

## A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam



# A Poor Man Reads The Bhāgavatam

Volume Three

First Canto

Chapter 5

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GN Press

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PO Box 445  
La Crosse, FL 32658

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ISBN 0-911233-38-5

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The expert devotees also can discover novel ways and means to convert the nondevotees in terms of particular time and circumstance. Devotional service is dynamic activity, and the expert devotees can find out competent means to inject it into the dull brains of the materialistic population. Such transcendental activities of the devotees for the service of the Lord can bring a new order of life to the foolish society of materialistic men. Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His subsequent followers exhibited expert dexterity in this connection. By following the same method, one can bring the materialistic men of this age of quarrel into order for peaceful life and transcendental realization.

—*Bhāg.* 1.5.16, purport



## Preface

In the two volumes of *A Poor Man Read the Bhāgavatam* completed so far, I regularly discuss the nature of this work. That is, that I am mixing the straight presentation of a *Bhāgavatam* lecture with the relaxed freedom of an ordinary soul, a poor man. I do this in order to speak constantly about Kṛṣṇa.

The method in this volume is the same: I present the translation of a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* verse, then make a brief overview of the contents of Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport. Then I field questions devotees have submitted. When all that is done, I take off in a freer form of writing. When the cow has reached the end of its rope, I fall at the feet of the next verse and purport and start all over.

I wrote the first volume of the series in India—Vṛndāvana, then Khargone, Madhya Pradesh. The second volume opened in Hare Krishna Land, Mumbai, stayed for a week in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, then was completed at Śaraṇāgati. This volume begins at Śaraṇāgati and ends in New York.

As I began this volume, a friend gave me a volume of Thomas Merton's diaries. In his second volume, the editor writes in the Introduction:

Thomas Merton's journals incarnate his probe for a God who could be experienced day by day, wave by wave. Merton believed God's salt infused the sea Merton needed to swim in moment to moment. For Thomas Merton, transcribing his continuous desire to be submerged in God was one way of experiencing God. By immersing himself in an ocean of his own words, Merton waited for the Word of words to surface from their depths. Word after word, line after line, by the continuous

spiritual discipline of writing, Thomas Merton made himself God's bait.

On the dust jacket it also says that Merton endured the tension between remaining an observant monk and being a writer. "Faithful to both of these passions, Merton struggled with the requirements of daily monastic life while he continued to grace the world with his fresh observations and profound insights . . . he eloquently reconciled his spiritual life with his writing life, drawing deep connections between the two."

These themes reverberate for me. I experience the same tension, and I attempt to reconcile my two passions—that of striving for love of God and that of my nature as a writer. Kṛṣṇa consciousness creates the grounds for reconciliation in that we can offer up our nature to Kṛṣṇa's service, but the strain comes in fulfilling not only my nature as a writer but the other obligations I have accepted as well. Our society is rife with peer pressure, criticism, judgment, and what is expected of a devotee and a writer seems to have been decided by our movement. Therefore, there is tension, and not only for me as a writer, but for anyone who is forging ahead in a mode of expression that appears new to our disciplic line.

Although I will be interested to see how Merton reconciled his life of prayer with his writer's identity, I know I am not Thomas Merton and that I do not live in the Catholic Church. Neither am I an intellectual, as he was, or an omnivorous reader. And therein lies the other tension in my life: how to immerse myself totally and submissively into the life of reading the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

Prabhupāda has encouraged me to write, and he has ordered me to chant, hear, preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and of course, to do all this in the mood of coming to love God. I particularly remember his instruction that we BTG writers should express ourselves in our own words, our own language. He said that if

our writing was cumbersome, it was a sign that we had not assimilated the philosophy. I find this comment pertinent now for the writing of this book. It is not enough for me to simply repeat the philosophy; I must assimilate it and then speak it from my heart, in my own words, with my own aspirations and realizations. Nothing will be changed, but the expression of it may be simplified.

When Prabhupāda discussed the topics upon which an author should concentrate, he said, "So far as special topics for writing, all our topics are in the books. There is nothing 'special.' Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Person and we are all His servants. This philosophy we have to present in different ways. One cannot be happy without this understanding of his constitutional position." (Letter, April 9, 1971)

So that will be the nature of this book: I have not changed anything, and I have tried to take a personal approach to understanding how we can regain our constitutional position, how we can love the Supreme Person, how we can be true to ourselves and to our spiritual master. Nothing special.





## CHAPTER FIVE

### Nārada's Instructions on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam for Vyāsadeva

#### Text 1

*sūta uvāca*  
*atha taṁ sukham āsina*  
*upāsinaṁ bṛhac-chravāḥ*  
*devarṣiḥ prāha vipraṛṣiṁ*  
*viṇā-pāṇiḥ smayann iva*

Sūta Gosvāmī said: Thus the sage amongst the gods [Nārada], comfortably seated and apparently smiling, addressed the ṛṣi amongst the brāhmaṇas [Vedavyāsa].

#### Comment

Nārada smiled as he spoke to Vyāsadeva. Nārada is a *deva-ṛṣi*, a ṛṣi among the demigods. Vyāsa is a *vipra-ṛṣi*, a ṛṣi among the *brāhmaṇas*. Although one is the guru and the other the disciple, both are masters of the *Vedas*. Certainly it will profit us to overhear their conversation.

Why is Nārada smiling? Because he understands Vyāsa's defect. Kṛṣṇa also smiles when He addresses Arjuna on the battlefield. "At that time Kṛṣṇa, smiling, in the midst of both the armies, spoke the following words to the grief-stricken Arjuna." Śrīla Prabhupāda explains: "Kṛṣṇa was smiling because a friend had chosen to become a disciple." (Bg. 2.10, verse and purport)

Sages smile. Prahlāda Mahārāja smiled while teaching his demoniac schoolmates: "Smiling, he began to teach them about

the uselessness of the materialistic way of life." (Bhāg. 7.5.55) Prabhupāda writes: "Prahāda Mahārāja's smiling is very significant." Prahāda Mahārāja was actually *laughing* at the boys' foolishness. They thought they could be happy by advancing in material life! A devotee laughs to see the foolishness, but he is also compassionate. "The mistake of materialistic life is understood by devotees, and therefore they smile upon it, considering it insignificant. Out of compassion, however, such devotees preach the gospel of *Bhagavad-gītā* all over the world." (Bhāg. 7.5.55, purport)

It seems, too, that great devotees smile when they are presented with an opportunity to discuss Kṛṣṇa. It pleases them to alleviate their friend's (or disciple's) distress by giving the highest truth.

We have read up until this point that Vyāsadeva feels despondent, and although he has an intimation of what might be wrong, he does not know for certain. He does know, however, that the cause of his despondency is serious. Still Nārada smiles. What is grave for a disciple is often simply solved by the spiritual master. When a disciple is troubled by his own childishness and inexperience, the master, like a parent, smiles away the disciple's fears. Sometimes we take our problems so seriously that if the master smiles we become upset. Vyāsa was an ideal disciple, however, and he was willing to bask in the rays of his spiritual master's serene smile. Prabhupāda assures us that "he will explain gradually," patiently, and we need not fear. The spiritual master is a kind father; he will protect us and enlighten us. We can just imagine how Vyāsadeva must have felt when he turned himself over to Nārada's kindness and control.

As the spiritual master smiles to see his disciple's foolishness, so he may smile when he sees his disciple's maturation. Sometimes the guru smiles in the mood of the father with his child, sometimes in the mood of a father who has realized that his children have grown to become friends. Both relationships are sublime. Kṛṣṇa was pleased to see Arjuna's dependence on Him and

He honored his desire to submit before the Lord's superior intelligence, but the Lord was also pleased on other occasions when He and Arjuna joked as friends and shared the same eating or sitting places.

When the guru smiles at a maturing disciple, it may indicate his relief that his disciple appears worthy to take up his mission. A mature disciple relieves the spiritual master of some of his duties so that he may perform his personal *bhajana*.

Then Śrīla Prabhupāda states that Nārada knew the defect "and it was confirmed by the position of Vyāsa." Nārada could see the nature of the problem in Vyāsadeva's demeanor because the face is the index of the mind. Great sages such as Nārada can see into our hearts. Vyāsa's position was also confirmed by his own insight because Kṛṣṇa had inspired him to understand the vacuum in his heart.



May Kṛṣṇa smile upon me. I don't want to be far away, carried on an ocean of words, floating on a raft. I want to say what I need to say, but remain dependent on Kṛṣṇa.

I didn't dream of Kṛṣṇa's smile. Rather, I dreamt I was wearing a baseball uniform and sitting at a cafeteria table with a bunch of Hardcore kids. They were friendly, and we tried to eat ice cream together, but not too successfully. I preached to them that material

life doesn't yield pleasure, although we wish for it. One of the kids asked if I was planning to give courses at the university, but I said I would lecture in the temples. It wasn't that I could exactly preach to them as if they were submissive disciples, but I tactfully tried to suggest ways they could turn themselves toward devotion. All the while I was wearing that baseball uniform.

That's it, my dream. It filled the time while I slept on the chilly bed. Nothing satisfying or deep. At least it was a preaching dream.

Nārada smiled. Last night I drew (with a stiff brush point in black India ink) Nārada's smiling face and Vyāsadeva's downcast one. Vyāsa is as much the representative of Kṛṣṇa as Nārada. He's not an ordinary soul lost in *māyā*. Therefore, Nārada has arrived and they will discuss the situation. Vyāsa will hear and will receive the kernel of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Then he will write it.

*Nārada smiled*



How can we trust ourselves? Pain comes and goes. Rūpa wrote Sanātana, "Where has the Mathurā-purī of Yadupati gone? Where has the Northern Kośalā of Raghupati gone? By reflection, make the mind steady, thinking, 'This universe is not eternal.'" (Cc. *Madhya* 20.3, purport) All things pass; make the mind steady and think of the eternal. Your imprisonment [or enjoyment in this body] won't last. Such wisdom we have at our

disposal. I sit in the warming room, comforted by the fire in the stove. I'm only here for a week. I peek at Merton's diary, then remember Nārada's smile.

Nārada is always young because he has a spiritual body. When a devotee painted him with the sensual look of a Raphaelite painting, Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't like it. He liked the simple Nārada better. He said Nārada should look like a milk-drinker.

O Nārada  
with your permission  
I'll draw my simple picture  
of you. No art critic need apply.  
I step off into space and  
wonder how far  
I will go  
before returning  
with my harvest.

## Text 2

*nārada uvāca*  
*pārāśarya mahā-bhāga*  
*bhavataḥ kaccid ātmanā*  
*parituṣyati sārīra*  
*ātmā mānasa eva vā*

Addressing Vyāsadeva, the son of Parāśara, Nārada inquired: Are you satisfied by identifying with the body or the mind as objects of self-realization?

## Comment

Śrīla Nārada addresses Vyāsadeva as *mahā-bhāga*, greatly fortunate, yet his question is frank: Are you transcendently situated? Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that this is Nārada's hint about the

cause of Vyāsadeva's despondency. Vyāsadeva has great parentage—his father is the great Parāśara Muni. Therefore, he should not be deluded. If we are raised in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we should be able to overcome illusion and understand the causes of unhappiness. An ordinary person might identify with the body and mind, but not someone elevated like Vyāsa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's last sentence is a classic: "One cannot be cheerful by nature unless one is factually seated in self-realization, which is transcendental to the material body and mind."

We all know about glad-handers, or superficially cheerful persons. They are not jolly according to Prabhupāda's definition. It is encouraging to know that a transcendentalist does not have to hate the world; he is not a negative person who punishes himself (images of self-flagellating ascetics come to mind) for his sins. A Kṛṣṇa conscious person is satisfied, at ease, smiling. If we are morose, we are not Kṛṣṇa conscious.

Self-realization brings happiness because misery stems from the ignorance of identifying the self with the body. The bodily condition in the material world is just the opposite of the spiritual condition. Spiritual existence is *sat-cid-ānanda*, and matter is *asat*, *acit*, and *nirānanda*. When a transcendentalist can actually say *aham brahmāsmi* with realization, he feels real happiness. *Aham brahmāsmi* is nothing more than understanding our own eternality. Since such self-understanding brings relief from the fear of death, it's natural that it manifests in steady cheerfulness. Then we can tolerate material tribulations even while in this body because we know we are situated on the path of perfection.

According to Nārada Muni, a self-realized person never becomes baffled or despondent. A self-realized person trusts only in Kṛṣṇa's love for him; he knows he will soon be delivered by Kṛṣṇa's mercy. Kṛṣṇa assures the devotee of this truth in *Bhagavad-gītā*: "But those who worship Me, giving up all their activities unto Me and being devoted to Me without deviation, engaged in devotional service and always meditating upon Me, having fixed

their minds upon Me, O son of Pṛthā—for them I am the swift deliverer from the ocean of birth and death.” (Bg. 12.6–7)

Therefore, Nārada's question is direct. He does not compromise the principles of self-realization. His words carry deep meaning. His question reminds me of Śrīla Prabhupāda's preaching, especially to those who claimed to be teachers, political leaders, scholars, or religionists. Did they know their ABCs? Did they understand that they were not the body?

