



FROM MATTER  
to Spirit

PAINTINGS, POEMS & IMPROVISATIONS

SATSVARŪPA DĀSA GOSWAMI

**FROM MATTER TO SPIRIT**



# FROM MATTER TO SPIRIT

PAINTINGS, POEMS AND IMPROVISATIONS



SATSVARUPA DASA GOSWAMI

GN Press, Inc.

Persons interested in the subject matter of this book  
are invited to correspond with our secretary, c/o GN  
Press, Inc., P.O. Box 445, La Crosse, FL 32658.

© 2001 GN Press, Inc.  
All rights reserved.  
ISBN 0-911233-39-3

Artwork: Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami  
Cover design: Guru-sevā-devī dāśī

## PREFACE

Art has an undeniable way of reaching in and moving into a sacred place within us. Whether we are artists or we simply appreciate art, the experience of entering that hidden, mysterious world is the same and from there we sense the desire to offer our best, our most dear, from the deepest part of our beings—to touch and share the song that feels and lives within us.

For a follower of Śrīla Prabhupāda, that world is the world of moving from matter to spirit, a world where everything is alive with opportunity to serve Kṛṣṇa with our most feeling self.

What follows is what has moved out from one artist's life. It is an improvised solo emerging from a musician free of aid from manuscript, sketch, or memory. The artist performs alone, hoping to please guru and Kṛṣṇa. He doesn't always know the theme until he finds it and sings his various moods—the song of a Kṛṣṇa conscious life, full of melody that pours out into words and paint strokes.

And as a musician may allow for a chosen night's live performance to become a recording (while other performances are deemed not his best), here is a collection of poems and paintings with which he has not reworked to try to improve. They were composed in a spontaneous setting and are released here in the same spontaneous mood.

—The Publisher

Tubs of blue and forest green,  
yellow, red, white—focused on Kṛṣṇa  
His form, His movement.  
I want to be a devotee, so I  
keep staining  
stroking  
blank pages—and trust  
that Kṛṣṇa  
will appear.

Kṛṣṇa is in everything  
and I print words thick and soft  
like Japanese calligraphy:  
Kṛṣṇa  
*japa*  
beware,  
O Kṛṣṇa,  
I love You.





I am in the shack, thinking of Vṛndāvana. The Yamunā's bank is sandy, and the breezes are mild. Cows pasturing nearby. Kṛṣṇa is here.

But this is the shack and I have a headache. Life is beating away through my veins and I don't want to waste it. As one daughter put it, "I need feelings now!" She didn't find it in what she perceived as intellectual (i.e., distant) studies of *śāstra*.

I know about that. The heart wants something now.

But what?

Not the beat of rock-'n'-roll or  
jazz or even the classics.

The heart wants a real hero to love, not someone temporary to stir temporary, material emotions. Narottama dāsa Thākura sings, "I did not attain attraction for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa." I did not hear Kṛṣṇa's flute,

only Coltrane's sax or the  
Beatles' guitars.

O blues

O nights without You,  
lover, beloved.

A heart cries out  
feeling now. It's waited  
long enough . . .

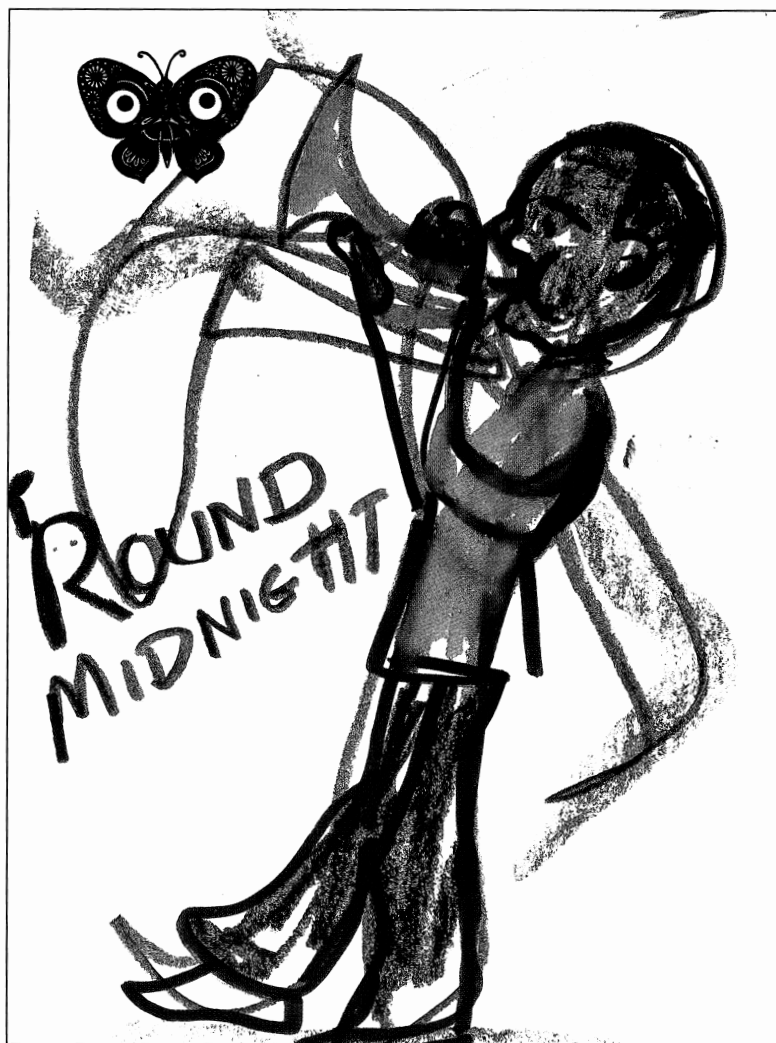
I need to dance

and to see

the face of a friend who speaks my language  
and knows how to touch

my . . .

soul?



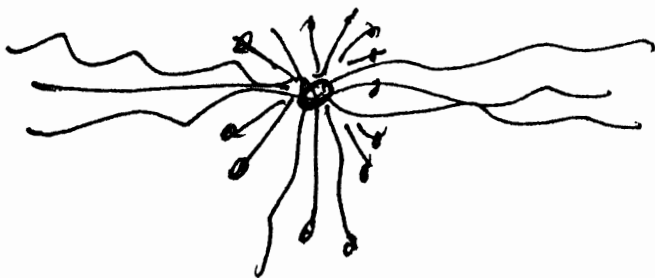


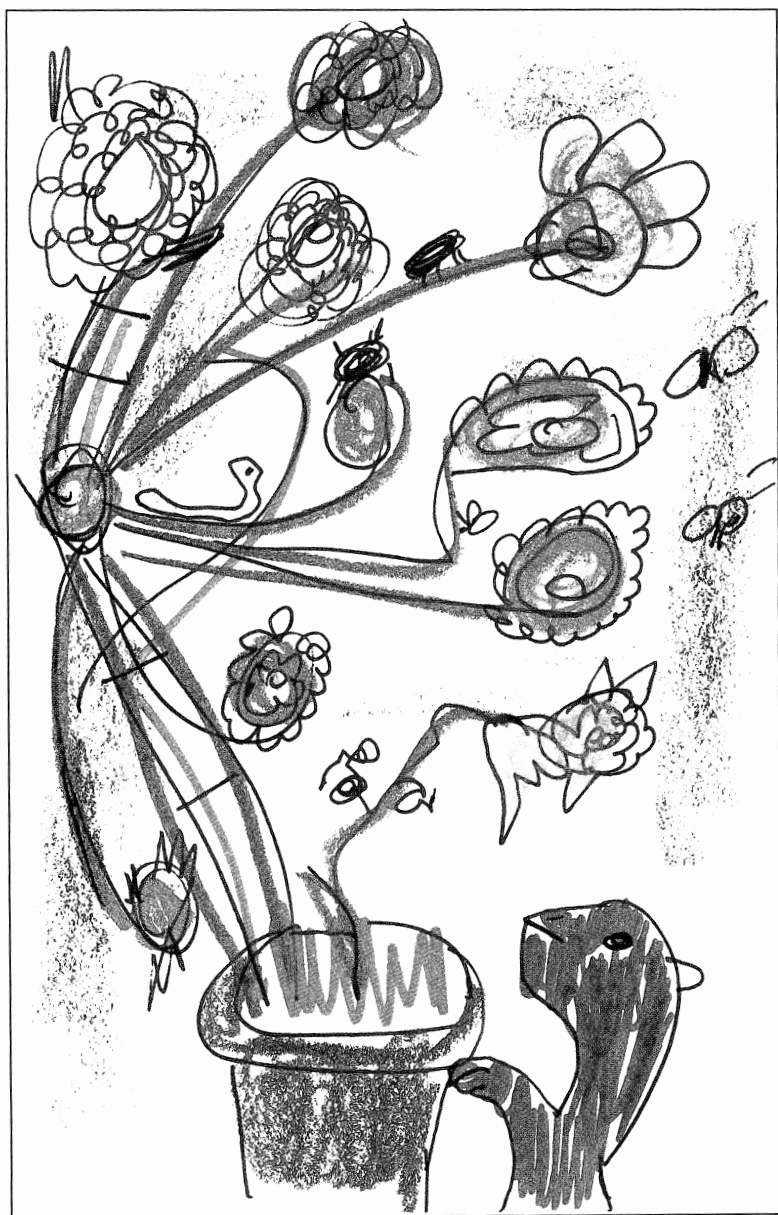
Calm current promised  
for faithful  
stay-at-homes or  
for protected preachers—  
even if storms arrive,  
safe passage guaranteed.  
Better book passage straight  
to the Lord's abode.  
Know what I mean?





