BOOKS AMONG FRIENDS



Radio Shows

Volume 2

SATSVARUPA DASA GOSWAMI

Radio Shows,

Volume 2

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

GN Press, Inc.

Series Title: "Books Among Friends"

Radio Shows, Volume 2
Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

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Hare kṛṣṇa Hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa Hare Hare
Hare Rāma Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare

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Radio Shows,
Volume 2

Also from "Books Among Friends"

A Litany for the Gone

Why not Fiction?

I am Prabhupāda's Servant: September Catchall

Sketchbooks of Joy

Songs of a Hare Kṛṣṇa Man

Author's Note

I have been reading this second volume of *Radio Shows* and I must admit that I love it. It's the freedom and the voice that capture me, and the aloneness, the unashamed memories, the connection of all of it to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This reminds me of a moment Jean Shepherd described on one of his shows. He used to ride a motor scooter to the studio each day. One day he was stopped in traffic and he looked up at the midtown Manhattan skyline and felt love for that city. I remember his spontaneous affection and feel it today myself, not for some mundane city, but for how Kṛṣṇa appears in our lives and in our words when we just open up and speak.

Each of us has an immense number of impressions and things to articulate, but most of us block them from ever being expressed. Being on the radio releases my inhibitions and allows me to speak openly. It's a good way to get an introvert to talk. I can sit alone in a room and talk intimately to the world without ever having to meet anyone.

Of course, a devotee has a special responsibility to speak about Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Unfortunately, that may limit his audience. My book, *Under the Banyan Tree,* was reviewed favorably in several haiku magazines, but very few people outside of the devotees bought copies. I did receive one letter from a Mr. Alvaro Cardona-Hine, author of an acclaimed haibun and a writing teacher. He wrote:

> Many thanks for the little book which both my wife and I enjoyed. The fervor of your belief comes through. This is its strength and its weakness, for ultimately the poet best serves the hidden purposes of the Universe by remaining

> free, by not assigning his authority to anyone else. . . . My path led me to look to myself for the authority. You openly assign yours to someone else, and this gives voice to a devotion that colors the entire book. . . . However, many people won't take it seriously as poetry because to them, poetry is a voice that comes from within before it has been tethered to an extraneous service.

Of course, I didn't like being described as "tethered to an extraneous service." Sounds like a calf tied by a rope to a peg. I wrote back to Mr. Hines and quoted to him Śrī Uddhava's statement about the two spiritual masters, the Lord in the heart and the pure devotee, and how they are appreciated by "transcendental poets and experts in spiritual science." We will do much better getting through this universe birth after birth if we have reliable guides and not just our own fault-prone authority.

But I can take some good advice also from the writing teacher in that one should speak from the heart and not just sound like a parrot. I think it was unfair of Mr. Hines to assume that a devotee doesn't have a heart, doesn't have a human cry of his own, even while he is trying to follow God and guru and discover his own way.

That anecdote also reminds me of the time I described the nature of free-writing to a devotee and how the process is to separate "creator" and "editor" within the writing process. The devotee then asked, "Would the free-writers, or those who teach free-writing, consider you a *pure* free-writer, since as you say your motto is to steer to Kṛṣṇa?" He saw the contradiction in what I was saying—essentially that free-writing allows the hand to move of its own accord, and yet I direct it toward Kṛṣṇa. I had to smile because that devotee had my number. Yes, I steer to Kṛṣṇa.

But that doesn't limit any of us even if most people don't want to hear it. Rather, it's our strength. We have to make our speech chaste and we can't be concerned with the audience's whims. That's because the essence of all our speaking is to please guru and Kṛṣṇa. That is the real substance of these shows.

Perhaps that's why I find doing radio shows particularly appealing. I am able to relax, be myself, and speak the Absolute Truth with candor and acknowledgment of my own imperfection. These shows are not orations on scripture, but an attempt to touch on the humanness of a *sādhaka's* experience.

The shows in this book were selected from shows done between 1994 and 1996. I did them while in America, the Caribbean, Europe, and India, so the flavor of each is a little different. I hope you enjoy "hearing" them as much as I enjoyed speaking them.

1

Prabhupāda singing:
saṁsāra-dāvānala-līḍha-loka . . .

I'm strapped in here in my rocking chair studio, preparing to speak.

I remember on an airplane only a few years ago hearing someone singing. I overheard a fellow passenger saying that it was Neil Diamond. I had never even heard of Neil Diamond. Once you become a devotee, if you are strict, you drop out of the world of sports and popular music and cinema. Most devotees are pretty righteous about being out of touch, I guess. We like our ignorance.

Anyway, on this occasion we had already landed and the music was on. It was a live performance on the overhead speakers, and the people were supporting him. He seemed to have them in the palm of his hand. The song he was singing had the refrain, "Do you know what I mean?" He sang it, then began to say it, speaking intimately to fifty thousand people.

That phrase, "Do you know what I mean?"—he didn't ask it as a question, really. He was speaking in the imperative tense, reaching beyond objectivity to a level of subjective truth that binds speaker and listener together in common experience.

"Yeah, I know what you mean."

People also use that phrase to throw a blanket over things they would rather not acknowledge aloud. "Do you know what I mean?" a man asks the border guard, and he presses

a bribe into his hand. The border guard waves through a truck full of illegal drugs or guns for the rebels.

Devotees use it too. Here in this material world, we are facing birth, death, disease, and old age, and in a sweeping acknowledgment of our inability to surrender, we sometimes confess our shortcomings, "Do you know what I mean?" Or we list the things that made us happy in a day. Kṛṣṇa is kind to fulfill our desires, but there is always the underside of the positive mood: "Is that *all* you wanted? Time is running out and you still haven't learned to desire." Then we say this phrase, "Do you know what I mean?" with more poignancy. We have lost our innocence.

Prabhupāda singing:

saṁsāra-dāvānala-līḍha-loka . . .

Innocence. Simplicity. Joy. We have lost our ability to pretend we are fully enjoying in the material realm. Our joys are full of ambiguities and poignant mixtures. We look for pure experience, experience devoid of objective reality. Like drinking ginger ale. I haven't had ginger ale for decades, but for some reason, it occurred to me today that I no longer remember how it tastes. It's not that I wanted to taste it again after all these years, but somehow attached to the memory of ginger ale was the idea that it once made me happy. Then the other side of me disparaged that thought and killed the moment. That's what I mean by ambiguity.

Remember *Pierre and the Ambiguities* by Herman Melville? The critics said it was a deep book, better than *Moby Dick*, because it was so ambiguous. Something happened to the hero, but you couldn't tell whether it was good or bad.

I mention all this because I tend to think about the poetic nature. Poetic or sensitive thinkers often think that reality is really a series of ambiguities. Devotees say that because the material world is full of misery, whatever happiness is experienced is really another ambiguity. Citraketu wanted a son, but his karma didn't allow it. Although the sage Aṅgirā overruled his karma, so to speak, and allowed a son to be born to him, he said that his name would be Harṣaśoka. That is, he would be a mixed blessing.

I'm pulling these words and ideas apart, but ultimately, this is the relative world and everything in it is relative. We have lost our innocence and simplicity. A question as simple as "What made you happy today?" has no objective truth.

Prabhupāda singing:

saṁsāra-dāvānala-līḍha-loka . . .

We have different opportunities to make stabs at expression, at reality, while trees grow and maintain and dwindle through the winter, their crumpled leaves littering the ground. "Simply wood," Prabhupāda said about the trees in North America in winter. I'm in a composite forest, so there's some green.

My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, when we're in pain, or even anticipating pain, we tend to pray from the stomach, then the chest. We feel the pain in the stomach, or the fear, and we think of all the ways in which we have overstepped our bounds—how we have indulged in sense gratification and now have to pay the price. Perhaps we gave up our integrity in some way. Sometimes our indulgence is subtle.

For myself, I seem to be facing my lack of simplicity. I'm a complicated person, what we call sophisticated or civilized.

It's all right, but when I try to reach a simple level of prayer—"O Lord! O God! O Kṛṣṇa! I am a sinner. Please relieve me. Please help me"—I see that I can't do that unless I drop my sophisticated pose and just cry out, "Help me, Lord!"

At the same time, everyone has to have a sense of decorum or civilized well being. That seems to require compromise or a lack of surrender, and that's why the pose of being surrendered cannot endure. Fake tears—what value do they have? Prabhupāda joked about the pose: "Sometimes Mr. Paul says to me so insistently, 'Swamijī, I want to have spiritual advancement right now.'" Prabhupāda chuckled and then became serious. Perhaps Paul was there and he became embarrassed. Prabhupāda added, "No, it is nice that you do this, and you will attain. But gradually."

We become sadder but wiser as we face the gradual path to real surrender. Do you know what I mean? Still, we can cry out, we can speak to Kṛṣṇa, we can have faith in *śāstra*.

It's a funny thing how Prabhupāda also didn't appear simple, at least externally. He wasn't part of the world of ambiguity, yet he was not a village boy but raised in civilized Calcutta. No one could cheat him. At the same time, he was innocent and pure, deep and strong in his Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Prabhupāda didn't flatter people. He was always polite, but he insisted on speaking the truth.

That's what we're really not able to do, at least not to the same degree. We're too afraid of our own hypocrisy and we don't have the same strength. Neither do we have the same depth of compassion.

No one can know Prabhupāda's mind, but he was, as they say, right on. (My friend in Australia says, "spot on.") He stays on, whereas I make tentative approaches—I go

forward, retreat, don't quite like the way I present things, feel the opposite, try to explain that too, all in the name of honesty. I feel the ambiguity and acknowledge it and call it honestly. Seems to be my song, turning to the material world of crumpled leaves on winter trees.

Do you know what I mean?

Prabhupāda singing:

saṁsāra-dāvānala-līḍha-loka . . .

Running out of time on this one—less than two minutes to go. *Saṁsāra dāva:* this world could go up in a blaze for any of us at any time. One devotee told me that she fell into a coma. The devotees came to visit her in the hospital. She wanted to see them because they were speaking so sweetly and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. For two days she worked hard to open her right eye. It took all her effort and two days of her life, but she finally succeeded. It was nice to know that you can hear while you're in a coma. She heard people come into the room saying, "Is she dead yet?" and other things to which she couldn't relate.

Our "blaze" may not mean falling into a coma, but the end is coming and it will be no joke. Whether we're ambiguous or not won't mean a damn. Death does not tolerate ambiguity. Once this life is over, it's over, and we have to count our winnings and losses. "Kṛṣṇa, I *wanted* to think of You," but who we actually are keeps getting in the way. And we get assigned to the next life to try again. Cry and gnash your teeth, but it's too late. Go and satisfy your material desires.

Do you know what I mean?

2

Prabhupāda singing:
saṁsāra-dāvānala-līḍha-loka . . .

Haribol. It's January 28 and I'm on the air to discuss Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Heard that there was an armed robbery in the temple in Guyana, fire in the Crimean, eruptions on the skin, temples in the Himalayas, jokes on Main Street, stripping of the birch trees, crumpling up of the oak leaves, winter in the Maine desert, prayer of the heart, St. Therese, Brother Aelred, William Burroughs, Hare Kṛṣṇa.

I once sat in the barber chair of—what was his name? Fiorelli? The Italian barber in Great Kills Village. Imagine going back there now as a devotee. It would freak them out. I wouldn't have the guts to do it. I *had* the guts to do it in 1966 just after the Swami had rescued me, but visiting them and trying to give them Kṛṣṇa consciousness seemed like an impossible mission. When I went back to see my sister to recruit her and her husband as trustees of Swamijī's fledgling ISKCON, I parroted Swamijī's words with conviction. I wasn't a cultist, but I hadn't yet learned to speak in my own voice. I hadn't learned to enunciate the philosophy with personal realization, although my heart had changed. I knew I wasn't taken in by an Indian "god," and Swamijī had not imposed "his" Kṛṣṇa on me. Love of Kṛṣṇa was already in me and Swamijī awoke it. No one has to teach what comes naturally. It would have taken someone expert, though, to see inside my fanatical, new convert veneer to see how I had been touched. The people I knew in Great

Kills Village just weren't up to that—not my parents, not my sister and her husband, not old Fiorelli, the barber.

Prabhupāda singing:

saṁsāra-dāvānala-līḍha-loka . . .

I already told you about a Godsister who went into a coma and heard people asking in her room, "Is she dead yet?" She wanted to see the devotees. It took her two full days of effort to open her right eye. I didn't tell you, though, that she said that for years she hadn't been chanting, but had been engaging in sinful activities to the max. After meeting the devotees in New York City again, somehow or other back at her place, she tried to chant again. She said it was like being a mummy. By chanting, she felt herself peeling off layer after layer of covering until she again remembered that she was a devotee, that Swamijī had loved her, that she was meant to be Kṛṣṇa conscious.

My dear friends, dear radio congregation, this is your announcer. There was a time when Vince Skully and Red Barber, who broadcast the games from Ebbets field, would say during World War II, "There is good news tonight," or, "There is bad news tonight," in those grave, rolling tones Gabriel Heater used. Well, what does a Hare Kṛṣṇa have to say? Does he speak like Billy Graham or as if he were part of a panel of religious experts? "Mr. Guarino (or shall I call you Satsvarūpa dāsa?), according to your faith, what is the meaning of religion?"

"Thank you for asking, Billy. In the Sanskrit language—the *Vedas* are written in Sanskrit and are at least five thousand years old—'religion' is known as *dharma,* a term which is difficult to translate into English. *Dharma* does not refer to

something appropriate. I'll just dig in and repeat something that Prabhupāda said.

Here's something he said: there is a difference between theoretical and realized knowledge. To illustrate this point, he told the story of the time he was at work in Subhas Candra Bose's chemical laboratory in Calcutta. The firm owned a sulfuric acid chamber. Well, that machine wasn't working one day, so all the big scientists conferred, consulted books, looked at the machine, and tried to figure out how to make it work. But they couldn't. Then Subhas Candra Bose, the intelligent manager, at once sent a messenger to another chemical firm and asked an ordinary laborer there to please come over. This man was a laborer, but he was experienced with machines. He came into the lab, looked at the ailing chamber, and worked at it for a few minutes. Soon, it was producing acid again. Experience is important, and even a simple person can have it.

I forget if there were more details in his telling of that story, but just knowing how Prabhupāda taught, I can conclude the analogy by saying that the "experience" to which he was referring in his reference to devotional service is feeling love for Kṛṣṇa. We don't have to become great *tapasvīs* or have a vast material or even spiritual education. All we need is devotion, and an ordinary person can have it just as easily as a learned scholar. Sometimes even easier.

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

I have experienced that Kṛṣṇa is present in Prabhupāda's books. That I can say honestly. I can prove the experience, at least to myself, because I feel my Kṛṣṇa consciousness

take that further. Does that mean, then, that the author is more like a tape recorder than a human being with a heart and mind of his own? Or, does it mean that God inspired him to write from his own heart with his own expression?

Rather than split such hairs, I prefer to present it simply: God is present in the words of scriptures as they have been recorded by Śrīla Vyāsadeva.

Another meaning of "inspired" is that God is present—injected into—the hearts of the receptive audience. Again, we could pursue this more technically. Does that mean that the hearers have to be qualified, and in what way? Is God present in an intellectual sense? Partially? And again, I want to make the simplest presentation: when the audience is receptive to hearing the scriptures from a bona fide source, God will be present and will reveal Himself.

This is another aspect of getting in touch with myself. When I give myself a good amount of time to read Prabhupāda's books, I tend to actually hear the message. Then I can pause and wait and anticipate and perceive Kṛṣṇa's presence, and feel what that's like. All from praying. And reading. Kṛṣṇa speaks to us when we read. Unless we read, we won't be practiced at allowing His divine words to enter our being.

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

Put me on a cushion in front of fifty people in a room in the suburbs (and make sure some are standing at the door, all eager to hear), and I bet that I won't pause for more than three, four, or five seconds before coming out with

I don't want to be forced to live a life filled only with social reflexes that have nothing to do with the self. For example, someone wrote me a letter and said that they like to read my books because they're honest. In another letter, someone else added "humble." It was nice to hear, but I know myself that those are qualities I have not attained. They are only aspirations. My definition of "honest" and "humble" may not be the same as how those letter writers define those words. If I'm sounding off, getting something off my chest, and it comes across as assertive and true, is that the same as saying something honest? Maybe I'm just opinionated. Humility has to be measured not only by what is said but by the motive behind it. Just because you speak your two cents' worth and then add that you could be wrong, or that your two cents might not be universally applicable, doesn't make you humble. Maybe your admittance was staged by a *desire* to appear humble. Ah! That's good. Uriah Heep is an 'umble man.

The more I try to trace these things out, the more I see that to speak about them in front of an audience chills my speech and makes me unable to be either honest or humble.

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

Tonight I am scheduled to do a home program a half hour from Baltimore. I am prepared to advocate the reading of *Bhāgavatam* to the devotees. One point I want to assert is that the Vedic scriptures are inspired.

What does that mean, "inspired"? Technically, it means that God is coming through the inspired author. We could

4

Prabhupāda singing:
cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

Hare Kṛṣṇa. Broadcasting from Jaya Gaurasundara's house.

I was thinking that I want to get in touch with myself. That's a cliché, isn't it? Just imagine someone reaching out and touching himself. What can it possibly mean? Is it just the jargon of pop psych, similar to "healing" and "self-esteem"?

Maybe, but I still think it's important. When I find I have too many obligations to fulfill, I lose touch with my inner purposes. That is especially true when I don't take the time to write.

Maybe I should be embarrassed to sit before this microphone and say that. What do I expect the listeners to say? "Okay, go ahead then. Get in touch with yourself. What *is* it you want to say?"

Well, I don't know. It's just more delicate than that.

Oh, what a delicate flower I am. Do I have nothing to say? I feel like a shy kid hiding behind his mother's skirts. I just don't perform well in public, no matter what I know how to do in the privacy of my own home. People get tired of such a tedious child.

Here's what I want to say: I want to be alone. I want to be able to have the time to go beyond the usual clichés we all tend to live out in our lives.

There.

"As sure as death."

"Death on the installment plan."

I see death in the petering out pine boughs. It stares me in the face when I look at the dried up leaves of the oak or feel the pain behind my right eye. Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd boys have eternal, spiritual bodies. That means that death is not the end. It has no dominion over the spirit soul, who goes on to another body, who knows Kṛṣṇa, who is full in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagavad-gītā* that one who understands His birth and activities will not take birth again in this material world but will attain Him.

While we try to understand, we shouldn't disturb those who don't want to hear, but we should help those who do. And we should go on practicing our own *bhajana,* even while looking out the window of a moving car traveling from Stroudsburg to Baltimore. How much longer?

"They swim very deep in the ocean."

Then in Philadelphia, Ravīndra-svarūpa asked about skepticism. Śrīla Prabhupāda replied:

"Skepticism, rascalism. We are not going to deal with rascalism. We are going to deal with sense. Skepticism means they do not believe in anything. . . . They are so disappointed, they think everything is false. . . . So why one should be disappointed? We say that 'You come to the spiritual platform. You will be happy.' . . . You see Kṛṣṇa's picture anywhere, how they are happy. The *gopīs* are happy, the cowherd boys are happy, Kṛṣṇa is happy. Simply happiness. Where is disappointment? So you come to that platform. Then you will be also happy. You come to Kṛṣṇa. Dance with Kṛṣṇa. Eat with Kṛṣṇa. And that is information we are giving. . . . Otherwise, if they are not happy, how the man, woman, the boy, the child, the father, the mother, the black and white, everyone is dancing. Why? This is the platform of happiness. So we are inviting, 'Come to this platform. Why you should remain disappointed?'"

Snowy woods on our next to last day here, but like I said, the snow isn't serious.

Prabhupāda singing:

hari haraye namaḥ . . .

Don't make Kṛṣṇa consciousness a fancy accompaniment to this material sojourn as if matter is everything, your own life has ultimate value, your work, and you're going to be published in New Directions paperbacks or something. Do something useful because the end is near.

Death. We who are about to die salute you. "Ours is not to reason why. Ours is but to do or die."

Kṛṣṇa bestows both, by His mercy, especially on those who love Him in Vṛndāvana. When it's necessary, He acts as God and lifts a mountain with the small finger of His left hand, just to show the king of heaven that subduing him is the business of His pinky. That is Kṛṣṇa.

We sit and we hear Prabhupāda speaking while we eat lunch, or at any time, at Brooklyn's Henry Street temple in 1971. Noises of the rough Italian neighborhood outside. Just inside, just a few yards away, on the other side of the wall, with his back to the street, was Śrīla Prabhupāda on his lotus *vyāsāsana,* speaking to a packed room of earnest devotees. The building used to be a convent. The devotees carried forth the tradition of austerity.

In the winter, the devotees would seal the windows with cellophane. They would also sing their hearts out at the evening *āratis*. When they were singing, that was the only time they couldn't hear the noises of the neighborhood. The girls were full of earnest purity and emotion, surrendering to Rādhā-Govinda, and the men were for that half hour free of their gripes, just wanting to surrender. Prabhupāda went there, and I did too, and here I am still, listening to him there while the Henry Street noises sound in the background.

How can we understand Prabhupāda? Yesterday, I heard him speaking in Melbourne. He was speaking about eagles so large that they could grab elephants in their talons and fly off. The audience laughed—the audience, his own devotees, present for the morning class. "Don't laugh. It's not a joke."

Then he told about the *timiṅgila* fish, which are so huge that they can eat whales. Someone asked, "How come we don't see them in the oceans?"

from the temple president on how the devotees are doing. The BTG house is gone, and my editorship is gone. With it, so are many of my obligations. Now I am a traveling *sannyāsī*. That role will be gone one day too. Then what will I have left?

The fact that death is coming is common knowledge among devotees, but what can we do about it? We're not *trikāla-jñā*. We don't know where we've been and we don't really know where we're going. We're left with nothing to do but move ahead in the best way that we can determine, with the snow slashing at our eyes and the huskies and wolves howling around us. We have to keep going, sliding over the icy white. If we stop, we'll freeze to death or be lost.

Prabhupāda singing:

hari haraye namaḥ . . .

I'd like to go deeper and speak more freely, and not be worried what it is or where it's going. I'd like to speak as if I were all alone, desiring to speak my heart to Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda says, explaining "*Jaya rādhā-mādhava,*" that Kṛṣṇa is the original Personality of Godhead, Brajajana. Brajajana-vallabha. "*Yaśodā-nandana, braja-jana-rañjana.*" He is dear to all the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana. All the Vrajavāsīs love Kṛṣṇa under any condition. They don't even demand that He be God. They simply love Kṛṣṇa. In return, Kṛṣṇa loves them unconditionally.

Brajajana prefers to be subservient to His devotees. Therefore, devotees offer the service of becoming His superiors. His father reprimands Him, His mother worries. When Kṛṣṇa wants to fight, the cowherd boys wrestle with Him. Unconditional service means unconditional love, and

Philadelphia to Gītā-nāgarī to Washington, D.C. Of course, I also had to go to New York City because I was the zonal guru for that place, and Vancouver for the same reason. The pressure of all those visits was tremendous. I remember it now and cringe. How did I ever survive? How did any of us survive?

There are people here and there who didn't survive it unscathed, who resent those days and resent me. They think I cheated them. I just can't see it that way. Although I'm sorry for those days, sorry that the whole movement was in error, sorry that I was in error, I gave the devotees whatever I could of Prabhupāda's association.

In any case, ISKCON is plunging ahead through the snow, cracking the whip over the huskies as it sledges off to the South Pole, then off to the North Pole, then west and east to distribute books. Bodies are strewn along the way. Well, that may be true, but I still can't buy that the trip is so destructive that it shouldn't be undertaken at all. Anyway, I brought this up here only to thank Kṛṣṇa for getting me through.

I don't travel in that old way anymore. I remember being in Philadelphia, staying at the old BTG house that Śamīka Ṛṣi had generously bought for us. Originally, he was going to live there, but then he decided to move to where he lives now. It was a nice, comfortable house to be used only by the BTG staff.

I was editor-in-chief in those days and used the house along with the others. I wrote poems there too. Although I liked to go there, however, even then I was aware that everything would eventually end for me. I'm no longer the GBC of that huge project in Philadelphia that required so much money and manpower. I no longer listen to reports

In earlier times, it was probably quite shocking to depart from Biblical authority. Now practically everyone is secular, so it's not so shocking. Indeed, the free-thinkers proved to be dependent on the ideas of authorities like Darwin and Newton. They couldn't concoct *everything* for themselves. Rather, it seems they were eclectics in the name of being humanists.

Devotees speak on Kṛṣṇa's authority. Where *we* run into difficulty is when we speak on authority without personal realization. Not that there's anything ultimately wrong with that, but when what we say hasn't been tested by practical experience, we may have to sometimes step away from the perfect presentation to admit doubt or pain, mundane emotion or foolishness. How can we pretend to be free of pain? Pretense would be the worst thing. Better to say "ouch" when it hurts and pray that such honesty helps us turn to Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda singing:

hari haraye namaḥ . . .

Tomorrow is the day we have to pack everything and prepare to travel to Baltimore. I'm already making my plans how to use the car trip, even though car trips usually mean headaches. Because of the headaches, I always take a pillow and blanket into the back seat so I can lie down if I need to.

In Baltimore, I'll lecture each day of the weekend. Sometimes I wonder how many more trips to Baltimore I have left in me. How many more times will I be allowed to go there and speak before I die?

I used to go to Baltimore as the GBC man for the area. My Northeast American zone extended from Baltimore to

"How did it so happen that King Parīkṣit met this great sage, making it possible for this great transcendental essence of the *Vedas* [*Bhāgavatam*] to be sung to him?"

"He [Śukadeva Gosvāmī] was accustomed to stay at the door of a householder only long enough for a cow to be milked. And he did this just to sanctify the residence."

The stage has been set for the hearing of *Bhāgavatam.*

Prabhupāda singing:

hari haraye namaḥ . . .

Hare Kṛṣṇa. Alone at Śamīka Ṛṣi's house, feeling small in my chair, but also full of confidence. I feel like praising Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda.

Tongue, you may be surprised to hear, you are the first sense we engage in devotional service. Of all the senses, you are the most difficult to control because when you are engaged, all the other senses become involved. That means you are most prominent among the senses. Therefore, we engage you by speaking about Kṛṣṇa. You form the words—the palates, the dentials, the labials (with the help of the lips)—always seeking a place on the roof of the mouth behind the teeth to speak what the brain urges. Speak only about Kṛṣṇa. Nothing else has any value. And don't speculate.

Remember the phrase "free-thinkers"? Those people really grabbed a good word to describe themselves. Makes you wonder what the opposite is. An imprisoned thinker? An unfree thinker? Free-thinkers don't follow authority, especially scripture, although they claim that they are free not to be atheists. No, they are speculators.

can't. It won't. Because all of our hearts are contaminated regardless of our bank balance. Therefore, this material world is a place of suffering, of birth, death, disease, and old age. The only work we need to do here is toward getting out.

kasmin yuge pravṛtteyaṁ
sthāne vā kena hetunā
kutaḥ sañcoditaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ
kṛtavān saṁhitāṁ muniḥ

"In what period and at what place was this first begun, and why was this taken up? From where did Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana Vyāsa, the great sage, get the inspiration to compile this literature?"