By reading this verse we can affirm that Prabhupāda's emphasis on our understanding *aham brahmāsmi* is not a particular predilection of his, nor was it a shortcoming that he repeated this teaching so often. His emphasis has its roots at the beginning of our disciplic succession. Prabhupāda tailored the message for the modern day, but he spoke the eternal *paramparā*.

Nowadays, we hear even some of Prabhupāda's own followers accuse him of not speaking the “higher topics.” Prabhupāda was convinced that there were no higher topics until his disciples and followers had mastered the ABCs. We saw that especially with guests. A guest would try to jump past Prabhupāda's elementary presentation and try to ask questions about Kṛṣṇa, but Śrīla Prabhupāda would say, “Don't talk about Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is millions of miles away. First we have to understand, ‘Who am I? Am I this body, am I this mind, or am I something else?’”

Sanātana Gosvāmī also asked this question when he first approached Lord Caitanya: “Who am I and why do the material miseries give me trouble?” If one does not understand that he is not this body, then he has to seek the help of a spiritual master. Sanātana Gosvāmī said, “People praise me as a scholar, but I don't even know who I am. Please instruct me.” One who has accepted a spiritual master should not fail to identify the *ātmā*. Otherwise, he will never be satisfied “by identifying with the body or the mind as objects of self-realization.” A disciple must live up to such a heritage.

By calling Vyāsa the son of Parāśara, Nārada implies that one who comes in such a lineage should not fall into gross error on

the most preliminary instruction in spiritual life. Of course, anyone can fall into forgetfulness because the material world is so contaminating, especially in Kali-yuga. Again, taking the assistance of a spiritual master is essential. It is not expected that Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers will identify with the body and mind. We too are in a great line.

At this stage of the discussion we may note the similarity between Nārada speaking to Vyāsa and Kṛṣṇa speaking to Arjuna. In both cases the guru smiled, then quickly became grave. Both gurus referred to the disciples' parentage and reprimanded them for harboring a basic misunderstanding: "While speaking learned words, you are mourning for what is not worthy of grief. Those who are wise lament neither for the living nor for the dead." (Bg. 2.11)

All disciples are in a similar position when they approach a spiritual master. Disciples are praiseworthy in that they are seeking the Absolute Truth, but to the degree to which they are unsuccessful in fulfilling their quest, they are also foolish. Our failure to find the Absolute Truth is based on our identification with body and mind, and our lack of understanding that we are Kṛṣṇa's eternal servants. Only the spiritual master can help us. Anyone now living in this material world who thinks himself above the need for guru is proud and therefore doubly foolish. Disciples should always be prepared to have their faults exposed by their spiritual master. Such care shown by the spiritual master is the life of a disciple. If we don't admit that we don't know Kṛṣṇa, and if we don't open ourselves to instruction from higher authorities, we will always remain dissatisfied, lost to our attachments.

Okay,

I'm not my body

I am not my body

and I am foolish because I still don't believe it.

Not really.

Foolish.



I admit it. I'm attached. I like to be warm at night and warm in the day, and I prefer to keep my belly full rather than empty. I'm not advanced. When I speak of higher subjects, I am speaking only theory and I lack basic realization.

"The very first step in self-realization is realizing one's identity as separate from the body. 'I am not this body but am spirit soul' is an essential realization for anyone who wants to transcend death and enter into the spiritual world beyond. It is not simply a matter of saying 'I am not this body,' but of actually realizing it. This is not as simple as it may seem at first." (*Beyond Birth and Death*, p. 1)

Then what else is there to say and pray? I can make further confessions, but that doesn't seem to be the point right now.

Are you satisfied to think that you are this body?

Nārada is sarcastic, as Kṛṣṇa was with Arjuna. "Oh? You say you are a learned man, but you are lamenting for that which is not worthy of grief."

I make claims to identity—artist, writer, *sannyāsi*, man—but I don't know who I am. I say I will learn writing from other writers, but what can they know if they are identifying themselves with body and mind?

O Nārada, you hit so hard. Please let me follow you without compromise. You assure us that Kṛṣṇa is the final goal and that we should love Him without selfishness. You awaken us to this goal.

But still we dream from our contaminated minds. Taints remain. We live alone or with others, but the defect does not wash clean. What will it take? I write letters to others, I preach the realization, I expose my defect and the defects in others, I take a walk. Lack of knowledge turns to fear.

Last night while Jāmbavān dāsa drove me from a meeting with a Godbrother back up the hill to this cabin, he spoke again about bears. I told him how I used to see bears during my summer visits years ago. Jāmbavān said that the bears were here first; it's their country. They don't seem to mind that humans are

encroaching as long as they have enough to eat. It is dangerous to get between a bear and its food supply, he said.

Then I asked, "Has there been any incident of a bear mauling a devotee at Śaraṇāgati?" Then I reached forward from the back seat and simulated a paw scratching at his shoulder to demonstrate what I meant.

"No," he said, "not a single instance." Then he added, "I have to admit that last year I shot a bear." A black bear had gotten into his grain supply in the barn. He had also raided another devotee's house. Jāmbavān said it was dangerous because the bear was quite large and if a child or another adult came upon him while he was raiding, the bear might have become enraged. Not to mention the fact that the bear was depleting their food source. Jāmbavān shot him.

I asked if it was legal to kill bears. He said they couldn't be hunted, but you could defend your property from them. He reasoned that in former days in India, they killed tigers who threatened a village. The bear is Śaraṇāgati's tiger.

I was interested in all this. The bears are hibernating now, but spring will bring them out. And it's related to this *Bhāgavatam* verse: if you identify yourself with the body and mind, you find your mind filling with fear.

In the preliminary stage of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we use the body and mind in Kṛṣṇa's service. That's how we become purified. We can't instantly remove ourselves from our contact with matter. We're also afraid of bears and we keep a healthy distance from them. We might decide not to explore the forest. Jāmbavān said the bears have become too familiar with humans and with their food supplies. You used to be able to frighten away a bear by clapping your hands. Then you had to use *karatālas* before they would run away. Then you had to clang a bell. Then devotees started up their chain saws. And now?

It is intolerably hot in here. The stove has reached a mad peak of red coals and open flame. Okay, I opened the door and window.



But what is there to say?

I identify with the body, so bliss is not mine? I can't chant the holy name in a way that attracts Kṛṣṇa and floods me with the happiness of living in His presence. *Anarthas* are stubborn. It's easier to think of bears and an overheated cabin. Easier to think of position in ISKCON.

Spoke to a Godbrother. He explained his understanding of how a *brāhmaṇa* should serve as an impartial instructor and managers should benefit from him. A *brāhmaṇa* should see into people's hearts and understand what they can best do for Kṛṣṇa. I appreciated what he said, but couldn't see myself being a full-time counselor. I stay more apart. We each have our sphere of influence, and that one-on-one meeting style is not mine. I also admit a general lack of confidence and a fear of criticism. I mean, I am afraid to express my needs. My Godbrother suggested I not feel guilty. He assured me if I was more confident, I would be more influential in my writing.

During our meeting, I heard myself say things I was not sure I actually believed. For example, I said, "I have a deep disappointment in the way things are turning out." I said I was

disappointed that Śrīla Prabhupāda disappeared. (Is that true or did I just say it?) I said I'm disappointed in how ISKCON has developed, and certainly I am disappointed in my own lack of devotion. I *heard* myself say these things. It sounded so negative. I'm not even sure I'm convinced in my own disappointment.

That's what I mean by associating with others too much. We speak things that come out, but where do they come from? Do they always come from our truest insides? We claim to know our feelings and convictions better than others, or what we say is true only to an extent, but it may not represent our deeper concerns. Our hearts dwell on other things.

For me—what is it? What are my actual concerns?

O Nārada, O Prabhupāda,

I just don't know.

Am I ready to listen

to be reduced

called the fool?

Am I saying learned things but lamenting my foolishness? Do I think I'll be satisfied free-writing as if I identify with the self as my body? Do I think I'll be satisfied publishing books and running from *sādhū-saṅga*, cutting the edge of society and then bandaging the wound? Will I live forever?

No? Then what is the point? O

holy

names

I am a complacent fellow

looking for peace and aloneness

and I am old

so old I wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled up.

Do I dare to eat a peach?

O Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa

I want to spend my time with You

although I burrow into this hole and shut the door against bears

and mice

and men

but not literary books  
 until I read them.  
 Then I throw them out of the hole and  
 take off my hair shirt  
 and crank up the Aindra tape  
 and read my spiritual master  
 as a first and last resort.

*A list of birds at Śaraṇāgati—a non-logical play or madness:*

- (1) The tanager.
- (2) The bear-warning "phew! phew!"
- (3) The furtive black-belly yellow-belly feathered friend.
- (4) The music of the spheres.
- (5) Sonny Rollins as a bird, *saxophonous-colossalous*.
- (6) The man in Dundee who apologizes for writing me about  
mundane subjects
- (7) Birds, birds, too cold. Let them come.
- (8) Canadian geese flying south over Gitā-nāgarī.

What is the importance of this list? *I'm an artist.*

There, I said it. I confess I spend my precious time doing amateur drawings to remove the obstacles from my chest, to bring joy to my heart in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and to help me bring that joy into the Kṛṣṇa conscious society. Does it require apologetics?



So this list is important. It contains no apologies.

Lists of birds,

of logs,

a list of lists,

of peeves and the

likes

items of confidence

and doubt.

I'll try but it has grown late. I have to chant. See you next verse.

"They heard we are very ill," I told Madhu, "and weak. They want to know how they can help."

Madhu said, "Bring on the sweet rice."

How far we are now from Nature Cure and all our ribs showing.

### Text 3

*jijñāsitam susampannam  
api te mahad-adbhutam  
kṛtavān bhārataṁ yas tvam  
sarvārtha-paribṛmhitam*

Your inquiries were full and your studies were also well fulfilled, and there is no doubt that you have prepared a great and wonderful work, the Mahābhārata, which is full of all kinds of Vedic sequences elaborately explained.

### Text 4

*jijñāsitam adhitam ca  
brahma yat tat sanātanam  
tathāpi śocasy ātmānam  
akṛtārtha iva prabho*

You have fully delineated the subject of impersonal Brahman as well as the knowledge derived therefrom. Why should you be despondent in spite of all this, thinking that you are undone, my dear *prabhu*?

## Comment

As Vyāsadeva examined himself and considered his own good activities, so Nārada now reviews them. Nārada's opening remark was almost sarcastic: "Did you think you would be satisfied identifying the self with the body and mind?" Now he softens and offers praise for Vyāsadeva's great achievements. In particular, he mentions the *Mahābhārata*, which makes the Vedic teachings available in elaborate story form. Nārada states that Vyāsadeva has also delineated the impersonal Brahman. This refers to the compilation of *Vedānta-sūtra*. The person who compiled *Vedānta-sūtra* must be the transcendental philosopher par excellence because the *Vedānta-sūtra* "is accepted as the most exalted philosophical exposition in the world. It covers the subject of eternity, and the methods are scholarly." As the writer of such diversified books—an elaborate saga and the scholarly *sūtra*—Vyāsadeva is worthy of everyone's respect.

Nārada's address, "my dear *prabhu*," is touching. We feel the affection between guru and disciple. Nārada is Vyāsadeva's master, but also his close friend and affectionate well-wisher. He is sorry that such a dear *prabhu* now feels despondent. He wishes to relieve him by offering instruction.

After all, Vyāsadeva is no fool and his concerns are not trivial. Vyāsadeva incarnated just to give the people of Kali-yuga relief from the dangers of the age. One reason Vyāsadeva was despondent was that he realized he had not provided the boat by which the people in Kali-yuga could be rescued. His concerns and his understanding of the solution are already profound, and therefore Nārada reminds Vyāsa of what he has already accomplished.

Still, Nārada is of two minds. He respects Vyāsa, but he recognizes his duty to point out Vyāsadeva's defects. If Nārada was *only* respectful, or if he *only* identified with Vyāsadeva's despondency, then Nārada himself would become despondent. Rather, Nārada smiles, then proceeds to enlighten his disciple. We may say that he takes Vyāsadeva's despondency seriously, out of respect for him, but he now encourages him that a person of his stature should never think he has been undone. Sometimes, however, people, even great sages, feel lost before they are found.

Nārada implies that literary prowess and expertise in *jñāna* is not sufficient to produce self-satisfaction. Despite compiling other scriptures, Vyāsa remained dry. Nārada will remedy this by directing Vyāsadeva to write the *Bhāgavatam*.

Although writing the *Bhāgavatam* cured Vyāsadeva's despondency, it somehow doesn't always seem to cure ours. Therefore, it is obvious that it takes a certain quality to become a scholar of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. That is, our sincerity must be deep when we approach the *Bhāgavatam*, and completely focused on spiritual gain. To understand the *Bhāgavatam*'s essence we must study it under the guidance of pure devotees, just as Vyāsadeva undertook to write the *Bhāgavatam* under the guidance of the pure devotee, Nārada. Without such guidance, we will not be able to cure our own despondency and taste the desired result of *kṛṣṇa-bhakti* when we approach Vyāsadeva's book.