I am a cat on soft paws.  
The creation is God's—  
"Who can say no?"  
They dare but  
Swami proves  
God behind the flowers.





Pure song—sung for God a  
flower given to Him.  
Not incompatible although improvised.  
We give our best and this is it.  
We savor the holy name, inviting  
Kṛṣṇa into sacred space,  
into our madness—  
subway madness not excluded—and  
into issues real or imagined.

My  
my  
little boy-man  
of tinsel spirit  
going bravely underground.

No cigars no  
low  
lights  
but a building solo  
a wail, then pause,  
sneaking in ditties,  
trying to evoke  
soul,  
emotion,  
the music of no structure—  
Kṛṣṇa consciousness  
really.



He asked, "If we are not these  
bodies how come *śāstra* says  
a pure devotee liberates his kin  
fourteen generations forward and back?"  
I said there are some things I don't know.

What do I know? Sailors, soldiers—  
some things are not worth  
bothering about (*āsuram bhāvam*).  
I prefer to be alone in  
this house  
and walk in stockinged  
feet, pacing, chanting  
another round.

Answers come with my own confessions and  
I just don't know. We  
are not these bodies. We  
have eternal spiritual quality  
as persons, as servants of God  
in blissful *rasa*.

A clown, a sincere guy old-growing this  
last day of May, walks  
stooped but awaits the season in which he can  
write and read the *Bhāgavatam* where  
Kṛṣṇa is fully  
present in name and form  
and only our blindness prevents us  
from seeing.

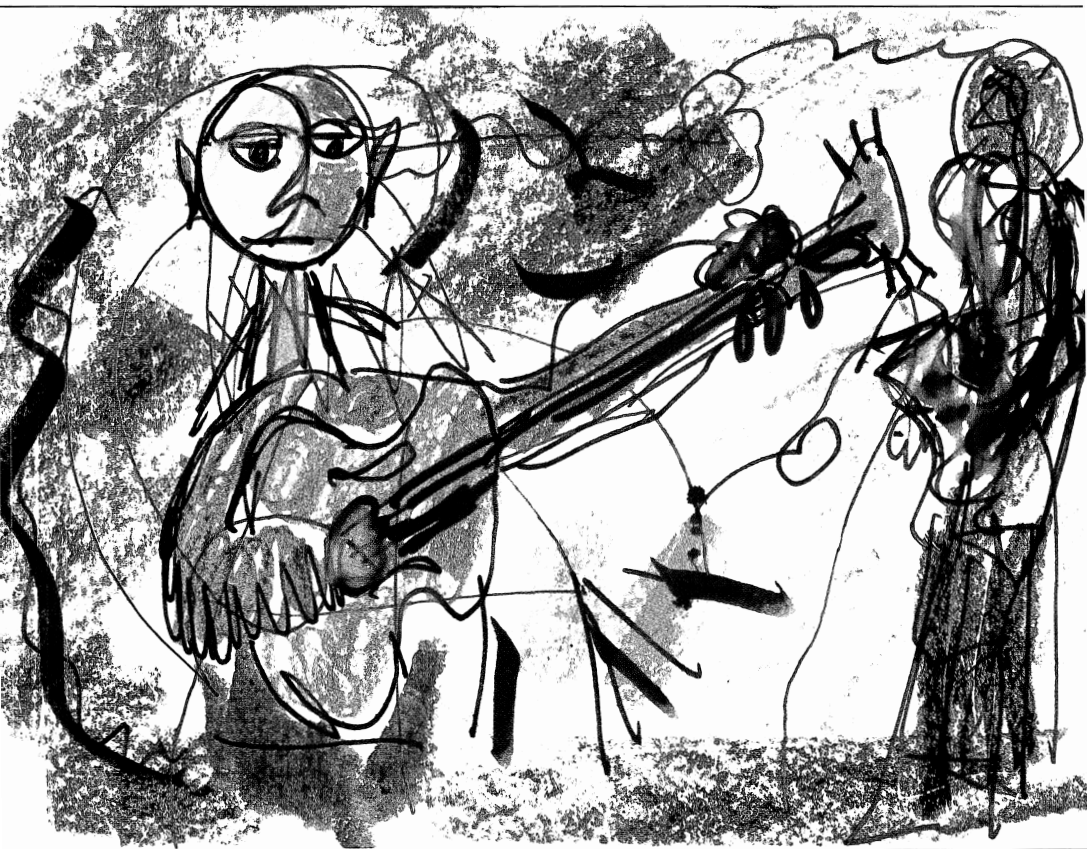




It's raining slanting rightward.  
The guru—  
a mere child in spiritual  
life and frail in the head—  
is in his sleeping bag  
dreaming  
but wakes to faint  
strains of bouzouki music. He gets  
up and asks for more quiet  
while the goat beds  
down on the cement ledge by  
the back door (glass), sometimes  
butting his head against it when  
he sees his reflection  
or imagines he's eating the upholstery  
inside.

Meanwhile the book  
waits to be read. After  
he's slept and he's  
clear—the guru—he'll  
turn to Vidura  
and his love of God.





No more velvet illusions—  
I stay in the Guesthouse  
and my inner mind  
screams, wants to go  
somewhere, Vṛndāvana  
slow blues  
known to us all. To enter.  
There's no way it can be otherwise.





My God is not my ego  
but even my ego  
is Kṛṣṇa in tiny part.  
God is Master and  
I am soul and  
both are spirits.  
One serves the other.

Just to avoid the always  
serious and official,  
and just to make an  
offering which  
has no audience, like  
a flower that blossoms unseen, seen  
only by God.





I climbed the hill alone to where  
you can see far off, a lake a  
bare hill, and heard a bird  
once in a while. I was  
tuned into Vṛndāvana  
remembering a pastime  
about two-year-old Kṛṣṇa  
and how the gopas teased.

"You are not Yaśodā's son," they said.  
"Look how black You are, and  
their skin is fair.  
They found You in a hole in a tree  
and adopted You, Nanda Mahārāja and his wife."  
Young and gullible, Kṛṣṇa  
wept, only wept,  
even after Yaśodā took Him on her lap.

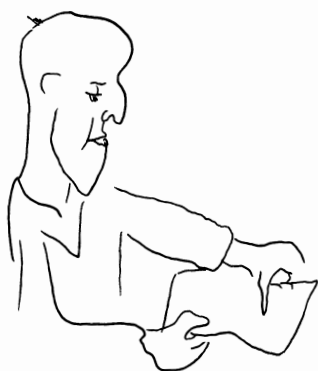
A scent of sweetness  
in the morning air.







This is  
the exact time when you could  
be reading of Brahmā and  
Maitreya or the *gopīs* and Kṛṣṇa.  
You could be chanting your beads  
or ascending to heaven,  
hearing a priest's confession or  
attending the eighty-first meeting  
of a brahminical council with  
the accountant giving an alarming report—  
and still you'd fall asleep.





Storks landing in a paradise of chimneys in Spain, the belfries of churches their favorite roosts. It's a strange sight. "Perhaps Paris," he thought, "or persimmons. Perhaps words can release me from my bondage."

Foolish. He tries in various swash themes, in dreams, and by exploring the six enemies of the mind to find his lost way. They are bitter enemies.