Good questions, aren't they? The sages want to understand. They know that Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana Vyāsa already wrote the *Mahābhārata* and compiled the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads,* but they have heard that the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is transcendental to those other literatures. Therefore, Śaunaka asks Sūta to speak on this topic in order to glorify the super-excellent position of the *Bhāgavatam.*

tasya putro mahā-yogī,
sama-dṛṅ nirvikalpakaḥ
ekānta-matir unnidro,
gūḍho mūḍha iveyate

"His [Vyāsadeva's] son was a great devotee, an equibalanced monist, whose mind was always concentrated in monism. He was transcendental to mundane activities, but being unexposed, he appeared like an ignorant person."

to enter their hearing and chanting. Some devotees may think the stories in the *Bhāgavatam* are mythical; others think they are irrelevant. Some think neither, but are neglectful nevertheless. Mahārāja Parīkṣit saw it as giving the relief he needed to face the time of death and what lay beyond. We need it too.

Śaunaka said, "O Sūta Gosvāmī, you are the most fortunate and respected of all those who can speak and recite. Please relate the pious message of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam,* which was spoken by the great and powerful sage, Śukadeva Gosvāmī."

Here Prabhupāda's purport describes how both the audience and the speaker must be qualified.

Prabhupāda singing:

hari haraye namaḥ . . .

Turn back to the time when the *Bhāgavatam* was spoken. Visualize the great sages hearing the sublime topics. If you want to meditate on that time, you have to turn your back on the nonsense whirlwind recorded in the newspapers—what's going on in Washington, D.C., who is leading Congress, how the Republicans plan to defeat the Democrats. The journalists go round and round. Don't go with them into that apparently real but truthfully illusory world of politics, poverty, suffering, and war. True, it *feels* real enough. *Māyā* is tricky. The rich appear greedy—are greedy—and the poor are poor. We all acknowledge that. But the *Bhāgavatam* lifts us beyond rich versus poor, Republicans verses Democrats, and tells us straight that it's never going to be all right even if the war in Bosnia is stopped and the inner city ghetto people are uplifted. It

incarnation of God, compiled by Śrīla Vyāsadeva, who delivered it to his son, Śukadeva. Next, Śaunaka Ṛṣi congratulates Sūta.

śaunaka uvāca
sūta sūta mahā-bhāga
vada no vadatāṁ vara
kathāṁ bhāgavatīṁ puṇyāṁ
yad āha bhagavān chukaḥ

I am warming up to speak on these topics at a couple of home programs next weekend. I think I'll introduce the *Bhāgavatam* by speaking about its importance. This morning I found myself feeling deeply how contaminating everything is that we touch. I look at a book, *The Best Poetry Of 1994.* This isn't supposed to be trash literature by material standards; it contains the best poems from the American literary and poetry magazines. But it is trash. It's filled with sex, atheism, and confusion—all in the name of art. Looking at it for a few moments made me eager to return to the purity of the *Bhāgavatam.* It seems like I'm always facing that—going out on some errand or other and then returning to the *Bhāgavatam.* Better late than never, I guess. I mean, finding my regular reading practice again and again. Mahārāja Parīkṣit knew he was about to die, and he spent his last week on earth hearing the *Bhāgavatam.* It is important.

My audience at those home programs will be devotees. Most of them are firmly convinced of the philosophy, but many of them have to work out in the world. I want to encourage them to stay free of contamination, and especially any contamination that allows the voice of doubt

3

Prabhupāda singing:

hari haraye namaḥ . . .

Hare Kṛṣṇa. I want to do something revolutionary on this show today, something really far out. I want to read *Bhāgavatam* on the air. I have been hankering to return to my own regular reading of *Bhāgavatam,* so I thought, "Well, why mess around on the radio show? Just read." I'm reading the fourth chapter of the First Canto, "The Appearance of Śrī Nārada."

vyāsa uvāca
iti bhruvāṇaṁ saṁstūya
muīnāṁ dīrgha-satriṇām
vṛddhaḥ kula-patiḥ sūtaṁ
bahvṛcaḥ śaunako 'bravīt

"On hearing Sūta Gosvāmī speak thus, Śaunaka Muni, who was the elderly learned leader of all the *ṛṣis* engaged in that prolonged sacrificial ceremony, congratulated Sūta Gosvāmī by addressing him as follows."

Sūta Gosvāmī was saying in the previous chapter that he was now going to speak the *Bhāgavatam* as he heard it when Śukadeva Gosvāmī recited it to Mahārāja Parīkṣit. Sūta Gosvāmī had listened with rapt attention, and he now wanted to speak it according to his realization. In his introduction, he spoke glowingly of the *Bhāgavatam* in verses like *kṛṣṇe sva-dhāmopagate,* "The *Bhāgavatam* is as brilliant as the sun." He also declared that the *Bhāgavatam* is the

Hello, folks, this is your radio show host. I just stepped out of the studio for five minutes. I thought I heard some chatter? I hope that sorcerer's apprentice didn't conduct anything unseemly while I was away from the microphone. Now, what mantra of *Īsopaniṣad* were we up to?

No, let's remember. I remember ISKCON in the 1940s.

ISKCON in the 1940s? It wasn't formed yet!

Yes, it had been formed because ISKCON is Śrīla Prabhupāda—wherever he was. In the 1940s he was living in Calcutta on Sita Banerjee Lane. Imagine him, visualize him wearing a vest and a white *dhotī*, sitting in the outer room that was his office, apart from the family. Sometimes B.R. Śrīdhara Mahārāja and Gosvāmī Mahārāja, who were tenants of a building he owned just down the block, would come and talk with him. This was after the Gaudiya Math had broken apart. Those particular Godbrothers hadn't gotten much, so they lived in those small rooms and would come to talk with Prabhupāda. Apparently, they discussed the verse, *yasyāham anugrhṇāmi, harişye tad-dhanam śanaiḥ.* Prabhupāda took it personally; he thought it applied to him. Who knew how right he was? Later, he told us that Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura instructed the editor of *The Harmonist*, "Whatever he writes, publish it." Remembering ISKCON in the 1940s—it's only remembrance of Prabhupāda.

ultimate development and becomes the pure servant of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is the all-attractive Supreme Personality of Godhead."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Satsvarūpa, for sharing with us . . . "

Prabhupāda singing:

saṁsāra-dāvānala-līḍha-loka . . .

Nikuñja-yūno . . . You mean—yeah, you *do* mean serving the *gopīs* in the forests of Vṛndāvana! Come on, you don't mean you're doing *that,* do you? The spiritual master is supposed to do that, but you're not saying that *you* do that, are you? I mean, I knew you when. You used to attend Hare Kṛṣṇa New Year's Eve parties and drink "near beer" and eat tofu hotdogs. I *know* you.

Nikuñja-yūno rati-keli-siddhyai.

"What the hell is he talking about?" a GBC subcommittee asks as they listen to the latest batch of radio show tapes. "He has gone off the deep end. Too many . . . "

I know.

"He also said something irreverent about the Centennial!"

"And he doesn't subscribe to the newsletter!"

"No, no," says another—the one who is now GBC of the Lost Islands, which he won after a bitter battle through subcommittees up to the plenary sessions of the whole body. "He's blaspheming the Vaiṣṇavas, and he's *stabbing* our founder-*ācārya* in the back!"

Well, no. I'm just drawing pictures in blazing tempera colors of Lord Caitanya's *saṅkīrtana.* You'd think I was a five-year-old in kindergarten. It just goes to show what happens to people who give up management.

any particular religious denomination, such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, or Buddhism, but to the constitutional nature of the living entity. By 'constitutional nature' we mean that nature which cannot be changed, which is, by definition, eternal, or in Sanskrit, *sanātana.* The eternal religion of a living being is known, therefore, as *sanātana-dharma.* That nature cannot be changed no matter how many times one changes one's religious denomination. And what is that nature? It has nothing to do with the body, nothing to do with gender, nothing to do with nationality, nothing even to do with the species in which we find ourselves, because all of these changes from one life to another come according to the laws of karma. It has only to do with the soul. If we observe that basic activity in which every living entity is engaged, we will discover that the constitutional nature is to serve. It may sound odd that we would choose this one quality out of all others, but if one were to analyze this quality in the light of modern science, one would see that it is this one activity that all nature pursues.

"Let me explain a little more about 'constitutional nature.' The 'constitutional nature' of sugar is to be sweet; the 'constitutional nature' of water is its liquidity. If water loses its liquidity, it is no longer water. If sugar loses its sweetness, it is not sugar. Similarly, all living entities are essentially serving one another. Parents serve their children, the children their parents, and one living being, by nature's law, provides facility for others. This is as true for the humblest living entity as for the most powerful. Aside from service to others, each entity also serves his or her senses. When all these varied services are purified by knowledge, austerity, awareness, and so on, the living entity reaches his or her

and the service to "play my flute" for them. The trouble is that if you try too hard to entertain the Vaiṣṇavas from the conditioned state, you can become more like a dancing dog than an honest Vaiṣṇava yourself. You might end up selecting material methods of presentation because you know they like it. You might jazz it up, for example. They don't always like it too slow, or too pure, and you might work to actually give them a mixture. Too much concentration on an audience can do that to you.

Playing for the audience doesn't seem to be pure devotion either, not even in the name of Vaiṣṇava *saṅga*. There is something to be said for this difficult-to-attain state of crying out to Kṛṣṇa in solitude—because you are alone—and yet knowing that you are in the association of devotees and the alone cry will please them.

Don't ask me to sort it out completely.

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

the desire other than to love Kṛṣṇa. Reading those passages felt like examining the levels of devotion under a microscope. Imagine suffering from the desire to want to know God's power. Too much *jñāna* and not enough *prema.*

What if while in the pit you call out with material desire? Or, what if you are so advanced that you don't call out for the Lord to deliver you from the pit, but you just feel your dependence on Him? You may still want the Lord to reveal Himself to you, to see His supremacy and power so that you can feel your servitorship that much stronger. But the pure devotee doesn't want that either. All he prays for is love of God and eternal devotional service. That includes knowing Kṛṣṇa, but it's a different kind of knowing. The pure devotee wants to know Him in whatever way enhances his devotional service.

It seems that mixed devotion is a stage over which we cannot simply jump. We need to inquire into God's nature, into our relationship with Him, and into the mechanism of everyone's relationship with Him. At the same time, we shouldn't be bewildered about what is the highest goal.

Play your flute, boy. Pray that Kṛṣṇa will please accept the sound. I wish to purify myself as far as I am able and to direct the sound only for His pleasure and the pleasure of the devotees.

Yet I can't cry out to Kṛṣṇa alone. It seems that I want to serve Him by doing something serviceable for His Vaiṣṇavas. What about that? That means that the "pit" position is itself a little mixed. What is this desire to be alone? I don't want to be *all* alone. The pit man did not *want* to be alone. He was forced to be alone and he made the best of his situation. Therefore, I'm realizing that total aloneness is artificial. Kṛṣṇa has given me the association of the devotees

6

Prabhupāda singing:
cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

I wanted to feel the "pit" theme. That is, to be alone and to speak to Kṛṣṇa. One of the most poignant things I can do in such a situation is to beg Kṛṣṇa to direct me. We can't demand Kṛṣṇa's mercy; we can't demand love of God. A devotee should take a beggar's attitude.

I had a conversation with Jaya Gaurasundara this morning. He asked me to explain some passages from the *Bhāgavatam* where the difference between mixed devotion and pure devotion is described. Under mixed devotion, the *Bhāgavatam* lists the following material taints: the desire to know the position of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the desire to know one's relationship with the Supreme, and the desire to end material suffering and to have the life of eternal bliss and knowledge.

Wow! Those are material desires?! I guess they are. You can have material taints in your desire for spiritual advancement. Prabhupāda wrote in the purport that beyond mixed devotion is pure devotion, and he gave the example of the Vraja *gopīs* because they were not interested in knowledge about God or of the relationship between the infinitesimal soul and the Supreme. Neither were they seeking relief from misery. Their only desire was service and the exchange of love.

When we understand this discussion, we are forced to admit that our struggle isn't very elevated. It also helps us to understand how even spiritual states can remain mixed with

numbers, dear tuned-in listeners, dear subscribers, folks, family, tribe, disciples, those whom I serve. Dear friends, I'm all alone in this pit, screech owling to the Lord, "Please accept my humble obeisances as I die. My time is running out. I tried to serve You. I wanted to serve You. Now I don't know what will become of me or where I will go next. Whatever happens, I pray I may be able to serve the devotees again and also have the opportunity to become a better devotee in my next life."

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

That's Swamijī singing *Brahma-saṁhitā* verses in 1965 in New York City all alone. He wasn't disappointed, but he was certainly struggling. He thought he might have to return to India without accomplishing his wonderful plans. He wanted to bring Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa to New York City and to establish a temple for *pracāra* and *prasādam* distribution.

Śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu nityānanda, śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura bhakta-vṛnda. Kṛṣṇa is the reservoir of all pleasure, the source of everything. Try to understand. Although He plays the flute in Vṛndāvana, He is in a human-like form. That same cowherd boy is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. That form is the most powerful form, inconceivably powerful. Power doesn't mean muscles or many hands. The muscles and multiple hands appear in His expansions. Still, Kṛṣṇa in His original form is the power behind all power. He is so powerful that He can simply play, make no display of power, yet do everything by His will.

"I would believe in a God who could dance," said Nietszche. Nietszche also asked, when he was young and was dragged to church by his parents, "Why don't the Christians look redeemed?" You can't fake that look. Kṛṣṇa *looks* like the reservoir of all pleasure. He is Rasarāja enjoying with His dearmost friends.

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

In two minutes our show will be over. I hope I am not bending your ear too much, dear audience, dear seated

pointed. They spoke about their disappointment on a tape. The idea was to speak about some deep disappointment they had experienced in devotional service, but most of them spoke about how I didn't come to the engagement and how disappointing that was. Maybe they made too much of it. Let it go.

I'm moving from that to remembrance of Swamijī. *Kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa he.* "What was that song you sang at the airport, Swamijī?" the devotees asked, referring to the time he left New York for India perhaps never to return. He wrote them back:

> *kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa he,*
> *kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa he,*
> *kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa pahi māṁ,*
> *kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa rakṣa māṁ,*
> *rāma raghava rāma raghava rāma raghava rakṣa māṁ,*
> *kṛṣṇa keśava kṛṣṇa keśava kṛṣṇa keśava pahi māṁ.*

Haṁsadūta passed around a soldier's hat to request donations for Swamijī. We were certainly feeling disappointed that day. Swamijī was leaving and might never come back. There is a photo—someone from Air India took it—of all of us standing around him, looking sad. Jadurāṇī's face is like a caricature of a sad person—mouth downturned, eyes half closed. Kīrtanānanda had a scintillating smile. I know what was already on his mind as he stood there in his black, wool suit with his slightly bent frame. He suffered too. Rāyarāma, "Good-bye, Swamijī." We were full of Swamijī and feeling shaky, but we had our duties on his behalf. Those are sweet days to remember. And there I go again, this time into the past.

have heard of a malaria outbreak in Guyana. After we leave Baltimore, we plan to go to the Caribbean, and Guyana is part of the itinerary. We talked back and forth about what to do, and we finally decided to call someone to find out if the rumors were even true. Then we began to discuss the more immediate trip to Denver. Then we backed up even further to what we would do after breakfast.

The more you live in the future, the shorter your present seems to become. You draw up your calendar of events, meditate on them as they approach, then even while living them out, you have your mind focused on what will come after. Suddenly you realize that you just lived through four weeks without even noticing it, without even using it fully in the ways that you had planned. The present is destroyed moment by moment.

What does it actually mean to live in the present? Do we think moment to moment existence is some kind of sense gratification? Maybe it's a moment of surrender, and maybe it just takes too much to give up the false ego so thoroughly all day long. And that's why we don't do it, which is also why we can't pay attention right now to the holy name. We would prefer always to be aspiring, moving on, planning for the time when we will surrender, for that next *gāyatrī* or quota of rounds to fulfill.

What about my present right now? I'm here, sitting in this chair with the low back, and I don't have a headache. How does my body feel? I feel tightness around my waist, tension in the back of my neck, but overall, pretty good. Relaxed. Plenty of time to think of Kṛṣṇa.

The word "disappointment" just popped into my brain. When I had to cancel the second of the three engagements I was scheduled to give, some of the devotees were disap-

everyone, even Cupid, but She attracts Him. "That is out of love," Śrīla Prabhupāda says.

Out of the fullness of love, Kṛṣṇa agrees to be conquered by Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, who is nondifferent from Himself the way a flower and its aroma are nondifferent. Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī also expands Herself into many *gopīs,* and Kṛṣṇa enjoys with each of them. The details of Their "lusty affairs," as they are sometimes called, Their *prema,* is told in many scriptures. Those details are really meant for the liberated souls, those who have no taint of material lust. I am not one of them.

There are persons who may actually be competent to guide other competent persons into relishing the many details of the conjugal *rasa,* as appreciated so much by Rūpa Gosvāmī, Raghunātha Gosvāmī, and others; our spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, rightly thought that we were not *so* liberated, *so* free of sex desire that we could hear these details and not have our mundane sex desire aroused. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Still, it's Valentine's Day, so I will acknowledge that Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā are the ideal couple to exchange that mellow, and that at some distant time, in some distant birth, I hope to assist Them in Vṛndāvana.

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

Doing a radio show means living in the present. I thought about that this morning while walking over the crusty snow. I should live in the present. Most people live in the future. For example, this morning when I was walking with Madhu, I found myself wondering and worrying about the rumors I

5

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

Aravinda, Kṛṣṇa. Here I am, speaking presumptuously. When you hear other people speak, you see their limits and you judge. That probably makes it harder to speak yourself, to make it on your own hot air.

It's Valentine's Day today. Another money-making day in the material world. Those paper cut-out hearts, all those people turning to other people and telling them of their undying love. Of course, Valentine's Day is supposed to be about cupidity, lust and sex and romance, but nowadays, they've spread out the concept so widely that you send Valentines to your mother or brother or to people you barely know. You're supposed to express love wherever you can.

Romance originates in *ādi-rasa.* Kṛṣṇa has romantic feelings, just as He has bellicose feelings, feelings of wanting to be parented, boyish feelings, and chivalry. Therefore, He expands His *hlādinī-śakti* as Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. In effect, He becomes two and enjoys conjugal pastimes. He doesn't do this out of lust or a sense of incompleteness as we try to do it in the material world, but out of abundant desire. The Absolute is not a dead stone. He is also supremely powerful because when He experiences desire, He immediately fulfills it by His own potency.

He plays with all-attractive Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, who attracts even the all-attractive Kṛṣṇa, Madana-mohana-mohanī. She's the attractor of Madana-mohana. He attracts

devotees and to all living entities. I regret them all. I wish I could have been better, that I had preached more, performed more austerities, tried harder to surrender and serve. I regret my illusioned, conditioned self.

Get in touch with myself? Get in touch with this person, this Satsvarūpa dāsa who is the servant of Kṛṣṇa, not the Satsvarūpa dāsa who is bones and flesh. That bones-and-flesh person will die, and soon. He's my vehicle, so I don't hate him, but I need to use him to get to You. What else can I do?

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

Take it easy, man. Cool down. Remember Kṛṣṇa's mantras. Take a deep breath and chant a few.

ether and the ability in man. He is ever-present in the hearts of His pure devotees.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Vraja-Kṛṣṇa. The Vrajavāsīs love only Kṛṣṇa. They no longer look for sense gratification. Rather, they want only to please Kṛṣṇa. That's the pivotal point by which we can measure our own Kṛṣṇa consciousness: how much are we acting simply for Kṛṣṇa's pleasure, and to what degree are we acting for our own?

Of course, wanting to please Kṛṣṇa means we know Kṛṣṇa to some degree. Again, scripture is the medium by which we can gain knowledge. Scripture, guru, *sādhu.*

See Him everywhere. Kṛṣṇa is the riff. Kṛṣṇa is the composed melody. Kṛṣṇa is the painting done carefully. Kṛṣṇa is the painting done spontaneously. Kṛṣṇa is the frame of the painting, the content of the painting, the artist's creative brain. Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Truth.

Prabhupāda singing in background.

Kṛṣṇa will save us in the end and He will care for us even now, even if we are unqualified, even if we disqualify ourselves, lose control of our minds, embarrass ourselves. Kṛṣṇa will grab the steering wheel at the time of death and help us to remember Him. He will forgive our discrepancies. He will remember our service. We don't have to ask that of Him. Kṛṣṇa will never forget. He will also remember our connection with guru. So hang on without fear through the inevitable pain. Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa. If I have any piety, please remove the obstacles to my attempt to reach You. I fall at Your feet. O powerful one, more powerful than fire, please let there be no obstacles. Let me think of You only. Please forgive me for the offenses I have committed to Your

becoming nourished when I read them. I can definitely assert that much.

The sages at Naimiṣāraṇya were thankful that Sūta was speaking. They said, "We have just begun the performance of this fruitive activity, a sacrificial fire, without certainty of its result due to the many imperfections in our action. Our bodies have become black from the smoke, but we are factually pleased by the nectar of the lotus feet of the Personality of Godhead, Govinda, which you are distributing." Fortunately for us, Sūta did continue. He explained how now that Kṛṣṇa had left the earth planet, the religious principles reside in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam,* which is more brilliant than the sun. It gives light to those who are lost in the darkness of Kali-yuga.

The *Bhāgavatam* is poetry and I like to recite it. No, I don't have the "experience" of pure devotion—I'm not like that old Muslim laborer who bested the scientists in getting the machine up and running. I'm a groper trying to avoid the next headache. Still, Kṛṣṇa will protect even me. Kṛṣṇa, the bluish boy, the boy the color of a fresh rain cloud, who has two arms and two feet, but who is the inconceivable God of gods. Kṛṣṇa speaks the *Bhagavad-gītā* and loves Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, His own *hlādinī* potency. When Kṛṣṇa plays and dances with the *gopīs,* He is like a child playing with His own image in a mirror. The Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* contains that vision. If only we could chant it properly.

The *Bhagavad-gītā* teaches us that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Truth and the essence of all that is great or wonderful in this world. He is the taste in pure water, the heat and light of the sun, the cooling rays of the moon. He is the sound in

7

Prabhupāda singing:
cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

This is the radio show and I am talking on it, speaking a little lower than usual because it's early in the morning and I'm in a small room in Denver next to the bathroom, which is presently occupied. I won't let that stop me from broadcasting and feeling alone with the walls surrounding me, trying to learn how to speak to Kṛṣṇa from the heart and simultaneously to others.

"My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, please have mercy." There's actually no need to pray for that. Kṛṣṇa has all the mercy and He'll give it to us freely. Then how to pray?

I think of Prabhupāda in his room at 26 Second Avenue where that Reverend Gary Davis pounded his cane, a blind man's cane, on the floor, and said that the difficulty was to know what to pray for. He spoke so loudly that Prabhupāda's softer voice contrasted. He leaned against the wall in such a relaxed but yogic, Eastern, Vaiṣṇava position, beautiful in his saffron, fully himself, and said, "We should pray, 'Please let me love You.'"

I think Thérèse of Lisieux had one prayer, "God, please draw me to You." It's a loving exchange. The tiny living entity wants to love Kṛṣṇa.

Here I am in Denver in an apartment someone has kindly lent me. There are different things left around in the room I am using. I didn't look through the collection of letters from their spiritual master, but I see a hand-printed card that says, "I am such a sinful person, but since I have now

gotten this opportunity, I must completely control my mind, life and senses and always engage in devotional service so that I may not fall again into the deep darkness and ignorance of material life." Under that it says, "Ajāmila, *Bhāg.* 6.2.35." Well said and well quoted.

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

A very strange dream last night. And the night before, I had a dream so rich in metaphor that I could turn it into a short story. It took place in my childhood neighborhood of Great Kills, Staten Island. As you got off the train at Great Kills station and walked toward my old house on Katan Avenue, you would take a shortcut past Kelsy's house, through the alley there. It was a big alley—you could drive through it—and people used to drive trucks to get to Warren's Lumber Yard. The alley connected to Samson Avenue, which was a low, sloping hill that goes right to Katan Avenue. The whole walk equaled about two city blocks.

In my dream I was taking that same route, but it had completely changed from the way I remember it. Contractors had built up the area, and there were also jungles and treacherous sand pits, and the route seemed to take much longer and was constructed as a roundabout. The dream went on and on as I tried to get through what was once an easy shortcut home. Now it was a maze of difficulty.

One problem was that the route now led through a rough neighborhood. The same young hoodlums who attacked our Allston temple were living there. Later, I was told by one Godbrother that I had received wrong

information. Those hoodlums had grown up and moved to Washington, D.C. to work for the mint.

The main emotion in the dream was one of losing hope. I was constantly climbing big towers, sinking into sand, meeting up with old devotees, skirting construction, but no one could lead me through and neither could I find my way out. In the end, I decided to go back to the train station and go the long way around, but that was no longer possible.

As I said, this dream was rich in metaphor. What does it mean? I take it as a symbol of entanglement in the material world. Once you get in, it's almost impossible to get out. If you're not Kṛṣṇa conscious, you can't cut the ropes that bind you. Everything in our lives depends completely on our being Kṛṣṇa conscious immediately. As Nārada told Vyāsa, "You are completely fit to describe the scriptures. You are enlightened in every way and you followed all the vows, but in the books up until now, you have not directly praised Kṛṣṇa. That is the cause of your despondency. You have encouraged people in sense gratification by telling them of the religious processes by which they can attain their material desires. I know your intention was that they gradually be elevated to God consciousness, but they will take advantage of this. They will go for the sense gratification within religion and they won't take to renunciation. You have misled them by the way you presented the literatures." *(Bhāg.* 1.5.8–11) *Jugupsitam:* this is condemned.

Both Nārada and Śrīla Prabhupāda advise that we hear about Kṛṣṇa's activities to remedy our despondency and ills. I didn't do that in the dream, and perhaps that's a reflection of what I don't do in this life. That's what we *all* don't do, at least not enough. Therefore, we go from one

thing to another with a little vain hope, sometimes meeting someone we hope is enlightened, sometimes meeting well-wishers and altruists, but finding, in the end, that no one but guru and Kṛṣṇa can save us from the pits and towers and bad neighborhoods of this world. Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa with devotion. That's the only answer.

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

8

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

Hare Kṛṣṇa. We're off and running this February 18 in our Denver radio station. Imagining that I'm alone, although I'm actually in a house full of people. A thin wall separates me from the bathroom. Madhu is in there doing his morning ablutions. The Denver temple is across the street. I heard police sirens during the night. This is America.

Two hundred million people, so many billion people, and yet each one of us is alone in a separate cell of feelings. The soul does not feel the pain and pleasure of souls encased in any other body, although the Supersoul knows and feels what everyone feels.