An example of a true scholar of scripture is the South Indian *brāhmaṇa* whom Lord Caitanya embraced. Although the *brāhmaṇa* was illiterate, he had a deep love for Kṛṣṇa as Pārtha-sārathi. In his appreciation, he became overwhelmed with ecstasy. Lord Caitanya told him that his reading of the *Gītā* was perfect. We are not looking for information or any other kind of learning when we approach scripture, but to understand Kṛṣṇa as He is and to experience love for Him. To study with any other motive leads ultimately to dissatisfaction.

*Jñānis* prefer to study Vyāsadeva's *Vedānta-sūtra*, but to study any scripture without understanding that *bhakti* is the goal,



results in unhappiness. Devotional service is so important that any advancement one makes in *jñāna* or yoga stems only from the mercy of the *bhakti* prescribed in each path. As stated in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, “My dear Lord, devotional service unto You is the best path for self-realization. If someone gives up that path and engages in the cultivation of speculative knowledge, he will simply undergo a troublesome process and will not achieve his desired result. As a person who beats an empty husk of wheat cannot get grain, one who simply speculates cannot achieve self-realization. His only gain is trouble.” (*Bhāg.* 10.14.4) This is also stated in *The Nectar of Devotion*: “. . . if *brahmānanda*, or the happiness of becoming one with the Supreme, is multiplied by one trillionfold, it still cannot compare to an atomic fraction of the happiness derived from the ocean of devotional service.” (NOD, p. 15, 1982 ed.)

We need *bhakti*, but it is not easy to attain. Nevertheless we have *bhakti*-filled literature and *bhakti*-filled practices prescribed by pure *bhaktas*. Serve with the tongue by chanting and honoring *prasādam*.

My dear prabhu—I like that. Prabhupāda gave us the word “*prabhu*,” and he told us to bow down to each other and see others as master. No one, however, was supposed to exploit another in the name of being called *prabhu*. That would be too much of a contradiction. If we say *prabhu*, we should treat each other as masters, not try to engage them in our service. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura said his disciples were masters sent to him by Kṛṣṇa for training in devotional service. That was the service he was to render them.

My dear prabhu, why are you feeling undone? Take to *bhakti*. It's not enough to be a scholar or writer. You can't help others unless you immerse yourself in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* contains Kṛṣṇa, and is therefore the sum total of all things.

And if you haven't yet tasted *bhakti*, speak about it anyway. You will receive the mercy sooner or later. It will rub off, catch fire, on you sooner or later.

Our concentration is on other things at present. We want to unburden ourselves before we disappear into the *Bhāgavatam*. Ultimately, we can't go on talking about ourselves and our wounds or the world's dangers forever. They are not going to end, and the more energy we give them, the more we are consumed by them. When we approach the *Bhāgavatam*, we should wish to hear. Sometimes devotee friends sit together to read. One reads aloud while the other listens. Then they comment, and it is natural that their comments will contain personal concerns or realizations. The two friends empathize, then refer to the *Bhāgavatam*'s solutions. Chanting and hearing in the midst of life's experiences, we take the solace only the *Bhāgavatam* can give.

It's dark out. They say there's a comet in the sky and it's inauspicious. Some of my friends here have been able to see it, but I haven't yet found it in the night sky. I see only the stars. Once I saw a smudge behind one and thought it was the comet's tail, then thought that this universe is like a toy. It's not the real world. I turned back to the book and my *japa* and realized that I want to live with reality and I don't always.

I like the phrase, "Why are you feeling undone, my dear prabhu?" It reminds me that despondency is only useful if it leads us forward in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We are the recipients of liberating knowledge. We are the sons and daughters of a great father. We haven't written the *Mahābhārata* or *Vedānta-sūtra*, but we have received the perfect holy name. Perhaps we are despondent because we neglect the mercy we have so freely received. But it's never so hard to reach out for Kṛṣṇa's shelter again in His names and pastimes. Baladeva told Rukmiṇi when her brother was defeated, "Sweet, smiling Rukmiṇi, do not be aggrieved by false notions caused by ignorance. Only because of false notions does one become unhappy, but one can immediately remove this

unhappiness by discussing the philosophy of actual life. Be happy on that platform only." (Kṛṣṇa, Chapter 54) Yes, that is what we are meant to do.

There are different kinds of despondency. Whichever flavor we each taste will help us feel compassion for others. It will also cleanse our hearts. We might experience a sadness that we have left material enjoyment behind, but we all know that's a waste of time and energy. Such despondency should be renounced as quickly as possible. We may also be sad that our Kṛṣṇa consciousness is so undeveloped. Sometimes that sadness borders on spiritual emotion. Prabhupāda told us that a true Vaiṣṇava is never unhappy no matter how he seems to be; rather, he is always experiencing spiritual bliss. A Vaiṣṇava may feel sad in his ecstasy of compassion for others, or he may be feeling separation from Kṛṣṇa. He may lament that he cannot taste the holy name, or that he is not a bold enough preacher to help more people. He may feel a mixture of emotions, but his lamentation is never material. Ours may be tinged.

So lift yourself up, Prabhu,  
and go on chanting  
Hare Kṛṣṇa, insisting  
there is no other way—no other way  
at all.



Someone sent me a newspaper clipping about New Vrindaban from the *Washington Post*. Before reading it, I read the reverse side of the page, which discussed presidential candidate Bob Dole's campaign. Noted the reporter's jargon. I also remembered a dream I had last night about a bobcat. Then I remembered the prayer from *Īsopaniṣad*: "Let this temporary body be burnt to ashes, and let the air of life be merged with the totality of air. Now, O my Lord, please remember all my sacrifices, and because You are the ultimate beneficiary, please remember all that I have done for You." (*Śrī Īsopaniṣad*, Mantra 17) I will need Kṛṣṇa to remember me because there are so many things still covering my original Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Will death wash them away? Please, Kṛṣṇa, find the good in me. I am always Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciple; I want always to chant the holy name. I don't wish to dwell on the causes of my despondency.

White rabbit comet creature scratching against the woodwork—dying, trying to get in. Bob Dylan's dead, but Frank Incense, I mean, Frankenstein never lived. He was just a story. Bob Bullet is dead, and my Bhakta Bob is alive and well. I was born in 1939, and obviously my mother lived and father too—their bodies probably old now, and cheesy. I don't need to dwell on the mortal because it's too horrible to contemplate. Ultimately, they will be embalmed and thrown away—everyone will—or burned. Then the soul will be lightened for a while, free of its old-body burden and lighter than air. But it will have to relocate. O Kṛṣṇa.

I'm full of good advice  
 like infield chatter to encourage the pitcher.  
 April comes  
 with the lark and Paul Desmond  
 pops burning wood in the stove.  
 This pert nonsense is fallible  
 and helps me bear the pain  
 while I seek engagement of  
 tongue and belly.

Please give me a better sense, me  
 and peers, to get above the hype  
 and foolish bodily pain.  
 Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa—something genuine—  
 and offer it not just because it's in the book  
 but because you lived  
 to taste the holy name  
 in Ekacakrā or  
 in another real place,  
 Newcastle, England,  
 the lecture,  
 where you stumbled in the dark.  
 Is it reality you want?  
 Then touch your carbon-smudged fingers  
 and tend this fire.  
 Feel the pain beginning in your tooth, your head  
 and hope you're getting fat  
 from your days of privation  
 in India.  
 It won't save you  
 but you will be warmer.  
 O Prabhu, O Nārada, tell us  
 something above matter.  
 O Kṛṣṇa,  
 what else can I say?

Sorry I'm not wilder. All I can say is "within Kṛṣṇa consciousness." Okay. I'm not really mad. I'm not, and I'm staying in a cabin in British Columbia happy to be here to chant on my beads. The *Bhāgavatam* is our unending escalator up, and no one can tell how long or short the way.

### *Nonlogical or logical list*

I called Madhu in and told him I intend to keep a memo book in my *kurtā* pocket while we are in the Northeast U.S. just

to write lists. He didn't say much in response, but it was important for me to tell him. The lists are like poems for me, or they spark my attempt to delve beneath the logical brain.

Then I thought, "I'm such a delicate flower. I want to bloom, but don't want to be seen. I want to be loved, but don't want admiring eyes shining on me as if I am wonderful. Because the precious stuff will fade. Don't want anyone to take the precious stuff away either—the bubbles that come from the rainbow-colored bubble pipe."

Is this becoming a list?

Here's a list of creatures at Śaraṇāgati:

- (1) The hooting owl.
- (2) The scratching creature I heard this morning.
- (3) The creature (me) who falls asleep in the dimmest light.
- (4) The creature of remorse, creature of free-flying—do you want to shake him off?
- (5) The creature Madhu bringing me lunch and breakfast in tiffins. (Me as hungry as any bear, as primal too, hoping to stick my paws in the honey.)
- (6) The creature comforts of a bed with clean sheets.
- (7) The fire creature devouring logs and overheating the room.
- (8) The artist creature who plays—what's it called? Pitiful something—a personification game where you call an inanimate object animate and ascribe it a personality. It's a game of imagination.
- (9) The typewriter creature who moves along pretty well.
- (10) The simple-faced creatures who have round eyes and dabbed on *tilaka*, who appear when I paint with Tombos.
- (11) The sublime creatures—the demigods and pure devotees described in the *Bhāgavatam*.
- (12) The typist creatures, the heroes in books, the Beat authors, the modern authors.
- (13) Creatures like Bob Dole and other monsters, Yeltsin, Khrushchev (dead), Marx, Godbrothers who have passed on—creatures of the past.

(14) Billions of creatures in this square foot—amoebas, germs, the creatures Prabhupāda talks about who occupy an inch of space—not the spirit souls but their coverings. Their coverings designate them as creatures.

The dictionary doesn't even define *creature*. There's only *create* and *credence*, with nothing in between. The thesaurus says "beast, animal, brute, critter, or human being. Any mortal, personage, soul, sycophant, reptile, suck-toad, toady (derogatory usage)." It can connote many things.

A disciple wrote to tell me how much trouble he went through to copy Aindra tapes for me. He says he works full-time, so has little time to run such errands. He also had to wait for his paycheck so he could purchase blank tapes on which to record. Neither does he have professional equipment. He was not complaining, he said, yet I couldn't help but think he was affixing a price tag to the gift he had given rather than giving it openly and freely. Annie Dillard said writing should be like that: a gift delivered without saying, "I worked hard to do this."

Okay, now tie this all in to *Bhāg.* 1.5.3–4, because we are still on that verse and purport.

Well, it's like this, see. Nārada told Vyāsadeva he had compiled two *mahā-bhūta* books, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Vedānta-sūtra*. No mundane author could equal his contribution.

My list of creatures is only extra energy given by God. I want to contain everything in Kṛṣṇa consciousness,

then publish it,

distribute it,

like a relevant handbill

as revolutionary and as necessary as Thomas Paine's

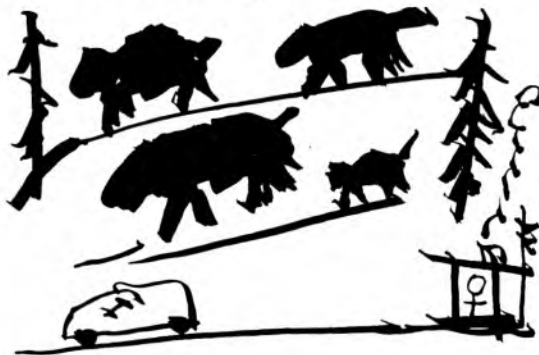
"Common Sense" or Gandhi's call to arms

and the vitality of Charlie Parker.

Now you had better quiet down and let this excess energy go before lunch. I am happy because I have no pain right now. Therefore, I'm singing a longer song like a canary let out of its cage.

It's almost spring here  
and everything will melt  
including the bears  
out of hibernation.

Lists are meant to help get past the logical mind. I have disciples and I should be sensible, but I also have file cabinets and that leads to drawers, which makes me think of long johns, and a johnny, and the finding of one's own voice with which to speak. While they are being serious and organized, I will play and take nonlogical hops from one thing to another. It's a private method that I'm publishing, and it subverts the logical, serious mind of The Organizer, the one who thinks he has all the answers. It's the real mind of the man about to die I'm looking for, and not that staid, upstanding citizen who isn't sure what he thinks. Does he think only what others think of him? That is the connection to *Bhāgavatam* 1.5.5.



*Bears coming out of hibernation*

## Text 5

*vyāsa uvāca*

*asty eva me sarvaṁ idaṁ tvayoktaṁ  
tathāpi nātmā parituṣyate me  
tan-mūlaṁ avyaktam agādha-bodhaṁ  
pṛcchāmahe tvātma-bhavātma-bhūtaṁ*



Śrī Vyāsadeva said: All you have said about me is perfectly correct. Despite all this, I am not pacified. I therefore question you about the root cause of my dissatisfaction, for you are a man of unlimited knowledge due to your being the offspring of one [Brahmā] who is self-born [without mundane father and mother].

## Text 6

*sa vai bhavān veda samasta-guhyam  
upāsito yat puruṣaḥ purāṇaḥ  
parāvareṣo manasaiva viśvaṁ  
srjaty avaty atti guṇair asaṅgaḥ*

My lord! Everything that is mysterious is known to you because you worship the creator and destroyer of the material world and the maintainer of the spiritual world, the original Personality of Godhead, who is transcendental to the three modes of material nature.

