. But if he said it, then I must accept it and find a way to live up to his words.

But what does he mean? Does he mean I should not *try* to be serious? I should just be a regular fella and live life for what it is temporarily?

No, I know he doesn't mean that.

And that's all . . . Don't put on airs. He left me to mull it over. Well, that's what I'm saying in these Notes, isn't it? I'm telling myself not to be schmaltsy just because it's Christmas and the end of the year and just

because I have been in a hermitage and am now going to face New York City. Don't put on airs as if you live in a private world of nursing wounds, a daily bog walk, of prayer, of everything else.

Rather, be in prayer. I mean, look for it, chanting, I mean, by the fireplace, and read, read, and don't tail off just because you're leaving ideal circumstances.

Face everything that is to come. I'll be dodging my Godbrothers' inquiries as to where I've been all month, dodging the bullets of shock from being back in New York City, hoping to dodge the hurt in my head, which hasn't gone away although I have dodged so much. I hope to dodge the desire for attention, the desire for respect and praise, and dodge . . .

Just don't put on airs. When I sit in the storefront and they expect me to say something touching about my experiences with the Swami, I should just do what I can, as a workman does what he can. Prabhupāda is reminding me.

I once went to a classical music concert with my sister for piano and orchestra. They played recorded music over speakers. There were no live musicians present. There was even a piano on stage. I settled in anyway to hear the music, cozy beside my charming sister. There were many people in the audience.

Suddenly the concert was interrupted as the orchestra arrived and gave a pop rendition of the classical composition. They made it light and comical. It was embarrassing. I heard people exclaiming, "Hey, what are they doing?!" Some people laughed. All were astounded. And that was just the beginning.

At other parts in the classical composition, people came on stage and hammed it up with corny collegiate songs. I was so disturbed I wanted to leave, but we didn't.

This was a dream. What do you make of it?

Well, I think the serious music represents my desire to practice serious Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The collegiate amateurism represents my doubts about the personal free-writing I do. I am embarrassed, but I can't stop.

Hmmm. And my sister and my too-close relationship with her?

That obviously represents a latent material desire to experience the coziness of a woman. It seems to fit in, doesn't it? I mean, it's wrong, isn't it, to dream of a woman, even if she is your sister? *Māyā*.

Anyway, the whole thing is weird—going to a concert of piped in music. Where is the real stuff? Does it mean I am tricking myself or being tricked? The profound music that I want to appreciate is not available. It has been hindered.

The music I seek is actually Kṛṣṇa consciousness in its pure state. It comes from the classical composers, the Mozart and Beethoven of the Gauḍīya tradition, our Prabhupāda and the previous *ācāryas*. I am hampered from being a true aficionado because of my nonsense, the amateur jokes and my other hankerings.

But wait a minute. How do you know, Mr. Dream Specialist, the music of my own soul, my own pure desire to be Kṛṣṇa conscious? Why put me down so much that it comes out that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the sublime thing and my hard-fought, long, developed writing proclivity comes out to be a college buffoon

with his sister beside him? Is that fair? Maybe the māyic elements are just the material world tempting me. My intentions are right. I wanted to leave, didn't I? This material world is a nonsense place, falsely advertised, and as soon as I see it, I want to get out.

Yeah, but you didn't get out.

Well, it's just a dream. It was even cut off, or I can't remember the rest. I do remember that I was enamored by my sister . . .

Now I'm awake, desiring to go back to Godhead. I hope to take this dream in a way that will be useful for my serious life so that I can hear and delight the self in service to His Divine Grace as he actually is, the Lord as He actually is, without being misrepresented and fooled by an inattentive plaything of a woman.

And so, dear reader, we are closing out.

I want to be as serious as possible. That includes what I write. It has been a year for writing. That's a neutral statement, no ego involved. I wrote a lot especially in the second half of the year—one timed book after another. I tried to improvise and through it, search for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. As I said in a dream a few days ago, maybe I will find a book in which I suddenly break through to a new informality through which I will carry the vision of what I have always wanted to express but haven't been able to. Each author should write the book he most wants to read.

But how? For now it seems I should write my way toward it, book after book, from *Ballyferriter Stories* to

Progresso to The Story of a Retreat to The Kārttika Papers to In Search of the Grand Metaphor to this one.

Mr. Little Bird, emptying the ocean in your beak,
Mr. Writing Process dovetailed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
Mr. Poet who stabs himself in the back, Mr. Dreams,
dreams, I want to see you reading your spiritual
master's books and . . .

The dialogue continues.

There is no way out.

Keep chanting
by candlelight or
otherwise.

"I want to be as serious as possible," he said,
holding up a glass of Christmas cider (unspiked).
He ate plenty of sweets—one a tart with
a custard center, another, a shapely sweet ball, then
hot delicious *halavā* made just right
with a tinge of orange. Yes, he wants
to be as serious
as possible.