Kṛṣṇa is not alone, Prabhupāda used to say, but to the degree that there is something valuable, a part of personhood, which is our individuality separating us from others, well, Kṛṣṇa has that too. At the same time, He is always enjoying pleasure pastimes with His devotees. That's characteristic of Him. It seems that hermit life is either the frustrated sentiment of renunciation, or an act of one who is striving for perfection and wants to avoid all distractions whether they're pleasurable or not. Kṛṣṇa doesn't need either of those reasons—either to be alone or to enjoy with His devotees. He is not striving to perfect anything, and He is not disappointed in His loving affairs with any of His associates. If anything is lacking, He fulfills it by His own will. Therefore, there are no "bad" elements in His life.

Kṛṣṇa is inconceivable. He's so supreme that He is alone in that sense. *Ekala īśvara kṛṣṇa.* No one is equal to Him. *Mattaḥ parataraṁ nanyat.* The fact is, however, that He likes to be subordinate and to associate with His friends and devotees.

I don't look at my own desire to be alone as necessarily a godly quality. I guess it is what it is. It's just as useful to be with qualified devotees who respect your individual practices. In fact, it's better to be with such devotees rather than to be isolated or with those who cannot sympathize or appreciate you.

Last night, someone asked me how to appreciate my poetry. He said, "It seems that your other writings are geared so much to direct Kṛṣṇa conscious teachings in order to instruct and inspire devotees. Your poetry, however, seems geared more toward self-expression."

Self-expression is itself persuasive. When we see that someone is not trying to manipulate us, that all he wants to do is express himself, then I know for myself I always want to listen. Then I said, "I have developed this to a stage where I can do both at the same time: express myself alone and yet desire to share it."

As soon as I said that, I realized not only that I was boasting, but that by blurting it out like that, I would probably lose whatever ability I had to do it. Therefore, I tried to qualify it: "Of course, I have to be careful not to overdo it and fall into pretense. I think I am alone in a scary sense, so scary that I don't want to admit it, the fact that I have to die alone, that nobody knows my innermost heart . . . "

"Nobody knows the troubles I've seen, nobody knows my sorrow. Nobody knows but Jesus." So goes the old black gospel line. It is scary to be alone in the world, but we

shouldn't pretend to be more alone than we are. We're on the path of *bhakti* with many other souls, all of whom experience a variety of what we experience. The danger in talking too much about your aloneness is that instead of practicing solitude, you can end up practicing isolation.

Biographer Leon Edel used to read the literary heroes of his day and demythologize them. He said Ernest Hemingway was a sissy, and that's why he pretended to be so masculine. And he attacked Thoreau by saying that he didn't actually live alone. "He was just trying to give us the impression that he spent more time alone than he actually did. He was more or less a kid playing in the backyard." (Thoreau's defender, Robert Bly, said that if you read Thoreau's passages written in winter, you would see that they could only have been written by a person who knew what winter solitude was.)

My point in mentioning this is that it's possible to playact the profound hermit, and of course, people will see through it anyway. Better to just be yourself. We do want space away from the maddening crowd to read a book and to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. Who doesn't want to be alone, at least some of the time?

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

People don't know our innermost hearts. We go to a temple and people kindly make arrangements for us, buy us whatever we need—socks, a few votive candles—and things we don't need—an extra large sweatshirt, food we can't digest.

I am alone and you are alone, yet we're together in Kṛṣṇa consciousness (or if not, we're thrown together as we

hurdle through the universe). When you're on an airplane, your weight is figured in collectively with all the other passengers' weight. You become a collective entity. Then the plane propels itself forward and our destinies seem to become as collective as our weight, despite the fact that we all sit in different seats.

If you are sitting by an exit and for some reason you don't want to open the exit door in an emergency (which admittedly can be difficult), and if you're not prepared to give orders like a crew member, if you're not prepared to look out the window and ascertain whether there's too much fire or debris at your exit, and to lead your group of passengers to a safer exit—if you don't think you are brave and strong enough to lead everyone into the ocean and out of the burning airplane—then you are supposed to immediately tell the stewardess that you can't cut the mustard. Those who are assigned to exit seats by chance have to face destiny in the face, but yes, even the exit-sitters are alone to face it in the shared, collective space of the airplane.

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

I told them that poems don't have to rhyme anymore. Just yesterday however, a young girl sent me her latest poem, which was full of rhymy chime.

Here's a rhyme: O holy name,/ it's no shame,/ don't be to blame,/ you should take to the holy name.

A person named shame,/ can chant the holy name./ Don't be a bive,/ and don't forget to strive,/ and be careful of the jive/ that comes to mind.

I'm a free-verser,/ not a curser.

Kṛṣṇa will help us tomorrow,/ so don't sorrow.

Now if you want to chant the holy name,/ I say don't blame/ me for singing a song/ which doesn't belong/ in the repertoire of a pure devotee's efforts because this particular jive (and you'll pardon the word) is really absurd. Because Prabhupāda gave us a way to bedevil ourselves. I mean to say (correction please), Prabhupāda gave us a way to work if we're not jerks. You'll accept the board/ and you can afford/ to make the sacrifice of words,/ by which you go forward to chant, serve, and distribute books/ even if you get dirty looks/ in every nook/ and corner and cranny.

Keep on moving,/ keep on grooving/ on the *bhakti-mārga*/ and be happy.

Anyway, this girl wrote me a rhyming poem—not like the rhymes I just made, but a rhyming poem. Then at night I said, "We don't rhyme poems anymore. This is the modern age. We use the free-verse form."

"But why do you write this way? Where's the straight presentation?"

"Look, I love it."

"Yeah, but just because you love something . . . I love to snorkel, and my friend over there loves to dance like a Sufi. I thought you said we weren't supposed to play frivolous sports. How come you can write poems? Who do you think you are, a disciple of William Carlos Williams? Do you still think you're a Brooklyn College poet?"

"Of course not. The swami said I could write poems, and to be poetic is one of the twenty-six qualities of a devotee."

"Yeah, well, we want Kṛṣṇa, we want Rāma, we want Rādhā, we want *saṅkīrtana*. We want fired-up preachers. We want . . . "

"Okay, okay, calm down."

A babble of subpersons to end this radio show. Now everyone sit down, compose yourselves, and we'll have a *kīrtana.*

"I'll lead."

"No, *I'll* lead. Everyone together: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare."

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

This radio show has been brought to you by United Products of West End Boroughs, care of the mile-high city, Denver, Colorado. Prabhupāda walked here, and I did too, and do, in his footsteps. And remember what he said: rich men's sons don't work. Kṛṣṇa takes care of His children, so just join this movement, you fools, and don't be cowboys or nonsense nerds living out a meaningless life in this slaughterhouse state.

9

Prabhupāda singing:
cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

Śrīla Prabhupāda is singing about Kṛṣṇa. How beautiful He is as He plays His flute, His necklace and earrings swinging, His bodily hue like a fresh rain cloud, more beautiful than thousands of Cupids. He wears a peacock feather on His head. *Govindam ādi-puruṣaṁ tam ahaṁ bhajāmi.* Those devotees whose eyes are anointed with the pulp of love of God see this form of Śyāmasundara in the core of their hearts.

I'm pretty far from that vision myself, but I like to talk about it. Nārada Muni said that in a previous millennium when he was just the son of a maidservant, he heard from the *bhaktivedāntas,* who were chanting the Lord's glories. When he took their *prasādam* remnants, he felt his sins wash away and he developed attraction to the Supreme Lord. He realized himself as pure soul, like Kṛṣṇa in quality, and felt his gross and subtle coverings fall away. And so the flow of his devotional service began, never to stop. That's the power and infectious nature of devotional service. What happened to Nārada can also happen to us.

I'm recording this session a few weeks before Gaura-Pūrṇimā. ISKCON's GBC will soon be holding their annual meetings. Big controversies this year, like every year, I suppose. That's the nature of our society. We expect conclusions, but even if one controversy or another is solved, there will always be another problem. The GBC, like any government, can only resign itself to a watchful vigilance.

The problems will never end. It's a great service those GBC men have.

My service is different. I avoid controversies and the continual flux that they bring. That's the contribution I want to make to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Better I concentrate on what Nārada said to Vyāsadeva and share *that* with the devotees. Someone has to do that too.

It's up to me to control my mind—not that it's swept away in controversies—and to go ahead and be Kṛṣṇa conscious while I can. *Govindam ādi-puruṣam tam aham bhajāmi.*

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

Hearing Prabhupāda sing the *"Govindam"* prayers makes me want to have the verses before me to look at. *Sad-ujjvala-vigrahasya.* Words so full of nectar. The brilliant form of Kṛṣṇa attracting the *gopīs* and Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. Oh, poor ISKCON, oh, demanding ISKCON, oh, glowing ISKCON, branch of the Caitanya tree. Prabhupāda didn't cut us off from the previous *ācāryas* as some people are hinting these days. Rather, he gave us the mercy of the previous *ācāryas.* When we concentrate on him, the previous *ācāryas* come through him.

Can we help it, however, that there are so many strange and wonderful family members in ISKCON? How can we all possibly get along? We have to at least sympathize with ourselves and each other. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

I had a dream that I went to the cleaners with my laundry. When I went to open the door, I saw a sign that said on it "Please use other door." Then I went to the other door, but no one was there. There was a single pane of glass in this door, and when I touched it, it fell out. I caught it and eventually was able to put it down, but I cut my pinky right down near the joint where I put my thumb when I'm chanting *gāyatrī*. A friend, who suddenly appeared in the dream, saw the blood coming from the cut and became upset by it.

Now the interesting thing was that when I awoke, there was a cut on that finger, right where it was in the dream. I don't want to scare the listeners, but it's true. Dreams can be so real, so specific, and you can see everything so vividly, that you wonder if they spill into your waking life. It makes me want to understand what these dreams are about, why we have them, and what they're for. And how could there be a cut on my finger if I only dreamt I had cut my finger? I can't figure it out.

Over time, I have developed the habit of going to sleep with the awareness that I will be visited by dreams and the hope that I will be able to understand them for my betterment. Even painful dreams have their purposes.

My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, I don't want to be forever talking about the cuts on my fingers, whether they come in dreams or waking life. And I want to improve my chanting of the *gāyatrī-mantra* so that when I put my finger on that joint, it won't be painfully inattentive. Imagine a friend examining

my chanting of *gāyatrī* and being upset by witnessing such a bad condition. Is my *gāyatrī* chanting in a bleeding condition? Am I spiritually injured? I had better heal myself and chant real mantras with attention.

Prabhupāda singing:

cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu . . .

10

Śrīla Prabhupāda singing:
udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

I want to talk some more about this concept of being alone and speaking your heart to God. I have spoken in the past about the flute player in the pit and also about Jean Shepherd's radio show and the aloneness and intimacy he was able to capture with his audience. The flute player is put into a pit to play his flute with no audience, other than God. There's just no one else listening, no one at all. Therefore, he has no hope of acclaim or even criticism from his peers. All his hopes have to be pinned on God's willingness to listen and to receive his expression. God is his audience and by his acknowledging that, God becomes real to him. If he starts out with doubts either in God's existence or God's willingness to hear him, then there is no hope at all. His success is not his best musical expression but his development of unwavering faith. In the story as Charles Simic told it, which he said was also told by Jean Shepherd, an anthropologist recorded one of these dying flute players alone in the pit, so we could hear that final cry of faith.

In contrast, Shep himself used to speak his radio shows in a fully equipped New York studio, WOR in those days. I used to listen in the late 1950s, along with a potential audience of millions of others. The shows weren't played alone in a pit but knowingly broadcast all over New York City. That is quite a different experience than the flute player's experience. What Shepherd was able to achieve, however, was the ability to speak intimately and personally, as if just to

one old friend, as if he were sharing his deepest secrets to that huge audience.

Both images were on my mind when I began doing radio shows last year. I even thought it would be good to listen to some of those old radio shows so that I could capture their magic. I'm sure I missed a lot when I heard them as a teenager—seventeen, just out of high school. Shepherd was my first real introduction to the intellectual life and the life of art and rebellion and sensitive thought and of not going along with the crowd. Anyway, I didn't hear them again because they had disappeared without a trace.

What I found out, though, was what had become of Shepherd. He has written some books which he refers to as *Americana* and which detail, with humor, the American scene of the 1950s—dating, a boy receiving an air rifle for Christmas, stuff like that. I also heard that he had been doing stand-up performances in various places. I heard he did one at Princeton University where he shouted out to a large audience, pretending to be a big-time comedian. Each of his lines was followed by hundreds of people guffawing in the audience, and then he would reach for another guffaw. Vulgar. Furthermore, they spiced his performance with insets of rock 'n' roll to give it a more '50s feel. Just hearing about it was a turn-off. To think of Shepherd, that man who was able to speak intimately to me in my attic room during my teenage years, blaring rock 'n' roll and making wisecracks—well, it just doesn't sound like the same person.

In any case, I hold onto these two images and sometimes try for the mood of the flute player in the pit and sometimes for the more traditional radio raconteur of the '50s speaking alone to his audience, imagining them into existence as he speaks from his soundproof room with an engineer seen

through the window, giving him a thumbs-up sign to indicate when to start.

Śrīla Prabhupāda singing:
udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

Jīv jāgo, jīv jāgo, wake up, fallen soul, wake up, fallen soul! How long will you sleep in the lap of the witch called Māyā?

While chanting *japa* this morning, the words "Rye Beach" popped into my head. I decided to put them aside and to think about them while I was doing this radio show. Rye Beach is an amusement park in New Jersey. I went there once on an excursion boat, on a date with a girl and few other guys and their girlfriends. I was still in grade school. I couldn't have been more than thirteen years old. I took a girl named Barbara McDonald. There was no real attraction between us, but I took her to be social. Boys took girls out on dates. Playacting really, because we were so young.

What I remember about Rye Beach wasn't the girl but the roller coaster. The whole day was difficult for me. I didn't like going out into the world with others, and especially on a boat. I distinctly remember not liking it, and not liking Barbara McDonald either. I can't remember why I went when I had such strong feelings about it; was probably pushed into it by someone. In the same way, although none of us wanted to ride the roller coaster, we did.

The reason this came to mind is that I am in Denver where a householder has kindly lent me his house. In a drawer I found a map and a guide to Colorado's vacation spots. An amusement park was listed. The guide said it was the "third scariest roller coaster on earth." It called it a

"run-to-mama-screaming" roller coaster, and that reminded me of Rye Beach.

So I might as well tell you what happened. We all got into the roller coaster. An attendant came around and made sure the bar that fitted above our laps was secure and locked. Then it started on its slow ascent to the top of a high incline. I was already scared and holding firmly to the rail. Somehow I got the idea in my head that there was something wrong with the rail, that it wasn't really locked because it gave a little. And who knows, maybe it wasn't secure, wasn't safe. I turned to Barbara McDonald in my fear and said, "Look, this rail doesn't seem secure. What will happen?" Then we were at the peak. Already the people in the car ahead were screaming. That's what people do on roller coasters. They were screaming and maybe I was too as we sped down the other side of the track. I grabbed the bar and braced my legs against it, holding my body as tense as possible, pushing back (as if that would save me, that flimsy bar that probably wasn't locked anyway). Barbara McDonald was screaming, everyone was screaming, and I was holding on, white-knuckled, for dear life. Zoommmm. Down we went. I thought it would never end. I thought we would die. I had dropped all pretense now of being cool.

But we didn't die. We got to the bottom with relief, but then I realized we were going up *again*. Fortunately none of the other runs were as bad as that first downward rush. When it was over, however, some of the kids in our group were sick. I wasn't. I was just thinking deep in my gut, "Never again. I'll never go on one of those damn things again."

When I remember stuff like that, it leaves me feeling grateful for Prabhupāda's mercy. I know it sounds a little strange to think that Prabhupāda saved me from having to

ride roller coasters ever again, but it's true. He saved me from so many things in the mundane world that I can't even count them all. I tend to think that if I take birth again, I will retain some memory of how horrible such things are. I know we forget everything from our previous lives, but don't we retain *anything*? Impressions of fear? Doesn't something stir in our hearts when we look at a roller coaster and for some unknown reason we just know that we would never want to go on one of those? Some kids refuse to eat meat from birth. Some refuse to smoke or drink, or they practice celibacy. Impressions must be there. That little voice of conscience, Supersoul, reminds them that they have already given all this up. I hope I'm truly saved so that little voice speaks to me in my next life, by Prabhupāda's grace. I pray to Kṛṣṇa to please protect my vows and my freedom from all this mundane nonsense, not only in this life but in the next.

Śrīla Prabhupāda singing:
udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

Once I started to remember my school days, I also remembered this: When I was a kid, I was quite short, right up until my last year in high school. Kids are usually full grown by then, but I was a late bloomer. Whenever there were line-ups according to height, I would always be second from the end.

I was small and remember one girl who was tall. Her name was Joan Bolavia. Why do I remember her? She fixed herself in my memory because she came from a family of Jehovah's Witnesses, and that was something strange to me. I didn't know any other Jehovah's Witnesses. She said

something to me once when we were talking. She said that she thought I was nice except that I was so short. I took it as a compliment.

Another time I visited a friend named Sal Bivona. His father was a gas station attendant and they owned a house not far from ours. When it was time to go home, his father offered to drive me in the car. The whole family came and it was rather crowded. I was put in front with his mother. She turned to me and said, "Oh, you're a peanut." She meant I took up practically no room at all, I was so small. She hurt my feelings.

We really have survived so many insults and taunts by the time we're adults. Kids can be cruel and adults don't always give us respect. What can we do but take them all in? They say sticks and stones may break your bones, but names will never hurt you, but they do hurt you unless you can understand that you are spirit soul. If you have pimples or are deformed in some way or are too fat or thin, what does it have to do with you? Let people say whatever they want. You can be detached, it's true, but detachment takes realization.

I remember when I graduated from Tottenville High School, we had to write down what we wanted to be in the yearbook. Usually kids wrote something joking, except the more straight kids. I tried to make a whimsical remark in my entry. I said I wanted to be six feet tall. A girl named Mary Jane O'Connor, who was voted most likely to succeed from our graduating class, autographed my book with this remark: "Don't feel bad. Even a short man can become great, as in the example of Napoleon." Anyway, now I'm an old man, but not really, and I did achieve my goal of becoming six feet tall, but not really, and thank God.

Śrīla Prabhupāda singing:
udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

This radio show is about done on this day before travel. We've been cozy here in Denver, and I've been able to work in the mornings, but it will be a long haul to Puerto Rico tomorrow.

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Śrīla Prabhupāda singing:
udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

Hare Kṛṣṇa. I'm in Puerto Rico in the hills of Gurabo, in a little house near the temple. Yesterday we had a long day of air travel. It's raining and the wind is blowing strong through the leaves.

I felt light this morning in the temple room, light of limb and light of heart. I was feeling so light that I began to dance, which is unusual for me, and when I gave the lecture, I felt so light that I felt I could answer any question I was asked and really give something to the audience. I felt the urge to give the devotees hope.

Where did all this lightness come from? I remember once reading Ouspensky's theory on travel. Of course, Ouspensky was teaching a whole method by which to live and I don't remember much about that, but I remember that he said that although no psychiatrists understood this (only Gurdjieff knew), we should have the consciousness of an observer when we travel. He said travel was good for suddenly delivering us into an extra awareness and lightness. It takes us out of our usual context and allows us to be something different. I do find travel to be like that, just as I found the all-night observance of Ekādaśī while fasting to change my consciousness.

As evidence of this lightness having come to me because of the long air travel, I'll tell a couple of thoughts that sent me off. I thought it would be nice to take a retreat, not alone, but with some devotees, in which we would agree to

chant a large number of rounds. Although we would live together and share the cooking, etc., we would practice our chanting separately, as monks do when they meet but pray in separate cells.

I also thought that I need to pay more attention to reading what I have already written and to observing the evolution of the timed books so that I can be more aware of how to develop my art. I felt the need for more dedication to my service.

To someone else, these two thoughts may not seem special, but they were special to me. And then the lightness in the temple.

After arriving at the airport, we were met by a devotee, who drove us up here in his jeep. I laid down in the back and thought about how adventure means giving up attachment to the idea that things should be done in a particular way. Travel makes your joys simpler: you're glad to be alive. I'm sure you're all familiar with the phenomenon of feeling demanding, of wanting everything to go just the way you want it to go. Then you get on an airplane. You want it to leave exactly on time and to land exactly on time. I felt that way yesterday, but it was storming in Miami and our landing was delayed. That meant that our next take-off was also delayed, and the landing after that. I allowed myself to feel the frustration and anxiety of the first delay, I think because I was worried about making the connecting flight. Then the plane started shaking in the storm. I felt the smallness of the plane—just a toy in the wind's hands—and saw the angry black sky. I was going to be lucky to get to Miami at all, and I relaxed. All my demands floated away and I was willing to settle for the mercy

of being allowed to live. In fact, this was the theme of the *Bhāgavatam* verse for today.

That's another thing about travel: when you go from ISKCON temple to ISKCON temple, you get a chance to speak on a variety of verses from various sections of the *Bhāgavatam.* I often think of it like spinning the wheel of fortune. You never know until you get there what Canto the devotees are reading and what verse you will be asked to speak on. This morning I had little time to prepare. As soon as I saw the verse, however, I felt confident. I had hit the jackpot and I knew it immediately. The verse was about Vāmanadeva cheating Bali Mahārāja. I thought quickly of how Kṛṣṇa cheats us, but how we actually cheat ourselves, and I remembered how when Kṛṣṇa cheats us, it's always for our own benefit. What to say suddenly became simple and clear. I felt I could, by Prabhupāda's grace, sweeten the philosophy with my own words and experience.

All of this gets back to my evolution as a writer. I have to feel, when doing my service, that I have a unique contribution to make to the preaching. I have to feel that I have something to say that hasn't been said in quite that way before in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Does that sound arrogant? But every writer or artist *has* to think that way. If all a singer wants to do is to imitate Bob Dylan, then why bother calling himself a singer? He's an impersonator. A singer can be *influenced* by Bob Dylan, but he has to have his own art and his own presence.

I feel like that too, and I want to pursue this line of thought. I don't want to be overcome by the temporality of life and death in a way that it paralyzes me from making my fullest contribution.

Śrīla Prabhupāda singing:
udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

I want to give some visual impressions of yesterday's travel before I forget them, especially from the flight from Miami to Puerto Rico. There was a guy on the plane wearing a sleeveless undershirt. He looked like some kind of Latin American type of guy, not very sophisticated, yet with an aura of brute sensuality. Next to him sat a woman. I don't know if it was his wife or his girlfriend, but she was definitely his woman. She kept her hand on his leg throughout the flight as if she owned him, and her nails were painted bright red. That's the Ajāmila factor when you travel—danger at every step for a celibate monk.

Of course, they played the nonsensical videos. News, not a film, and sports. Whenever I glanced up, I would either see men running back and forth on a basketball court or yet another commercial. So many talking heads, mostly white men representing the "successful executive" trying to get you to buy a "world phone" or some new kind of credit card that will get you tremendous deals on all kinds of leisure gadgets and enable you to tie in with the latest good eating available in expensive restaurants—the scene shifting to a man forking down chicken something-or-other and then to a poolside where beautiful women lounged.

The plane came down over San Juan about 9 P.M. and we could see the lights on everywhere, just as in any city. San Juan has plenty of lights. Fortunately, we have no attraction to finding out what it is they are trying to illuminate down there.

It reminds me of how just yesterday before I left Denver, I had an interview with a disciple. She said that she was

impressed with a sixteen-year-old girl in the temple who has been a devotee since birth. She said this girl is completely fixed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. My disciple asked her, "Isn't there *anything* that attracts you in the material world?" The girl said no, she's not attracted to anything. She just wants to be Kṛṣṇa conscious. She likes *kīrtanas* and feasts and everything devotees do. Then I asked my disciple, a girl of twenty, "And what about you? Do you have any desires in the material world?"

"Just books and art. Otherwise, I'm not interested."

"Hmm. Books and art. Yes, they can be as dangerous as anything else because the nondevotees who write and create the art are sensitive people and that is their power. Prabhupāda says that by listening to music, you can understand the composer's feelings. We could become attached to their ability to express what we too may feel. Therefore, we have to be careful and to do our own art in Kṛṣṇa consciousness as far as we are able."

There's also that verse. I heard it just today. *Viplavo* something, fifth chapter, First Canto, where Prabhupāda translates, "On the other hand, that literature which is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of the name, fame, pastimes, etc., of the unlimited Supreme Lord is a different creation, full of transcendental words directed toward bringing about a revolution in the impious lives of the world's misdirected civilization. Such transcendental literatures, even though imperfectly composed, are heard, sung and accepted by purified men who are thoroughly honest." *(Bhāg.* 1.5.11) The impious civilization to which I am referring—we saw it clearly in the lights of San Juan.

If we want to make our trip to San Juan a real pilgrimage, we'll have to distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness here. Otherwise, it's a pilgrimage place for crows.

Śrīla Prabhupāda singing:

udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

So, my friend, how did you become Kṛṣṇa conscious during the day? What were your Kṛṣṇa conscious moments?

Well, it's unfortunate that I couldn't read because I had a headache for the entire flight. Reading just required too much sensitivity and I can't get below the surface when I'm in pain. Instead, I chanted. I was chanting, not so much on my beads, but living the chanting, making the effort to repeat Kṛṣṇa's names. Time passed, but it didn't matter.

Living the holy name, not in the quiet of your own room and heart, but in the airport dealing with all that time—four hours from Denver to Miami, an hour lay-over on the way, then another three and a half hours in the air. Big segments of time. Even twenty minutes can feel like a lot. "Flight 101 will be boarding in five minutes." Then ten minutes later, "We would like to update you on flight 101. Due to the rain, we will be leaving in twenty minutes." That's twenty extra minutes you suddenly have to deal with. At the same time, people all around you are talking. Then they start to serve drinks and people get louder. You glance and see the guy across the aisle from you with his stout little can of Coca Cola mixing his miniature bottle of liquor together in a plastic cup filled with ice. He's "oiling" himself, as they say, and getting louder by the minute. "Seven dollars, please," you hear above the pandemonium. "Get World Phone," "No more outrageous searching for hotels." You

look up and there's a picture of a man talking to anyone anywhere in the world.

How to survive these times? Live the life of Hare Kṛṣṇa. Turn within yourself and just utter the name: Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. And stay there as far as possible.

Another Kṛṣṇa conscious moment was when I lost my self-consciousness about being a devotee. At the beginning of the day, I was very self-conscious. I wanted my clothes ironed nicely so that I would look clean and respectable, and I wanted my *tilaka* neat. Toward the end of the day, however, I no longer cared how wrinkled or sweaty I looked. That was partly due to being in the association of Latin Americans. They didn't care either. I walked through the Miami airport and simply chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa to myself.

Śrīla Prabhupāda singing:

udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

Prabhupāda on tape playing harmonium and singing in that foreign language. I don't have to know the words. *Jīv jāgo*—it's like lightning that cracks the heart. "Look to the left, dear passengers," he said, "and you will see nature's fireworks." And we saw lightning and clouds. *Jīv jāgo*—how to understand the depth of Prabhupāda's mood even if you can't understand the language? Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare.