## Comment

Now Vyāsadeva responds. He agrees with Nārada's assessment of himself, but still he is not satisfied. As a true disciple, Vyāsa trusts that his spiritual master will find the root (*mūlam*) of his dissatisfaction. He recognizes that Nārada is powerful because he himself is the disciple of a powerful father and spiritual master, Lord Brahmā.

Prabhupāda comments that the whole material world runs on the basic misidentification of body with self. This is a powerful and sweeping criticism. Kṛṣṇa consciousness does not criticize people from a sectarian stance. Prabhupāda is not discussing religion, but basic truths. Truth is nonsectarian. Anyone must ask themselves, "Who am I? Am I the body, the mind, or the soul?" Most people, despite what they respond, act as though the

body is the sum total of their identity. That is, we live in a world of material designation. Some may consider that the mind is the more important point in describing their designation. Few people will refer to scripture—their scripture or anyone's—to understand that the soul exists beyond the body. Rather, they speculate. When they do decide there is life beyond the body, their concepts are vague, often rooted in bodily designation (sectarian), and tending toward the impersonal. How can they help themselves? They have no scientific knowledge of the soul. Kṛṣṇa consciousness can fill in the gaps in education.

If we lack knowledge of the self, we will automatically be dissatisfied. We will be able to heal our body to a point, and even our minds to a point, but we will not feel grounded in truth. We will be blown about by our speculations and sense desires; the soul cannot be pacified by dogma. Partial solutions give only partial satisfaction. What is the root cause of unhappiness?

Vyāsa asserts that Nārada is qualified to offer a solution because he worships the infallible, all-knowing Supreme Personality of Godhead. "A person who is cent-percent engaged in the service of the Lord is the emblem of all knowledge." The devotee is so intimate with the Supreme through devotional service that he imbibes Kṛṣṇa's qualities and becomes enriched with transcendental knowledge. Lord Kṛṣṇa assures us of the enlightenment we will receive when we hear from Him: "I shall now declare unto you in full this knowledge, both phenomenal and numinous. This being known, nothing further shall remain for you to know." (Bg. 7.2)

The individual spirit souls have the same quality as Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, when they become perfect they can develop up to seventy-eight percent of Kṛṣṇa's qualities in part. In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to the eight mystic perfections developed by perfect yogis. Then he writes that one who is one hundred percent surrendered to Kṛṣṇa possesses these powers automatically and they "constitute very little of his godly opulence." Of course,

this standard is rarely found, even among those who practice devotional service in the higher stages, but Śrīla Vyāsadeva is confident that Nārada Muni, by his intimate contact with Lord Brahmā and Lord Kṛṣṇa, can deliver perfect knowledge and realization.

Vyāsadeva stresses Nārada's lineage, just as Nārada stressed Vyāsadeva's lineage. Nārada was born of a great father. Therefore, he too must be great. Most of us have the misfortune of being born from materialistic parents. Even if our parents were well-intentioned in our upbringing, they could not relieve our despondency because they themselves were engrossed in material consciousness. When we took our second birth from the spiritual father, we joined the *acyuta-gotra*, Kṛṣṇa's family. The spiritual master is the father, the *Vedas* the mother, and Kṛṣṇa the well-wishing, all-fulfilling Lord. We do not have to suffer the curse of the misbegotten. We simply have to revive our eternal relationship with Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa's spiritual family. That family includes all living beings, although not all living beings are aware of it.

A pure devotee is not interested in the fame and power that accrue to one who develops the eight mystic perfections of *āṣṭāṅga-yoga*. Nevertheless, Kṛṣṇa bestows powers on the devotee, and as *Kṛṣṇa desires*, the devotee may manifest such potencies. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that he had no magical tricks or special powers but that his main qualification was his solid faith in his spiritual master's words. This was Prabhupāda's humility, yet it is also an assertion. If we have full faith in the spiritual master, then all the Vedic truths are revealed and wonderful things will happen through us. Śrīla Prabhupāda's faith was so great, and his devotion so pure, that he was empowered in spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness around the world. This was certainly a miraculous feat.

One time in 1966, when I was just trying to learn the theoretical rudiments of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, I went to Prabhupāda to confirm something I had been thinking. I had finally figured

out, I thought, the difference between demigods and devotees. Prabhupāda had spoken of them both and they had seemed similar. I announced, "I think I know now the difference between devotees and demigods. The devotees are the same as the demigods except that the demigods have greater powers." Prabhupāda replied, "One day I will tell you about the powers of the Vaiṣṇavas." By following Prabhupāda, I am gradually coming to understand what he meant.



It's Rāma-navamī today. I remember the Rāma-navamī we observed in 1968 when Śrīla Prabhupāda was away from New York City. We went to a peace rally in the park next to the public library on 42nd Street. The whole park was filled with people demonstrating to end the war. We shook our tambourines and clackers, played *karatālas* and drums, and chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa, our devotees lined up in rows facing the crowd. People watched and listened. Later we went down to the Lower East Side and I seem to remember fasting, chanting, then eating potatoes after an entire day out on *harināma*.

Someone told me that inauspicious comet caused my headache the other day. I don't know about that, but I saw the comet (I think) when I went out to the outhouse around 3:30

yesterday morning. It was a star with a long white smudge behind it. Just now (it's midnight) I couldn't find it. There were only good stars up there, and the half moon.

Everything fits together in this universe, but I can't see much of it. I'm just a tiny living entity. Well, it's a toy universe anyway. I'm seeing more in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* than I could ever see in this universe. It's sweet to enter the Lord's return to Jagannātha Puri.

Then I read some *Tattva-sandarbha*, which states that *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* should be understood according to the Vaiṣṇava realizations of Vyāsadeva, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, and Sūta Gosvāmī. Yes, I agree. Now a small portion of *Bhāgavatam*—Vyāsadeva and Nārada.

Hare Kṛṣṇa.

I'm eager to tell Madhu I am ready for more fasting, although the Āyurvedic doctor says I should not fast—wrong constitution for it. I mean, I want to fast today because it's Lord Rāma's appearance day. Religious fasting never hurt anyone. Hare Kṛṣṇa. Śukadeva Gosvāmī became attracted by hearing about Lord Hari in the *Bhāgavatam*, so why not me?

We didn't have good parents, but we have excellent spiritual parents. Actually, we are the spiritual master's natural children. Prabhupāda wrote me that he was my real father and that my material father was ephemeral. We live to carry out his instructions and depend on him to guide us back to Godhead. It is the spiritual master who has connected us to the Gauḍīya-sampradāya. It is through him that we have our relationship with the Six Gosvāmīs and with Lord Caitanya. That connection is not casual; it is based on the truth of the guru-disciple relationship.

Our original bad parentage shows when we speak off the *Bhāgavatam* topics. If we were to ask Nārada to say whatever comes to mind, he would repeat the things his father taught him—his father, Lord Brahmā. Nārada knows Kṛṣṇa and is

versed in all departments of knowledge. He can raise anyone to God consciousness. Nārada was present during Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. He tried to speed up the Lord's advent by increasing Kāṁsa's sins. He went to the Lord shortly before He killed Kāṁsa and described the *līlās* the Lord would enact. He said he was happy to see them all taking place.

Our talks are not so palatable. We have to sift and select our memories, finally coming up with the day we spent next to the 42nd Street library chanting. Although men and women stood next to each other on the street, there was no material desire. The waves of the chanting offset Manhattan's (and the mind's) material modes for a while. Yes, we have such memories, but we have to sift to sort them out from the jumble.

Since we are fasting today, maybe Madhu and I can have *kīrtana* when we would normally be eating. Other people can come. Today the typists and cooks, people who have supported us during our month's stay here, are coming to visit. I want to thank them for their help. It would be nice to thank them through *kīrtana* too—something that will benefit us all. May our hearts become softened from the winter of our discontent by the holy name's mercy.

The Vaiṣṇavas are powerful and we hope to receive their mercy. The persons in the *Bhāgavatam* are not fictional characters. They lived long ago, and still live as eternal spirit souls. Vyāsa, Nārada, Śukadeva, and the Vrajavāsis—they will help me. It doesn't matter that I was born in a different culture.

*The Curse of the Misbegotten* is the title of a book written about Eugene O'Neill. Yes, we are cursed because our dreams and mental images are not filled with Kṛṣṇa. I dreamt my college professor bought me a new gray suit and took my old brown one. I wanted my brown suit back, but I didn't want any connection with that professor. Those days are over. Still, the mind plays over it in bizarre forms. *Māyā* must still have some hold.

In one letter, a devotee in India told me he went before Durgā in a temple and prayed repeatedly, "Please let me go." He didn't feel any dramatic results, though. He realized that he still had to prove to the goddess that he really didn't want any further connection with her. Only Kṛṣṇa can grant us freedom from the fear, from matter, from birth and death. Only Kṛṣṇa.

We don't always know how to express ourselves about this, we who were born into a Judeo-Christian culture. We are trying to graft our understanding of the truth onto the Vedic culture because we have been told it is superior, but we tend to be not so Vedic in our conceptions. Is God punishing us by forcing us to remain in this world? Or is it love? Neither can we turn to Christianity for the answer because Jesus gave only hints and parables and not the fullest revelation of Kṛṣṇa. Someone wrote about this in a letter that I read this morning.

In another letter, a young, newly married girl wrote begging to be initiated. She just heard that my Godbrother Gaura-Govinda Swami passed away. She is worried the same thing will happen to me. She thinks all the people she loves will die, and then she also will die. Well, that's true. But before we are all gone, she says, let her become linked to the *paramparā* through initiation. Her candor was appealing and even a little amusing. She doesn't want me to die off before I initiate her.

*Lord Rama (top) and Hanuman (with long tail) copied from drawing by a 4-year-old*



Everything brings us to the center. Say “long underwear” and return to the center. Think of a magnet, a line: “No time for poetry, just what is.” Back to the center. From sweater to *hari-nāma*. From comet to comma to coma to hop, skip, and jump to Bob Dole in a hardhat photo—jump over and beyond. Get to the center. People know they’re in this world and that they’re stuck. Sick or healthy, the body is contaminated by mortality. We’re creatures. O *hari-nāma*—the center.

One brother told me he reads Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura’s *Bhajana-rahasya* before he chants *japa*. It gets him into a devotional mood. I write before I chant, that is, after I throw logs on the coal-red fire.

Ah, Stevie, we know  
you wanted to be a poet  
and now you have a chance to connect to  
the center  
to Kṛṣṇa. Better do it quick.

O Vyāsadeva, what is the root of my despondency? Please find the defect in me. I trust you.

There’s music in this room when the pot on the stove boils over and the lid rattles under the water’s pressure. It sounds like a drummer’s foot cymbal.

O Vyāsadeva, O Prabhupāda, I bow at your feet. Please bless me with a Vaiṣṇavas blessing: *kṛṣṇe matir astu*, “Let your attention be on Kṛṣṇa.”

Met with Jaya Gaura and his family yesterday. His four-year-old son was not shy, and he told me small things from his life. It reminded me of how I share with my readers. We’re all a little innocent. Then he sighed and the conversation continued without him. When he sighed again, his father said, “You want attention again?”

God, we want *attention*, is that it? The boy told me his Frisbee fell into a hole and that he plants string beans and likes bread with sugar. His father added, “He does whatever we do, and he especially follows his mother.”



Jaya Gaura also has a twelve-year-old son, but he was more reserved, although not ill at ease. He told me he liked reading *Viṣṇu-rāta Vijaya* and *Am I a Demon or a Vaiṣṇava?*

It was a pleasant meeting. After I'd thanked Jaya Gaura's wife for the pies and we all expressed other things, we parted. And now I have to part with you. I've demanded your attention long enough. After they left, I remembered their four-year-old and thought I resembled him in certain ways, although I'm fifty-six.

No, I can't face it. I can't face my deepest defects.

And I can't stop talking.

Kṛṣṇa will stop me when He likes. Until then I salute you. May we all become Kṛṣṇa conscious.

## Text 7

*tvam paryatann arka iva tri-lokim  
 antaś-carō vāyur ivātma-sākṣi  
 parāvare brahmaṇi dharmato vrataiḥ  
 snātasya me nyūnam alam vicakṣva*

Like the sun, Your Goodness can travel everywhere in the three worlds, and like the air you can penetrate the internal region of everyone. As such, you are as good as the all-pervasive Supersoul. Please, therefore, find out the deficiency in me, despite my being absorbed in transcendence under disciplinary regulations and vows.

## Comment

Vyāsa states that Nārada possesses extraordinary abilities "as good as the all-pervasive Supersoul." He credits Nārada not only as knowing the scriptures, and not just as a strict, kindhearted *brahmacārī*, but as someone who can travel throughout the three worlds. We know this is true from reading of Nārada's appearance in different stories in the *Bhāgavatam*. He travels as the

transcendental spaceman without the aid of spacecraft. He travels to relieve the miseries of fallen souls from the demigods to the demons.