The path is sacred, the attempt noble. The accumulation of evidence for (and against) him: the piling up of written books.

Surrender is best. It can be offered gradually, pursued regularly. Give up all attachment to the monkey world. So what if you get a few mosquito bites?

The world is a fearful place. My life is so sheltered in ISKCON that I see the danger only in dreams. Here, *kirtana* goes on twenty-four hours a day.





Rūpa-mañjarī once found Kṛṣṇa  
with Candrāvalī and Padmā and cried,  
"Kṛṣṇa, a demon in the shape of a bull  
is attacking Your own baby bull.  
If you delay a moment, he'll be killed."  
Kṛṣṇa understood and He leapt up  
glad to go to Rādhā-kuṇḍa.

Walking on the woods path  
I see signs of horses—  
those wild, gentle stallions  
who roam and eat the grass  
and who never work—  
but I draw my mind back  
from the earth and its signs  
to the sounds in my ears.

Kṛṣṇa left the *gopīs* to increase their eagerness.  
If He were to stay always,  
their love would become peaceful,  
domestic. Love is best when there are waves in the sea  
of feeling.

I tell what I heard and what I saw.  
It's like coming back with a rough bag  
filled with herbs, dumping them on the floor,  
then sitting beside them to give them  
a trim. That's it. What I heard was  
valuable and what I saw in the woods was  
vivid, and each has its ability to move  
the heart and to belong in my poem.  
Milkweed is sturdy, Goloka is *cintāmaṇi*,  
and the buttercups are now open.  
White clouds rest like pillows on the hill  
and the sky is blue-changing.



Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa,  
Kṛṣṇa—the favorite word,  
the saving direction.  
cummings writes  
    paris  
    paris  
    paris  
in his 1920s  
poems and cannot  
find words pretty and feeling enough  
to express his love.  
O Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa,  
O inconceivably personal  
*tri-baṅga* form  
in the hearts  
of pure devotees.







Looked out at the ocean around 6:30 A.M. and saw the sun rising. The ocean and beach are Lord Caitanya's playground. His body is compared to many full moons, and we can glimpse it when the moon sparkles on the ocean waves. O Lord Caitanya, You sported in Purī five hundred years ago, and Your pastimes are now kept in the hearts of Your pure devotees. O Lord, You empowered Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī to describe Your *līlās*, although he never saw them, and we are grateful. O Lord, You felt Rādhikā's *bhāva* here at Purī. On this early morning while the sun rises and the moon still sparkles on the water, I pray for safe passage to Your lotus feet.

O Lord Caitanya, I am a person, not a zero or a piece of Western dirt, a bottle cap or even a capitalist. I am only a tiny servant of my spiritual master, who favored me, a tortured cat from the streets of the Lower East Side. O Lord, I pray to You to see his mark upon me and to allow me to arrive at Your lotus feet.





In 1955 I was off blue. I still remember the phrasing.  
 "Bring me closer to You, Lord," M. was singing as I entered.  
 Oh, I don't know what's best for me and  
 what I like best.  
 We all grow old and die. No  
 don't flinch  
 unless you want to.  
 Spokesman says, "Here it is."  
 I say, "Peanuts."  
 No phony but true  
 and this slow line suits.  
 I'm one in humanity but they cut you out if you're the wrong  
 color  
 or make.  
 Now I say elongate, because time is running out.  
 Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa—our cliché is fine. Just love it.  
 Just love it, that's all.  
 That's all.

The refrain:  
 No matter where they sent us we believed in spreading  
 Kṛṣṇa's words,  
 but the blanched effort of a timid soul kept indoors—I be-  
 lieved in that too.  
     O Swami, we depend on you.  
     Tell us what God wants  
     and how to attain His grace.  
     I gather my proofs so I can pass  
 out into the streets, the parks, and sing for all I'm worth!  
 O Kṛṣṇa,  
 Kṛṣṇa, unto You I commend my soul.  
 Drumroll, please.



What's my disease?  
Do I live with it well?  
It intrudes on my life, has become  
indistinguishable from life itself.  
It defines me.

O soul eternal, break loose.  
It's June but still cold.  
My light is dimming, but  
I'm waiting. Saints take pains  
to spread His glories. They help  
the fallen, have spiritual bodies.  
I'm waiting, reading when nobody  
notices.



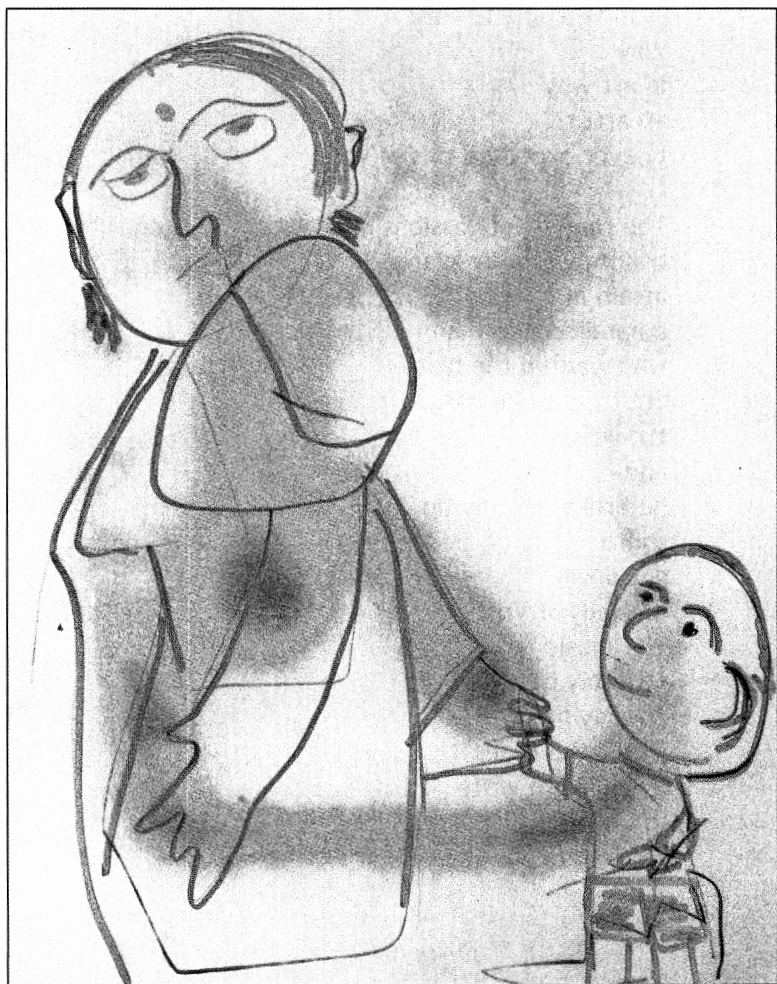


The tired guy the tired  
bellclap is tiny and the  
metal varnished silver plaque.

The tiniest fellow in me  
wants out, wants rest  
wants Raghunātha Gosvāmī to know  
the tiniest soul we are  
all the same size so we  
can't be any smaller  
but light up pure our own  
self-realization. Guru guides  
and we obey.

Tiny repeating got a gimmick  
a "he," a  
mask of gauze and stone but  
Mātā made puppet shows with  
tiny memories of her tiny  
son Tim coming to me  
each day carrying a plastic  
bucket with this in it:

A piece of incense, a flower—  
something—and his mother approved and  
laughed throatily.  
I was beside myself, mannered,  
foolish, grinning—had my own  
teeth back then when  
fierce brass strong-thighed  
Nṛsiṃhadeva was worshiped by  
yours truly.





Artist in the grip of doubt,  
helpless, I look at my master  
and no others. He says,  
"You've come to this?  
Why  
in art why  
an artist?  
I never expected this of you."

The running of passions like vertical bars on subway  
trains out to the plane—  
afraid in dreams of  
a handicapped man  
who wanted the truth  
until the same riff  
grew tired  
and  
he broke me, my lip  
split I  
got down  
in sands of Vṛndāvana.  
The music faded  
from my brain  
and my hand  
wrote the tunes  
I wanted to write.  
Did my master frown?



I wake after an afternoon nap. She's still moaning her Rādhā-song. The sky is still bright blue. The fan is still revolving.

Prabhupāda said, "Waking is like eternity."

Where are the monkeys? Where are the birds? How much time do I have before Madhu comes in to tell me what I must do with my afternoon?