12

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

A man sitting alone in a corner of a room in a house on a hill in Italy, talking, broadcasting, beams going out to whoever wants to listen. It's such a nice time of day, four-thirty in the morning right now, *maṅgala-ārati* time. I already held my *maṅgala-ārati,* singing to Prabhupāda *mūrti.* It's a sacred time. We should use it not for sleeping, but śāstric study or *kṛṣṇa-kathā.*

When I think of word images at this time of day, this phrase comes to mind: "Don't become contaminated by secular life." Yes, we can become secular—that is, forget Kṛṣṇa—if we spend too much time in the material world. Write and speak and breathe Kṛṣṇa consciousness and then give it to the secular city as preaching.

We who live in ISKCON live in our own world, that's for sure. Each of us lives in his or her own world even within ISKCON. I don't know if that's absolutely true of everyone in the world. Maybe some people don't look at their world, or don't want their world, or live in a television variety show version of the world, or are so much slaves to their jobs that they belong to the company. Some would say they're lucky. At least they belong somewhere besides to themselves. Some people would define that as responsible. Those kinds of people often call devotees escapists.

I'm not an escapist, really. I'm just saying that we each have our own world of consciousness, and through that

consciousness, we live in the body we have been given life after life. The soul is carried by the subtle body from existence to existence, and where we go is determined by that world we live in now, that private world of thought and desire. Thought and desire arise partly from what we take into our private world—those newspapers we read, those novels, or the words of *śāstra.* We might consider it responsible to read newspapers and to be dutiful workers, but what good does it do us in the end? We are eventually thrown off and shuffled into a completely foreign world, perhaps related to, but different than the world we perceive now. That foreign world too is just another little world, and from that world we will again be shuffled off to another and another even more foreign existence. Each of those existences can be traced back to the present. People think we live in a macrocosm, but actually, reality is microcosmic.

That's why the first question with which people begin spiritual life is, *"Ke āmi?* Who am I?" Who are we and where do we belong? In which world? Do I belong to this world as it is perceived through the senses of this body, or do I belong to the previous existence that led me into this one? Microcosmic worlds, tiny souls in tiny bodies, simultaneously worlds unto ourselves and yet powerless rulers within those worlds.

The *śāstras* say that we belong in the infinite spiritual world with Kṛṣṇa. We talk about secularism and we know that the danger for someone trying to remember the truth in association with secular thinkers is that those thinkers are so far from the truth, yet so convinced of their opinions, that it can become bewildering. They write religiously about politics, for example. They stress the injustice of rich versus poor. They witness it, comment on it, give the situation flesh

and bones, but what can it possibly mean in the face of eternity? It's a little world with a temporary reality that seems as if it's the all-in-all.

Devotees, therefore, should be witnesses for the truth. In that way, they live in their own worlds. We may not be prophets, but we want to bear witness to the greatness of the attempt to contact Kṛṣṇa at the *maṅgala-ārati* hour.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

We can't advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness by our own endeavor. Our endeavor may take us a certain distance, maybe, but we need the Lord's descending mercy if we are really going to advance. Should we, then, try to discover how to convince Kṛṣṇa to lower His rope of mercy? There is no trick; we have no leverage with Him, really. Nothing but pure devotion will attract Him.

We can't cut a deal with Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is unlike anyone else in this world. We can't convince Him to be more reasonable in our case. Neither can we deny His mercy, as if to say, "I realize You have been very helpful, but now You are no longer necessary." No, you can't talk to the Supreme Personality of Godhead in that way. Kṛṣṇa is the supreme controller, and His power and control will always be above us, subordinating us. We need Him. In a higher sense, too, we need Him even to feel satisfaction. Satisfaction comes ultimately from expressing love, and Kṛṣṇa is the supreme, lovable object. You can't cut deals with the supreme lovable object, and you can't respond to His love unless you are

free of attachment, fear, and the causeless unwillingness to surrender.

Actually, Kṛṣṇa offers us a deal. He says in the twelfth chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā* that if we can't always think of Him—bear with me, I'm looking it up to get the words right—He says He knows we have to work in this world, so we should do it for Him. Be a householder, but restrain your senses. In different ways, Kṛṣṇa goes out of His way to acknowledge that we are limited and conditioned but that we have honest desire to know Him. "Just fix your mind upon Me, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and engage all your intelligence in Me. Thus you will live in Me always without a doubt."

A pure devotee lives spontaneously and ecstatically in Kṛṣṇa. His mind is always fixed on Kṛṣṇa, his intelligence too. Others don't know anything about that little world in which a devotee lives.

Then Kṛṣṇa says, "My dear Arjuna, O winner of wealth, if you cannot fix your mind upon Me without deviation, then follow the regulative principles of *bhakti-yoga*. In this way develop a desire to attain Me."

Spontaneous love, and if you can't do that, then practice *vaidhi-bhakti*. Kṛṣṇa doesn't reject the *vaidhi-bhakta*. Rather, He provides him with the means to attain spontaneous love.

Prabhupāda describes *vaidhi* in his purport: rise early in the morning, take bath, enter the temple, offer prayers, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, collect flowers for the Deity, cook for the Deity, honor *prasādam*, and so on. Then Kṛṣṇa says, "If you cannot practice the regulations of *bhakti-yoga*, then try to work for Me, because by working for Me, you will come to the perfect stage."

So many words in our little world— *bhāva, prema, rasa,* Kṛṣṇa, Rādhārāṇī, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, Bhagavad-gītā,* Arjuna, Prahlāda, *mahājana, prasādam, karatālas, mṛdaṅga, bhajanas,* devotees, demons, karma, *jñāna,* yoga, Goloka, Vaikuṇṭha.

These sound vibrations are not subject to all that contamination of secular language or history. These words can liberate us. And of course, that is especially true of the alphabets in God's name. When any word, however, is used in Kṛṣṇa's service, it regains its spiritual nature and becomes as potent as any other. Then bang! Bang! The words become nails being driven home by a carpenter to hold together the walls we are building around our spiritual lives.

13

Prabhupāda singing:

udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

Hare Kṛṣṇa. Still in Puerto Rico. "Cluck, cluck, cluck," goes the chicken in the yard. "Cluck, cluck, cluck—come and cut my throat." Prabhupāda used to say that when he heard a chicken making that noise. The rooster agrees, "Cock-a-doodle-do, come cut my throat too." Ignorant creatures.

Silver-gray-bodied clouds. Big pillows, or mushrooms, light shining through. Evanescent stuff. What are they made of? Cotton? The captain doesn't think so. He says, "We're passing through a cloud bank. There will be a few bumps. Please fasten your seat belts." Clouds are obviously not mushrooms or marshmallows or made of cotton if they can make an airplane bump around as it passes through them. They don't even seem to be dead matter.

Relax. Śrīla Prabhupāda, who translated and commented on the *Bhāgavatam,* is my savior.

Bali Mahārāja speaks cuttingly of material life. What's the use, he asks, of a body that will soon enough cease to exist? And therefore, what's the use of a wife and family or friends or the house? They are all temporary. Strong words.

Cock-a-doodle-do!

Fly on quilted tablecloth. I wave my hand and it flies away. Water drying in beads. Prabhupāda. He smears a few drops of water on his table and says, "The whole universe is like that, just a drop that gets smeared. Everything ends and still they are wasting their time." By "they" he meant the people

twenty stories below, didn't he? We could hardly see them, we were so far above them.

"You have to change your apartment. They want to get into this room."

"Who?"

"The repair men."

"But we rented this room."

"Yeah, well, you rented *a* room in the hotel and now they want you to move to another one."

Remember? Close your eyes and visualize it. You have to move again and again. You rented a body in this material world and soon the world will move you to a new "apartment." Wake up, man, you're dreaming.

Prabhupāda singing:

udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

Blades of green grass. Green is Lord Rāma's color. Green icing on cookies. Prabhupāda ate some cookies once with green icing on them. We were driving in a car somewhere—Texas? I think we were coming back from a television show in Fort Worth. He ate one cookie and then called for one after another. I don't remember what he said about them. O Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda singing:

udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

Thinking of a Godbrother who left Prabhupāda for beer. He had curly, blond hair, which he cut off to become a devotee. A big man, and now what? Often devotees are sorry they gave up Prabhupāda for the world. They're sorry, and

sometimes they're also righteous. It makes me tired to think about it. I'm sorry that this particular Godbrother left Prabhupāda, but perhaps he'll be back. He was attached to Prabhupāda, still likes to quote him and occasionally read his books, but whenever he does, it reminds him that we are all Prabhupāda's sons and no one should have become guru after him. Prabhupāda is the only guru for the rest of time.

Ha ha prabhu nanda-sūta—the hills look blue. That's poetic. From the front yard I can see the house where I stayed almost ten years ago to try to free myself of my headaches. I lived there for two months. I saw a brain surgeon, had a CAT scan, and when the doctor said, "Hold your horses," to me when I was talking too fast, I had to shut up. Then the doctor commented on my asymmetrical head, which he added was no crime to possess, and said something about the Lord, but I don't remember what. He had a sign in his office that said something like a boat can take shelter in the harbor, but it's meant to go to sea.

During those same two months, I also visited an iridologist, who told me to drink cabbage juice, which tastes horrible. I wrote some poems while Baladeva cooked *purīs*. We had no idea then that diet mattered. We ate whatever Baladeva felt inspired to cook. Time went by and I read *Bhagavad-gītā* every day, but my health did not improve.

I was still trying to develop the guts to write poetry. I even sent a poem to a Godbrother, who wrote back, "Well, if you like, I can analyze it for you, but I won't do it right now. I mean, if you really want to talk about poetry, you can come and see me." It was not an encouraging letter. He did say, however, that he agreed that poetry could be a major service for a devotee, but if I wanted to talk about it . . .

What the hell was there to talk about? I just wanted to be encouraged. I didn't want the New Criticism from the 1950s applied upon my soul.

You remember that summer?

It wasn't summer, man, but winter. I was still on the GBC. Rañcor was building in the movement as more and more devotees were angry about the zonal *ācārya* system. Yeah, they were getting mad. And I was worrying about it a lot. What would happen next? Then one Godbrother came to Puerto Rico and we talked. He said, "You know"—he was acting as if he was on my side and their side at the same time—"it's not that they want to take everything away from you. Just a few things, like maybe you guys shouldn't sit on *vyāsāsanas,* and maybe you shouldn't call yourselves *paramahaṁsas.*" Then another Godbrother came to visit. Then a disciple. And Baladeva bought me some clumsy shoes, the best stand-ins we could get for track shoes. He strapped up my ankle and we walked as fast as I could go, and I sweated like the doctor said I should, and I was still eating *purīs,* bless my soul.

Prabhupāda protected me through all that, although the headaches were never cured. It was not the greatest time of my life, but it had its nicer moments, like when I would sit in bed under the net at night and see the sparkling lights of far-off San Juan and write and pray. I learned to laugh at myself then, and I still do that regularly.

Well, that's all for today. I've got nothing else to say, except that I see a helicopter crossing the hill and that it's better to take direct action than to try to philosophize about it. Let's sing, *śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu nityānanda, śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda.*

14

Prabhupāda singing:

udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

Hare Kṛṣṇa. I'm under a tent of mosquito netting in a room in Baladeva's house in Trinidad. It happens to be the first day of "de carnival" down here. Last night in the airplane, we were surrounded by people coming to de carnival. It was difficult to tolerate their loud, cackling laughter and drunken talk, but I stayed in my protective cocoon, chanting to myself with my eyes closed.

Again there was a delay, as on the flight into Puerto Rico. We couldn't land because there was too much air traffic. We circled and circled and didn't get down and to bed until almost 1 A.M. And now here I am. Don't have much to say. Being here is the same kind of life I tasted in Puerto Rico.

Looked through a photo album filled with pictures of a guru Godbrother. He has such stark, bony features—almost severe. There was a picture of him on the *vyāsāsana* surrounded by gift-wrapped boxes. Must have been Vyāsa-pūjā day. How embarrassing that all is now for both of us.

In a few hours, we'll drive from this house to the Longdenville temple. The last stretch before we arrive is so potholed that we'll have to drive quite slowly. Once we arrive, I am scheduled to speak.

Travel.

"Where will we go next?"

"After Trinidad, Guyana."

"Oh, you're lucky." Or maybe she said, "They're lucky." I don't feel lucky because I'm always complaining. I'm not lucky to be traveling exactly, but I'm lucky that people are willing to hear from me. God knows, people of this world need Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

I was thinking last night of the people on the plane. They're not going to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Prabhupāda said that the age of fighting as a means of persuasion was over. Now we have to persuade with humility. But those people could not even be approached. They were too drunk with the spirit of enjoyment.

When we arrived, however, there was a man in the car next to us of Hindi descent. None of the devotees seemed to know him, but he made *praṇāmas* and said, "Hare Kṛṣṇa." Baladeva feelingly remarked to me afterward, "The people here are pious."

The most pious are those who have given up their youth to Prabhupāda. They may or may not be chanting, may or may not still be reading, but it is for them I have come, and that is *my* fortune.

Devotees shouldn't be cynical and forget their good fortune. This world is miserable. Trying to become happy here by some material means is a phantasmagoria. Vedic culture doesn't even bother to define "material improvement" as someone remaining on this planet; at least they should aspire for the heavenly planets where life is long and enjoyment abundant. But what's the use? You eat, you sleep, you mate, and you defend, and then you die. Yes, you ate papayas and mangoes instead of sawdust, but still you have to die. Prabhupāda shouted that out to the audience. *Still* you have to die. I heard it on a tape just a little while ago. Prabhupāda yelled it so loudly that I thought Baladeva

next door might hear it. That worried me because his four-year-old son recently left his body and he might be sensitive to talk of death.

It was Baladeva who was waiting for me with the car at the airport last night. I asked him how he was doing. He turned to me, and there was a blank look in his eyes. It could have been the lights, but I couldn't tell. I wondered if it had something to do with the grief he's been through. He said his son's illness was so prolonged that they had allowed themselves to hope right up until the end. That must have been intensely draining. Then he told me that his son died in Alachua and described how the devotees in Alachua had helped him through it all.

Of course, the *Bhāgavatam* discusses such a situation, but it's difficult to repeat it to someone who is actually grieving for a family member. Or you can, but you yourself may not want to hear it put so starkly when you are grieving.

Baladeva said that he learned a lot from all this, and now he feels he has realization that he can share with others going through similar difficulties. I would have liked to ask him what those realizations were, but I knew I was tired and that I would probably tend to hear them analytically, to not be touched by them, and to say, "Oh yeah, I know that, and that, and that. Oh, that's interesting." You have to be in the right mood to offer respect to other people's sacred understanding. So much in Kṛṣṇa consciousness depends on our receptivity.

Like last night I was trying not to be receptive to the lives of those revelers around me. There was a white man in front of me talking to a black man. The white man was from Florida, and he was fairly young, maybe thirty-five. He was telling this black man how he had been to carnivals before

and he knew all about Trinidadian culture. I didn't care for him much. People were talking like that all around us and I tried to withdraw myself.

We have to save our receptivity for something worthy. Baladeva's realizations about death were probably very worthy, and would certainly be helpful to anyone who was suffering from loss. He has tasted the same bitterness. I pray that he can convey his experience, in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, to others.

Prabhupāda singing:
udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

Devotees sharing and giving each other support, healing and speaking confidentially to each other. One lady wrote me and said that there is a community in California where a support group has been operating for some time and now there have been miracles. The devotees are able to work together as a community and to cooperate in small and big ways. She said she knew I was above all this, but this is what they were doing.

I'm not above it, of course; I'm more to the side of it. It may be true that *sannyāsīs* don't have to be quite as involved on that level in community life, although some *sannyāsīs* certainly do get involved. I guess if I were pressed, I would say that I was not personally interested in participating in such a group but that I am interested in healing. That's why I write.

But I'm not against such groups. We can each do something, but none of us has to do everything. We *can't* do everything even if we want to. I don't work oxen, I don't raise children, I don't manage temples, I don't preach to

the envious, but I write timed books and writing sessions and poems. I dance. I entertain. I sit by the window on the airplane and look out at the lights. I think about the typewriter I left in Ireland, and like all of us, I wonder what the next step will be—how to close the gap between what I am and what I wish I were. I try to concentrate on Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda singing:
udilo aruṇa pūraba-bhāge . . .

I realize that Prabhupāda's *bhajana* is not broadcasting clearly over the radio. I hope you can pick up the words.

15

Hare Kṛṣṇa. Broadcasting from Trinidad, this time from Viśvarūpa's house.

On the top shelf of his bookshelf, I found a stack of all sorts of old ISKCON things, old *Back to Godheads,* etc. At the bottom of the stack, I found a set of old *"Sādhu-bhūṣaṇams."* For those who don't know, *"Sādhu-bhūṣaṇam"* was a newsletter put out in late 1979 and the early 1980s by the disciples of Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami Gurupāda.

I leafed through them, although I almost felt it would contaminate me to look at them. Then I thought, "Well, maybe they'll spark something in me that will be good for my writing or my spiritual life." I was certainly younger in those pictures, but I feel I also have that—what should I call it?—I was going to say "phony" look, but that isn't quite right. Maybe "posed" look would be better. You know, smiling for the camera.

It also contained offerings by Godbrothers such as Bhakti-tīrtha Swami, Śeṣa Prabhu—devotees looking up to me as if I were special even among my Godbrothers. I would never put out such a newsletter now, or accept praise so brazenly, as if it would be good for my disciples to hear in order to reinforce my position in their lives. It's all a little nauseating.

I read one article written by my secretary listing my daily activities. My God, so many meetings in one day! Four meetings, then three meetings, then two meetings, then a zonal meeting, a BTG meeting, then travel. There was one instance where I was supposed to be writing somewhere, but

I came back early and my secretary said, "How come you're here?"

"Well, I finished the writing and I wanted to get back to my zone."

I was a figurehead, but not the kind of figurehead that had no responsibility. Even though I actually had little power over the temples in my zone, I still had to accept the burden to hear and try to solve the devotees' problems. Of course, most of that side of things isn't told in this newsletter. All it says is that I met with four devotees. What did I meet with them about? No doubt the temple president had asked me to motivate those devotees to go out and sell paintings. Three meetings? No doubt the temple president had told me to please motivate those devotees to do their service and to help the one in the red *sārī* who was having such-and-such a problem. I saw it as my duty.

My duty was to the zone. We had to sell books, or at least give money to the BBT to print books. We had to keep the zone afloat financially, and that took a lot of manpower. We had to keep the devotees faithful because if they didn't lead a "surrendered" life, none of the above would be possible.

We all know what was wrong with that picture, but there was something wrong in it for me too. Surrender meant something intense. It meant total physical and psychological commitment. The commitment was preached, but the form it took eventually had to be demolished. In this case, it was too much oriented toward pushing devotees to collect money, too centralized, too renounced for the householders, too black and white. People were not allowed to grow in ways that were necessary for them without thinking that they had become fallen devotees. Finally, it all cracked and

exploded. I don't want to pretend I'm a sociologist making an analysis, but looking at old newsletters can be a trip.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Seeing those old *"Sādhu-bhūṣaṇams"* was like discovering a pile of *Life* magazines, or a stack of old *National Geographics,* and going through them until you've seen them all. You feel almost compelled to leaf through every page, just for old times' sake, even though you are jarred and startled and even amused. In one, there was a picture of me riding in an oxcart at Gītā-nāgarī, and next to me, looking blissful with his arms upraised, walking alongside, is a devotee who has recently completed his bitter rejection of me and accepted another guru. There he is, looking happy at that moment. What to make of it? Was it false? Real? Does that make him false or real now? What about me? Twenty years from now, will I look back at what I'm writing now and think, "Oh my God!"? Time makes everything look different. How different I am now, even in appearance.

Here in Trinidad I can't do much before my head starts throwing up resistance. I am very different now from the Gurupāda of those days who thought it was his duty to gut it out at so many meetings. I can't meet like that now; I won't meet like that now. I consider that an improvement.

I decided to speak at the Sunday feast on the five most important practices of devotional service and to try to convey them to the congregation. I like speaking in Trinidad. I didn't speak on a text when I arrived yesterday, but spoke what I felt were words coming from the heart. I

mean, I preached the philosophy and spoke on their good fortune at being saved from the sources of misery as they appear in various forms in this life, especially identification with the body. I felt convinced as I spoke. As I looked out at the audience, I saw Baladeva's wife listening intently, and others too, and I thought, "Just keep going and let Kṛṣṇa consciousness flow through you."

Maybe that's why it was interesting to run into those *"Sādhu-bhūṣaṇams"* today. Yesterday, I was just as much into my role as their spiritual master as I was in the past, and I was aware that I have few opportunities to be here and to address them personally like this, and it felt truthful to be thinking like that. But it's different too. And so it goes.

After the class today, a devotee asked me whether it was offensive to doubt what we read in Prabhupāda's books. Everyone laughed. Such a naive question. What could I say? Yes, it is offensive, but I appreciated his courage in asking such a candid question. Then I spoke on how to overcome doubt.

So this is the mode I'm in while in Trinidad: preparing for lectures (Sunday feast lecture tomorrow, and a class on how devotees fall but are always considered righteous for the morning class). Hope all these lectures come out practical and applicable.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

I'm sorry, Gurupāda, that you had to go through so much stress, walking in the woods and looking up smiling at whoever came to take your picture. I'm sorry you had to go

through all those meetings just to tell people how to behave, you yourself being surrendered to the zonal cause. You were in a position to tell others, "Look, man, you got to surrender. Look, daughter, look, *mātājī*, surrender! Sell those paintings, do that Deity worship, stay in school, and behave. Look, Prabhupāda said this, Prabhupāda said that, the *śāstras* say this, the *śāstras* say that. Get in line and stay there, and give up all your flaky tendencies. Tow the GBC line and listen to the gurus. We're bona fide. Yes, we may be so advanced that we can't even determine how advanced we are. As a matter of fact, we don't even have time to think about it. Just give the honor (and the foot-bath) and tow the line." What price did I pay to be allowed to utter those words? I had to work like crazy and travel to be honored. When I went to bed, if there was a minute to think, to feel something else, it was pushed out in the name of surrender. That's how it was.

I'm sorry.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Less than three minutes left. My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, please accept my humble obeisances. Although I talk irritably here, it's a fact that I'm grateful for the opportunity You give me to speak to others. I want to keep my mind reined in. I'm an old skinny horse, or a merry-go-round horse, not one of the horses You drive with their square chests and skinny but powerful legs. I *wish* I were one of those.

For now, please allow me to continue my prescribed duties of lecturing in the evening and lecturing in the

morning, then lecturing in the morning and lecturing in the evening, then holding disciples' meetings and saying the predictable things. Please allow me to put my heart into those predictable things because it's what I'm meant to do, old, lame horse or not. You are my best friend.

16

Prabhupāda singing bhajanas

Back in Puerto Rico and all those sounds. Out on the roofed deck of this house, I hear the wind whistling in the valley and through the trees, whistling Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

In a few hours, I'll meet with a group. They'll ask me questions and I'll try to answer them according to scripture. I want to try my best not to allow it to become an empty exercise, and they have to do their part in that too by asking questions relevant to their spiritual lives. Even a question like, "How can I surrender to Kṛṣṇa?" becomes empty if it's not asked with feeling and when you're not really wanting to surrender. Sometimes it seems our real questions are too embarrassing to ask in public. Any one of us might really want to ask, "How can I take it easy and still go back to Godhead?" Right? "How can I not comply but still get the result?"

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

The *Bhāgavatam* verses are still discussing Bali Mahārāja. Today's verse stressed that we shouldn't complain when we find ourselves in an awkward situation. Bali Mahārāja was not ashamed or aggrieved by his predicament but accepted

whatever happened to him as the will of Providence. It's not even necessary to inquire into the nature of the Lord's plan.

When I said that this morning, the questions after the class were to the point: "Why shouldn't we want to know the Lord's plan? How can we accept something like that dogmatically?"

Well, we can know to some degree what's going on, but the main point is acceptance. We have to accept the Lord's plan and we have to accept that we can't see its beginning or its end. Even if we don't understand the morality or justice in that plan, we should at least accept that whatever is happening to us is our karma, and if we are trying to practice *bhakti,* it is Kṛṣṇa's using a situation to our advantage. "To our advantage" means using something to purify us of material attachments. If we fight with that, it means we are trying to second-guess the Lord. And even if we do that, it still doesn't bring our lives completely under our own control, as if we had the ability to live according to our own laws instead of the laws of nature. If we recognize all this, we will be left only with the realization that we should serve the Supreme.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Someone wrote me a letter: "I want to know how to go about looking for God, Mahārāja. Can you tell me?"

I thought it was almost a silly question to ask me. I mean, the answer is that you chant Kṛṣṇa's holy names and practice other forms of *sādhana.* It made me wonder whether this person was ready to pay the price of giving up

all other pursuits in his search for God. It is impossible to divide your time between other things and God and to actually find God. There just isn't that much time in a life. Therefore, before you say you're looking for Kṛṣṇa, you have to decide whether or not you really want to find Him. But if you say, "Well, I'm looking for Him, yes, but I'm also looking for other things. I thought that if I showed some effort, Kṛṣṇa would personally illumine my other interests and bring me to His lotus feet," well, that's possible too. So I shouldn't be too severe in my response. Still, the eclectic approach doesn't usually lead us very far in *bhakti*.

Ah, my. Do I know, either, how to find God? I see myself, dressed in saffron, directly representing Śrīla Prabhupāda, and realize that I should be doing better in my own search for Kṛṣṇa. I don't stay up all night like St. Francis and call out, "O my God! O my God!" wanting to know Him, wanting to serve Him, wanting nothing more than this and crying like a child for it.

No, I don't do that. But I am inclined toward God consciousness, and when I look out (or in) and see the obstacles I have to cross, I realize that they *are* obstacles to my goal. To recognize the obstacles means to understand the goal.

We speak about these things, and I will speak about them tonight to Mother Murāri, to Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa dāsa, to Ekatvam, to all these devotees who have survived their

pain—the women birthing their children, the men trying to support their families, to those who feel guilty when they neglect their rounds. They may not think I know what they are going through because I tell them to give up their guilt and to chant anyway, but I do, I do.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

17

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

We're broadcasting from Hari dāsa's house in Berbice, Guyana. "Hee-haw, hee-haw, hee-haw . . . " There's a jackass out there somewhere. He sounds just like the jackasses that bray in the fields of Vṛndāvana. Horrible sound for a civilized Britisher like me who likes his tea on time and doesn't like to see so many gruff people along the Guyanese roadsides. This Britisher prefers to stay in his own little world. This house is noisy, but it's elegant, and in this room, there are screens on the windows.

Now the thing is, a person like me with a little spare time in the afternoon ought to be reading. But I can't right now. That's a dilemma.

A voice pops up: "Is it a dilemma because you've read Prabhupāda's books so many times? Or is there some other reason?"