The more amazing point is that he not only travels in outer space, but can “penetrate the internal region of everyone.” Therefore, it should be easy for such a *siddha* to discover Vyāsadeva’s deficiency.

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s one-sentence purport lists the activities of a transcendentalist: Deity worship, charity, scriptural study, etc., and concludes that these “are always helpful.” The implication, however, is that although these activities are helpful, and Vyāsadeva followed them strictly, they are not always able to remove despondency from the heart.



Vyāsa submitted himself to Nārada long ago. We should similarly submit ourselves to our spiritual masters. We should also be pious, read scriptures, and become qualified to receive the help. Don’t remain sinners, then approach the guru for help. Neither should we become upright *brāhmaṇas* and decide we are already advanced enough to require nothing further from the spiritual master. We should strengthen ourselves, and admit we need help to make further advancement. The guru, like the sun, can

travel everywhere and see inside our hearts. We have to trust that this is true.

Yeah, that's what we've got to do. And I'm here to remind you. Just don't ask too many difficult questions, such as exactly how you should be pious, the definition of forty varieties of nonviolence, where charity should be given and absolutely where it should not be given, or where you can find a guru as good as Nārada, or even a fraction as good. I can only point you to Prabhupāda's books and nothing more. As for me, I'm busy sitting here worrying that I will get a headache if I push much beyond that.

But I won't dodge the truth of it. I'm telling you straight what we gotta do. I can't travel everywhere, but I can travel downhill in my boots until the incline becomes too sharp. I can also travel in a car back to Vancouver and catch a plane the next day to Newark, but even there I'm limited. Travel usually triggers headaches. So I can't move like Nārada, and even if I could deliver my carcass to your door in Sweden, there's not much I can do for you. I can't penetrate your internal heart region. I don't have that ability, and not even much desire. Why should I want to see inside another person? I can't even see into myself. I just want to get through my days and gather some fruits and flowers of Kṛṣṇa conscious literary value.

*What do you want?*

*Na dhanam na janam na sundarim?* Remember that rock song of the early '50s? I think it was sung by the Robins. It was a perverted reflection of the *Śikṣāṣṭakam* verse, *na dhanam na janam*: *I don't want no fancy car/ I don't want no candy bar . . .* Then the punch line: "Well, whaddya want?"

"I just want a little girl to love."

Those lyrics went right to the heart of the feckless, pimple-faced teenagers at Tottenville High School. Me and John Young loved that song too, not even aware of how much it exposed our needs.

It's many years later and this old *sannyāsi* wants no girl (little or otherwise) to love. Believe you me.

But neither does he sing *Śikṣāṣṭakam* as Prabhupāda sang it. Prabhupāda says he wants causeless devotional service life after life. He doesn't even want liberation, and he means it.

Is that what I want?

Of course. I won't be self-deprecating here and say I have other desires. I'll be honest on this one: I want causeless devotional service life after life. I don't need to acquire the power to travel everywhere or enter into everyone's internal region first. I'll keep my requests simple. And I know that waving a wand over people won't improve their situations unless they themselves want to improve, by Kṛṣṇa's grace. So who is doing the improving anyway? I will just concentrate on myself.

Of course, Nārada had amazing powers. He was brave and inviolable. We never hear of anyone attacking him or arresting him or abusing him in some way. Rather, he was so powerful that even the hunter Mṛgāri came under his influence. That is the nature of a saint.



You honestly stepped down and modestly said you don't even aspire to be as powerful as Nārada. Okay. Now what? You want to be a disc jockey? A soul sporting a Scandinavian snowflake-patterned sweater, sitting at a desk and looking at a peaceful vista?

O sweet classical melody  
 the song of Kṛṣṇa conscious yearning  
 played softly even by the roughest  
 jazz men of this world.

What does it mean?

It means daybreak  
 and sweet, people,  
 tender people  
 alive in this world—disillusioned  
 lost,  
 but searching.

I don't know. I can't  
 conjure up a fiction like some ask me to do, the  
 story of a devotee lost  
 in the past or in a realistic setting  
 the visiting *sannyāsi*  
 who enters the *Bhāgavatam* and politics.

O Prabhupāda, please discover my deficiency. I'm your disci-  
 ple and I ain't Nārada, ain't Vyāsa. I can't travel and I can't  
 even shake off the soft beat of  
 all material life. But I want spiritual life,  
 pure devotion,  
 love of God and  
 of you.

I don't want to live in night clubs, or have us all sit around a  
 table with a circle of friends and say, "See how this relates to  
 Kṛṣṇa consciousness?" They don't see, and they furrow their  
 brows and laugh in embarrassment. "Gurudeva, did you intend  
 to bring us to this nondevotee place?"

Oh no,  
 I didn't, and only Prabhupāda can penetrate  
 that internal region of my heart  
 as my fire dies out  
 and I have to add more wood.

O Kṛṣṇa  
 it's You.

That guy in Italy plays his guitar and knows just what I mean because he's doing the same thing.

Last days in these hills, and March already gone, April on the way. The bears probably won't awaken until I leave. I'm on my way to Gitā-nāgarī. There too I will try to work at self-realization. May Kṛṣṇa bless us all with tunes that hurt but don't. Our lives are really quite predictable. The trash bin has to be emptied. There's no other way. And yes, religious fasting is good.

## Text 8

*śrī-nārada uvāca  
bhavatānūdita-prāyaṁ  
yaśo bhagavato 'malam  
yenaivāsau na tuṣyeta  
manyate tad darśanam khilam*

**Śrī Nārada said:** You have not actually broadcast the sublime and spotless glories of the Personality of Godhead. That philosophy which does not satisfy the transcendental senses of the Lord is considered worthless.

## Comment

Śrī Nārada speaks most directly in this verse. He doesn't pull his punches in his literary and spiritual criticism of Vyāsadeva's works to date. Vyāsadeva has almost not praised the glories of the Supreme Lord, which are sublime and spotless. If a philosophy or work does not satisfy the Lord, then it has no value.

In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the living being is eternally the servant of the Supreme Being. Lord Kṛṣṇa expands Himself into parts and parcels as an act of His own complete perfection. His nature is blissful (*ānanda mayo 'bhyāsāt*), and He expresses His nature in full when He accepts loving service

from the living beings. Unless they are in a loving connection (yoga) with the Supreme Lord, neither the living beings nor the Supreme Lord are satisfied.

In Vyāsadeva's books, however, including the *Vedānta-sūtra*, direct glorification of the Supreme Lord was either omitted or sidelighted. The subject matter of Vedānta is certainly above mundane considerations, and therefore the *sūtras* begin *athāto brahma-jijñāsā*, "Now let us inquire into Brahman," but if discussion of the Absolute remains impersonal, it cannot ultimately attract the soul. Realization of Brahman as impersonal, or even as Paramātmā, does not bring the full bliss that comes from the full personal realization of the Lord's qualities and pastimes.

If the author of the Vedic compilations is himself not satisfied, then how can he expect his readers to find the way out of their own despondency? "Herein arises the necessity of explaining *Vedānta-sūtra* in the form of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* by the self-same author." Since a devotee wishes always to write under the spiritual energy, Vyāsadeva will only be satisfied when he pleases the Lord's transcendental senses.

It would be foolish for an ordinary, practicing *bhakta* to hear this and think himself superior to Vyāsadeva, as if his service is pleasing whereas Vyāsadeva's was proven not to be. We should never become so complacent as to think our service is fully pleasing to Kṛṣṇa. Success is judged by whether we are fully satisfied at heart. If we are not, if we have any material hankerings or despondency, it should serve as a hint that our service—our love—is lacking.

Vyāsadeva failed to directly glorify Kṛṣṇa in his books. That was not only a failure in terms of his pleasing Kṛṣṇa's senses, but he failed to direct others to Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet. Sometimes devotees don't praise Kṛṣṇa because they are afraid of the judgment of nondevotees, but repeated failure to speak on Kṛṣṇa's behalf, and on behalf of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, will cause a sense of dissatisfaction. Kṛṣṇa declares in *Bhagavad-gītā* that

He is most pleased by the person who spreads His glories. The opposite is also true. If one is silent about Kṛṣṇa, then Kṛṣṇa will be silent in his case too.

We speak out of love of God—whatever love we already possess. Nārada Muni emphasizes that the service must be rendered with love, with the desire to please the beloved. Whatever self-satisfaction or ecstasy we feel in our service should be coming from a conscious connection with Kṛṣṇa. The great devotees sometimes even feel that their ecstasy impedes their service, as Dāruka felt when the tears in his eyes hindered his ability to fan Kṛṣṇa.

Neither should we too easily assume that Kṛṣṇa is pleased by what we are doing. He is a person and we are not in control of how He experiences pleasure. Once someone asked Prabhupāda how we could know when Kṛṣṇa was pleased. He said, “When He smiles.” It is a rare soul who can see Kṛṣṇa’s smiling face. Nevertheless, that is our goal: to please Kṛṣṇa and to see His smile. We know we are on the right track when the spiritual master is pleased. Prabhupāda said that he was working hard to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness in order to see his spiritual master smile.

Sometimes foolish people challenge Kṛṣṇa and say that because He is supposed to be *ātmārāma*, He should not require the satisfaction of our loving service in order to feel complete. Rather, the *bhakti* exchange represents the Lord’s beauty and personhood. It is His personhood that allows Him to feel incomplete when He is unable to enjoy a *jīva*’s love. It is part of Kṛṣṇa’s perfection that He does not remain alone, but expands Himself into innumerable servitors. It is our misfortune when we choose to disconnect from our constitutional nature. Kṛṣṇa is inconceivably transcendental, always enjoying in the spiritual world with His liberated associates, yet He simultaneously hankers for us to return to His loving service.

I am thrilled to think that Kṛṣṇa needs our loving service in order to be fully satisfied. Why should we deny Him the pleasure of our service? It is because they realize the Lord’s inner



nature that the *gopīs* are considered His topmost servitors. Lord Caitanya proclaimed that there would never be any worship greater than the *gopīs'* service because they rendered service simply to satisfy His senses. In so doing, they held back nothing, but gave Kṛṣṇa everything they had without consideration.

In order to become most pleasing to Kṛṣṇa, a devotee must please Kṛṣṇa's devotees. Although it is impossible to satisfy every devotee in all details, we should try hard not to neglect them. Our association with devotees is our training to be able to associate with the Lord in His eternal pastimes. We are crude, offensive, and unfit in so many ways. Therefore, to understand and learn to serve Kṛṣṇa's heart, we have to start by serving His servants.

How could wise Vyāsa have written so many books failing to glorify Kṛṣṇa, and what is the value of those books? Sometimes we hear that they have value, and at others times they are called worthless. I can't answer that question. As to why Vyāsa failed to glorify Kṛṣṇa, I can say what I heard from Prabhupāda. He said that Vyāsadeva was preparing books for all classes of people. Some of them needed guidance for gradual upliftment, because they could not immediately accept Kṛṣṇa's glories. They were too attached to material enjoyment. Thus some of the *Vedas* present karmic paths by which such people can gradually come to understand that there is a Supreme Being, one who is controlling them and everything else. That's a big step for materialists, but they have to go farther. The value of the *Vedas* is that they connect us to Bhagavān. The *Vedas* only become useless when we ourselves are unable to progress through the steps and we become stranded. Then we are left only with philosophy and no *bhakti*.

I particularly related to the point that the author has to be satisfied if he expects his audience to be satisfied. It all revolves around his desire to write to please Kṛṣṇa and to bring people to some level of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I tend to think that if an

author is dissatisfied along the way, he might tell his readers of his failings as part of his attempt to overcome them. The readers often sympathize. They accept that the author is imperfect, and they don't claim perfection for themselves either, but at least they expect that the author will not deny them the truth. The author at least shouldn't cheat anyone either by claiming to understand the truth if he doesn't, or telling us he has attained it if he hasn't. It is also cheating if an author presents a book that doesn't discuss perfection at all. While it's all right to aspire for perfection along with the readers, it's necessary for the author to distribute whatever nectar he has. Formerly, only liberated souls wrote books for this reason. If we say now that non-liberated souls may write, it's on the condition that they also light the yajñic fires and glorify Kṛṣṇa with authorized mantras.

Today the devotees will gather for a farewell meeting and I will thank them for cooking and typing for me and giving me firewood and water. I have been using all this not as an enjoyer, but in my attempts to serve the Supreme. The things in themselves have not made me happy, but they have provided the fuel that has run me like a machine. I run by writing. That's what an author-servant does. And yes, I find it satisfying.

Does the *Bhāgavatam* reflect something about the general condition of authors? In a sense, although no other authors can compare themselves to Vyāsadeva. We didn't write the *Vedas* nor have Nārada's *darśana*. Vyāsadeva is a unique example. Yet he is also meant to teach all authors an example. No author will be satisfied unless he or she describes the Lord's spotless glories. That's the *sampradāya* lesson. Find your mature work and make it pure devotion.

Yesterday I read Merton's description of his life in the monastery during his first five years. He worked hard to dedicate himself to God's will and to give up his own desires. Yet he wanted to realize his vocation. He wanted to pray, and he

appealed to the saints in his scriptures. I found that inspiring. I read it in the spirit of interfaith dialogue, as a writer might turn to a fellow writer to learn how he connects his writing to the religious life. I found something human there.