I have a round to chant, some reading, a lecture to prepare, water to drink, words to select, but no choice whether to live or die, whether to stop time or to let it go by. I have only free will to choose Kṛṣṇa.



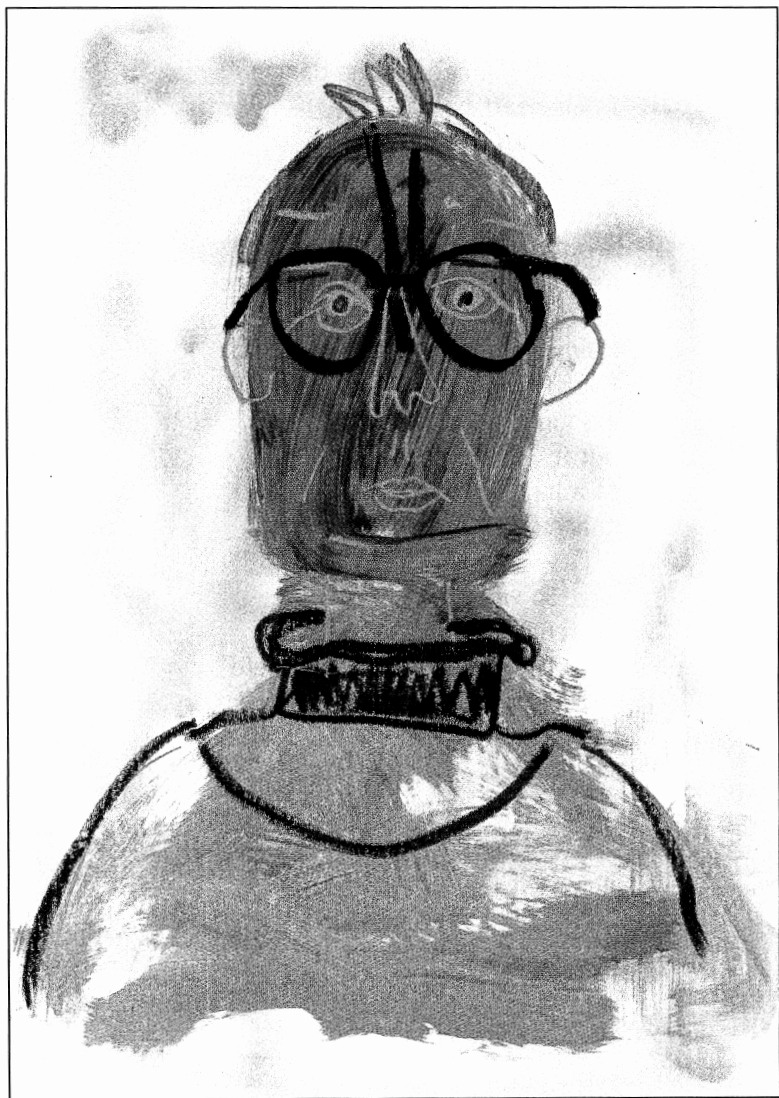


To tell of the great steel-gray hulk  
that Saratoga then moored in a Napoli harbor  
us approaching her in  
a sailor-packed whaleboat all  
thinking of her as home.

Resuscitated, it's now  
forty years later and I'm a sailor  
of *Bhāgavatam* seas.  
A retired admiral,  
sea legs shaking,  
my head like a vise.

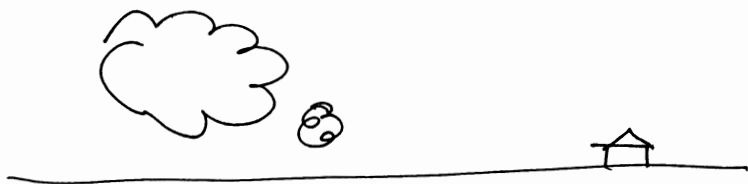
"Don't," she said, "write  
poems to sell your pain  
and gain attention for  
your merely sincere  
confessions. You've got  
to do something for us."  
What if I don't  
have it in me?

Then write as a little  
follower of Suka,  
a peahen in Vraja  
who pecks at his *sādhana*.  
I tell you, we are all  
more or less quivering  
in illusion.



He doesn't have the courage to walk to  
his shed—  
afraid his eye might "fall out."  
Does he dance? Yes, he dances  
in his heart he does  
and bends his notes  
and feels.  
After the Navy,  
after he failed to find love,  
he thought he should get into insurance—  
looked it up in the library,  
random.  
Found Coltrane's "Blue Train."  
It sounds silly, I know,  
but it was a solace  
to a lonely empty  
heart.

So what's new?  
He fell in love, was rescued.  
There was no way he could  
tell how much he intended to  
be happy.



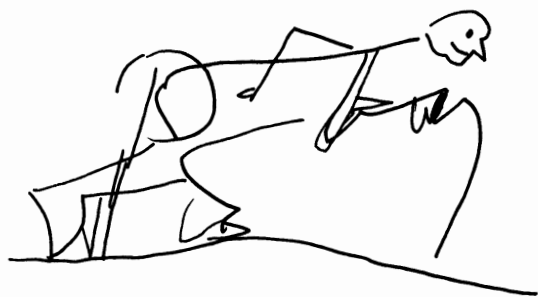




In the few minutes when I tried to do something besides feel pain today, I glanced at the editor's introduction to Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death*. Kierkegaard wrote of his personal suffering regarding a lost love and applied it to the universal theme of sacrificing what we love most to surrender to God's will. Great art comes when the individual expression weds with the universal.

I concentrate on the individual and let others create the universal link for themselves. Kierkegaard's editor writes that science appeals to sense-data because anyone can perceive it. Art, however, "appeals to what is found by the individual in his particularity, with just this personal make-up and just this special experience of the world, when this experience is penetrated by reflection, as it was in Kierkegaard's case."

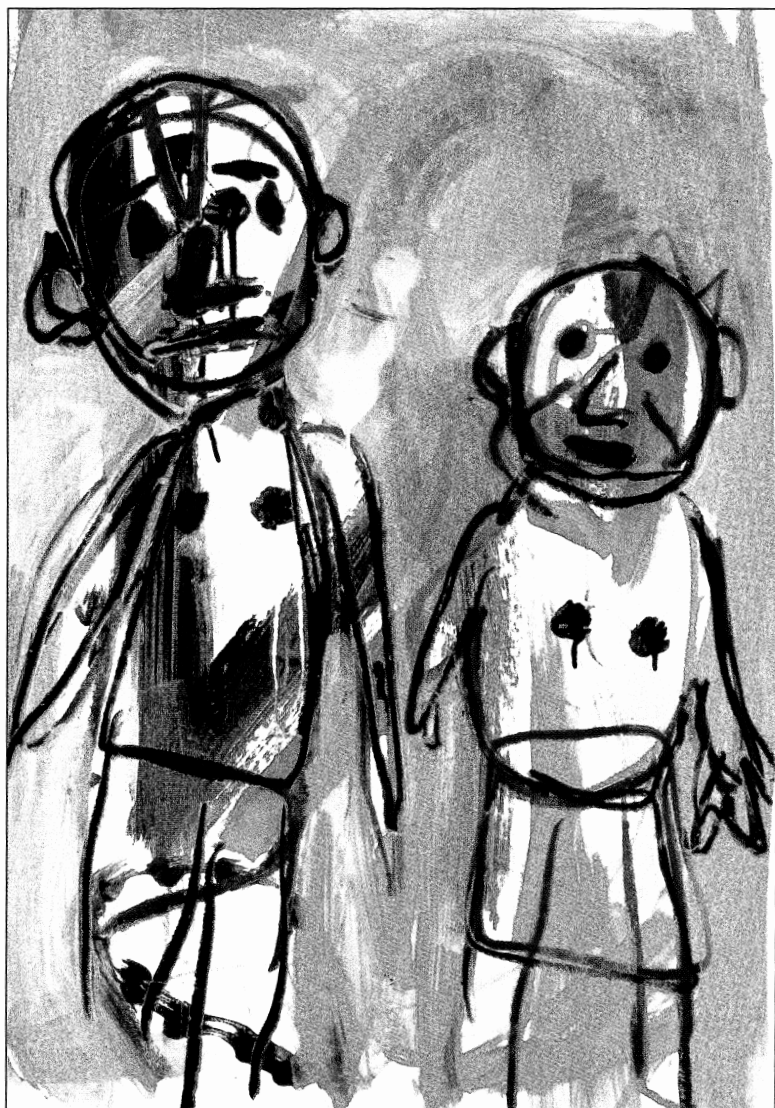
Penetrated by reflection. I sense something when I see the cat at the window. It's just a cat, but it's surcharged with the moment, the pre-dawn, the surprise—it becomes a surreal moment.