"That's not a question, that's a challenge."

It sounds like the challenge of the whole *vaidhi* process. How long can we go on doing something simply by going through the motions? I don't know, I don't know.

Does that question scare you as much as it scares me? To think that I might not have full faith in my spiritual master's books, that I'm holding onto the practice the way a dying man holds onto a dead limb. Eventually, he'll have to let go, and then what?

That's a blasphemous thought and we're not allowed to have blasphemous thoughts. Well, we do. We have to face our demons because unless we face them and stop trying to avoid them, we'll never get anywhere.

Well, here's a demon. Am I or am I not being nurtured by my spiritual master's books, and if not, why not? Am I suffering from some unknown handicap or inability? A lack of mercy? The material desire for cheap novelty?

Okay, so this is an exercise in facing doubt. I don't always suffer from this problem. Often it comes when I'm tired and distracted. Still, I don't want it to come at all. It would be a real victory to overcome my doubt forever. I don't know if I have it in me to do that now. It's late afternoon and it's hot. I can see the coconut palms from my window and hear the gruff-voiced Guyanese out on the road. In half an hour I'll have to shower, then sit in a room and meet with my disciples. I'll begin that meeting by explaining that the reason I didn't invite all the Guyanese devotees to this meeting is that my disciples and I have a family relationship and need to spend time nurturing it. Then I will tell them they can ask me questions. They might not have any. In any case, you can see that I'm on a schedule of performances and I don't have time to concentrate. That's my excuse.

Prabhupāda singing:

śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu nityānandaśrī advaita
gadādhara śrīvāsādi gaura-bhakta-vṛnda

Time in the tropics seems to go slower, but it's an illusion. This afternoon will end at some point just like any other afternoon, and I will discover that it wasn't longer at all. Even Lord Brahmā will discover that at the end of his long

lifetime. When the afternoons feel longest, and when it seems like you have endless hours to accomplish something, that seems to be the time when nothing much gets done. So it goes.

The palm trees lean out, growing straight up at an angle to the ground. The long, green palm leaves sway and clack in the breeze. They look almost yellow in the sunlight. The silly bonk, bonk, bonk of the music down here. It's all the same wherever you go. Sometimes I see people in the airport wearing T-shirts that express disgust with life's sameness. When people are sincere about their disgust, it's usually a sign that they are ready to try and cut through the artificiality of their lives and to find something constructive to do. They're usually stuck, though, and not too successful. That's because they equate "constructive" with a more honest form of sense gratification rather than with transcendence.

18

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

I just heard a tape of Prabhupāda speaking in 1973 in London on *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.6. Arjuna is trying to decide whether or not to fight. He is confused; should he follow what he considers good morality, or should he give in to his urge to surrender to Kṛṣṇa? In that context, Prabhupāda quoted a Bengali proverb. It was an unusual juxtaposition of points. The proverb was, "If you don't know whether or not to eat, then don't eat, but if you're going to eat, then eat in December. Similarly, if you are unsure whether to travel, better to stay home, but if you feel the call of nature, you must go."

Then Prabhupāda spoke about how we can fight even in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He emphasized the word "consciousness." It's not that we have to stop our natural lives, but we should live and act only for Kṛṣṇa's service.

You can probably guess what example I drew from my own life to fill into that instruction. I thought about writing. Writing is a natural propensity for me. Even though I sometimes run into a block about it, why should I think it has to be stopped in order for me to become Kṛṣṇa conscious? Prabhupāda went so far as to say that some people want to stop war, but war cannot be stopped. Fighting is a natural propensity, and we see it even in children. Similarly, creative writing is a natural propensity for certain types of people. I don't have to give it up in order to serve Kṛṣṇa.

I've gone over all this already. Last year I even wrote in one writing session, "If you persistently feel that you should stop writing, then put down your pen. But this may be a trick of the gremlin mind to make me stop writing. Better I plunge ahead through the darkness with only the headlights of my conviction turned on than give it up."

Yes, the gremlin, the personified writing block, the personified pain in the neck. Sometimes he thinks that he has such devastating power that by just one or two quick statements, he can wipe out a whole lifetime of service commitment. His attack is usually more emotional than intellectual. He tells me I've already said everything I want to say. The fact that I hesitate between pen strokes is the proof.

I have discovered, however, that as long as we're living, as long as the heart beats, we will have something more to say. And since that is true, we might as well say it—or write it—in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Here are some things I want to say:

I pray to be with Śrīla Prabhupāda in my next life.

I want to feel confident that Prabhupāda accepts me.

I want to be who I am and serve the devotees.

Hmm. How to talk about any of those statements? Some things shouldn't be openly discussed. Better to let spiritual feelings simmer and grow in flavor. Or, better to give an analogy about a tree. Trees don't grow deep roots overnight. Our feelings, to become deep, don't grow overnight.

That is especially true of love. Love is developed by attentive and long-term service, and the taking of risks in expressing affection. That's how we build the confidence that our beloved accepts us. It's a little beyond words because it's based on deeds.

Who *is* Prabhupāda and how can we praise him? It may take time to answer that question. To ask, "Who is he?" doesn't even have to begin with inquiry into his specific *rasa* in Goloka. That information may not be open for our understanding until he himself desires that we know it. At the same time, we can inquire into who he is as he appeared among us, that elderly *sannyāsī,* pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa, the daring preacher, the founder of ISKCON. *That* in itself is unfathomable.

I wrote this in one writing session: "We hear of cutting through and writing what is in our hearts, what is deepest, but we fear to write what would make tears flow. If we can only open ourselves like that, however, we will become supremely blissful. I don't know if I can expect such an opening, so I write along. Could it be much better? Is there something I can do to cut through? Will I improve and should I even care about it?"

Cut through. It means cutting through what we usually do when we talk. We don't talk, actually, we blather. Our words are puffy, or like the fluff inside a pillow. Why? Because we're often afraid to be honest. Fear creates a kind of bloated prose. A writer is supposed to cut through all that and to speak nakedly what he or she really thinks. Often, the easiest way to do this is to speak the truth as quickly as you can and to move on.

One of my truths, and the reason I tend to discuss writing and writing blocks, is that although I feel good to be

nearing the end of my latest writing project—the happiness of accomplishment, gratitude toward Kṛṣṇa for allowing me to serve in this way, etc.—I feel the pressure of passing time. I want to produce as much as possible in the time I have left, and I don't know how long that is.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

19

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

This is a radio show, broadcast from Vicenza, Italy. This is the very place I began doing radio shows over a year ago, although I'm in a different room on this visit. It was spring when I was here last time, and I remember looking out the window at the same beautiful, pink-violet blossoming tree, the surest sign of spring in this area. This year I'm in a third-floor attic room, looking out at the hills green with olive trees. It's my last day here.

Yesterday, I spoke to two devotees as a warm-up to a seminar I am about to give at Villa Vṛndāvana. I spoke about how we have to cool down our feverish material activities and relish the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.* Hearing *kṛṣṇa-kathā* is a deeper pleasure than any other thing we can do in this world, but often we're too hyped up to stop and read.

To the two devotees listening to my rehearsal lecture, I presented the example of my own life before I was a devotee. I said that I used to read in such a feverish spirit that when I first opened the *Bhāgavatam,* I actually had to learn to slow down and read more deeply. One of the details I threw into that story was that I used to take amphetamines.

Afterwards, I felt some disturbance that I had told them something unsavory from my past. Of course, that brings up the whole discussion about my wanting to write and speak in a confessional way.

I heard about a drug rehabilitation program that arranges for people to live in communities. I think it's a twelve-step program. Anyway, above their meeting room door they have a sign that says, "Remember where you came from." I heard that the program's organizers feel that such a sign would help the participants increase their determination. I'm sure it makes them feel humble too.

Prabhupāda says something similar: "Always remember how you were saved from your fallen position." He writes that specifically in the *Bhāgavatam* section on Ajāmila, in a purport after Ajāmila curses himself for his sinful life.

In general, however, devotees prefer not to dwell in the past, especially if doing so gives rise to the opposite of humility. If instead we feel bravado that although we were such sinners, we have been able to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or just as bad, we defend our inability to practice strictly because we were such sinners, we may find ourselves remaining subtly attached to our sinful life. My mother was like that. Surprisingly enough to me, my mother was a flapper in the "Roaring '20s." In New York City, no less. If ever she saw a flapper on television or in a magazine, she would wink and say, "I was like that." Of course, to us, she was more a "mother hen" and didn't resemble a flapper in the least, but that was her little moment to brag.

In someone who is supposed to be saintly, such bragging is, of course, inappropriate. He knows he would never take *that* up again—he doesn't even want to—but he likes to wink at it once in awhile to show that he remembers those days. His wink becomes a combination glorification of the sin and a glorification of the fact that he had such spirit in those days, even though he is winking safely from a distance.

"You mean *you* almost went over the waterfalls?"

"Yes, I was right at the edge. I was daring in those days. That's part of who I am."

Some people may take that all right; others may lose their faith. That's how I felt yesterday. Here I was, trying to reach the devotees with the clear message that they should become absorbed in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam,* and I had to throw in that reference to drugs, as if it mattered then or now.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Our first volume of *Radio Shows* is almost ready to go to the printer. The front cover design shows a man speaking into a microphone. On the back is a drawing of a man sitting in an easy chair. Śrīla Prabhupāda is on the altar. The man's neck is bent forward; not a heroic stance. That scholar's slouch again as he tries to get it out, whatever it is he feels he has to say.

When I remember speaking in that mood, I realize that it wasn't a physical act but an act of spirit. It's not that that spirit was always flying on its wings of triumph. That man was trying earnestly to speak despite the croaks and the occasional unsavory references. He sat under Prabhupāda's gaze, trying to be truthful and always hoping for Kṛṣṇa's approval, if not for the actual speech, then for the purpose behind the speech, for the attempt to get to the heart of a person whose cry, croak, howl, expiring breath, sometimes stuttering madness, vanity, humble prayer, performance were meant only for Him.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Dear people of the world, please take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

During class this morning, I answered at length a question from a boy who said that he was attached to Christ when he was young, but now doesn't feel the same degree of attachment to Kṛṣṇa. I tried to explain that we have to go forward in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, trusting that Christ approves.

After class, a young devotee, Caitanya-candrodayā dāsa, accompanied me up the stairs to my room. He's about twenty-two years old, and he's Russian. He said, "I never had any religious upbringing."

"Oh, were you brought up as a Communist, or didn't your parents teach you?"

"No, my parents were against the Communists, but they were atheists. I never had any religious feeling. I was attracted by the *philosophy* of Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

Then he spoke a little about the Russian Orthodox Church and the impending laws that will make what they call "non-national cults" illegal. Cults, or new religions not approved by the national religion, are losing ground along with the Russian liberal forces. Some kind of reactionary movement is growing in Russia.

I do lead a sheltered life. I have to admire the ISKCON preachers for going to Russia and trying to save the situation. They have a lot to deal with. In fact, Caitanya-candrodayā said that the biggest problem in ISKCON Russia is not the government suppression, but the internal difficulties.

I added, "Prabhupāda said that internal dissension is the only thing that can destroy us." Caitanya-candrodayā said that even when the Russian empire was intact and the KGB was persecuting the small band of devotees, the flame of devotional service was strong. The preaching could not be stopped by any outside force. If we collapse within, however, what can be done?

Prabhupāda hoped that by distributing his books, even if ISKCON crumbled, Kṛṣṇa consciousness would live on in the Western countries.

20

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

It's early in the day and I have different things to talk about, but before I get into that, I want to grope with something else I may want to say. I want to get at current thoughts, past thoughts, to concentrate or not, but to allow whatever wants to be said to surface.

When I began the radio shows a year ago, I kept the image of the flute player in the pit within my mind. I imagined my audience was Kṛṣṇa. There was no one else there with the man in the pit. All other speaking was over.

The other part of the image was the anthropologist hidden in the bushes, recording the flute player's last rasping notes played for the gods. Therefore, although I speak to Kṛṣṇa, I speak to be heard by others too. I don't like to analyze that too much and to carry the analogy too closely into my own attempts here. Rather, the image of the pit means reaching deep within yourself and finding out sincerely, what is in your heart. It's not possible to do that in front of an audience, or even if you're thinking of an audience. It takes solitude.

Solitude is such a paradox in an artist's life. It creates the space to work with honesty and integrity, and even though it means you have no audience, by working in solitude you produce something better to share with an audience than you would have been able to do in public.

Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I'm not alone; I see a flying insect right under the desk lamp. Its wings are transparent and in the light of the lamp, iridescent. Its wings pile on top of one another—it has ample wings—but it doesn't seem to be a good flyer. Looks more like an ant with wings. It crawls around and when I reach out to disturb it, it doesn't fly away. It simply wanders, jumps, and finally, if you coax it into flying (it would take a lot of coaxing), it may fly.

Everyone has their own karma, even insects. I don't see any advantage to being a flying insect. Come on, fellow, go away!

I'm slow company today.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

I wanted to read something from a writing session I wrote:

"We achieve integrity in different ways. I mentioned how it's easier internally to follow your authorities with the confidence that they always know what's best for you. It's more difficult to be self-reliant and alone with yourself. I don't want to run out of seclusion shouting, 'I surrender! I'll do whatever you want me to do!' Better I stick it out in my bunker and fire shots at the approaching enemy. I too work to defend the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. I too have a place now, in the phalanx, and I must not desert it out of cowardice or because it's too hard, or out of passionate, restless dissatisfaction, lack of patience."

I feel the conviction in those sentences that something can be done even if it doesn't seem direct. Actually, we all

have conviction for what we are doing. I remember while speaking at Gītā-nāgarī some years ago, the devotees were convinced that by taking care of the cows and working the land, it would affect the whole world. Paramānanda on the other hand, used to speak more of the effect the farm work would have on the local neighbors. He said they would see the devotees doing something good. That seemed limited to me. I asked, "Do you have any other concept of how it will influence others?"

"No."

He was a practical man, and he had deep realizations about the importance of cow protection and agriculture. When he said "no" so simply, I felt hesitant to add more, but then I did: "Well, maybe it's a little mystical, but don't you think that by working the land here at Gītā-nāgarī and protecting the cows, by setting such an example, that it will reverberate around the world in some way?"

We almost always want to see cause and effect and a tangible result from our work. It seems important. The real tangible result, however, is in the performance of the *yajña* itself. *Yajña* pleases Kṛṣṇa. We can't always perceive the results of pleasing Kṛṣṇa with our blunt, material senses. Does the little work going on at Gītā-nāgarī have the power to please Kṛṣṇa and to offset the tremendous amount of bad karma going on in America? Is it enough to save mankind?

Prabhupāda told us that in order to get food, people had to perform sacrifice. Are the farmers who don't perform *yajña* in control of whether or not the rains fall? These cash crop demons? No, it must be that the rains come because of the performance of *yajña*. It's a mystical process. Prabhu-

pāda said that nuclear war may be offset by the performance of the *saṅkīrtana-yajña.*

Book distribution as well as cow protection are forms of *saṅkīrtana-yajña.* Farming produces the tangible result of producing food grains. Book distribution usually brings in money. Other than that, what can we see? When a book is distributed, we don't know what happens to it any more than we can know how the protection of cows on one small farm in rural Pennsylvania can influence the whole world in some way. All we can do is have faith that because the book and the example are potent in and of themselves, they will act.

I mention all this because I too am looking for such tangible results in my own service. I want to see the connection between my going alone and trying to understand myself through writing, reading, prayer, and *japa*—how this one person seeks to understand and serve Kṛṣṇa—and the fulfillment of Kṛṣṇa's mission in the world.

However we feel compelled to serve, action is important. Acting in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is more important than theoretical *jñāna* and especially an indecisive mental life. Still, how long will we continue to act if we don't have the conviction that our actions have some value beyond ourselves? If we can't see our actions as part of the preaching mission? If we think we will continue to act regardless of the action's intrinsic value simply because it is the guru's order, we are wrong. To surrender to guru, we have to surrender our whole selves and not just a part. We will want to understand and be part of a bigger picture and it will be difficult to serve without any vision. For me, finding that vision requires that I spend time alone instead of constantly bouncing off others' opinions and feelings. In the quiet I

can ask myself whether or not I want to surrender and find my own "yes."

That's a kind of integrity. Integrity means a person is acting from his or her wholeness. When you act out of a personal wholeness, you don't act for cheap reasons but for truth.

I just read a few snippets from the book, *Black Like Me.* It was written by Griffin, a white journalist who chemically dyed his skin black, went to the deep South, and entered into the black experience. Then he came out and wrote about it to educate the white world. Afterwards, he became quite a celebrity and appeared on a variety of talk shows to discuss his experiences. One of the shows on which he appeared was the Today show, hosted by Dave Garroway. Later, he told how before he went on the air, he was talking with Dave Garroway about the show. Garroway said, "There's one thing I want to say to you," and Griffin was afraid Garroway was going to tell him to soft-pedal his experiences. Rather, Garroway said, "When you're talking, I want you to concentrate all your energy on being honest. Don't worry about how it's going to sound or whether it's too radical. I'll worry about that. Don't worry about what my sponsors will say. Will you do me that favor and just concentrate on being honest?" Of course, Griffin appreciated Garroway's remark and respected him for his willingness to have him tell the truth.

Act from wholeness and trust that it will affect others in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

21

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

I would like to read more from my writing sessions. Here's something: "I was formed by him." I wrote this last year, talking about Prabhupāda. "Memories of our exchanges are important to me, and to read his books as he wanted me to."

I am an imperfect disciple, there is no doubt, but I don't have to doubt whether or not I am Prabhupāda's man. I am. I don't have to doubt whether or not Prabhupāda accepts me or loves me. He does. The real question is whether or not I can improve. Of course, the answer is that I can stand to improve a lot. At the same time, am I capable of making the effort? I hope so. I won't succeed, however, by feeling guilty for my shortcomings.

To improve means to follow the spiritual master's instructions. I heard Prabhupāda on tape today saying, "If you don't think of Kṛṣṇa for a moment, then *māyā* can come: 'Come here, my dear sir,' and you'll be entangled. So always think of Kṛṣṇa and be very cautious." Good advice. But it's not just advice, it's an order and we should take it as such.

Remember Kṛṣṇa, remember guru. I was just thinking—was it last night?—about *Prabhupāda-līlā,* that chapter about Prabhupāda in Boston. It was chock full of stuff from the diary I kept at that time called "Swami in Boston."

Swami in Boston. I'll have to read that again. Maybe I'll even give lectures on it so I can tell about that wonderful

visit, that wonderful month of May in 1968. It's May now, and maybe that's why I'm remembering it.

Prabhupāda, Jaya Prabhupāda, Jaya Prabhupāda,
Jaya Prabhupāda. Jaya Prabhupāda, Jaya Prabhupāda.

Prabhupāda said that the spiritual master has to be able to chastise his disciples for their own good. Kṛṣṇa chastised Arjuna when He spoke the verse in the second chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā, aśocyān anvaśocas tvaṁ, prajñā-vādāṁś ca bhāṣase/ gatāsūn agatāsuṁś ca, nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ.* "Arjuna, you are a fool because although you are speaking learned words, you are lamenting for the living and the dead." A guru has to be able to speak strong words to break through the disciple's illusion.

That's a hard one for me. I prefer to be nice and not to intrude into other people's lives. I prefer to mind my own business. Still, I have taken the role of teacher, and I have to fulfill it according to Prabhupāda's instructions. The teacher shouldn't bully his students, nor reprimand them for things they did not do. He shouldn't be unfair. That takes gravity because he has to be sure about what he is saying. But he has to teach because that's his duty.

Imagine this scenario: you meet with a devotee who wants counseling, a valuable *saṅkīrtana* devotee. The authorities want you to motivate the devotee to continue doing *saṅkīrtana.* If you bow to that pressure, your preaching will be motivated by something other than your own realization of what the devotee should or should not do and the devotee's own conviction or needs. If the devotee feels that doing *saṅkīrtana* is too difficult, does that mean you can give no other advice?

I tend to want devotees who seek my advice to decide certain things for themselves. I also decide for myself how I would like to serve Kṛṣṇa. I like to write. In the one-hour writing sessions, I am not responsible to "motivate" anyone, but it has its own value as a teaching tool.

It's not that the teacher has to make all the decisions. I heard a nice point on a tape yesterday where Prabhupāda said, "Don't go to the guru as you would a physician for medical ills." And, "There are so many specialists in different things that you may want, but when you want Kṛṣṇa, that's what the guru gives. *Kṛṣṇa se tomāra kṛṣṇa* . . . you know that song? 'You have Kṛṣṇa. Please, I am begging you, please give me Kṛṣṇa.' *That's* spiritual master."

Go to the guru to receive the essence of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It's not irresponsible of the guru to avoid making relative decisions in the lives of his disciples. Neither is it irresponsible if he doesn't act as the instrument to tell the disciples what others want them to do. Neither does he want to create rebelliousness in the disciples. His relevance in the disciples' lives is to help them remember Kṛṣṇa despite their struggles. We all have to struggle, but who will remind us to hear and chant with devotion? Who will help us to find our actual capacity to remember Kṛṣṇa regardless of the externals of our lives? The disciples can figure out the externals themselves when they understand the heart of the guru's instructions: remember Kṛṣṇa, be honest, and always try your best.

"Please," someone wrote me, "I am desperately waiting for an answer." What was the question? He wanted to know whether he could take an herbal medicine that contained animal products for his heart problem. How do I know? I told him that when Prabhupāda was asked that question, he

said that since we don't know whether the medicine will actually cure, it's risky to give up the regulative principles. If you're sure it would save your life and otherwise you would die, then you can take it. That much I can say, but what I can't know is how to judge the seriousness of the case medically nor how to gauge the effectiveness of the medicine. I wouldn't want the responsibility of telling someone something about which I know nothing but which may mean the difference between life and death.

So I said, "You're right, you do desperately need my reply, but what you desperately need to hear is that you're an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa." Similarly, if someone wants to know whether or not he should follow his temple president's order that he continue *saṅkīrtana,* even though he is finding it too difficult, I say, "Here, I just wrote this writing session."

"Oh, good! There's something in here about this?" They'll read it and it's *not* about *that,* but it's a way to teach. *Capiche?*

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

It's a slow-moving day today. Rainy. Last day here in Cozilli. I don't know if I'll be able to go out on a walk, but I hope so.

22

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

I have been speaking the radio shows down by the lake, but since yesterday, big trucks have been going down there to pick up rocks. Let's see if I can get out early enough that I don't run into them. Just in case, though, I'll talk as I walk down there.

Prabhupāda asked, "Who is crazy?" It's not difficult to find a crazy person—he said that in 1968 in Los Angeles as he saw the cars going back and forth, back and forth all day long. They're crazy," he said, meaning, "What are they doing?" Their commercial endeavors are especially useless, especially in a city like Los Angeles where despite their serious intentions, everything can be finished with one earthquake. An earthquake has destroyed the roads? Don't worry! Within hours, they have arranged new roads upon which they can continue their serious back and forth travel. Prabhupāda questioned whether it was really so different from a dog's running back and forth, or a cat's.

Of course, as he said that, I thought, "Well, you're really stepping on some toes here! I mean, would he stop it all?" And of course, Prabhupāda knew he couldn't stop it. Devotees are not stoppers through violent aggression, so who will notice if one *sādhu* is standing on the sidewalk saying, "This is crazy, all this back and forth for sense gratification"? It seems of no account except to a handful of followers.

But it is of definite account to those followers, and those followers are out making it of account to others. And besides that, it becomes of account as those followers are taught by the *sādhu* to use the inevitable energy being generated out there in Kṛṣṇa's service. We too get into cars and go out for Kṛṣṇa's purpose. Beyond the activity of driving back and forth on crowded freeways is the motive behind it, and that's what makes the difference between someone caught in a world of craziness and a devotee.

Sādhus should speak the truth. Prabhupāda said that the real purpose of human life was to awaken to our constitutional spiritual nature as Kṛṣṇa's servants and those of us who were willing to go out and tell others that message were real welfare workers. Prabhupāda conceded that other welfare work is nice—hospitals, and so on—but that those other forms of charity have little ultimate value. He compared it to finding a lost child and discovering that he is actually the son of a rich man. It is far better for the child's ongoing improvement to carry him back to his father than to give him a free meal. Similarly, it's better if we carry people back to their true father than tend only to their bodies.

And, of course, the *sādhu's* words are not of no account if they are part of the message carried to others. They weigh so much that they will be heard and taken into the hearts of people and applied. That's how Kṛṣṇa consciousness is spread. Imagine if the preaching were so successful that numbers of people became devotees. Whole constituencies! Then we *would* see the craziness diminish. People would begin to wonder themselves why they were working so hard, driven on by the modes of passion and ignorance. What about these people here? Why are they working so many

hours to remove stone from a lakeside and to put it somewhere else? Yes, people would ask themselves that question.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Now, it's also true that people may see me out here in the wind and the rain and think *I'm* crazy. What am I *doing* anyway? Don't I have a job? Well, no. You see, folks, I just chant this simple prayer to God. It's a recitation of His names, actually, and we say them over and over.

Do you want to know what I'm doing out here? I'm looking at the tractor. It has huge iron cleats for tires and a big hydraulic scooper to pick up the rocks. The rocks go in the back of the truck that sits beside it. Then there's another tractor that pulls the truck away. I'm looking at these pieces of equipment and doing my simple work of chanting the holy names of God. If I say it prayerfully, and at the same time, remember myself as spirit soul and God as the supreme soul, if I remember that I'm going to die and pray never to forget Kṛṣṇa and my eternal relationship with Him, then I feel I am doing all the work I need to do.

Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa! You can do it too! Devotees usually tell people in the beginning that they can just add the chanting to what they're already doing in the day. Just chant a little in the midst of your busy life. You don't have to change anything. Sometimes you may wonder why Prabhupāda said that. Why don't people have to give up their work to perform pure devotional service? Well, that's obvious. Everyone is driven to action. It's the nature of the

human animal. Prabhupāda knew he wasn't going to close down the work force by encouraging people to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. Just to live we have to do some sort of work. It's very difficult to overcome that except for the few people who might take *sannyāsa.* Therefore, a process that takes too much away from that drive is just not going to be seen as practical by most people. Some people will renounce, though, and spend more time praying, chanting, preaching, and trying to engage in pure devotion.

Some neophyte devotees don't take *sannyāsa,* but get fired up anyway and give everything up. They chant with fervor, go out preaching, and distribute books. The more they do that, the more qualified they become. Qualification comes in the form of increased sincerity. Sincerity is what makes us dear to Kṛṣṇa. As those neophytes keep it up, they become more and more dear to Kṛṣṇa.

Most of us have probably been through that stage. Some of us cool off in later life and have to find a service in the *saṅkīrtana* movement more in keeping with our mellowing fires. We don't always have that same blind enthusiasm, but are older and a little wiser. Such people might begin to understand that you really can chant Hare Kṛṣṇa while you remove rocks from the lakeside, that you don't have to start by giving everything up.