Walked on the bog (can't think
of another name for it) a near-last time
and felt myself sinking into the soft earth,
the sun blazing overhead and rain
and dark all at the same time.
Good-bye to this place.
Without even saying it I feel it coming.
And one of these days,
Pow! Right in the kisser.
Kṛṣṇa will give it to you. (He already is.)

Angels of mercy, Kṛṣṇa, this sinner
beseeches you, walking the lane, although I
mumble and not
clearly and yearningly utter
Your holy names.
Still, Thou art with me,
You comfort me though I walk
in the shadow of the valley of death.
You are with me
and Prabhupāda is with me as we go out to meet
the duties
he has ordained.

Appendix

I wrote these cues each day after the actual “Notes” session. The cues were to help me get off to a good start the next time I went to write. Here are some excerpts:

Accept loneliness and aloneness.

Accept obscurity.

Be positive that you’ve come here to write.

Your themes in “Notes” do fit into a form since they *are* the last days of the year, each one.

Don’t get angry and quit.

Go to write, honestly, and you’ll see—it will be worth it. It will approach Kṛṣṇa consciousness as you do.

A serious practice, not just making noise, a ruckus.

Can’t plan ahead much, but write without sense gratification.

How can I be myself and yet be an obedient devotee?

How can I be honest and yet not talk of the past, the world, my senses, etc?

Or, if I deliberately omit my faulty self and speak only *sāstra*, how can that keep my interest and honesty?

I especially broke through when I saw that *The Last Days of the Year* does have an inherent connectedness.

I also felt solace reading *Forgetting the Audience* and seeing how I was facing things then.

I have to accept that this is my service. Don't complain. Make the best of it and pray that Kṛṣṇa will see good in it.

This is your life. It is all you have. Make the best of it.

When you are stuck, pause and rest, then start again.

— Remember to go beyond performance, but not beyond communication. Not beyond Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

— Are you afraid of something? Afraid to write of something? Write of that.

— What was a nice moment today? An important thought?

Make a prayer to Kṛṣṇa without being afraid it will be the same old thing. Don't care that Murray said I

“wrap it up in the canon.” I do that—make a whole canon poem.

— Start a song-poem, one of my own, with words, and break your heart. Don’t wait for something better to come. That is also the basis of daring to be guru.

What would Prabhupāda think of what you are doing?

Can’t control the mind.

Want to be a writer.

Be serious and Kṛṣṇa conscious.

Desire to write free on one hand, yet be sober so that at the time of death I won’t be thinking of things other than Kṛṣṇa conscious. How to resolve this?

Use methods like lists, dialogue with imagined persons, interviews, spoofs.

Be careful you don’t misuse your free will and fall down in the name of free-writing. How to assure you won’t do that?

Is free-writing a good thing to be doing? It’s what I do. When I raise the doubt I reply in my favor.

Seems I’ll go forward and ask Lord Kṛṣṇa to direct me clearly how to please Him best, how this *jīva* should surrender.

Serious about it—believe truth can come through in this way.

I count on my other activities to be solid *sādhana*.

I want to be a serious devotee but dovetail this writing.

The more painful admissions are the ones that will have lasting value, such as when you mentioned that the book distribution marathon is going on and you are not participating in it.

Or when you admit poverty or turn to simple pleasures and perceptions while walking in the rain. Or you tell us what you've been reading. Don't be afraid to tell us from the smallness of your life. It's better than beating around the bush and being too shy even to admit that you are happy about lunch and little things. Tell us those little things. Tell us of your Kṛṣṇa, what you know.

Write from quiet place (external and within). What do I mean by that?

Happy to write. Tell us more of that.

Clean floor . . .

keep well, life is precious and great
and you can write, write
as much as possible.

The main thing is to break through sincerely—sincerity in the writing process. Speak the honest truth.

It's just that I couldn't think of what to say. I seemed stuck in the immediate present. What else is there? Well, there is the past in ISKCON, thought, and so on. I can range out.

Each day tell what you have read in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

Do classic free-writing, whatever words pour out.

It's not just a space filler—write what is important to you.

What did I feel today? How did I contact Kṛṣṇa?

Tonight I said I ought to think about death when I write.

I wrote poem fragments and I don't care if they don't have cute endings.

I admit this is just practice and has no direction except the natural one. Good. Keep writing like that.

I first told dear reader, "This is not me. What follows is no holds barred, so watch out."

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa

V-day—don't worry.

Try to see clearly (or recall when I did).

Admit shortcomings, but be happy with yourself.

Seems like I said everything already—that we are leaving here, what we will do next year, and so on. If you can't think of more than that, end the whole thing. Or make each one shorter.

I want to be as Kṛṣṇa conscious as possible.