Was Merton in blissful God consciousness? It reminds me of the statement in *The Nectar of Instruction* that the guru should be an *uttama-adhikārī* or his followers won't be able to rise higher than his level. If he is not an *uttama-adhikārī*, he has to be giving the teachings of the *uttama-adhikārīs* and be constantly giving us Kṛṣṇa.

We are all placed on trial by this verse—all writers, readers, speakers—and we will have to explain how we are pleasing Kṛṣṇa's senses. Do we measure up?

We either focus on Kṛṣṇa or what we say has no value. Later Nārada will develop his argument. He will make this high standard attainable for all of us; no one will be exempt. Nārada will explain that we first need to accept śāstric authority which insists on Kṛṣṇa's supremacy, then use whatever we have or are attracted to doing in His service. Even those of us who live down here in the pits will find engagement and hope. We too can serve the Absolute Truth. We too can go beyond what Vyāsadeva wrote in his preliminary books by aiming at pure *bhakti*. Vyāsadeva himself will guide us through the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Can Kṛṣṇa be more merciful? He who gave salvation to the Pūtanā demon, although she came to poison Him, is our Lord.

I'm writing this, a little fearful of Nārada's stick. He keeps me on the road. I want to give the Lord pleasure. I think He is pleased when I make an all-out effort to flow with everything and direct it to His lotus feet. Nondual. Kṛṣṇa is apart from all, yet everything is connected to Him.

The little men I draw always wear *tilaka*. They often smile, and if not, their mouths are straight lines, making them look grave, foolish, or a little sad. But they always wear *tilaka* because they are engaged in devotional service despite everything.

No, I will not abandon the path. It is  
 too fearful to wander lost in  
 the city of dreams, searching for  
 the Staten Island ferry  
 terminal. That only leads to Great Kills  
 and not to my real home.

Nārada's words have sobered us. When Lord Caitanya re-  
 jected Choṭa Haridāsa and Choṭa later committed suicide, the  
 devotees became so afraid they didn't think of women even in  
 their dreams.

Dear Lord, my sweater is fraying—this instead of something  
 wilder.

Two days left at Śaraṇāgati. I'm ready to move on.

O Lord  
 may my words  
 please You.



### Text 9

*yathā dharmādayaś cārthā  
 muni-varyānukīrtitāḥ*

*na tathā vāsudevasya  
mahimā hy anuvāṇitāḥ*

Although, great sage, you have very broadly described the four principles beginning with religious performances, you have not described the glories of the Supreme Personality, Vāsudeva.

### Comment

Now Nārada pinpoints the defect in Vyāsa's writings: he has spent more time describing the four principles that begin with religion (*dharma*), and has not focused enough attention on *bhakti*.

The four principles which manifest when human civilization elevates itself beyond animal life are *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*. *Dharma* means religious activities intended to garner material benefits both in this world and after death. Nowadays, few people are even pious enough to go to God in order to fulfill their material benefits. Therefore, they skip *dharma* and go to the second principle, *artha*, or economic development. Our instant gratification culture, after all, teaches us that material happiness requires hard work, not piety. In either case, however, both the *dharmī* and *karmī* are interested in making money in order to attain the third principle, *kāma*, or sense gratification. Both think that to enjoy properly, they must have possessions. Therefore, they work hard to supply the objects for their senses to enjoy.

*Dharmīs* and *karmīs* fail to notice that their activities are no different than those the animals perform; the only difference is that the animals do not need to make money to enjoy the same standard of material happiness. This is why the *Vedas* describe such mean-minded men as asses. It is rare to find a person who has advanced to interest in the fourth principle, *mokṣa*, or liberation.

In order to become interested in liberation, a person has to have become disgusted with material advancement. Prabhupāda

said he witnessed a large-scale dissatisfaction among the American youth in the 1960s. What sociologists called the counter-culture of the '60s was really a simple rejection of materialism in the form of consumerism. The counter-culture was misguided, but it was a form of renunciation.

It is natural for someone who experiences distress to become renounced. If such a person is fortunate enough to contact transcendental knowledge, he or she may then seek liberation from material suffering. Teachers such as Lord Buddha have taught that all suffering comes from material attachment, so material desires must be subdued if we are to become free.

Above the four principles is *bhakti*, or love of God. Ultimately, even liberation cannot satisfy the heart. Only acting according to our constitutional nature as Kṛṣṇa's servants can give us solace. Even if someone succeeds in merging into the *brahmajyoti*, he or she cannot stay there forever. *Āruhya kṛcchreṇa param padam tataḥ/ patanty adho 'nāḍṛta-yuṣmad-aṅghrayaḥ*. "O lotus-eyed Lord, although nondevotees who accept severe austerities and penances to achieve the highest position may think themselves liberated, their intelligence is impure. They fall down from their position of imagined superiority because they have no regard for Your lotus feet." (*Bhāg.* 10.2.32)

Nārada's point was that although Vyāsadeva did not entirely fail to mention the glories of serving the Supreme, he gave prominence to the four principles. Therefore, "he had more or less improperly used his valuable time, and thus he was despondent."

*Bhakti* comes after one achieves liberation. Liberation begins when we understand that we are not the material body but spirit soul. This is known as the *brahma-bhūta* stage. The *Bhagavad-gītā* describes *brahma-bhūta* and its relation to devotional service, *brahma-bhūta prasannātmā* as follows:

"One who is thus transcendently situated at once realizes the Supreme Brahman and becomes fully joyful. He never laments or desires to have anything. He is equally disposed toward every

living entity. In that state he attains pure devotional service unto Me.” (Bg. 18.54)

According to this verse, we must reach the *brahma-bhūta* stage before we can practice pure *bhakti*. *Brahma-bhūta* means being one with the Absolute, and it produces transcendental happiness. In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “In the material concept of life, when one works for sense gratification, there is misery, but in the absolute world, when one is engaged in pure devotional service, there is no misery . . . Because a pure devotee has no thought other than Kṛṣṇa, he is naturally always joyful. He does not lament for any material loss or aspire for gain, because he is full in the service of the Lord.” Therefore, real *brahma-bhūta* does not mean remaining in an impersonal conception, but becoming one in interest with Kṛṣṇa through transcendental loving service.

Nārada recommended that Vyāsadeva enter and remain in the *brahma-bhūta* stage by “eagerly and repeatedly describe[ing] the path of devotional service. This would cure him from gross despondency.”

Upon reading this verse, devotees sometimes wonder how Vyāsadeva took the instruction. He was given the key to solve his dilemma; what did he do with it? One devotee wrote, “Vyāsadeva seems intense—an anxious author wanting the key. When he was given the key, did it leave him any room to continue his personal search? Did his search then become how to please Kṛṣṇa in his own way by glorifying Him? Did a new world, unlimitedly more full of opportunity to exchange with guru and Kṛṣṇa, open to him?”

We will have to wait to discover the answer. Nārada has not yet finished speaking. First, Vyāsadeva will take advantage of Nārada's personal presence to ask him about his own life, and Nārada will tell his story. We will only pick up the thread of Vyāsadeva's trance in the seventh chapter.

However, this much we know: Vyāsadeva is not an ordinary author. Certainly his enlightenment will open new vistas for

him, but it won't mean that he takes off into some kind of independent inspiration to write books as a mundane novelist might. For the mundane author, inspiration includes delusions of grandeur and explorative speculation. Vyāsadeva was more interested in glorifying Kṛṣṇa and in serving humankind than in inventing new modes of expression. I can't know his mind, but I am certain he felt the freedom a writer will feel to express his understanding in his own words. Even when a writer receives dictation from the Lord, there is still scope for writing it into his or her best poetic expression. Vyāsadeva proved this, as did his successors, the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

Prabhupāda continues, "After attainment of *brahma-bhūta*, one is satisfied. But satisfaction is the beginning of transcendental bliss. One should progress . . ."

Sometimes we think satisfaction is the goal, but a devotee is never satiated by hearing Kṛṣṇa's glories. Neither is he satisfied with his own performance of devotional service. He wants always to improve, to hear more, to please Kṛṣṇa more. The satisfaction of *brahma-bhūta* refers to the peace that comes when one becomes free of the bodily conception. It is certainly a relief to overcome one of the most major obstacles to happiness.

Still, understanding our eternal nature is only a beginning. To actually maintain our "eternal" status, we have to understand our individual selves and the nature of the Supreme Lord. This is called practicing *sanātana-dharma*, and we cannot practice such realization until we possess it. Therefore it is said that devotional service comes after liberation. Liberation cannot stand by itself as an impersonal concept (*vimukta-māninaḥ*).

The impersonalist thinks he is liberated, but there is no liberation until we are aware of ourselves not only as spirit souls, but as Kṛṣṇa's eternal servants. If we are aware of our service to Kṛṣṇa, then we are liberated even while living in the material body (*jīvan-muktaḥ sa ucyate*).

*Brahma-bhūta* is also described as the stage of bliss. This too has to be realized within the context of pleasing Kṛṣṇa's senses



and becoming happy in His service. Even a devotee in the early stages of *sādhana-bhakti* feels a bliss which resembles the first symptom of *brahma-bhūta*. Actually, such a devotee will travel beyond *brahma-bhūta* if he persists in practicing *sādhana-bhakti*. The *gāyatrī-mantra* honors the spiritual master: I meditate on the spiritual master, who is always in blissful Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I want to be enthusiastic serving him, just as he enthuses me.

With such goals, we can never think we have attained perfect Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Those who wish to overcome their present position in devotional service and attain a higher status, will find their purposes will best be served by honoring the advanced Vaiṣṇavas. It takes lifetimes to become a purified Vaiṣṇava, and it also requires the Lord's full mercy. Śrīla Prabhupāda condemned those who thought Vaiṣṇavas were those who stayed home to ring bells, show the Deity, hope to receive some donation, then fall asleep in the afternoon sun while chanting their rounds.

All our despondency is therefore due to a lack of love of God, and in the earlier stages, of proper hearing and chanting. We need to save ourselves, and Nārada has given the cure.



I'll want to discuss this topic at the upcoming meetings at Gītā-nāgarī. I wrote about it years ago in a BTG article. Nowadays with so many devotees seeing counselors, we tend to more

easily seek out the roots of our depression in childhood traumas. But Prabhupāda was not wrong; the *Bhāgavatam* is not wrong. The deeper root, even beyond this lifetime, is our lack of hearing and chanting of Kṛṣṇa's glories. We were spirit souls before we were children, and we have carried this urgent need to satisfy the soul from one lifetime to the next. We are starving spiritually when we don't avail ourselves of the proper nourishment. That is the cause of our dissatisfaction. Even Mother Theresa once told a devotee that it was better to preach in the West because spiritual poverty was more acute than material poverty. Never give up the primary therapy: *śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam*. Put yourself in the sunlight of Kṛṣṇa's mercy; don't hide in the dark like an owl.



Sometimes devotees wonder how to make Kṛṣṇa consciousness more directly part of their day-to-day conversation. It doesn't require much when you speak to other devotees. You don't even really need a transition sentence. Kṛṣṇa's pastimes and qualities

are always relevant. Akrūra was heading to Vṛndāvana, thinking of Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura as saying that you cannot approach Vṛndāvana unless you are free from *viṣaya*. Part of our journey is to rid ourselves of materialism. Be confident, as Akrūra was, that you will meet Him at the end of your road.

But you won't unless you start the journey. Life is a symbol for a journey, right? Aim for Vṛndāvana. It is a journey that is filled with anticipation: What will it be like to receive Kṛṣṇa's mercy? Akrūra was humble yet confident that the Lord would embrace him and he would fall at Kṛṣṇa's feet.

Walking yesterday on top of the frozen mud ridges, chanting three rounds after breakfast. It occurred to me that there is a deep problem in my *japa* and I seem incapable of overcoming it. This is personal and I needn't trouble my readers with it, but I'm committed to writing it out. It's a serious topic and common among practicing devotees, although each of us has the problem in a unique way. Still, we can gather hints from one another. For example, in the ISKCON health magazine one girl told how she cured herself of cancer by practicing the rules of cleanliness a doctor had taught her. Someone else might try her method and achieve the same results.

Thinking about my own *japa* and suggestions others have made, I know that doing another sixty-four-round *vrata* is not what I need right now. The small daily *kīrtana* Madhu and I have been holding has helped some, but even as we sing, my mind drifts to the conversation I know will follow. When I glanced over at Prabhupāda and the typewriter—objects in my room—while thinking these thoughts, I felt the mantra stop-ping time. I don't know how to explain it. Hearing has to be done in the present.

We leave here tomorrow.

Merton talks of prayer and infused meditation meaning specific Catholic images as well as things he has learned from the

Buddhists. It all sounds rather impersonal to me. He's serious about it, though, and rules out cheap meditation, sensational attempts, meditation that leads to sense enjoyment, etc. Still, as simple and deep as what he seeks is, it sounds like he is trying to merge into the One. I can't say for sure *what* his realization is, so probably better I don't try to judge it.