There are a lot of devotees who sneak in their chanting. I know one devotee who is a secretary in a place where they give music lessons. She goes to work early and chants her rounds before the other workers come. Another man works at a computer with others in a company. Each worker has a cubicle, not an office with a door, and this man has pinned up pictures of Vṛndāvana in his. It took him awhile to work up his courage to do something like that, but now that he's

established there, people don't mind. "Hey, Joe, what's this a picture of?"

"That's the place where I'm going to retire."

His coworkers look closer at the picture of Govardhana with its gnarled trees and rocky hillside. "Well, whatever turns you on! Looks like a nice place. What's that, a pond?"

"Yeah, it's called Rādhā-kuṇḍa." And he chants Hare Kṛṣṇa one way or another—on the computer, in his mind, whispered, or aloud.

We *have* to chant, we have to chant the holy name of God. Nothing stops us because it's the satisfaction of a basic need. We chant covertly or openly—crazy Hare Kṛṣṇas—but we get the rounds in.

Hare Kṛṣṇa kids. I looked in a dictionary of American slang and found the phrase, "Hare Kṛṣṇa kids." Amazing! The definition said it was an alternative to "Hare Kṛṣṇa people." All it said was that we were "members of the cult, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. 'Hare' means 'hail,'" and I forget how it defined "Kṛṣṇa." It might have said "a name for God."

Imagine still being known as kids. Because a lot of young people used to join. It's sort of a breezy, slangy, condescending term. You picture kids with sneakers and orange bed sheets who come up to you and ask for money. We're perpetual children, immortalized in the slang dictionary. And it did seem like it would be like that because we were all so rosy-faced, the girls young and virginal. Most were cheerful and just a little pushy out there on the street. Definitely the look of cultists. Well, better to be counted in with the Hare Kṛṣṇa kids than listed as yuppies or guppies or dinks (double income, no kids).

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Oh no, you're one of them?! A devotee I know who works as an executive—something about her gave her away. They were talking about Buddhism and mantras, something acceptable. I guess one can be a Buddhist and still live in the world without any conflict, at least an armchair Buddhist. Anyway, they were having this discussion at work. Then a little later, that same executive came into her office to talk about work and said, "By the way, when we were talking about mantras, you didn't tell me what mantra you chant."

The moment of truth. Should she tell him? Hare Kṛṣṇa is such a buzz word. It has so many immediate associations in people's minds different from distant mountain peaks rising into the sky. She went for it: "Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa . . . " and she continued to vibrate the holy name in that skyscraper in the middle of Manhattan.

"What?! You mean those kids that ride around chanting on the back of a flatbed truck?" He was referring to the way they do *harināma* in New York. It's not so sophisticated in a way, but a real all-out people approach. "One of those?" He was incredulous.

Blushing, she said, "The very ones. Yes, the very ones!"

I guess these Hare Kṛṣṇa kids have infiltrated society's awareness more than we tend to think. This executive then learned that the Hare Kṛṣṇas are not only children. They really do have adult members, even old adults. They're serious people.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Well, I thought I'd be back at the house by now, but since the workers didn't come—it's already 9:25—I managed to complete a whole show by the lake.

Do you think I sound a little too cocky? I'm a timid soul. As soon as I see the first sign of some character coming, I'll hide my tape recorder, take this microphone off my lapel, and try to look like a guy who is just looking at the lake. "Good mornin', how are ya?" I won't say something else because I'm not part of this country. The character will probably say, "It's dirty weather today, isn't it?" Or, "Hell of a day." I'll just play the role of an old guy who has come out of his guest house, who, it is rumored, has come here to do some writing or something. Do you think he's rumored to be a Hare Kṛṣṇa?

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Prabhupāda was bold, his movement is bold, so what's wrong with me? Well, I'm just saying, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa privately, or if you've got the moxie, then be a prominent, easily spotted member of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement.

You want people to know. Because this life is a joke, a bitter joke. It's *asat.* There are so many ways to say that—I like to say it in poems—but it has to be said.

As life passes, we wish we had done things differently. Especially given more attention to the most important things. But that time has passed. Now what?

In my bones I don't know. I don't know anything. I don't know how it all began. Some people say it began by star dust, or by a universal chunk, but they forget to include Kṛṣṇa as the supreme director and intelligent force beyond the universe. That's what I mean by concentrating on what's important. We can spend lifetimes researching the data, but who are we and what are we doing here? Those are more essential questions.

People wonder how one person can be behind everything. How can Kṛṣṇa be behind the wars, behind the pancakes we had for breakfast, behind the power to even digest them, behind the good times and the bad? The pub? The Guinness Stout? *Everything*? Doesn't that create contradictions? He's either on one side or the other.

No, He's incomprehensible. Yeah, that's what He is, incomprehensible.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Well, I made it through another radio show. I know this one was a little wild, like the weather, and I was ranting a bit. I found myself wishing I was more of a preacher. I'm not, but at least I was able to hint that if you're a coward like me, you can still chant Kṛṣṇa's names. Of course, I realized as I spoke that it probably would have been better to drop all pretense and just chant for half an hour, but after all, this is

a radio show and my sponsors expect me to say something too.

I wish you the best in your day. Go on chanting and be brave. You can make a difference.

23

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

It's a hot June day and we're in a campground, traveling through Assisi. I was just looking at an ancient treatise called *The Art of Writing,* or in Chinese, *Wen Fu,* by the author Lu Chi. It's an ancient classic of advice for writers. There are quite a few mentions in it of revision and the importance of precision, which, of course, is like poison to my ears, because I don't like that kind of writing discipline. I'm looking for improvised, free expression, not studied, careful wording. That doesn't mean I want to be self-indulgent or sloppy. Rather, I continue to write, look for the best, and don't publish everything I write. Anyway, I'm not bound by Lu Chi's advice, so I don't need to comment on it.

There are other things in it that I like, though. I've just come from several weeks of intense lecturing and seminars, disciples' meetings too, like that, and I had very little time for writing. Whenever I do that, I feel distanced from my creative flow. I'd like to get back into writing when I have the time—in about a week. I thought I would write a timed book called "A Week in Palermo." Then I read this nice piece in Lu Chi's book called, "The Inspiration." I'll read it to you:

> The time comes when emotions strangle, though every stimulus wants response. There are times when the spirit freezes. The writer feels dead as bleached wood,

> dry as a riverbed in drought. For a way out, search the depths of the soul for a spirit. Beg, if need be, for a sign of life. The dark inside of the mind lies hidden. Thoughts must be brought like a child from the womb, terrified and screaming. Forcing emotions brings error and error again. Letting them come naturally means letting them come clear. The truth of the thing lies inside us, but no power on earth can force it. Time after time, I search my heart in this struggle. Sometimes a door slowly opens, sometimes a door remains bolted.

Maybe that image will be the beginning of my book, especially the part about bringing a child from the womb, terrified and screaming. That sounds like a natural path because sometimes words come freely and sometimes we have to sit in silence, gnawing on the pen. In either case, it's a birth of something from the inside to the outside.

"When cutting an ax handle with an ax, surely the model is at hand. Each writer finds a new entrance into the mystery and it is difficult to explain. Nonetheless, I set down my thinking as clearly as I am able."

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

The Art of Writing says that for inspiration, you should beg if you need to, but you should not force anything. Let the way be natural. Look for the spirit within and beg Kṛṣṇa for the inspiration to glorify Him. The ideas, he says, are in the dark, and you have to bring them out, those who want to be

spoken. I speak of my muse, but I know that there is no muse other than Kṛṣṇa's sanction.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Words that want to be said. Let me lower my voice. Maybe I need to speak quieter for them to feel safe to come out, like talking to a priest in the confessional booth. "I told some lies. I talked back to my parents, I did this, I did that."

"Okay, say five Hail Marys and three Our Fathers."

You go to the altar rail and you say the prayers and wonder if those are the words that really want to come out of you and whether they will really make you a better person. Perhaps you wonder about heaven.

It's all so far away now that I am practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness, in one sense, although I suppose I still experience the same questions and lack of deep realization. Where is my direct experience of God and the spiritual world? What's the difference between my shortcomings now and the shortcomings I had while kneeling at the altar rail? Am I really any closer to God?

It's different now because I have more specific information about God's nature and the nature of the spiritual world. I also have a guru who speaks on every possible doubt with such strength of conviction that the doubts are vanquished. Not only that, but I have a personal, loving relationship with him. I have worked on his behalf, giving myself to his movement. I've become, in other words, a priest, not of a vast organization with ever-increasing levels

of hierarchy, but of an organization begun by my own personal guide and guru.

There was nothing equivalent to that in the Catholic Church for me. Not even a hope of meeting such a great figure who had the power to so totally convert my heart and fill me with Kṛṣṇa conscious knowledge. I'm no longer left to be that boy on the spongy kneeler at the altar rail, looking up at the Eucharist and trying to understand something a priest who didn't know me said, trying to sift it for meaning in a life lived within a family that wasn't God conscious. Now I can ask with feeling that Kṛṣṇa please bring me back home to Him.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Dear Father, please forgive me, for I have sinned. It has been I don't know how long since my last confession. I have not prepared myself for this confession. I have not enumerated my sins by self-research before coming here, so please excuse me for that.

I told Father Hicks that one of my sins was that I no longer believed in the process of making confession and being forgiven for sins. When Father Hicks heard that, he invited me to come and speak to him in his office. "Don't just say you'll come, but come and see me."

"I will, I will," and I did.

A few years ago when I was back in Staten Island, I saw a big building named the Father Hicks such-and-such center. He was a young man when I knew him, but it seems that in the years when I was busy working in ISKCON, he was

establishing himself as a leading Great Kills priest and was so successful at it that a building was named after him. I can imagine him becoming an outstanding pastor. It intrigued me. I wanted to stop and find out what he had done through all those years. Did he become beloved by the people? Was he actually a saintly person? I'm not sure why I was so interested, maybe because the turning point for me in following the Catholic path was when I admitted to him my doubt in the potency of confession and absolution. He didn't convince me and I left the Church. I told him that there was so much suffering in the world—the Korean War, the blacks in the South—so much injustice, and I couldn't understand why God was allowing it to be there. All he said was, "I can see you have a lot of love in you." It was a flattering statement, and I liked hearing it, but it wasn't enough. At the end of the conversation, he said, "I have to go and pray now." He said he had to pray to be able to do better to save me. He was a true fellow in his way, but I was meant to follow Prabhupāda.

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Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

This show is being broadcast from the back of the van, which we have parked outside the Medalago temple. We're near the 600-foot radio tower, which is broadcasting this message a-l-l o-v-e-r t-h-e w-o-r-l-d. Prabhupāda said that when we vibrate any sound, it travels around the earth seven times through the ether.

Can you imagine that? People pay so much to get their own radio band, but every vibration they make is already traveling around the world without fee. You may think that no one hears your little sound vibration, but sound is powerful and it begins the cycle of cause and effect. When you make your little vibration, it doesn't necessarily catapult you into popularity; no one calls your "show" to insult or praise you. Still, that sound will act.

Imagine how important, then, it is to vibrate Kṛṣṇa's message. Pure sound will affect people, and of course, that's especially true of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. It appears to be just a sound formed in the mouth and vibrated with the vocal chords, but because that sound happens to be the name of God, there is special power in it. It can clean the heart of the person who utters it and the hearts of countless others.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Some things we talk about, some things we don't. I'm building a resolve to try to collect excerpts from Prabhupāda's tapes so that I can play them to audiences and speak on them. Most of the excerpts are things that to me point out Prabhupāda's perfection in one way or another.

I have said before how I sometimes find it hard to listen to tapes on which people are challenging Prabhupāda. I become so aware of what the audience might be thinking from their own viewpoint about Prabhupāda's mood and response that I begin to feel anxious. What if they can't appreciate the logic of his example? What if they think he is faulty in some way? What if they don't like how he cuts the speaker off? That sort of thing. I feel for my spiritual master, and I don't like to see him exposed to those who won't understand or appreciate him.

The danger for me is that I may become subtly critical of Prabhupāda and want him to act in a way that doesn't allow others to criticize. It's something I deal with.

I'm learning to sympathize with *whatever* Prabhupāda was doing and to not assume to know his mind. Prabhupāda didn't make mistakes. Even if he did fail to understand a question someone was asking, that's not a cause to find fault with him, because his perfection is that he is always absorbed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

With this in mind, I think I'll excerpt from a tape where he's talking to a Catholic priest. I may even confess at the beginning of the excerpt about this problem I have sometimes. Perhaps some of the devotees in the audience do too, I don't know.

Talking about it makes me aware that it's really not an intellectual problem as much as an emotional reaction to the circumstance, and if I take the time to discuss it, I can

be cured. I did take the time to talk it out during a series of morning walks in Wicklow earlier this year. I aired my doubts and satisfied myself that what I thought was dogmatic was not really so. I tend not to hammer my doubts into the ground because I'm not a fanatic; I try to remain open-minded, even with myself. Therefore, I may feel the same challenges more than once. I have enough philosophy to defeat the challenges, however.

On this particular tape, the priest started out, it seems, with questions with which I sympathized due to their penetrating nature. He was doubting whether Prabhupāda disciples were actually developing their interior spiritual lives, or were they just busily engaged in duties? Prabhupāda said that there was no difference between inside and outside. I felt convinced by that. Then Prabhupāda challenged him by saying that there's a hospital for alcoholic priests. The priest explained it a little and then added that perhaps Prabhupāda's devotees, although busily engaged, were not so internally Kṛṣṇa conscious. Prabhupāda defended them, "No, they may be young, but they won't fall down."

I felt embarrassed when I heard that because so many of them did fall down. It almost made it seem that Prabhupāda's argument was false. Instead of being embarrassed, I can see its poignancy in retrospect. Prabhupāda voiced it so strongly at that time, 1973, and it was a fact then, that the priests were falling down and the devotees were strong. It seemed as if the reason the devotees appeared stronger was because our process was superior, but that didn't prove true. Devotees can also fall.

At the end of the conversation, Prabhupāda said that even if the devotees did fall in the future, whatever they have done is never lost.

I want to appreciate Prabhupāda and use his logical arguments in my own preaching, but I don't like to do that blindly or dogmatically. I realize that Prabhupāda was always fighting for Kṛṣṇa and that he would use whatever weapon he had at hand. Sometimes that weapon would break in two as he was using it. It's not that every weapon Prabhupāda used was invincible or infallible any more than every single one of the Vānaras' sticks and stones were infallible. Some were ground into powder under Kumbhakarṇa's feet, some were caught and hurled back by the demons, and some bounced off ineffectually. Still, the Vānaras went on fighting with whatever weapons they could grab. Similarly, Prabhupāda continued to fight with any argument, any line of reasoning, any reference, even non-devotee references, to make his points. What was his message? *Kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān syavam,* and *mattaḥ parataraṁ nānyat:* there is no truth superior to Kṛṣṇa. We should join him on the battlefield, not with a dogmatic attachment to each and every weapon, but with an understanding of the underlying essence of his mission. Not that we should take the position of an observer and say, "My dear sir, that weapon you just threw was faulty." If it was, then I'm in danger too and need to throw a weapon of my own in menial service to my spiritual master.

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Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

A radio show from South India. What's the idea? To spend some time talking, to spend some time with you in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Pastimes. I've been drawing pictures while I've been talking. Just now before starting this show I drew a picture of Prabhupāda with a brown pencil. I like the way it came out. It's a close-up. I'm under the net, the fan is whirling slowly, and it's 4:30 A.M., *maṅgala-ārati* time. I already sang *"Gurvāṣṭakam"* to Prabhupāda, so don't mark me absent from ISKCON.

Don't mark me delinquent, truant, resigned, ashamed. I shouldn't be attached to wanting either praise or infamy—that's been drilled into us—but we do want good marks, to be seen as earnestly good. Have you ever noticed how much time we spend justifying ourselves?

Today is the anniversary on which I again began to move toward death. There's one lecture Prabhupāda gave labeled something like, "Initiation Brings Deathlessness." Of course, that's for those who perfect their Kṛṣṇa consciousness. No more coming back. Their absorption in Kṛṣṇa carries them back to the spiritual world. "And whoever, at the end of his life, quits his body, remembering Me alone, at once attains My nature. Of this there is no doubt." (Bg. 8.5.) Of this there is no doubt because whatever we think of at the time of death, we accept that condition of life in the next birth. And what do we think of at the time of death?

Well, whatever we have been thinking of during our lifetime. That's what comes up. We've always loved our country or our husband or wife, or we've been dedicated to family life—whatever it is—those attachments will haunt us at the end. What a twist of irony this life is. Even if our thoughts are on our suffering, if we are meditating on our attachment, off we'll go, O spirit soul, to the next life.

Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagavad-gītā,* however, that if we have performed any devotional service, however, even if we didn't perfect our devotion, we will still be well situated in the next life, not necessarily materially, but spiritually. We will automatically take up the devotional principles again where we left off, and gradually, gradually, we will become perfect.

We can't claim that now, or can we? Whether we are fallen *yogīs* now or not, we should be striving to get as far as we can in spiritual life. Not a moment should be wasted. We should always be anxious, wondering whether or not we are spending our time in the most devotional way, such as in developing a taste for the holy name. There are no excuses for not making spiritual advancement in this life. And there is no point trying to understand why we ended up with the problems we now face in this life. We got our present body according to our deeds in our last life.

Head in hands, head in hands. This isn't the *vyāsāsana.* I don't have to have all the answers or solve all the problems. I am under a mosquito net, trying to find the real person within me. If we can cleanse ourselves at least somewhat, we can go back to the more official, responsible presentation of reality, having touched base with who we actually are when we are being ourselves. We have to learn to use up all our colors in Kṛṣṇa's service, and to express them all fully.

Be Kṛṣṇa conscious to the max. Is that not our desire, and has not Prabhupāda given us that opportunity?

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

The six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana—we don't know exactly what they looked like. There's one picture—they say it's an accurate rendition of Rūpa Gosvāmī's features. It's a lovely picture. He's graceful, sitting on his haunches, writing. And there's the picture of all six Gosvāmīs posing for the artist. It's a little humorous, as if they got together for a group photo.

I want to make my own rendition of them in their *bābājī* dress. I imagine they're older, Rūpa and Sanātana, their clothes hanging in folds.

Can't be quiet, this radio show man. Can't draw either. I tried to draw them as individuals, but they came out looking alike. It made it clear to me that I don't know exactly who these six Gosvāmīs are, each one of them, except by name.

In the picture I have, the artist made it look like Sanātana Gosvāmī doesn't have any teeth. There's nothing shameful about not having teeth. It's not that for spiritual advancement, you have to prove that you kept your teeth, or that because you lost your teeth, you aren't advanced. It doesn't mean that at all.

I think I'll just try to draw one Gosvāmī. On my little pad, I am coloring green shrubbery in behind him and brown earth under his feet. Simple earth of Vṛndāvana. I left the page white where his clothes are to show his *bābājī* dress.

The sky is blue behind his head. Images come onto the page. Is it the light?

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

To speak in the silence and to produce something by it takes work. You know, it shows that we're all just people trying to improve ourselves by serving Kṛṣṇa according to our inclinations. Kṛṣṇa seems to sanction that. Within ourselves, however, we also cultivate gentleness and strength, austerity and the other qualities a devotee should possess, faith in the Absolute Truth. A devotee doesn't think that by serving according to his inclination he has become the apple of his spiritual master's eye, better than all others, but he does acknowledge his connection with guru and Kṛṣṇa, and he does assert his desire to render everything he does as service to Kṛṣṇa. That is what his life is about. Therefore, he draws pictures of a *sādhaka's* life or in some way illustrates the suffering of material life. He always points to Kṛṣṇa consciousness as the only relief.

A devotee glorifies Kṛṣṇa. He doesn't pray for material benefit, but he prays to please Kṛṣṇa. He begs Kṛṣṇa for service at His feet. He begs to be accepted as one of the devotees. He aspires to attain offenseless chanting. He maintains hope against hope. After stating his aspirations, he continues on his path, doing whatever small services he can, living carefully according to scriptural injunctions, and being rectified by Kṛṣṇa for whatever mistakes he commits.

Devotees are not ordinary persons. The world can be decorated with the ornaments of their good qualities.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

"This way," the arrow points, "this way to *bhakti*." This way to the temple. This way to the preaching field. *This* way.

Good old age is upon me. I don't want to forget to thank Kṛṣṇa for His mercy with my body, mind, and words before this life runs out. Kṛṣṇa has His hand in everything, and we can learn to see Him everywhere. That is the purpose of life. And to always chant the holy names. Take every opportunity for that.

If you give a devotee a blank page, he will fill it with images of *bhakti*. Such pleasing forms come out from his hand. He wants to feel Kṛṣṇa acting through him, and he wants to draw an image that will remind people of Kṛṣṇa. Even if it's what we call abstract art, he feels Kṛṣṇa's artistry at work. Kṛṣṇa is color, Kṛṣṇa is design, Kṛṣṇa is the source of everything. When we look at something, we should remember that; the object should remind us.

At the same time, Prabhupāda said he saw a painting in Montreal at the Unitarian Church of bamboo logs. There was nothing, he said, to impel his Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, in his artwork, the devotees either draws Kṛṣṇa's form or writes out the mantra or puts *tilaka* on all the faces—something to impel remembrance of Kṛṣṇa. Why waste time?

What to speak of what it impels for the artist. I may draw the Gosvāmīs one after another just so that I can think of them and their wonderful qualities. They were always immersed in the scriptures, always glorifying Kṛṣṇa, always writing scripture themselves from the inconceivable per-

spective of directly seeing Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in Vṛndāvana as they practiced their intimate *bhajana* under the authority and instruction of Lord Caitanya Himself.

We say devotees are as good as God. As good as Vyāsa. Some say they are better. One of my Gosvāmīs holds a manuscript in his hands, some great work that he's written in Sanskrit. We know he prayed that his work be protected from logicians, atheists, and mental speculators. Sometimes, at the request of the Vaiṣṇavas, he reads what he has written, although that only increases his humility. The saintly Vaiṣṇavas feel ecstasy in hearing the descriptions of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa presented in his writings. We cannot do anything to equal what he gave; we can simply worship him and his literature and follow Prabhupāda's instructions to serve him by distributing his books.

Yes, we may also write books to elaborate on what he taught if we do it with a submissive attitude, not trying to surpass him. We write simply to remember Kṛṣṇa and to remind others of Him. Beyond that, we can simply try to be sincere. There's nothing else we can do.

Prabhupāda singing:

śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu nityānanda śrī-advaita
gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda

This show is coming to an end. It wasn't substantial or organized, but some of you kindly stayed with me as I drew my pictures of the Gosvāmīs. I take such pleasure in the miracle of being able to draw a form and have it appear before my eyes. Am I indulging in an act of creation? Am I interested only in creativity and power, as Prabhupāda said

of Lord Brahmā? Creativity is another thing that comes from Kṛṣṇa. He doles it out to us in small portions.

Well, I know the secret that one can taste the bliss of being a creator in any act of creativity, even if people don't think it is beautiful by their standard. You get high—not high, but happy, satisfied, delighted. It's true. I don't claim I'm free of every taint of that. Still, if I draw devotional subjects to try and impel my Kṛṣṇa consciousness and the Kṛṣṇa consciousness of others, if I really try to capture the Gosvāmīs, then at least the creation is not something bad or useless. Prabhupāda says we write for purification. Similarly, we execute any art form for our own purification. That means we're not creating commercial products but getting in touch with Kṛṣṇa. The colors and lines themselves have to turn us toward Kṛṣṇa. When the lines turn into palms folded in *praṇāma,* we may be forced to think of what the *praṇāmas* mean. What are those beads that funny-looking *sādhaka* has in his hand? What is that book? It is a kind of association with devotional paraphernalia if we do it with consciousness.

It may also be purifying in the sense that it releases the desire for creativity in a harmless, devotional way. Mundane creativity carries karmic reaction. To want to be a creator is a mundane desire, but you want it on some level, so you pick up a pencil and you draw Prabhupāda. Then you're relieved of karmic reaction. That's another way to look at purification. You speak on a radio show because you want people to listen to you, but you still have to drag your mind to surrender to Kṛṣṇa, and by speaking you expose your lack of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It makes you unhappy. You wish you could be more Kṛṣṇa conscious so that people

would hear you and would want to chant and dance and then you become purified through humility.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

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Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Radio show from the sitz bath at the clinic on my birthday. Hope nobody knocks on the door, but if they do, I'll try to ignore them. It's peaceful now, despite the crows outside and the usual bustle around here. I want to sink into my Kṛṣṇa consciousness just like my body has sunk into this water.

I saw myself wanting attention today because it's my birthday. Then I corrected that desire. I thought, "It's Kṛṣṇa who should be the object of attention, today and every day." The Lord has already given me a birthday gift. He gave me this human body by which I have the means to extricate myself from the cycle of birth and death forever. Beyond recognizing that, there's not much to celebrate. Rather, to take birth in any material body is a punishment.

Even as kids we knew birthdays were more punishing than enjoyable. If kids at P.S. #8 knew it was your birthday, they would grab you and hit your rear end once for each year. Actually, they would beat the hell out of you one after another, and they felt entitled to do it. You came to the material world. You want to *celebrate* that? You should be beaten with sticks.

Kṛṣṇa gives us a gift in two senses. In one sense, He is presenting us with what we desired: we wanted to be the enjoyer, the controller, and the proprietor of everyone's affections, and Kṛṣṇa rewarded us with an opportunity both

to pretend we could do it and the intelligence to realize that we can't. It's not a put-down to be eternally and constitutionally Kṛṣṇa's servants, but we may see it that way and rebel. (I don't want to talk about the origin of the *jīva* and all that. Just accept the simple fact that we have a long history of rebellion in this material world, and our attempts at independence have culminated in our present happiness and distress.) The Lord gives that gift reluctantly. He chooses to defer to our free will as His co-eternals, even though we are subordinates.

The other gift, the real gift, is that when we are finally born into the human species from our long evolution through the modes of nature, we are finally blessed with the choice to get out. It's such a rare opportunity. Birth means we suffer and then we die. A birthday is an acknowledgment of that fact. Each time we celebrate a birthday, we're that much closer to death. If we use our birthdays for further plan-making in the material world, we have missed the point.

Prabhupāda said he saw a fairly young man—not *so* young, but not so very old either—die. The man was begging the doctor to please give him four more years to live so that he could carry out his plans. We always have plans—entanglements—either to raise a family or to raise an empire in one form or another. The human form of life is meant for something else.

That reminds me of Kṛṣṇa's greatest gift: the association of His pure devotees. Only by that association can we become free of our illusion and learn what's what. Not only do you learn that your birthday is actually a day of misery, but you learn that you were never actually born. We have no birthdays because we are eternal. If "birthday" means

anything, it means the day we were incarcerated within this body and this identity.

Kṛṣṇa says, "Just approach a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth." When you're around the truth, you'll understand that you are part of Kṛṣṇa, that you are eternally His. When you understand that, you will want to go back to Godhead.