Love is—I don't know,  
*hlādinī*, never-ending service.  
You can't really say if you don't know it.  
But I believe in love  
of brothers and sisters, children  
and spiritual fathers all centered in  
love of God, Kṛṣṇa the  
best friend, even more intimate  
than that.





*Sādhū* sitting in sunken garden in Yama-ṭoṭa, Purī, but white guys have to leave, the Hindus said. Mosquito-bitten, I retreated upstairs and said, "To heck with them. I'll speak American into my dictaphone. I know what they don't and they know what I don't."

I went back

back

stuck to ISKCON

that accommodates white guys.

I had already found my way

out of the Navy and

Elvis had dropped off—

I don't have to explain

how beyond myself, through fluid Kṛṣṇa consciousness, I imbibed so long ago

while some died, grew fat, thin,

fell, succeeded,

bashed *sannyāsis*

or *grhasthas* or themselves,

I pressed the strings on the tamboura as if it were a guitar

and survived

by God's grace.

"That's cool," he said, "real cool."



The yellow cool sun  
measures time over atoms and  
beef cows low in far-off pastures while I  
breakfast on fruits.

A man with brush and glue  
puts up strips on a  
billboard, replacing Guinness  
with Michael Jackson's world tour  
a holy campaign now  
advertised in my brain.

A fat bird sits on a pine tip-top.  
I wish peace today and  
to serve Kṛṣṇa in my way.  
It's up to Him and He says  
it's up to me—  
will I surrender?







I saw you and you saw me.  
I said I'll sell the mags  
keep the temple open  
here is my money  
here is my life  
and I won't take them back  
trying now inward to pull out  
some words I haven't said yet  
prayer and action  
as if they can save me.





I am sorry nothing in devotional service moves me to cry out, "Without Kṛṣṇa, I am feeling void. Tears are flowing from my eyes like monsoon torrents." No, I think it's okay—either give me milk or withhold it, I still have a bottle of water. Our conversation will go well or it won't. I still have my night alone in this net-protected bed. And whether or not the day is splendid, I didn't expect much. Even if he doesn't speak to us as he planned, I still have my van and Madhu, and if you take everything away, I still have the *mahā-mantra*. Maybe I'll finally come to appreciate it.





Rūpa Gosvāmī, Sanātana Gosvāmī—  
their names are slipped to me  
like passwords, entry tickets to Vṛndāvana.  
I take them eagerly.  
I have a right to repeat the Lord's  
words: "Do not stay long in Vṛndāvana.  
Come back as soon as possible. Don't  
climb Govardhana."  
Excited to record them, what I've read,  
what I haven't read—  
I can't say.  
But this: Jagadānanda is traveling alone.  
I worry, then remember  
that he's protected by Lord Caitanya.  
Once he started did he think, "I should  
have stayed home with the Lord?"

All day it's been snowing  
fine particles—no allegory  
for spiritual impersonalism.  
Not from me.





At noon the front door banged—  
was it the mailman?  
Then a spoon bangs against a pot  
and it's liable to bring me back  
to my childhood. Father called  
my mother "Sully," because she was a  
Sullivan, a Celtic woman, her name meaning  
"one-eyed warrior."

Who am I? Am I the itchy,  
coughing, helpless throat that's  
temporarily relieved by  
a lemon lozenge?  
Am I a Sully? A Guarino?  
A reciter of Kṛṣṇa's names?  
I know only what I would like to be for sure:  
a devotee serving his guru and  
forgetting all else,  
hearing about Kṛṣṇa and  
lying down at night on the floor,  
happy no matter what.



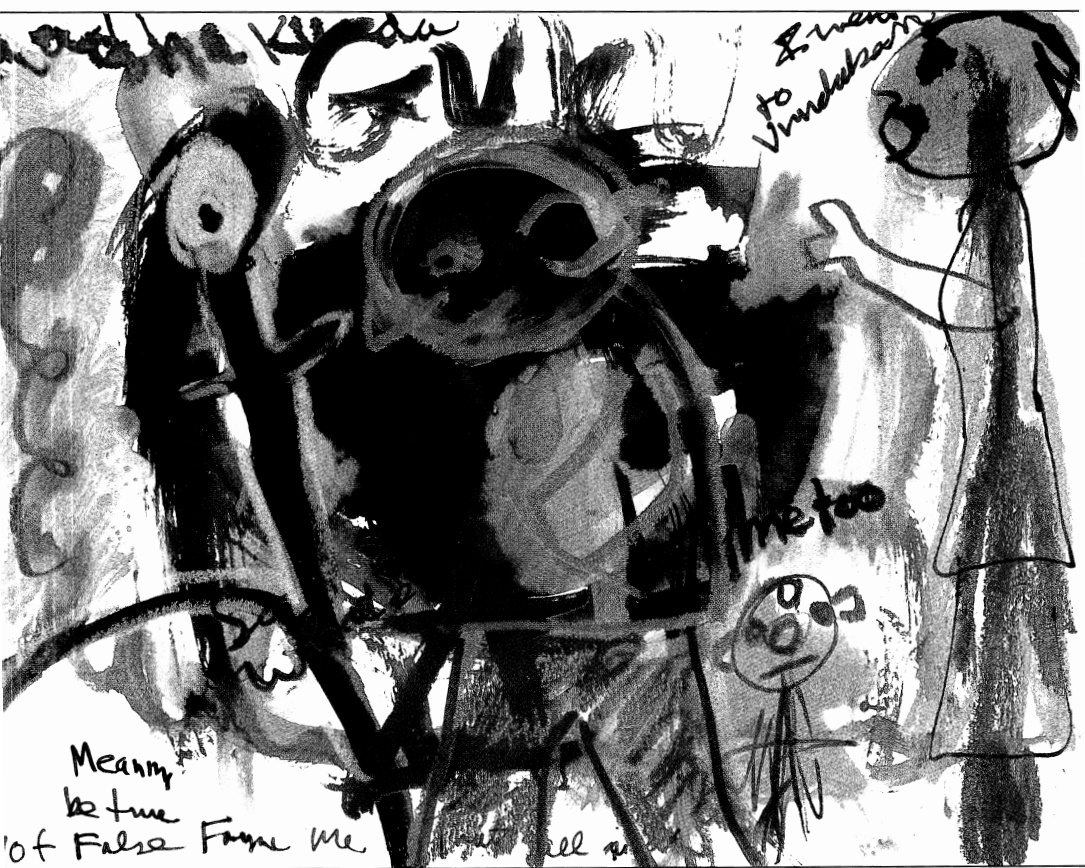
KRSNA Men Look back to  
where they  
came from