Our method is different; we take it straight from scripture, from Nārada. It's the simple act of hearing with rapt attention. Pray to Kṛṣṇa to give us faith. He's Supreme, He is present in His transcendental form, in the sound of His names, in His beautiful pastimes. That's all we need.

*A list of what I like in this verse:*

- (1) that Nārada speaks so directly
- (2) that he will help Vyāsadeva
- (3) that it is part of an entire train of thought
- (4) that the answer is clear

*A list of how I failed with this verse:*

- (1) I failed to love, to enter, to believe
- (2) I failed to think about it during the day
- (3) I didn't make plans yet how to stay more with Kṛṣṇa's pastimes
- (4) I don't draw pictures of Kṛṣṇa inspired by this verse

There's still time,  
still time  
for Kṛṣṇa to be merciful  
to me.  
Next life.

O Kṛṣṇa, O holy name, please rescue me. It is coldest winter and we are waiting for the thaw. You are the most intelligent person. Please arrange for me to reach Your feet. Don't reject me because of my faults. Enliven me with faith and love.

You know, I always wanted to be loved, and I wanted to be made an exception, although I didn't get the best grades. No grades, no money in the family—shame. Forget it, man.

You're a devotee now. The nondevotees think I'm a jerk cultist, but I think they're out to lunch—the President, his daughter, the divorced Queen—all of them. They're all sordid, bored, boarded up

ignorant  
of the soul.

They don't know anything  
and they won't admit it.

Interject a prayer. Of all orders of the guru, his order to chant sixteen rounds is foremost.



### Text 10

na yad vacaś citra-padam harer yaśo  
jagat-pavitram praṅṇīta karhicit  
tad vāyasam tirtham uśanti mānasā  
na yatra haṁsā niramanty uśik-kṣayāḥ

Those words which do not describe the glories of the Lord, who alone can sanctify the atmosphere of the whole universe, are considered by saintly persons to be like unto a place of pilgrimage for crows. Since the all-perfect persons are inhabitants of the transcendental abode, they do not derive any pleasure there.

### Comment

Verses 1.5.10–11 go together to describe the difference between condemned and approved literature. Words that do not describe the Lord's glories are like a pilgrimage place for crows. The swanlike, saintly persons do not derive pleasure there.

Śrīla Prabhupāda lumps all nonspiritual literature into the category of refuse—a garbage dump that attracts crows. That includes books written expertly according to the laws of grammar, structure, poetics and metaphor, and any other definition of powerful writing. The condemnation is made not only toward cheap, commercial fiction, but toward the greats of world literature. For example, Shakespeare's plays are character studies of men and women caught up in the vicissitudes of fate, written in powerful and decorative speech, but Shakespeare threw in only a dash of God consciousness as seasoning. His books cannot be labeled religious literature. What is their ultimate value? "These literatures in the modes of passion and ignorance are distributed under different labels, but they can hardly help the spiritual urge of the human being, and thus the swanlike, spiritually advanced men have nothing to do with them."

Prabhupāda's purport provides a sweeping rejection of Western culture, and it will be hard for those who prize world literature and art to accept it. We of the West have formed our political and social identities through these artistic expressions. We have sought to imitate them when making our own expressions. Yet a devotee will have to renounce his attachment to such expression and come into the realm of the pure expression

of *bhakti*. As we begin to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness, our attachments lessen and we begin to see clearly which things nourish the soul and which things do not. We gradually become interested only in those books that directly describe Kṛṣṇa's name, form, qualities, and pastimes, and that discuss the nature of His relationships with His eternal associates. I myself am not completely cured of my attachment in this regard, but I know Nārada is speaking the truth.

For those of us who like to write, it would be helpful to gain a better understanding of what art is in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Some say that material artists create an independent reality, which is illusion. Kṛṣṇa conscious art appreciates the reality that God has already created, which is truth. What, then, is the scope of Kṛṣṇa conscious artists? Are they free to express to the fullest extent the human potentiality God has given them? Is Kṛṣṇa conscious art simply a utilitarian function—propaganda for Kṛṣṇa? Is Kṛṣṇa conscious writing defined simply as the act of repeating what has been said before?

To be honest, I am not really interested in theorizing on this topic; I would rather spend my time exploring my own artistic urgings. It's likely that the answer will be found in the heart of each individual as we delve into our own personal expression in service to Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa conscious artists want to find expressions that are their own, and they want to make an outpouring in words or music or painting that becomes a poetry of mind, body, and spirit for Kṛṣṇa's pleasure.

"Crows and swans," "dolls of the material energy"—I have lived with these phrases for years, "place of the prostitute hunters," "market literature under different categories" . . .

In the end, I don't have much to say about this verse. Perhaps it's too close to home and I am still exploring the points for myself. This is the next to last day of March, and a cover of snow has settled on the ground, not deep, but covering the muddy ridges. It will soon be gone. It's the end of March.

I suppose that's the biggest defect of worldly literature, even when expertly produced. It reflects only the temporary, a so-called reality. We get caught up in it, but it cannot deliver us to the higher world. The world's writers think there is no other reality. Therefore, they write passionately about this one. Inadvertently, they do reflect God's glories by their honesty, sincerity, and their depth of understanding the human heart, but they seem to know nothing more.

And that is why Prabhupāda says such writers cheat people. To enter a novel describing the passions of men and women, to hear descriptions of the setting, to be drawn into the theme, is to exercise the emotions. The more expert the author, the more involved the reader is able to become in the imaginary web he or she has created. But where does it leave us at the end? We have simply managed to escape for some time from the pressing fact that we are lost in the material world. We have found some entertainment and little more. We didn't get out.

Literature written to lead us to God is always helpful, but it is better if it is written with art. If the writing is too heavy-handed, without concern for the nuances of expression, or sensitivity, it may not serve its purpose. Kṛṣṇa conscious writing should reflect Kṛṣṇa's own beauty. It should be poetic, metaphorical, concise. A devotee is meant to be the greatest poet; why should such claims go only to the nondevotee literary giants? The perfection of our literature will be when it both glorifies God and pleases the readers' ears.

Of course, Nārada will tell us in the next verse that literary standards do not apply as long as the praise of God is sincere, but it is a great blessing to read literature composed for Kṛṣṇa's pleasure that is full of expressive beauty.

I am not over-sensitive about Nārada's statement condemning world literature, but am I hypocritical because I still admire good writing, even when it is not directly God conscious? Let me use my admiration to aspire for high literary standards in Kṛṣṇa conscious writing.





Someone asked, "Are Kṛṣṇa conscious authors predestined to perform that service?"

Another asks, "Can a crow become a swan?"

"Is the world of mundane literature off limits or can it be rescued for Kṛṣṇa's service?"

We die and are reborn. What ever happened to Kafka? Shakespeare? What will become of Salinger after he is finished hiding behind his fence in Vermont, practicing his own brand of Vivekananda-influenced yoga? Henry Miller croaks in Big Sur and William Saroyan cracks a joke at death—a good one even—then goes off. The destination for many: Yamarāja's court. "What did you write and what was its value?"

Writers addicted to the seven deadly vices, vulnerable souls, dope poets, Beats. I was one of them at one time. I couldn't make it as a worldly writer, some say, so I turned to writing religious stuff for our little congregation. They say I'm spoiling spiritual literature. Call me frustrated. I've heard it all before. I don't care; I am writing as the snow melts in generous drops and the rivulets begin to run off the roof. I told you it wasn't a serious snowfall this close to April.

O Henry,  
 Henry,  
 fool—foolscap madness  
 those authors can jump in a lake.  
 Do I dare put down honorable  
 English department World Lit classics?  
 Ray Carver and Hermit Hesse—  
 no, I'm exorcising them all. Even Rilke's  
*Malte Laurids Brigge's* notebooks—  
 couldn't read a page. I'm done with it.  
 O sages of the *Bhāgavatam*,  
 may I stay always with you  
 and with my own expressions.  
 I'll walk in the footprints  
 now covered by snow, and blink  
 snowflakes from my  
 eyes. This is here and this is now,  
 and I have eternal *śāstra*.

Absolutely last day here. The routine I followed so carefully and lovingly—this quiet—is about to disappear. This is sacred land, truly.

Clunk, clank, sigh, pop, expire—I will miss the sound of logs burning themselves into black hunks glowing red, then coal black, then ashen as I write. Why don't people appreciate Kṛṣṇa conscious books? Why don't neighbors like Kṛṣṇa's looks? Where are the hooks and ivies and sassafras?

If I were more serious, were even someone else, I could comment on Art and Reality. I know some who wouldn't have hesitated as I did. Well, I'm too thin, and I've gathered no moss.

Here are some statements direct:

"This world expressed is art."

I agree, but we know its eternal connection.

They fall short, claim their art-writing is reality.

But it's not, it's not.

Anyway, that wasn't my idea. All I know is what I perceive with my senses and what I hear from Swamiji and Śukadeva. I stand on that. I wrote alone before I met him, and now I write for him. I was looking for honest expression before I met him, and now that honesty is directed. Inconceivable how that contact gave my writing life, even if it's clumsy sometimes.

Balls of wool straggle and fall off this sweater. I guess that means I've been wearing it.

Me—but

I'm not the main point.

No, but I fit in somewhere. Glad I'm connected. I want to serve, my reason to be—*ānanda*, *bhakti*, *svarūpa*, writing it down.



Rivers of praise coming down the mountains in the melting snow. Rainbows—the bow Kṛṣṇa broke.

Newspapers! Now *there's* a pilgrimage place for crows if ever there was one.

He said in two or three years the infrastructure will collapse. They will have to live like worms or something unless we learn to save ourselves now. O Kṛṣṇa, please make me strong enough to sing this canto.

## Text 11

*tad-vāg-visargo janatāgha-viplavo  
 yasmin prati-slokam abaddhavyaty api  
 nāmāny anantasya yaśo 'ṅkitāni yat  
 śṛṇvanti gāyanti gṛṇanti sādhaḥ*

On the other hand, that literature which is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of the name, fame, forms, 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 this world's misdirected civilization. Such transcendental literatures, even though imperfectly composed, are heard, sung and accepted by purified men who are thoroughly honest.

## Comment

This is what I call a personal classic. That is, Prabhupāda's purport is one of my favorites. Although it's true that there are occasions when a devotee might read non-Vaiṣṇava literature and pull something beneficial out of it, Prabhupāda refers to the Cāṇakya *śloka*, "Pick up nectar from a stock of poison . . . accept gold even from a filthy place . . ." and adds, "But a saint is far above the level of an ordinary man." If we want to become saints, or even saintly, then the standard is to absorb ourselves always in glorifying the Lord.

Prabhupāda's purport emphasizes not only the individual benefit of hearing about Kṛṣṇa, but how important it is for everyone in the world to engage in this activity. We like to glimpse the author preparing his purport, and Prabhupāda gives us a glimpse of himself in this one: "While preparing this commentary on this particular stanza of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* we have a crisis before us." When he was writing from Chippiwada and Vṛndāvana, China attacked India for what Prabhupāda considered no substantial reason.

Our neighboring friend China has attacked the border of India with a militaristic spirit. We have practically no business in the political field, yet we see that previously there were both China and India, and they both lived peacefully for centuries without ill feeling. The reason is that they lived those days in an atmosphere of God consciousness, and every country, over the surface of the world, was God-fearing, pure-hearted and simple, and there was no question of political diplomacy. There is no cause of quarrel between the two countries China and India over land which is not very suitable for habitation, and certainly there is no cause for fighting on this issue. But due to the age of quarrel, Kali, which we have discussed, there is always a chance of quarrel on slight provocation. This is due not to the issue in question, but to the polluted atmosphere of this age: systematically there is propaganda by a section of people *to stop glorification of the name and fame of the Supreme Lord*. Therefore, there is a great need for disseminating the message of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* all over the world.

—*Bhāg.* 1.5.11, purport

Therefore, Śrīla Prabhupāda himself, working in obscurity, produced the first volume of the *Bhāgavatam* in English with the hope to distribute it around the world. This was his effort to bring about world peace. Most people, even if they knew of his work, saw it as proselytizing. To promote peace they think they must work through the political sphere. Prabhupāda, like the sages at Naimiṣāraṇya, understood the truth: peace comes from our giving up material designations and understanding spiritual reality.

In his purport, Prabhupāda humbly admits that his rendering of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* will be “fraught with many difficulties. Our presenting this matter in adequate language, especially a foreign language, will certainly fail, and there will be so many literary discrepancies despite our honest attempt to present it in the proper way.”

Although Prabhupāda mentions his inadequacies, however, he sees them in the spirit of the *Bhāgavatam* verse upon which

he is commenting. The verse states that even if the Kṛṣṇa conscious writing is imperfectly composed, it will be accepted by those who are thoroughly honest. Some devotees have thus seen this *sloka* as a prediction of Śrīla Prabhupāda's coming. The relevant elements in the verse are (1) that the writing will "bring about a revolution in the impious lives of the world's misdirected civilization"; (2) the writing may appear to some to be imperfectly composed; and (3) it will be accepted by sincere souls all over the world. This is the effect the Bhaktivedanta purports have had, and prior to Śrīla Prabhupāda's edition, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* was not known outside of small Vaiṣṇava circles in India and a few nondevotee Indologists in their cloistered academies.