I am that fortunate in my life, and instead of celebrating my birthday by receiving special attention, I want to thank Kṛṣṇa for His gifts to me. What more could I need or want?

I feel fortunate that I don't have to face that other celebration today so I have time to understand better what my birthday means. It doesn't mean that I should hope for an international phone call wishing me a happy birthday, although no one knows how to reach me, or that I receive a piece of *burfi* delivered by an Indian messenger on a Green Hornet courier bicycle, or at least a telegram saying they had banked the printing fund money. No, rather than look for that, what touches me today is the clear thought that Kṛṣṇa has given me these gifts. Kṛṣṇa is so kind that He is always giving me gifts. I should thank Him more often. Thank Him for allowing me to take birth in a strange family with strange and twisted ideas of God consciousness, for arranging that I walk down Second Avenue in the summer of 1966 to see the ad for Prabhupāda's *Bhagavad-gītā* class, for allowing me the eclectic interest in *Bhagavad-gītā* and in swamis—for my beginnings. For sending Prabhupāda.

And I thank Śrīla Prabhupāda as Kṛṣṇa's representative, for his mercy. He has given me the gift of allowing me to serve him, the gift of indebtedness to him, the gift of Kṛṣṇa

consciousness—matchless gifts. Prabhupāda said if there is anyone whom you presume to love, the best gift you can give them is Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The best persons—guru and Kṛṣṇa—offer me this gift today. All I can say is that I see it and I thank them.

What does it mean, tangibly, to be made happy by this gift? It means I revel in the opportunity I have been given to render service. It means I am humbled by the fact that such a great *mahā-bhāgavata* recognized me and linked me with the most beautiful form of Godhead. It means I recognize that he offered this benediction to me despite my lack of appreciation for it and my lack of natural gratitude, my unworthiness, coming as I was from a low birth, low association, and abominable habits. The opportunity to have served, and the opportunity to continue serving. It also means that I have been given the holy name despite my many disqualifications. Not only that, but Kṛṣṇa has given me the awareness to realize the nature of that gift. For this I am grateful.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

I still seem to have some life duration left. I'm at this health clinic specifically trying to reduce the frequency of my headaches and trying to build my physical strength so that I can continue my service. I want to be physically brighter, if possible.

It's not necessarily true that if the physical side brightens, the self will follow, but I think about that too. Sometimes I defend "self-centeredness" against those who put it down

superficially. When you practice God consciousness, you are supposed to give up the self. Although that's true, it doesn't have to include giving up the initiative or individuality. It's not that Prabhupāda wanted us to abandon who we were, even who we thought we were so much, but to serve Kṛṣṇa with our selves. If someone comes in as the guru's representative and doesn't follow that example, I tend to rebel against that immature understanding.

Still, there is such a thing as selfishness or false ego, where you indulge yourself through your service rather than imbibe a submissive and loving relationship with guru and Kṛṣṇa. That is what I am trying to clear myself of when I talk about self-centeredness. Only when I am purified of selfish motivation will I be able to truly use my life in Kṛṣṇa's service. And only then will I be able to make nice offerings, because they will be filled with love of God instead of love for myself. I also know that if I can succeed in this purification, others will also be inspired to serve Kṛṣṇa.

No one wants to be forced to develop faster than they are able. Devotees want to do something that brings them happiness, that is fun and creative and productive, that makes them feel good, and that ultimately brings them to the stage of love of God. That is the heart of a *vaidhi-bhakta's* struggles, and he won't be satisfied with anything else. He wants the gift of the opportunity to surrender to Kṛṣṇa's sweet will and to accept His causeless mercy. As he progresses in devotional service, he wants at least the symptoms of the stage of meditating on Kṛṣṇa and wanting to please Him. Basically we have to turn from seeking to please the self in terms of the body, mind, and intelligence—the whole identity—and instead seek to please Kṛṣṇa, recognizing our greater self-interest.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

It's better to meditate on these gifts than to be sitting on a big upholstered seat and made to listen to people say how great you are, which you can't believe, but you have to hear it anyway. They give you gifts and you count them like a businessman counts his profits or a guru counts his followers. I live for my "followers," so I share with them what has been given to me, not by them, but by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Now I want to give them this birthday meditation to use on their own birthdays. Instead of hankering for the wife and children or friends and followers to celebrate your glories . . . Don't you see that they are driving gold-plated nails into your tinsel-decorated false ego? Better to spend the day receiving anew the gift of human life and learning to be grateful.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Ten minutes left on the air. Rūpa Gosvāmī included giving and receiving gifts as one of the six loving exchanges between devotees. Therefore, it's not just that we receive the gift of the holy name, we receive the gift of the human form of life, we receive the gift of service, and don't offer anything in return. We have to offer something back. That will make us real persons and our exchanges really personal. Personal means we reciprocate. Prabhupāda gives me the

holy name and I offer him my life energy by chanting in faith. How nice it is to be grateful and then to act on that gratitude by using what he has given. How wonderful that he accepts my chanting as a reciprocal gift.

To please Kṛṣṇa is just as simple, actually. There is nothing He does not already own, nothing we can give Him, except our devotion. And why does Kṛṣṇa want our devotion? Because He is our well-wisher and He knows that only by offering Him devotion can we be happy. Kṛṣṇa is so kind that His happiness is to see His devotees' happiness.

The spiritual master, who is inexplicably present in his instructions, tells us that he's not happy if the disciple gives him money. Rather, the disciple's advancement in spiritual consciousness pleases him. The guru is magnanimous. He wants to see our development. He wants good for others. And that is also Kṛṣṇa's mood. Therefore, the real reciprocation they want in return for their gifts are that we take advantage of the opportunities they afford us to become purified and happy and filled with devotion for Kṛṣṇa.

We could add that Prabhupāda also wants us to preach, but that's not really a different thing than what I already said. Preaching is a vehicle to "increase the family members" and to make us happy acting as Kṛṣṇa's servants and deputies. It's true that we may not be qualified to please Kṛṣṇa in the way the *gopīs* or other residents of Vṛndāvana please Kṛṣṇa, but preaching is something we can do. Preaching is *kīrtana*, one of the nine processes of devotional service.

I want to make a pledge right now. I don't know how good my word is, but I beg Kṛṣṇa to make my words true: I want to serve Kṛṣṇa for the remaining days of my life and in future lives. I repeat the prayer Mahārāja Parīkṣit makes,

that in my future lives, when I return to this world again and again, please allow me to have unflinching devotion for Kṛṣṇa, affection for His devotees, and kindness toward all living beings. My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, please allow me to use myself in Your service today and to not hold back. Allow me to be kind to devotees and nondevotees if only in simple ways. Please allow me to be a source of happiness for them by my peacefulness, cooperativeness, and innate Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Please let them see me hearing and chanting about Kṛṣṇa with sincerity. Allow them to see me truly engaged in Your service. Let them become attracted to Your lotus feet by that example.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Lord Caitanya says that we have *praṇa, artha, dhyāna,* and *vāca.* We are meant to do good to others by using these things, which are in our power. They are our resources, and we need to learn how to use those resources without falling into the trap of the false ego. We *can* learn because Kṛṣṇa is the source of intelligence. He can teach us to be sharp in the battle against *māyā* and her agents, and He can teach us the path to surrender.

I like to use my words to help others because I am a writer. Words can be used to make pleasing arrangements of sounds and syllables. Ultimately, it doesn't matter what we do, as long as we use our life's resources in Kṛṣṇa's service. Kṛṣṇa says, "Give Me the gift of fruit, water, and a leaf. If it's done with devotion, I will accept it."

Kṛṣṇa will accept it. If Kṛṣṇa accepts our gifts, how lucky we are! There is nothing left to achieve. *Kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa he! Kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa rakṣa mām*! Our resources are again only Kṛṣṇa's gift offered to us and meant to be offered back to Him as *yajña*. Otherwise, if in the name of good karma, someone has a birthday and people give him a bunch of stuff, he will become entangled in reaction. He'll have to repay it all, even the underlying motivations behind the gift-giving. He receives a nice shirt, a wristwatch, some money—whatever—and he will become bound by that charity. Even a *sādhu* can't accept gifts for his own sense gratification as if that's spiritual. Matter is matter and it will react. Better to spend your birthday anonymously so you don't get beaten by the kids at school or offered friendly gifts by those who love you. The code at school was that they couldn't beat you the next day. If you could get through your birthday without incident, you were free for another year. Similarly, if you can get through your birthday without accumulating gifts, without *wanting* to accumulate gifts, then you are free from that type of karma for yet another year.

In my case, I have been getting through my birthdays without staging the Big Event where people felt bound to come and bring me something. How can I possibly reciprocate with them all? I can't just say, "Well, here I am, my beautiful self, and that is my gift to you." I'm not God's gift to anyone. No, I have to give something substantial in return.

This year, I'm happy to be free and obscure in this South Indian health clinic, this desert of no place.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

The doctor is taking us to the beach this afternoon to let the waves run over us. It occurred to me that by becoming obscure, we also become free to praise Kṛṣṇa. Perhaps that's why I like the image of the flute player in the pit. His fate is the ultimate obscurity, in a sense. He's thrown in there and he can't get out. No one is listening to him play. He simply has to stay there until he dies of starvation or unhappiness or despair, tortured in body and mind. All he has, *all* he has is his faith in the gods, and if he doesn't have that, he has nothing. When he holds his simple faith, he plays to praise the gods. There's no selfishness left in him. And because he is obscure, only the gods hear him and reward him for his faith. His offering is pure. That flutist offers what the gods most want to hear, not fanciful tunes, but one sincere thank you, one sincere moment of praise from their creature. Then they release him from his mortal frame and take him back to them.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

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Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

In one writing session I did last year, I saw myself again question the practice of going apart to serve Kṛṣṇa. When I go apart, I take walks and write and read. In the writing session, I defended that practice. The center of service to Prabhupāda is not necessarily in North America or at a worldwide GBC meeting. It is something we carry with us when we take a walk alone. I wrote, "I sacrificed everything to come and be with You." That's the sentiment of a man of prayer, isn't it? That he sacrifices everything to be with Kṛṣṇa? Because he finds he can best be with Him when he's away from everyone else. Well, I don't always know about that. Still, I like what I expressed and it's how I usually feel.

Another statement: "I enjoy taking it easy, but I also want *You.*" A wrong attitude, no doubt, because there are flaws in everything I try to do. My point in writing that, however, was not to be perfect, but to talk to Kṛṣṇa in the present moment. Of course, I don't qualify to hear Kṛṣṇa respond in the way He responded to Arjuna, but that doesn't mean I can't hear anything at all. Kṛṣṇa speaks to me through my spiritual master. Through his books. He speaks over and over in *Bhagavad-gītā* in the verses beginning, *śrī bhagavān uvāca.* I have to learn more and more to hear those words as if they were addressed to me. That takes quiet concentration. Walks are good for that.

Someone could say, "What you need to do if you want to hear Kṛṣṇa speak to you is *serve.* It's the service that qualifies you to hear from Kṛṣṇa. Do you think the hearing process is material, that just by being alone you'll be able to hear God speak?"

Well, yes, I know, but I also know that simply keeping ourselves busy in the institution without any time for introspection, especially if we are looking for our surrender to be institutionally recognized and approved, will not help us understand too much. We may not even be able to pay attention when we go to read *śāstra.* What will we hear then?

There's a balance, and each of us has to find it. There's no easy solution. Being alone is physically easy, but it's not always spiritually easy. Being thrust into the passion of a busy institution is neither physically or spiritually easy. In both situations, we have to find time to face ourselves. Just throwing our lot in with our Godbrothers at a busy preaching center, taking up a post, discharging duties, always in the outreach mode—in a sense that's easier than facing ourselves. Plugging into "the program" doesn't demand as much conscious, moral responsibility because we are told that everything we are doing is recognized and accepted by Prabhupāda. We can begin to feel we're on an automatic track back to Godhead and forget how to aspire for deep surrender. That works for some, but not for everyone.

From the writing session: "What I want, I claim, is to not be inattentive, cold, and hardhearted. I like to be aware that You [this is addressed to Kṛṣṇa] are all-great and most dear. Why do I remain unloving despite my attempts to chant Your name?"

This is my attempt to gain a clear focus that whether I am alone or in the middle of a busy temple, I want to achieve

union with Kṛṣṇa and taste His holy name. How can I be so hardhearted that when I hear about Kṛṣṇa, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, nothing happens and no devotion is sparked? I want to know the answer to that question, and I want to find the solution to that problem. I know that I am hardhearted because I am unworthy of feeling devotion, but *why*? And how do I become worthy?

My Lord, You are so kind to come in Your holy names. There are not even hard and fast rules for chanting them. We can chant any number of holy names in any condition of life, at any time of day, and You will be there with us. Why, then, don't I taste Your association? Because I commit offenses when I chant.

And the writing session goes on to say, "I claim, 'If I knew Him, I would be a fired-up preacher.' Well, blessed are they who preach on Śrīla Prabhupāda's order and don't demand they have to know Kṛṣṇa first. Blessed are they as they expand the wave of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement."

All I am left with is gratitude toward guru and Kṛṣṇa and the opportunity to serve as I can, according to my limits and inclination. If I can just get to the point where I am glorifying Kṛṣṇa and extending Kṛṣṇa consciousness to whomever I meet, then the early morning *bhajana* will taste sweeter and sweeter. The taste of honor and distinction will fade if only I can have that five- or seven-hour stretch of uninterrupted hearing and chanting early in the morning. I pray for this blessing.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

All right, *sādhu,* start cutting. You can even use scissors in the air for emphasis. Clip-clip—cut your attachments as well as theirs.

Well, folks, the Big Attachment is family life. You have your spouse and your kids, and you claim them as your own. Bodily connection. When you own your family, you feel the pressure of responsibility to control and protect them. Next thing you know, you find yourself working like a *karmī.* Working is not bad in itself, but to work with the idea that you control and own your family is a waste of time. Society is orderly when people work to support their families, but when it's done with the wrong mentality, it doesn't save people from degradation. Sin is whatever separates us from God. Prabhupāda says it's *mahā-pāpa* to do *anything* for our sense gratification. We have to give up that ownership, or at least we have to dovetail it in Kṛṣṇa's service.

Don't you know, your family members are fallible soldiers that cannot protect you from death? Give up the attachment! Kṛṣṇa didn't like Arjuna being so attached to his family to the point that he wouldn't fight no matter what—even to gain all the kingdoms in the three worlds, even to avoid defamation, which would have been worse than death. Kṛṣṇa wanted him to fight. Although materially it is wrong to kill, Kṛṣṇa had transcendental reasons why mundane morality should be ignored, or reasons more imperative than our own. Actually, when you analyze it, as I'm doing with my scissors—cutting it down to its essence—you'll see that the family connection is temporary. It's not

based on anything eternal, not based on innate God consciousness. You can use it to serve God consciousness, but ultimately, souls come together and meet in the body according to their karma and the nature of their lust. When we claim those relationships as our own, it is a mistake.

Prabhupāda tried to help us free ourselves by teaching us to expand our consciousness. You think these relatives are your family? Well, *everyone* is your family because they are all spirit souls, children of the same father, Kṛṣṇa. And not just the people, but the souls in all species—the animals and plants. Think about that. Expand your consciousness until you understand the nature of the Kṛṣṇa conscious family.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

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Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Broadcasting from Tamil Nadu, India. Faraway snatches of songs in my mind. "The Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is in everyone's heart/ and each living creature is His own beloved part./ How can we find freedom from anguish and strife,/ when we torture the helpless we destroy our own life."

The Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* sometimes call the Māyāvādīs Vedāntīs, "toothless," playfully interpreting the flexible Sanskrit language. *Ācāryas* such as Rāmānuja break the teeth of the poor logical arguments given by Śaṅkara and others. Actually, the *Vedānta* asserts that everything comes from the Absolute Truth. The Absolute Truth is eternal and unchanging, even though the poor creatures in this material world appear to be in flux. We don't actually change, but that is the illusion. The Māyāvādīs say that we are transformations of the energy of the Absolute Truth (Brahman) and therefore Brahman is simultaneously everchanging and never changed. We agree with that, but from a different angle. They think that if you take from something, it will be diminished, and that that is especially true of a person. Therefore, the Absolute Truth cannot be a person or He would be diminished. But it is impossible to diminish the Absolute Person. He has inconceivable energies and He is never compromised. The Māyāvādīs interpret this philosophy to mean that in order for the Absolute to be

unchanging, He cannot have separated energies. The implication is that we are each one with the Absolute Truth, rather than separated parts and parcels. Well, they're wrong. We know that because Kṛṣṇa, the Absolute Person, describes Himself directly in many scriptures, and although He has an aspect of Himself that is the undifferentiated Brahman, that is only His partial manifestation.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

I have different things to say on this show, reflecting my life here at the clinic and the kind of people who are here. It will be a mixed bag today. Nothing wrong with a little mixing of things, is there? We certainly mix things when we cook, or colors when we paint—all in Kṛṣṇa's service.

And that's another point I have been thinking about: we want to use everything—*everything*—in Kṛṣṇa's service. If we reject something as unfit, Rūpa Gosvāmī calls that *phalgu-vairāgya,* a term denoting a particular river in India that although appearing dry on the surface, runs beneath the surface. In other words, the renunciation is only skin deep. We may say we are not using something that we have, and we may say that we have renounced that thing, but the energy of owning it, or the energy of enjoying it runs on beneath the surface. That energy flows within us. If we don't use it for Kṛṣṇa's service, it doesn't just go away. It will continue to flow beneath the surface, and our renunciation will remain false.

Of course, *yukta-vairāgya* is not a license to do whatever we like. We have to learn how to make our offerings and to use whatever we have by hearing from the spiritual master.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Off and on, I have been looking at haiku poetry. The stuff I've been reading was translated by Sam Hammel from the Japanese. He writes, "Haiku should be approached with a daily sort of reverence, as we might approach an encounter with a great spiritual teacher. It is easy to imitate; it is difficult to attain. The more deeply the reader enters into the authentic experience of the poem, the more the poem reveals."

Hmm. We can give the poem that much credit, I guess, a kind of creative and reverent respect, if it reveals a Kṛṣṇa conscious moment.

From Hammel: "Haiku is a deep evocation of material nature in sacred moments of perception by the poet." Taking that further, for a devotee, it means we come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Unfortunately, for his own purposes, the poet usually stops short of that. We may like his brush strokes, but we want to go further. Here's a poem by Basho:

Whore and monk,
we sleep under one roof together,
moon in a field of clover.

Let me give you some background. Basho was a Buddhist poet who took long pilgrimages, usually with a friend, and wrote travel prose and poetry. The book from which I am

taking this poem was written when he and his friend visited the former hermitages of monks and priests in northern Japan. They were austere men, almost monks, not whore-mongering men, but one night they stayed at an inn for a night. In a separate wing of the inn were housed some prostitutes. Basho is pointing out the incongruence of whores and monks sleeping under the same roof. He mentions in his accompanying prose that he didn't speak with the whores and that later he regretted that "he didn't help them on their journey." I think they wanted directions and he didn't give them—something anyway. Perhaps he thinks he could have been a little more human. Still, in this poem, we see the inevitable togetherness of all living beings as fate brings them together and then separates them.

We can extend this to include an awareness that we are all part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa. "Whore and monk,/ we sleep under one roof,/ moon in a field of clover." More than usually we find in haiku a symbolic meaning rather than something explicit. The mention of the moon in a field of clover seems to suggest a universal symbolism. The moon shines everywhere. Cāṇakya said that the moon shines equally upon the courtyards of a *caṇḍāla* and a king. The moon makes no distinctions.

This reminds me of a problem I have been feeling while at this clinic: I find the caste consciousness intimidating. I know I am a white Western tourist, and on top of that, a Hare Kṛṣṇa devotee, and that's quite a lot for any Indian to deal with. But the Indian system is quite a lot for me to deal with too. We're at a health clinic, we're "rich," paying patients, and we have been "given" servants. There is someone to clean our toilet room, someone to bring our meals to the door, someone to sweep and wash the floors—all low-paid

Indians. I often feel awkward about having them come in and do these services. I know they don't do them with devotion—I suspect that they even resent us and what we represent—but they play their servile *śūdra* role well and that makes me feel awkward.

The worst part, probably, is that regardless of how I feel, the system is the system and I can't break out of it while I'm here. Therefore, it occurred to me that the least I can do is to distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness to them especially in the form of *prasādam* or the holy name. That is what Lord Caitanya taught—that the holy name can be distributed without consideration for who is fit and who is not.

Which leads me to another comment on the poem: whether you're a priest or a prostitute, you can receive Kṛṣṇa consciousness—at a Ratha-yātrā or at any time you're ready to accept it. At that time, you give up those designations that separate you from the awareness that you are pure spirit soul, servant of Kṛṣṇa.

If I am sometimes forced into these material situations, I have to find a way to express the universal, to make a gesture to these people of a Kṛṣṇa conscious sort, or at least to set a good example. I shouldn't give them unnecessary trouble, and I certainly shouldn't be arrogant. A devotee offers respects to all living beings.

Here's another haiku by Basho:

> Now I see her face,
> the old woman abandoned,
> the moon her only companion.

Seems to sum up the end of a life story. The woman appears to be a widow. It's mysterious, the word "aband-

oned." Why has she been abandoned? Is there some other reason?

Again the moon is mentioned. The poet says he saw this woman all alone, and we feel that he saw loneliness in her face. Still, his poem is not sentimental. He doesn't invoke our pity, but simply points out how life is when the moon underlines one's desolation.

Of course, a poet like Basho might consider the moon to be a good companion. There's a similar mention of the moon in a poem by the Chinese poet, Li Po, who writes something about drinking with the moon as his companion. Poets reach out for communication with objects in nature, and often they seek solace and friendship there.

I want to talk about loneliness. If someone can take solace from the moon instead of the society of friends, he will never be alone. We say a *yogī* is never alone because he has God in his heart as his best friend. A *yogī* deliberately arranges to be abandoned. He *wants* to be alone. That aloneness is not really loneliness because he is with Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, there is no fear. Abandonment for a worldly person is the cause of depression. The only hope of overcoming it is enlightenment.

A *bhakta* relishes the association of devotees. In situations when he is alone, however, he feels no trauma. He can look around at nature and see Kṛṣṇa. He can look within his own heart and find Kṛṣṇa. He can chant the holy name. He may see the moon, the flowers, or feel the night air, and know that he is never alone, has never been abandoned, but is always in Kṛṣṇa's shelter.

(I'm certainly not alone here. There are, for example, plenty of mosquitoes to keep me company . . .)

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

So, friends, we each practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness in our own way. I draw pictures. (Anyone can draw if you let things come out of you that are already inside.) We Kṛṣṇa conscious people like to draw from the *śāstras*. I prefer to draw pictures with words on them. Japanese and Chinese pictures use calligraphy and drawings together. In the upper right-hand corner of the picture I just drew, I wrote the words describing the six unfavorable things, paraphrasing Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Upadeśāmṛta* verse, *prajalpa, niyamāgraha, atyāhāra, jana-saṅga* (to hang out with nondevotees), etc. Doing those things won't allow you to advance in devotional service and won't make you happy either. Greed.

When you draw, you can depict stereotypes of mythical beings, personifications of sin. The ancient Christians used to do stuff like that, personify the seven sins in the Catechism books—lust, greed, gluttony. I have personified *atyāhāra* in my drawing. *Atyāhāra* means overeating or the general desire to possess too much. I colored him green. Green is the color we usually use to depict envy. That's funny, isn't it? Because green is such a beautiful, natural color. Nature is filled with greenery. Lord Rāma was beautifully and transcendentally green. My character isn't beautiful. He reminds me more of a Marvel comic book hero, like the Amazing Spiderman. *Atyāhāra.* If we personify it, it makes it more personal to ourselves. We identify more closely with him—or wish we didn't—that person who is eating too much.

Prajalpa. I depicted him as a fool with an open mouth, spewing out nonsense. I only have eight colors to choose from, and since I've already used green, I think I'll do him in orange with a pumpkin head. His tongue's out and he has sharp little teeth. Wasting time. Prabhupāda says that one who is speaking *prajalpa* is croaking, "Ribbit, ribbit, ribbit," so I wrote that in. Should I draw in the snake of death making his approach?

Jana-saṅga, another bad thing. An unhappy guy with a downturned mouth, sad because he's been hanging out with all these unhappy, un-Kṛṣṇa conscious people. I'm going to color him yellow—sour-puss.

Niyamāgraha and the rest.

Wrap it up. It's 5:20 A.M. and at 6:00 they'll ring the phone to wake us up to get ready for the day's therapy. Before I go, I suggest you try drawing pictures to increase your Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Read Kṛṣṇa consciousness into everything you see and do in life.

29

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

I have expressed that sometimes I like to play college professor. Well, I want to correct that term and say I like to play lover of literature. There's also a side of me that likes to tell stories, although I tend to squelch that side because for a good story I like to prepare carefully revised pieces. Still, he lives on and I let him air his thoughts by allowing him to improvise. I'm interested in improvisation.

You know, I rarely improvise when I'm in public. It's too much pressure. When you know people are listening, you want it to come out right, and you don't want to look foolish.

Today, I decided to compromise: I'm going to improvise on the air, not a story, but *ideas* for a story. Okay?

But first I want to say something else. About a year ago, I looked at a story by Saul Bellow called, "Seize the Day." It was more of a short novel than a short story, actually, and by the time I was thirty percent of the way through, I began to get bored. Fiction can be tedious, especially when it is filled with too many details. Anyway, I want to give you an outline of the story because there were things about it that I liked.

"Seize the Day" is a story about a man in his thirties. This man is not at all career-oriented—I don't even think he has a job when the story opens. The entire story spans just one day of this man's life. This man has no commitments, no

focus to speak of, and no enlightenment. Some of the action takes place in his father's room at the Manhattan Hotel. His father, a retired doctor, is living off his life's savings with other old men in similar situations at the hotel. When the main character goes to see his father, his father becomes aggravated that this son hasn't managed to find his life's work yet. Not only that, but the father wants to be left alone. At one point, he yells, "Get off my back!"

Then there are other scenes with other people. I think the man goes to see a woman, and someone else, a psychiatrist or guru figure, who seems to know him and who gives him advice, but nothing helps.

The day passes and in the final scene, the man is standing on the street watching a funeral procession. He doesn't know who has died, but he decides to walk into the funeral home (maybe just to get off the street) and sit among the relatives of the deceased. Finally, he walks over to the open coffin, looks down at the man, and suddenly feels a great sadness. He begins to weep. The relatives don't recognize him, but they automatically assume that he must have been a close friend of the deceased by the way he is expressing his grief over the dead man's body. The author doesn't lay it on too heavy, but just hints at why he is crying. Perhaps he is crying for himself, and that becomes extended to crying for all mankind's plight, which somehow he sees reflected in his own undirected and unloved life that is destined to end in the grave.