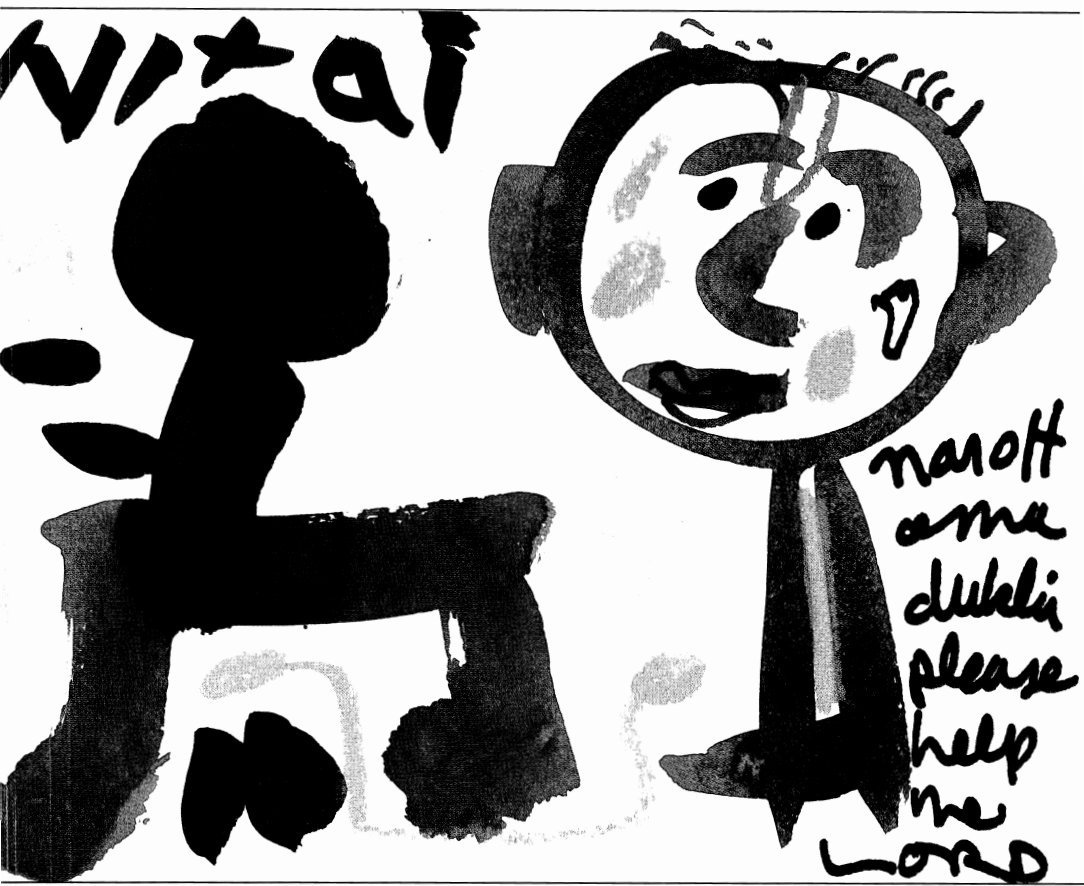
A simple heart is grateful  
and isn't bewildered  
by atheists' arguments. A simple  
heart thanks God for water  
sun, doesn't  
want liberation but  
loving service to Kṛṣṇa.  
A simple heart sees others as  
equals and respects all creatures.  
I believe it.  
I sigh and regroup  
for my next effort  
to comprehend the  
center the  
goal.





I find relief when I apply paint. Pain is art—the ache for God.  
Oh, I don't know. You can't say it. There are many things we  
can say, but some we can't. We paint or cry or both. Words  
bleed—"Nitāi," "help." The words of his song-singing bleeding  
down my arm to this page. Something true.

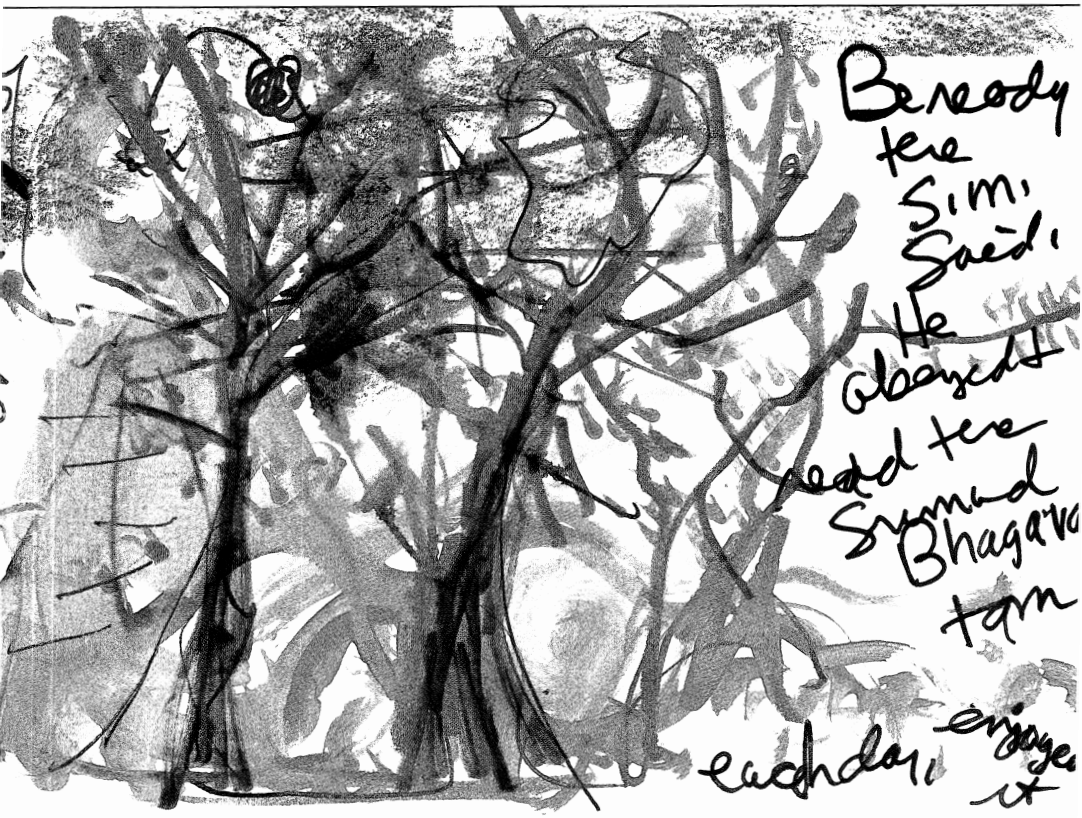




Prabhupāda's juice cup  
sits golden, he's chanting beads and  
I'm before him, a dull rascal.  
Words like that  
free us—our mindset—although  
they are clichéd.  
Clichés are sometimes the well-  
worn best and only words  
we can think of sometimes.

More: effervescent, spirit soul  
servant of God. All the same.  
It's almost June, and the woods are  
bright green, almost a little yellow  
in the sunshine. Pines  
stand erect and  
other trees  
while a red car leaves from the house.

I'll thank God even if I don't live  
through this day or any other  
and pray that my service  
will never be lost.



Our talk wasting, avoiding, hitting a few truths as we grew  
up alien

and heard the revolution brewing.

We talked while the sweet trumpet improvised and we knew  
this

was the language we wanted

velvet smooth talk of love

of cool

coming out double-time

then relaxed

unrepressed.

O Kṛṣṇa,

I could love You.

Kṛṣṇa, that bass

in our heads—where would it have ended?

At a tombstone?

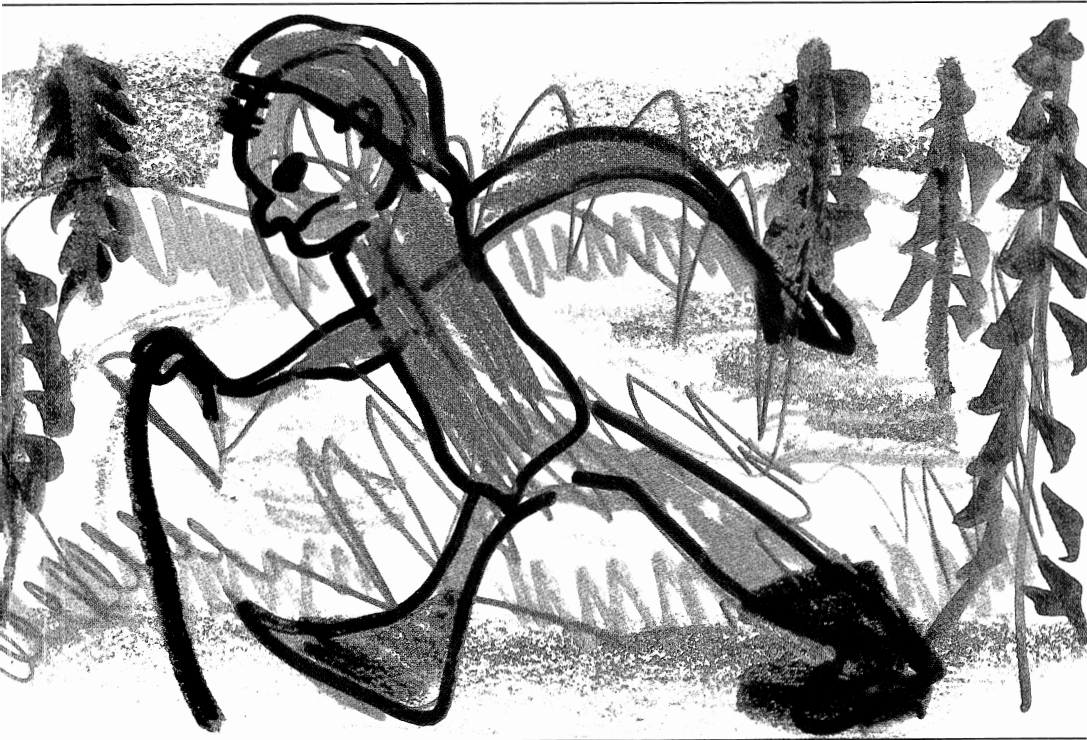






The pines' arms move  
in the breeze.  
I walk down a logging road  
alone,  
past the daisies crumpled by cold  
and rain. I'm warm and human  
and can think of God.