I wanted to tell you this story so you could see how by focusing on one day and making deliberate, dramatic adjustments, you can create a powerful evocation. We can do this in Kṛṣṇa consciousness too, can't we? Fiction means reducing the experience of a large amount of time and

packing it into a short amount of time to give a life more drama than it would normally possess. Imagine writing about a book distributor. Day after day he's going out preaching, being aggravated sometimes by what people say, sometimes by his struggle with his own mind and senses. Sometimes he overcomes, sometimes he ends up feels alienated from the devotees, sometimes he is lonely, sometimes he wishes his wife were different, sometimes he doesn't fully identify with his spiritual master's drive for preaching or know what to do with the ups and downs and doubts and certainties that he experiences. He and his wife were thinking of breaking up, but at her request they decided to move out of the temple. He didn't really want to live outside because whenever he and his wife were alone together, he would feel inclined toward sex. Then she didn't like his aggression and would be cold toward him. Finally, it got so bad that they decided their marriage was useless. They tried to live apart, but then reconsidered and decided to have a child instead. They chanted the extra rounds and she conceived right away. Now he has again lost his taste for marriage and she too is becoming more and more alienated toward him.

That is one side of things. He is also having his struggles in the temple. Although he likes to preach, he isn't a big collector, and he resents the pressure the president exerts on him. That is, the new temple president. The old one had been more of a friend. This new one wants to top the charts, so he pushes our hero (let's call him Babrubahuna dāsa) to do more. Babrubahuna feels like saying, "Well, why don't *you* go out there and try?" When he finally gets up his courage to make that comment, the temple president merely tells him that he used to distribute books, but now

he is a manager, which is also difficult. They don't get along well.

Anyway, Babrubahuna is having a hard day. You know, out in some parking lot, chased out by the security, trying another spot, harassed by fanatical Christians. He's getting the books out, but he's tired and his back hurts. He sits down to read, but can't pay attention. Sometimes Prabhupāda is hard to appreciate, he thinks. Today is one of those days. So much hard philosophy and he just can't assimilate it during this little break. He has a nagging doubt about the whole process pushed way back into his mind, and he doesn't really know how to bring it to the forefront so he can take it out and look at it.

There is one moment in his day where he finds himself crying out to Kṛṣṇa. It is when he suddenly notices that he's drowning, or at least sailing a leaky boat. That one cry gives him the strength to survive the rest of the day, although he overate at lunch, which isn't helping. Finally, he makes it back to the temple.

Now I need a "Seize the Day" style ending. Maybe he can have a run-in with the temple president, who himself has had a hard day. The fire department officials came by and ordered $25,000 worth of repair work to be done in the kitchen within a week. Where's he going to get that kind of money? When our hero comes back with his sub-average score, the temple president is sarcastic.

Even before this happens, let's say, our hero stops in to see his wife, but she's in a bad mood and tells him to get out.

Anyway, it's all too much to handle, and on impulse, he walks out of the temple, destination unknown. Maybe he should see something on the street. He's becoming ripe for

māyā at this point, because he doesn't know what he's going to do. It flashes through his mind that he grew up in this area and could probably look up an old friend or two and go to a bar or something. Nope, he couldn't do that. He grew up in this area and everyone knows he's a devotee. Anyway, his head is shaved and it would look bad for the movement.

Instead he walks around and spaces out. But he has to see something. What? A car accident? Someone is hurt. People are already helping, so he stands by and watches. The person has multiple lacerations and blood streaming in rivulets down her face. Everyone is waiting for the ambulance to arrive.

Does our hero go up and preach to the victim? Give her a book? Too daring. He's not such a daring type. He's not even inspired at the moment. But he watches, and it suddenly occurs to him that this is ridiculously like that picture in the *Bhagavad-gītā* of the sage with the cane looking at a dying man surrounded by relatives in the street. He had sometimes struggled with that illustration, thinking the sage looked on a little too coldly, too removed from the pathos of the scene, without compassion for these foolish people who can't understand that the soul is different from the body. Now he finds himself looking out from the sage's eyes—removed and detached, aware of soul and Supersoul in a vague kind of philosophical way, and conscious of his knowledge about eternality and temporality.

Then everything else that has happened to him today begins to distance itself and he feels more neutral about it, more at peace, more aware of the difference this knowledge makes in his life. He feels stronger and begins to walk away from the accident.

Then his mind turns. He's not ready to give it up yet. He stops at a store window and thinks, "I don't get affected by *māyā* the way other people do. Kṛṣṇa consciousness has given me a special ability." It's a video store. He's been away from that sort of thing for over eight years now—he doesn't even know what's playing these days—but he knows that most video stores sell both regular Hollywood movies and pornography. "How disgusting," he thinks, but his mind turns to his wife, and then to the girlfriend he gave up to become a devotee. The cushion he felt he had between the world of *māyā* and himself begins to feel very thin and he cries out to Kṛṣṇa to save him. Better he go back to the temple to see Rādhā-Govindacandra.

He arrives in time for seven o'clock *ārati*. Few people are in attendance. He's still wearing his street clothes. It all seems so beautiful—the incense, the golden forms of the Deities, the flowers—and his sense of the rightness of it all, the "homeness," the transcendental exchange between Kṛṣṇa and His devotees, even himself, the sweetness of devotional service. He resolves to become a better devotee.

The story is almost over, but I can't claim that he lived happily ever after and was completely reformed. I'll give you a hint at what happens next. He leaves the temple room and glimpses the temple president in his office as he passes. He suddenly notices how dejected the president looks and his heart is moved to go in and be generous and encouraging. Then he learns about the kitchen and the $25,000 bill and finds the last of the hardheartedness with which he had protected himself melting away. He *wants* to help. He'll do whatever he can, and he is full of suggestions how they can raise the money.

That's the end of the story.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

I also told you I like haiku. I don't want to be too reverent toward him, but Basho has really perfected the art of expressing things in only a few words, things that are almost inexpressible and that go to the heart of nature or the heart of life as we know it. His words reverberate in us.

Of course, I know that his expressions are short of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. When I say I'm a lover of literature, I also mean that I love to reclaim modes of expression for Kṛṣṇa. I don't always feel compelled to point out the deficiencies in Basho's (or anyone's) expression because I trust that my listeners are Kṛṣṇa conscious enough to see that for themselves. I'm talking about something beyond what he is saying anyway. For me, his words are a springboard into my own attempts at Kṛṣṇa conscious expression.

Here's one:

Exhausted,
I sought a country inn,
but found wisteria in bloom.

Sounds like it's from his travel book, *A Journey to the Interior.* Of course, this expresses an image, an anecdote, but it's also a real moment. It's quite different than the attempt to spell out an entire plot and to maintain a reader's interest for twenty minutes or more. Here, the story is submerged. You don't even know exactly what it is except that he was out there somewhere, exhausted, and he's looking for an inn. He's in the country. You know that too. He's walking. He's looking for one thing to ease his fatigue

but finds another. And it comes as a surprise or a blessing from God: wisteria in bloom.

We can't say this is entirely a material sentiment. A Kṛṣṇa conscious person might also be preoccupied with material anxiety and then suddenly see something beautiful, a flowering wisteria, some reminder of Kṛṣṇa's artistry in this world. That wisteria might lift his fear.

Of course, this is really a poet's poem, because a hardcore materialist might say, "What the hell good is a wisteria? I need a bed, preferably in a private room. I want to take a bath and to eat something." To be sheltered by the flower is an act of spirit, and for one who has spiritual priorities, especially Kṛṣṇa conscious priorities, his exhaustion will be lifted and his heart lightened.

It reminds me of that verse, *yasyāham anugṛhṇāmi, hariṣye tad-dhanam śanaiḥ:* someone is looking for material fortune, but Kṛṣṇa takes it away. He doesn't give it, but instead supplies the nectar of His lotus feet. Kṛṣṇa is more intelligent than His foolish devotees. He doesn't give them those things that will hinder their progress in spiritual life. Rather, He supplies the taste of His lotus feet so that the devotees will never leave Him. Although the wisteria is a poor substitute for a bed to a tired man, if it impels his Kṛṣṇa consciousness to see it, he is more than satisfied spiritually. Not only satisfied, but enlightened.

In haiku, we don't ask what happens after the moment has occurred. That's being too storyconscious, and this is, after all, meant to be only a moment. Perhaps it's the greatest moment of someone's life. Or maybe he just goes back to looking for the inn, but holds the image of the wisteria and the remembrance of Kṛṣṇa's beauty that it gave

him close to his heart. It doesn't matter which because in itself, it was a genuine Kṛṣṇa conscious moment.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

30

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Doing an early morning radio show while sitting at a small desk before a picture of Prabhupāda in Bombay. Do you know that picture? It's the one where he's slouched on the old upholstered chair which has been offered to him as a *vyāsāsana.* Taken in 1974. It's a candid shot. I'm not exactly sure what's going on in the room. You can see in the background the picture of Prabhupāda with a garland placed to the side because Prabhupāda himself is sitting in the chair, and although there may be devotees on the floor in front of him, I doubt there were too many. He looks more alone with his thoughts. It's probably quite warm, and he doesn't wear a *kurtā,* but just a *dhotī* and a top piece. His two lotus feet are placed firmly on a pillow as he sits, and that's nice too. I would guess that he's just come back from his morning walk because his cane is in the picture, his right hand is in his bead bag, and his left is in front of his face just below his chin—a thoughtful expression.

Hare Kṛṣṇa. That's our spiritual master, and today is the day after his disappearance. I wanted to do a radio show last night, but I forgot until I had already run out of time. Now the opportunity has passed and I didn't manage to observe the occasion on the air.

Okay, then let's do our business. Next to the picture of Prabhupāda is a picture of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī. He's sitting on his haunches on a straw mat placed on the

ground in Vṛndāvana. His knees form a kind of desk—he has no other. He lives beneath a tree. He's writing, not on a palm leaf, but on some kind of paper. Deer sit by peacefully, and there are swans on the *kuṇḍa* and even a monkey in the tree, a peacock. Lord Nityānanda ordered him in a dream to go to Vṛndāvana, "and there you will attain all things." It was true. He attained the association of Rūpa Gosvāmī, Sanātana Gosvāmī, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, and the other exalted devotees who lived in Vṛndāvana. Through Raghunātha Gosvāmī he learned what Svarūpa Dāmodara had taught, and thus received the mercy of Lord Caitanya, Rādhā-Govinda, and Rādhā-Madana-mohana. In his very old age, he wrote the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta.*

I carry that picture with me wherever I go. I hope it will remind me that I too want to write and pray as a very fallen soul. I am not worthy to associate with the swanlike devotees, but my spiritual master has asked me to write. I only hope that I don't offend anyone by pursuing this vocation in the way that I do. Rather, I hope to help those who want to be honest and to throw off pretense.

To the right of the picture of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja I have a picture of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in which Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī places Her right hand on the shoulder of Her friend, Kṛṣṇa, as if to show that She possesses Him. In Her other hand She holds a small flower—a rose?—which She may offer to Kṛṣṇa. Everything She does is for His pleasure. Kṛṣṇa is playing His flute. Their eyes meet. It's a wonderful picture.

These pictures are the source of my inspiration.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

What if we couldn't see? Some of the great devotees were blind. For example, there was Suradāsa, who sang beautiful *bhajanas* perfectly describing his beloved Deity without ever having seen Him. In the material world, a blind singer carries a certain poignancy. Their sadness is sharply evoked in their music. In the spiritual realm, the blind devotees didn't inject their music with sadness but with *darśana.* Like Bilvamaṅgala Ṭhākura. He had blinded himself before coming to Vṛndāvana, but Kṛṣṇa came to Him and eventually he saw Kṛṣṇa in his mind's eye. At first Kṛṣṇa disguised Himself. Bilvamaṅgala asked, "Who are you?" and Kṛṣṇa said, "I'm a young cowherd from this village." He would offer Bilvamaṅgala some milk and later, Bilvamaṅgala wrote *Kṛṣṇa-karṇāmṛta* about this boy, Kṛṣṇa, who had so captured his heart.

Well, I'm not blind yet, which is fortunate for me. As long as I can see, I want to see in Kṛṣṇa's service. That means seeing Him in everything and not seeing for sense gratification. That's a tall order because our senses seem to be built for enjoyment. Here we're being told not to use them for ourselves but for Kṛṣṇa's enjoyment.

We can change when we understand that Kṛṣṇa is the owner of the senses. When we are covered by false ego, we think we are the owner of our senses, but when we are established in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we know the truth.

Sometimes we hear that we have to get a different body before we can use our senses in Kṛṣṇa's service. It means that ultimately, we will have to leave this gross body behind and become re-situated in our spiritual form. This body will always be a convert, in a sense, but the spiritual body will be pure.

Still, we can accept our position as converts for now in service to the spiritual master. We were blind, but he forced open our eyes with the torchlight of knowledge. What is ultimate knowledge? Kṛṣṇa's *darśana.* The guru assures us that when we use our senses properly, we will be able to taste Kṛṣṇa's beauty.

But first we'll have to work at converting the senses. It requires discipline. How easily we slip into sense gratification, even when tasting *prasādam.* How easily the mind plots for physical enjoyment in its service to the false ego.

This talk, for me, takes the form of a prayer. I know what I'm meant to achieve before death, and I pray to achieve it.

Radio show, go further with this. What, for example, would it be like not to have functioning senses? Somehow I think I would be sad, maybe even bitter in some ways, and fearful, since I would be forced to be dependent on others. I would be forced to trust in Kṛṣṇa more too, of course, but I would be humiliated in a thousand ways. I guess that's what it means when it's said that we only rent these bodies.

It brings to mind the image of a rental boat. You take it out on the water for a spin, and then you have to return it. It's not yours. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa will reclaim our bodies at the time of death. They're not ours either.

To be without senses? That's one of the definitions of death: when the sensual organs cease to function and all the delicate connections which enable us to see and hear and touch and smell and taste and the brain to register simply stop. What will be the point in the soul remaining in the body? There is no point. It will leave and move on to a more functional machine.

The irony is that we will look for a more functional machine according to what we decided we liked about the

one we already had. Not that we have total control over what we receive, but the subtle body carries the soul forward according to its attraction to particular conditions. The attraction is based on all the sensory impressions accumulated in this and many lifetimes. The impressions are not all positive. The karma is weighed and the living entity is given another body according to the judgment, and he begins again to learn to control his senses for his own enjoyment.

What a risk! Who knows where we'll end up? Will our parents be devotees? And even if they are, will we again be inclined toward Kṛṣṇa consciousness? To what degree? Will we be born in the midst of a worldly disaster, caught in a crossfire or nuclear fallout? Will we really have the opportunity and the advancement to practice peaceful, blissful spiritual life? We have no way of knowing.

That's okay, we're comfortable here, and we have no immediate realization of these events. Since the future is unknown, better we spend our thoughts on this pinpoint of time we call the present and the past. The past is most tangible. We remember being children and young people and like to taste all that we went through again. But we can't remember the past body although time existed before I was born, and you too. People existed and we were one of them. "Many, many births both you and I have had," Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna. "I remember all of them, but you do not."

Before we know it, the past has extended into the present and the present into the future, connected by that thread we call karma. Then death and rebirth. If we guide our thoughts to follow those connections, our thoughts will become more sublime and sober. It will also become more obvious how we should act in this lifetime. We'll begin to

realize who we are and how to concentrate on our real self-interest. And if we forget for awhile, at least we will have put ourselves on the devotional path and be living life with a safety net. We'll turn from those thoughts, look at our watch, and think, "Oh, I had better go and cook the offering." Whatever that was, that earlier train of thought, will inevitably be picked up again and again as we go through the day and the years, that remembrance that we're meant to serve Kṛṣṇa as eternal spirit soul. Life has no other meaning.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

So, yes, I can speak without realization on the authority of *śāstra* and say that before I was born in this body, I existed in another body, even though I don't remember it. It's logical. After I die, I will be born again. In this particular life, my senses extend a few inches from my body like an insect's feelers, and through those senses, I can know a little bit about what's going on in my environment, but I can't see much.

The human form of life is such a great responsibility, yet material civilization has paralyzed and confused people, just like spiders do to insects before eating them. We have been confused by ignorance and passion—the whole society. In ignorance we walk around dazed in the shopping malls or sit in front of the television set. We are being cheated by people who are cheating themselves and are spinning around in forgetfulness of who we are. In the end, the "spider" Māyā sucks our blood and finishes us off.

31

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

Do you agree to surrender your time and mind to Kṛṣṇa's service?

I don't even know Kṛṣṇa.

Well, you know your Guru Mahārāja.

Yes, but he's been gone for so many years now. How can he keep account of me?

He does keep account of you, and you have his instructions. Anyway, the system is that the disciple remains chaste and faithful to the guru through his *vāṇī*.

Yes, I know, but it's heavy. I mean, that's the Indian system and I'm not an Indian.

For some people, this is a real dialogue, but sooner or later the devotee has to surrender, or does surrender, but with a limp. He walks as if his shoes were too tight. His is not a smooth path.

Subdued by his inner doubts and by the examples of persons who don't appeal to him because their "following of guru" is really a lot of bombast, he becomes contaminated by his own *anarthas* and stops. Actually stops. Often he won't admit he has stopped right away. It's like the emperor's new clothes. Everyone can see it, but few have the courage to comment to his face. Finally, the person admits himself that he is no longer following his guru. Then one of two things happens. Either he says that the guru was

right, but he just can't follow, or he says that the guru was wrong and that's why he can't follow.

Seeing people push themselves so far forward with expanded chests, leading the other followers forward, and then winding up stopped—it does something to you. Again, one of two things can happen. Either you look at that example and you dive more fervently into your Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or you use it as an excuse to stop yourself. That same contamination that stopped your Godbrother takes hold of you. Its voice begins to reverberate in your head too. It begins to make sense.

That's why we have to read *Bhagavad-gītā.* Arjuna heard the voice of doubt and decided not to fight the battle. But he was a *kṣatriya;* he was *supposed* to fight. On one level, it seems that Kṛṣṇa was enforcing a lower morality over a superior one—duty over mercy. After all, Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna that he couldn't leave the battlefield and become a beggar because he would appear cowardly. It wasn't until later that he explained the higher principles of *bhakti.*

People have trouble with that disparity between lower and higher morality. We admire conscientious objectors who, even during a "popular" war such as World War II, when patriotism was high in America, refused to fight. We admire them because they not only see the political ambition behind war, but they are willing to stand up and be counted as against it. The difference is that the Battle of Kurukṣetra was a religious war and the Supreme Personality of Godhead was personally present. He wanted Duryodhana and company out and His own devotees in. Therefore, we now have this example of Arjuna as someone who initially refused to do what he was expected to do and who was

considered wrong for it. Of course, in the end he was glorious by following Kṛṣṇa's instructions.

The main point of *Bhagavad-gītā* is that the immortal soul's duty is to do whatever pleases Kṛṣṇa. That's what we're trying to do in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement and what I am trying to do on this radio show by speaking about it. I started out this show by dialoguing with a lonely voice that admitted his weakheartedness in serving his spiritual master in separation. He was particularly referring to being weak in the sense of being able to be a mouthpiece for Kṛṣṇa, a preacher. I don't mind a preacher speaking according to his own nature and the hearer sensing the preacher's own personal flair. As a matter of fact, I kind of like it. But even while he mumbles and spills out his obsession with admitting his faults and speaking what he's feeling at any moment, he still has to speak in a Kṛṣṇa conscious way. He has to maintain his identity as a devotee of Kṛṣṇa.

I think you know what I mean. Identity. I remember going home from work one day in Boston and I passed the building housing the local Allston newspaper. It was a small building in a commercial suburb of Boston. Right on the spot I thought, "I'll go in there and tell them we have just opened a temple. Maybe they'll come and do a story." It suddenly became clear to me how much I identified with the missionary preacher my spiritual master wanted me to become. I was, on my own, thinking of ways to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Of course, I also wanted to present the results to my spiritual master.

We say it was easier then than it is now. We were more surrendered when Prabhupāda was present among us, and the whole movement was so full of hope. We were also young. It was easier to carry around a Kṛṣṇa conscious

identity. Now it's harder. We face more hesitation. We can't run to Prabhupāda and ask for direction, except through his *vāṇī*.

Reminds me of Hamlet. However you look at Hamlet, the most fascinating thing about him was his hesitation to act. He was supposed to avenge his father, who was killed by his mother's lover. His soliloquies are memorable: "To be or not to be, that is the question." He was too deep for a man of action, and that was his problem—too mental.

People joke now about the "Hamlet syndrome." They don't want a Hamlet making pretty and profound speeches in a position where they need something accomplished. I remember such jabs being made at New York's Governor Cuomo, because he was an intellectual among the politicians. He thought things over and was often of two minds about issues. It was the fault of his intelligence.

I suffer from it too, in my writing. When I go to write, a voice emerges, asking the same question: "Why are you doing this rather than traveling around and preaching like your Godbrothers?" Sometimes the voice goes right to my heart like a shock wave.

Imagine the ox man on his way to the barn picking up the yoke and walking over to the ox, "Burf, all right Burf, let's go." Then immediately the question arises from somewhere in his mind, "Why are you doing this? Why are you out here in this smelly barn working these poor beasts?" I guess my internal critic is not special to me; everyone probably has one, even if they don't vocalize it. It's there in whatever drags them down in their work.

With some, life is simpler. Zen teaches that kind of simplicity. They call it mindfulness: when you chop wood, chop wood, and when you draw water, draw water. Be like a tree.

A tree is a tree and doesn't aspire to be anything but a tree. The tree is not Hamlet, questioning whether or not he should be a tree.

A human being, unfortunately, is often not sure what he is. Of course, that confusion is good for him in the beginning. He is forced to ask, "Who am I?" Americans used to make fun of that question in the 1950s, especially the conservative anti-intellectuals. We used to call it an "identity crisis." Suddenly we found ourselves growing apart from the pack, apart from the tough kids or the American dream or Madison Avenue fantasy—and at least for those who were more intellectual—toward a deeper search for meaning. All those who were in the throes of an identity crisis could meet in the subways or at the Greenwich Village coffee houses. You could almost hear the table conversations: "Who am I? I don't know who I am. I'm having an identity crisis." It was so common at one point that it would be joked about on the situation comedies and laughed at in living rooms across America.

Of course, it was serious for those who were feeling it. Sanātana Gosvāmī said that although he was considered learned, he didn't know who he was and why he was suffering.

Let's stop mulling around with this discussion and try to get somewhere with it. I'm saying that when I write, I am attacked by critics and don't like it. I'd rather just say what I want to say and be who I am.

At the same time, I'm aware that the voice of the critic is not always the voice of a pest or of those teasers from the 1950s, but of conscience. Kṛṣṇa conscience. Guru. I can't push the knife blade away from my throat. I can't just ignore it once and for all. I can't make a neat and tidy

solution of how to do away with the internal critic. What else can I do, then, but go forward and say what I can in as Kṛṣṇa conscious a way as I can, holding onto my identity as a devotee for dear life?

Besides that, I've grown older. Looking back, I can see the track that has led me to where I am now, and it seems I'm this kind of a disciple, one who wants to write the way I write, even though it doesn't produce expositional pieces on the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness to be handed in to IWR. What I write is a little unusual. I know that. I don't start out quoting *śāstra,* and I don't tell people so much what they should or shouldn't do in their practice of *bhakti-yoga;* I write what comes to mind. I feel committed to this type of writing as an act of truthfulness. At the same time, I know it's unorthodox.

I remember way back to 26 Second Avenue a statement that Brahmānanda, our natural leader at that time, made to us. He said it not long after Prabhupāda had gone to San Francisco and we were beginning to hold the regular evening programs ourselves at the storefront. He said, "You know, I discovered about this lecturing that we've been doing since Swamijī went to San Francisco that you just can't speak from the mood you're in. You have to speak the philosophy." It was the sort of objective observation we accepted as truth. And it's still truth: when you sit on the *vyāsāsana,* you have to simply look at the verse and speak on that.

Ah Kṛṣṇa, one wants to go deeper in all this talk and to build toward clarity and resolution. I always want to cut through the talk and just tell you I'm cold and that there are no leaves left on the trees. It's beautiful here, especially the solitude available in this place. I've taken so many walks

along the same route that I've made a path through the unmown grass. The path interests me, and so does the lapping water, because time is running out. Does that make sense? There is no sense denying that I feel Kṛṣṇa's presence in the beauty that I see. I have so little time left to express it.

And I have so little time left to free myself from falsity. If I'm affected by someone's affectionate gesture toward me or by someone else's insult, I want to acknowledge it and get past it rather than deny it and allow it to live on.

Well, Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is so good that even a little bit of it is good. It is so complete that it can include the appreciation of nature and the writing of poetry and almost anything else you want it to include. Everything can be dovetailed; Swamijī assured us of that. We just need to be confident. Ultimately, there is no disparity between what we want to become and what we are if we remember Kṛṣṇa.

Confident that the beautiful moments are Kṛṣṇa's energy, you can kick out the negative voices that inhibit your free spirit. Go ahead, but be loyal and faithful to your spiritual master.

Prabhupāda singing:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare

"O Acyuta, please bring my chariot between the two armies so that I may see who is present before me and with whom I must contend in this great trial of arms."

This is the first verse of the "secret of affection," which is at the heart of God consciousness. You can become an intimate lover of God, and those who have achieved that

sometimes order Him as a subordinate. When this is done out of love—out of a love steeped with forgetfulness of God's independent greatness—then Kṛṣṇa likes it very much. He prefers that kind of love to the worship of those in awe and reverence.

I hope, therefore, that I'm not just so much into my own head that Kṛṣṇa's not there when I say I want to write in a certain way or I want to be a certain way. I have to trust that it is He who is inspiring my intelligence and not that He is saying, "Look, do you love Me and want to serve Me, or are you just on your own trip?"

That's a question we all have to face. Kṛṣṇa may recognize us because we have been favored by His pure devotee. He is prepared to fulfill our highest aspirations and to give us pure devotion. Already He's giving us money and facility in so many ways, but do we really want to use these facilities to serve Him, or do we just want to be poets (or supply your own word)? Or do we want both? Are we conditioned or unconditional? Do we even want to be unconditional?

I don't know. I know only that I'm not that great a devotee. I don't know Kṛṣṇa, although I can honestly say that I want to know Him. I don't want to say that I don't love Kṛṣṇa or anything like that. I certainly don't want to say I don't like to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa or that I don't want to preach. None of that would be true.

Of course, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura and devotees such as Rāmacandra Kavirāja do say those things for our benefit. They say they don't like to perform devotional service, that they're not devotees, that their hearts are made of stone. "When I hear of the love of Kṛṣṇa's dear devotees for Him, when I hear the chanting of the holy name, I remain unredeemed. I don't know why I'm living. A javelin has

pierced my heart. Better I die, but I have been cursed by Yamarāja." They lament.

O Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, I do want to love You, but I'm not yet a lover of Your Divine Self. This is my predicament and I don't know how to become free of it. I am absorbed in myself rather than in the shelter at Your lotus feet. Please help me.

We have to cultivate a mood of wanting Kṛṣṇa from wherever we find ourselves on the path. All of us will receive the result of what it is we desire and do in this life. Many of us are falling short for lack of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, many of our generation, but we are going forward too. O Kṛṣṇa.