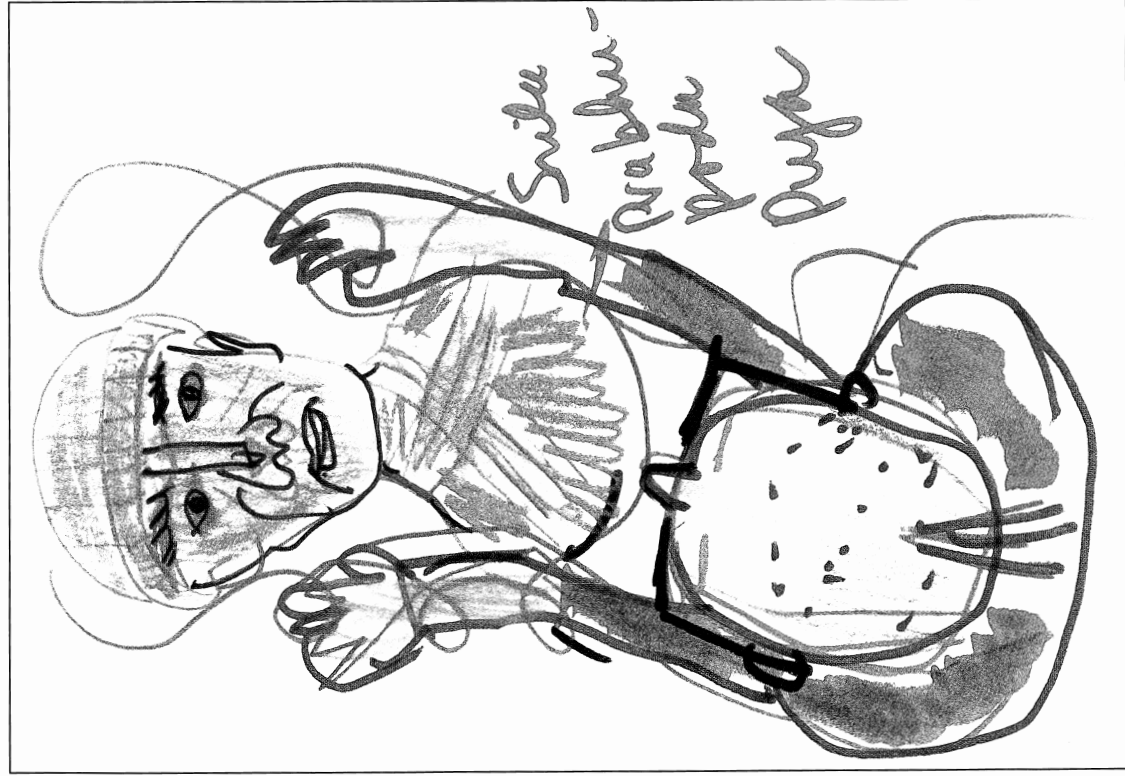
The cold in my chest makes me  
not want to read more,  
disables my patience  
to hear of Kumāras and gatekeepers  
and the steadily descending  
purports.  
Despite it I pluck up my  
courage or  
habit  
and nibble at  
Kṛṣṇa in all things.





In the dark room looking up to that skylight and the dark sky beyond, I called out Srila Prabhupāda's name and thought how I often pray to Prabhupāda to let me know him as he is now. I love the *siddha* form in which he appeared to us. I don't feel the need to meditate on him as a *gopi-maṇjarī*, as if I had that realization; I want to know how he pleased Kṛṣṇa in the form in which we knew him, and I want to know how I can please him. He revealed so much of himself in his books and lectures, all recorded, but that doesn't make him a static person. He changes and we change and the relationship can always deepen. His self-revelation is continuous; it has no end point.





You are my Nellie, my object of scholarship. I mean You, God. You, my minor and major, my tenor sax solo. When I stand to blow my piece, it's You who's on my mind. The joy, the sadness, the pain

come from You,  
but You're not to blame.

I made myself this way,  
toothless with a squeak of joy upon my lips.

Blow it pure—music as prayer. Or that's how I see it.

Wet leaves and the joy of being alive, following the line,  
waking up at center to attest

"God is good,  
all good, even to His enemies."

And the tunes roll spontaneously (a long, slow word)  
off the cuff the

heart

the holy names.

I play the melody I've been given and  
cascade

like the earnest, well-practiced bass player,

strong arm and fingers gripping emotion,

or the crashing drummer running free with his riff

scientific, artful, full of

creative juice

coming from God and returning to Him. No doubt.

In Goloka, every step is a dance, every word  
a song.

O Kṛṣṇa, may I sing Your name with heart

and passion

and blood and mind,

off minor or on,

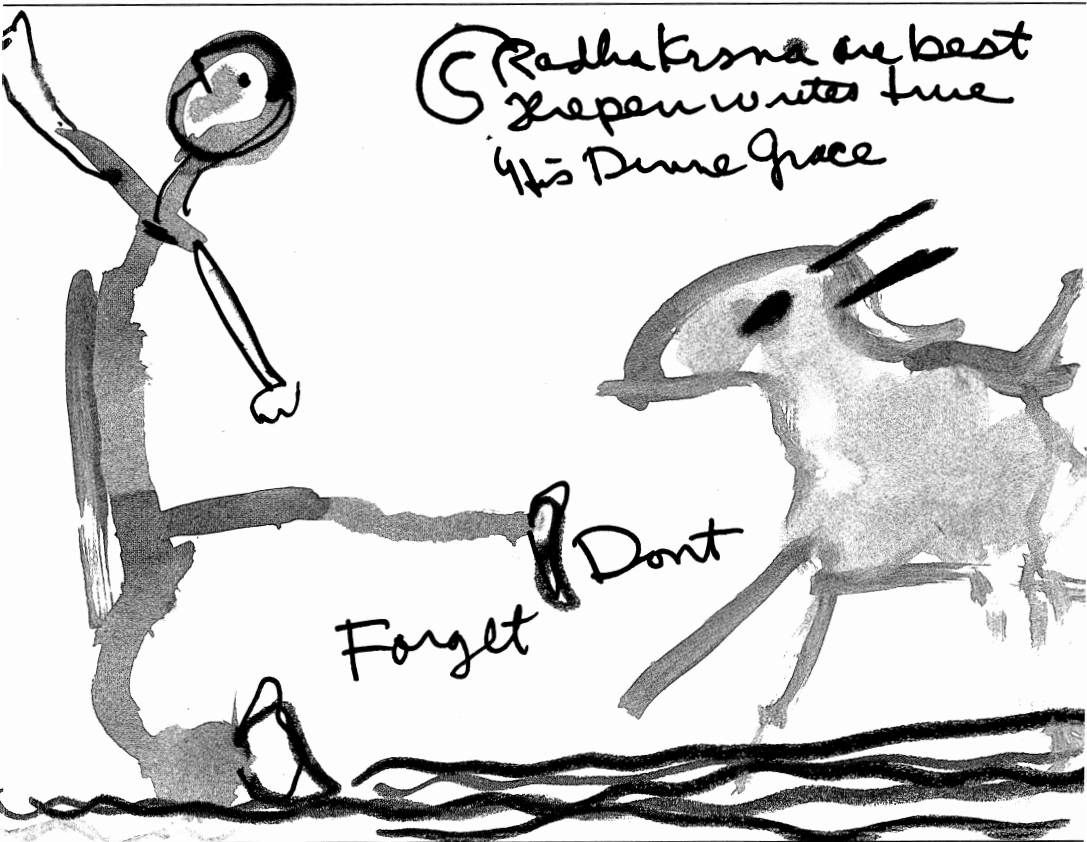
in love.





This morning  
is special and whatever he gives me for  
breakfast I'll accept. Put the key  
under the door and let yourself in  
at night. I'll be out dancing  
by the light of the cold June moon,  
dancing with *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*  
where there are hundreds of blossoming  
flowering trees and there is no one there  
to receive mail at the door.





## WORD MAN

You know me I am  
the kid who used to move  
fast as hell  
no one to see me  
but God in heart.

Played a recorder  
then back to Godhead—  
"Immediately do it,"  
Srīla Prabhupāda said, "Start  
a farm in Germany—anywhere—  
work bulls, get water, be expert."  
But I'm expert at nothing  
can't make water appear in wells  
or workmen from no money.  
I can only write/ spin words.

Wiggle holy Allen holy  
beads I  
chanted and thought of  
three, four projects—sorry, God,  
forgive me.  
I admit I'm a truck front, a turtle, a highway  
and want peace to roll  
and there's nothing like it.

Rhythm, then  
bow my way home  
in all good men  
souls.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa  
the Soul of all

## A SHORT PIECE

Adagio rain and sunshine  
quick flute and family  
avoided  
I heard  
you wuz a monk  
a sort of guru person in  
that cult . . .

Don't waste a mo' we only  
got 2  
less now  
and  
should hear Kṛṣṇa from Suka  
and Srīla Prabhupāda never mind  
anything else.

Life on short loan  
a flesh-and-bone Guarino  
doing his *daṇḍavat* best  
and hoping to meet his end  
in Vṛndāvana or Detroit  
on a highway but chanting  
Hare Kṛṣṇa his only  
way to believe and stay awake.

## PLEASE BE KIND

Please be kind  
to ugly sheep with broken  
legs and blue-stained  
backs, their oppressors' initials  
etched in wool  
staining them as we will each be  
stained  
for death.

## NOT ON YOUR OWN STRENGTH

On a sunshiny day so calm and quiet,  
you want to enter this man's creative  
clatter he calls "Harmolodics"? Yes, let  
me write. Because  
each goes his own way  
even though  
he listens to others  
jiving maybe  
but learning not to expect  
anything on his own strength  
or the strength of any musician-artist  
only God

turning, turning always  
toward Him  
pen in hand  
praying like Prahlāda  
or wishing too  
no morose mouse  
but prayers dripping down  
like dew  
melting frost  
on cold windows  
of the  
soul.

## COUNTRY LIFE

City life I don't want  
unless He sends me there to preach.  
Rural life—same old place I sink down like leaves in autumn  
and I don't regret the lack of passion.  
Here I can move my hand slow or fast  
and dogs, quays, hunters, magpies—no  
pianos or electric lights  
shops here  
and girls walking by in their shapes  
and loves and I never see  
any of them.

City life ain't for me. The coming-down calm  
of my day, rainy or sad,  
the fields, the weather—O  
God,  
God,  
Kṛṣṇa,  
and a place to read scripture.

## WHAT REASON

The simple melody a bass  
player can evoke  
that sadness SK said is  
me the bass player.

What reason did you give  
when you left your Lover?

What reason to say  
good-bye to your eternal home?  
O Kṛṣṇa, please may I learn to follow  
the intelligent heart?



## OLD MAN'S STAY-BACK PARTY

Dusk, facing the lake  
from the blessed indoors of my room  
alone. From here I can reach  
to 1966 recorded sounds  
protected by that Vaiṣṇava my  
life.

1966 or '65—good times on buses  
subways—all  
illusion when I drugged my  
blood even  
to go to work.

Then it ended  
    with my youth  
    crashed two lovers  
crashed through illusion  
of bohemian  
youth  
suddenly saw  
straight ahead my  
narrow way Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa—to  
offer myself to You.

Even as I remember those days  
    they're in Cork and about to begin  
a Hare Kṛṣṇa festival but  
    I'm a stay-back man  
who knows all is not lost.  
He's speaking for me to remember  
I want to  
remember O  
Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa

                                    a crow can't  
become a parrot can't  
sing  
quality

or can he?

O Prabhupāda, I'm no more a drunken Li Po  
celebrating the moon  
but looking up for His face  
in the sky.

## PASTIME

It's calm/ cool in this room  
and this is my time  
to depend on Kṛṣṇa. He is the source  
of exciting, breakthrough eloquence.  
Don't program yourself  
otherwise

because the Lord's pastimes are blissful  
and everything He does  
is for His own pleasure  
a pastime  
He's never tired or depressed  
and He never dies off.  
Time is under His control  
although we scratch and roil  
toil and fear  
near-die  
every day

and each moment.

Remembrance of death slips us into  
the creative minor  
and we need only nod alert  
to His beat  
His full sound  
both melody and the quiet  
that follows as we stand and move to our beads,  
on the feet He gave us—legs—  
and chant until night

blessed

encouraging those notes of sound  
to come out of our own mouths

while the tree in nature and  
the tree in fire stars falling  
the delight in play  
because God is nigh is  
true  
and shelters all in His names.

## NIGHTMARE

They were racing down a highway. They were squeaking.  
I think the cops were after them—  
or the bad guys—headlights  
cars slamming around corners so fast and all that  
adrenaline.  
They were nervous as hell.

They were just illusions  
but still they were painful  
and I was afraid. Am  
afraid.

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is everywhere  
and I want God  
no demons need apply  
or mad people  
controlled and suffering  
for the job.

Awake, I went to pick blackberries for my master, me  
and the children and their  
dad. The girl was bouncy,  
happy to walk alongside her father  
as he came home from  
milking the cow.  
These are good people.

I went inside myself, remembered the fear  
the nondevotee passion  
of people who have not agreed to serve Kṛṣṇa I  
went inside myself and drew in my limbs  
like a tortoise entering its shell,  
safe.  
The night was long and I think I moaned  
no quiet, strong, silent mystic  
but praying to be freed.

Awake, I remember Kṛṣṇa going out in the morning  
with uncountable cows and  
so many boys  
to play.

When Nanda and the elders  
decided to move to Vṛndāvana,  
they did it in a few hours. It didn't take long  
because their houses were small  
at that time. They  
went to Gokula and Kṛṣṇa was happy there.  
He and Balarāma walked around and loved the grass,  
water, trees, everything.

Considering that, if I had that dream again,  
could I be kinder and braver? Would I  
jump out of illusion to become  
Prabhupāda's personal servant again  
ask him questions  
then put it in writing—what he said  
or at least on tape  
and we would all be saved?

This life  
seems to take  
a very long  
time.

## PREACHING

Prabhupāda says a devotee  
doesn't want to go alone  
    but wants to save them all!  
Can I find myself a wringer a  
righter of wrongs?  
    Don't dabble in reform  
but take it as seriously  
    as any dance.

"Oh, please accept me,"  
he says  
with warmth  
advertising  
his cause, then  
"What you doin' to  
spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness  
my friend?"

    He's got a big program  
    thirty thousand in a tent  
rock 'n' roll enthusiasm  
    sold a million  
and fought off all  
the demons . . .

But me?

I wrote a pretty tune  
noticed my heart was beating when I died  
told someone fried  
on the ISKCON scene  
who voiced opinions  
full of scorn while pointing  
to the master's statue—  
"He doesn't like what you guys are doing"—  
that Prabhupāda liked us to roll over our notes.

I mean, our master wanted honest devotees  
honest to the core  
who were ready to give themselves up  
but never leave his presence.

From this Himalayan cave  
I hear the sounds of the city  
the souls  
of universal  
pain and joy  
and try to speak

my riffs in service  
a real person  
and no longer  
the professional preacher  
of whom I was once  
so proud.



## FLOWER-PRAYERS

In the shed—woodshed—a holy place  
for creativity

I hear the sacred music  
of the wind.

Now here is truth I am  
in this world  
of my own hearing

and interpretation  
alone in a room

to ponder  
but

not that room;

this room of the here and now.

Kṛṣṇa, I want to go with You  
and not return to *duḥkha* and *asat*.

Dear master, dear  
Kṛṣṇa, please accept my humble  
flower-prayers offered to you  
I know no other way  
but these prayers  
in this measure  
spoken with sanctity—  
whatever I have—wanting  
no other friends  
but You.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following disciples and friends who helped produce and print this book:

Guru-sevā-devī dāsī  
Kaiśorī-devī dāsī  
Keśīhanta dāsa  
Lalitāmṛta-devī dāsī  
Mādhava dāsa  
Prāṇadā-devī dāsī

Special thanks to the contributors to the Guru-Asraya Trust and Steve Reddy for their kind donations to print this book.

See the happy paintings  
I'm giving you and you are  
giving me in love  
exchanges as taught by  
Rūpa Gosvāmī.

I approve you and  
you approve me.

Then out you go,  
while your head is  
clear for Kṛṣṇa.

ISBN 0-911233-39-3