Prabhupāda then asks that his book not be rejected on pedantic grounds. Maybe there are flaws in the printing or grammar, but "After all, it is a technical science of spiritual values, and thus we are concerned with the techniques and not with the language." If people cooperate to learn and distribute *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, it can replace the crowlike literature with literature that can fill the spiritual vacuum. A mass movement toward reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is possible because the book is not only the highest and most edifying, but it is also "food for their hankering after reading some interesting literature."

Prabhupāda writes, "We are sure, therefore, that everyone in human society will welcome *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, even though it is now presented with so many faults, for it is recommended by Śrī Nārada, who has very kindly appeared in this chapter."

Someone wrote about Prabhupāda's purport: "Why blame the Indians for the lack of world peace?" It's Kali-yuga and the Indians are simply acting as part of Kṛṣṇa's greater plan. Prabhupāda does not agree. He says it is their fault. Kṛṣṇa appeared in India and the Indians have the treasure house of Vedic knowledge as their birthright. Rather than sharing their treasure, they try to take from the Western culture and subdue their

own natural cultural intelligence and training. Of course, the Indians have been exploited by so many invaders and conquerors, but they have Vedic knowledge within their grasp. Still they disown it.

Someone else asked why Prabhupāda said China was God conscious. Chinese philosophy has been traditionally atheistic. Maybe Śrīla Prabhupāda is referring to the fact that at least the two countries followed the principles of God consciousness. Both China and India had cultures based on compassion; both understood the temporality of the body. People were simpler. Perhaps Prabhupāda was being generous in calling the Chinese God conscious, or perhaps the Chinese *were* God conscious, despite what the Western historians have told us.

Prabhupāda writes that we should make systematic propaganda to popularize the *Bhāgavatam*. That seems difficult, because crows are crows and swans are swans. Or so it seems. The fact is, everyone is spirit soul, and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* can reach everyone in one way or another, either now or in the future. This was Śrīla Prabhupāda's own meditation when he arrived at Boston pier in 1965. How would the nondevotees take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness? He took heart by remembering these verses of the *Bhāgavatam*.

And Prabhupāda did make the *Bhāgavatam* popular. His disciples have arranged for the *Bhāgavatam* to be distributed in the West for over thirty years, and millions of books have been sold. Devotees are now teaching classes on the *Bhāgavatam* at universities as well as their ISKCON centers. They also preach in people's homes and try to help them understand the books they have received. We also distribute *Back to Godhead* magazine, and we are finding that although many of the recipients of the *Bhāgavatam* did not become devotees, their children are becoming attracted to the principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

When the leaders of society begin to follow the *Bhāgavatam*, their citizens will follow naturally. At present, the leaders are corrupt, even demoniac in their behavior, so it appears hopeless.

Our philosophy seems too high-natured for such people. Therefore, Prabhupāda taught us to distribute *prasādam* and to hold public *kirtana* in order to soften their hearts and incline them toward God. We know it is not really hopeless; we ourselves are proof of that.

“That literature which is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of . . . the unlimited Supreme Lord is a different creation.” The *Bhāgavatam* is not material. An author cannot hide his inner feelings when he writes; whatever he is will show through. Therefore, Vyāsadeva’s mood of devotion cannot be hidden in the *Bhāgavatam* descriptions. By reading his words, we too can learn to love God. Similarly, Śrīla Prabhupāda has held nothing back from us in his purports. He has created his purports from his own *bhāva*.

The ill feelings in the world are due to the quarrelsome nature of the world’s people, but devotees who are internally pure may produce literature to help the less fortunate understand Kṛṣṇa and each other in a way that will end quarrel and envy. Devotees should follow in Prabhupāda’s footsteps to present their feelings and realizations, to present a literature which is “a different creation,” and to catch the imaginations of the sorry people of this age. Then they’ll want to implement it on their own.





To be fully satisfied in serving the Lord and the Lord's devotees—we want to lose the false self and allow the simple, pure self to arise like a phoenix from the ashes. We want to take part in the revolution against impious civilization, starting with ourselves and working outward. That means declaring war on the material energy, as Prabhupāda said, and we should expect some trouble. As Christ said, father may be set against son, wife against husband, and brother against brother. Still, you will have the satisfaction of having participated in the only valuable revolution in history, the only one that can liberate the people it seeks to save.

Sometimes devotees feel that we have already spoiled the reputation of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement by our book distribution and money-collecting techniques. Well, whether or not that's true, does that mean we should now lay low? No, we have to continue to preach vigorously, and perhaps with more maturity. The people of this age are not going to love us no matter what we do, especially with shaved heads or devotional clothing and especially the four regulative principles. We must preach without such expectations.

When we were younger we were callous to the public's opinion. Now we are more sensitive to it. When we were younger we had faith that Prabhupāda loved us for the austerities we performed in his service. We didn't need the neighbors to love us. Now we are not always so sure our austerities were performed with intelligence. We need to learn to take the essence of his instructions and go out and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. What else are we here for?

It is not we who are creating the revolution but Prabhupāda's books. We simply want to be part of his movement to popularize the *Bhāgavatam*. May Vyāsadeva carry us. May the *Bhāgavatam* be our guide and light.

And how can we expect world leaders to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness? For the answer to that we can only look to Kṛṣṇa.

It is not necessary for us to always understand the workings of these things. We must simply make the attempt to please Kṛṣṇa as Kṛṣṇa directs us. If anything, our service can help sustain the devotees as they come more and more firmly on the path.

### *Little life*

It's March 31, 12:30 A.M., and this room is just warming up. It won't be long before I finish packing (we are leaving today) and can sit back to finish the last of my rounds. I don't know—I never know—if I'll ever return here. I decided not to write a farewell note to my Godbrother. We'll part in a simpler way and continue on our lone paths.

Rauschenberg said he wanted to fill the gap between life and art. Am I trying to fill the gap between perfect Kṛṣṇa consciousness (absolute) and the relative experience of a struggling, aspirant devotee? Perhaps. There is a gap. We see the perfect, hear about it in the *Bhāgavatam*, yet don't see it fully in ourselves or even in our contemporaries. We see faults—we *find* faults easily. A better devotee overlooks others' faults.

The problem with the gap is not that we have faults but that we cheat others by pretending we don't. It's the gap between sincerity and insincerity, between mundane feeling and spiritual aspiration. It's difficult to jump the gap.

Remember the illustration for the BTG essay on Carl Jung? It showed heaving waves in a deep sea. Everything and everyone was drowning—bureaus, houses, nations, and even Jung himself. We are like that when we are tossed about in the ocean of birth and death; it's the history of the human race. We need to rescue ourselves by closing the gap between our own sincerity and insincerity, and in helping others to do the same.

We can't do that simply by speaking ISKCON jargon or imitating Prabhupāda's phrases. When we say them offhandedly, they sound more like clichés than immortal truths. For example,

if we go around talking about delivering the fallen souls, we may be faithfully repeating something, but what do we know about fallen souls or delivering them? When we find our own realization of what Prabhupāda is teaching, we will also find freshness of speech. Otherwise, such phrases roll out of us and tire the listeners. We need to climb out of the rut, not necessarily into new language, but into honest realization. Our own words won't really help the situation unless they are spoken with heart. Therefore, it is not exactly original expression we are seeking, but "original" understanding within the *paramparā*.



## Text 12

*naiṣkarmyam apy acyuta-bhāva-varjitam  
na sobhate jñānam alam nirañjanam  
kutaḥ punaḥ śaśvad abhadram īśvare  
na cārpitam karma yad apy akāraṇam*

Knowledge of self-realization, even though free from all material affinity, does not look well if devoid of a conception of the Infalible [God]. What, then, is the use of fruitive activities, which are naturally painful from the very beginning and transient by nature, if they are not utilized for the devotional service of Lord?

## Comment

Even knowledge of self-realization, free from material designations “does not look well” when devoid of God consciousness. Karma is even less valuable when it has no connection to the Lord. Since literature for swanlike persons must glorify God, this verse also rejects discussions of impersonal Brahman. Both karma and *jñāna* are impurities in that they don’t focus life’s goal on pure devotional service. The goal of lesser paths is *bhukti* (sense enjoyment) and *mukti* (impersonal liberation), and the aspiring Vaiṣṇava avoids their poison.

Work performed to achieve material results is particularly entangling. Such work is *māyā*’s way to keep insincere, unlucky *jīvas* bound to the cycle of birth and death. Still, we have to work to live, so Kṛṣṇa advises us to perform work as sacrifice to Viṣṇu (*yajñārthāt karmaṇo ’nyatra*). If we offer the results of our work to Kṛṣṇa, we will become spiritually satisfied; if we perform work to attain a higher level of sense gratification, then such work will “become an acute source of trouble.”

How exactly do we offer the results of work to Kṛṣṇa? We give money, we use our talents to glorify Kṛṣṇa in some way, we help the devotees and the preaching. Somehow or other, find the connection between work and God and then perform the work for His pleasure with earnestness. It is not a matter of tagging on “for Kṛṣṇa” after we perform the work, but we must find the connection of using our senses for Kṛṣṇa’s pleasure, engaging ourselves in our work in such a way that we are making an offering to Him, and then lovingly and willingly handing over the fruits. Only that attitude will make it yoga.

Nārada and Śrīla Prabhupāda make strong statements asserting that material activity will cause only trouble. They are not trying to frighten us with fire and brimstone preaching, but rather are presenting facts. If we drink poison, we can expect to die. If we touch fire, we can expect to be burnt. Karmic activity devoid of God consciousness is fire. It produces karmic reactions

from which it is difficult to recover—the web of action leads us ever forward into more and more material suffering as the modes of nature combine to pierce us and tear us to pieces.

When we come to understand the definition of yoga, we will want to more and more purify our work offering in order to make it more pleasing to Kṛṣṇa. There are gross impurities and subtle impurities that must be washed out. The impurities are based on our own attachments. At first, we may be attached to possessing the results of our work, even if we make the sacrifice. Later, we may be willing to give up the physical fruits of work but retain attachment to receiving recognition for what we have accomplished. We may also remain attached to controlling the outcome of our endeavors.

The heart of the offering has to become our devotion. When Kṛṣṇa says we should offer what we eat to Him first, it is not that He is hungry. He is asking us to express our devotion. When we give money, if it is to please Kṛṣṇa's senses, it needs to be given with love and an open heart. It is the warmth and care with which an offering is made that makes it an exchange between Kṛṣṇa and the devotee.



I read this verse while sitting at the gate to my Air Canada flight. It's fun to write while traveling—I had to dictate this comment into my Sony tape recorder even while Air Canada made announcements over the P.A. system. We live in a Kṛṣṇa conscious traveler's world, and not the world of karma.

Now our Boeing 767 has lifted over the Vancouver region, climbing to 30,000 feet. The plane is trembling. A young married couple is sitting in the seats in front of us, trying to keep their two infants amused by singing “Old MacDonald had a farm, e-i-e-i-o.” I think, “If he can be that dedicated to his family, why shouldn’t I be so dedicated to writing on the *Bhāgavatam*?”

“It does not look well”—that phrase sticks in my mind—self-realization without Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

But I’m distracted too. Every time I look up I see the photo of the basketball player and the headline, “No stinking shirts.” I wonder what *that* means? At Śaraṇāgati I would look up from my page and see a valley, an iced-over pond, pine trees, hills. A good place to go during a guided imagery relaxation exercise. Close your eyes and think of that cabin where you stayed alone, warming yourself with wood from the forest, resting, writing.

“It does not look well” if work is not joined to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Work performed for Kṛṣṇa becomes beautiful, a work of art.

### *Little life*

Dreamt I was Prabhupāda’s servant again—the best kind of dream. I was relaxed in the company of my Godbrothers, although I was aware that I could improve my service. The next time I have such a dream, I would like to ask Prabhupāda what I can do to please him. I would like to know how to please the Lord’s transcendental senses. I will also ask him for his blessings to allow me to read his books prayerfully, to receive Kṛṣṇa’s *darśana* through his books, to never lose touch with them.

M. is looking through Air Canada’s *En Route* magazine. I usually don’t read mundane stuff in flight because there is always the danger of a crash and I want my consciousness focused. I don’t want to die looking through a gift catalog or at a pretty girl sunbathing at some vacation spot. But this is Canada, and on the cover of *En Route* they have a photograph of a white seal and the lead story is about the seal migration in the North.

“Does not look well” unless your work and thoughts are linked to God. We have over four hours to fly before we reach Toronto and change flights. O Kṛṣṇa. The stewardesses are starting to hand out the breakfasts. We already honored *prasādam* in Vancouver (after offering it first to Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa). O Prabhupāda, you are kind to travel with us.

“Does not look well.” Flying over Saskatchewan, or maybe Alberta. I can see the all-white, sharp mountain peaks below. We think we are comfortable in this plane cabin with our mint tea—other people think like that too and the air is filled with the buzz of conversations. Snake-like river—frozen. What plans should I be making? It doesn't seem important right now to think about what I will be doing tomorrow. If we link our actions, planned or not, to Kṛṣṇa, we can be sure they won't be the source of acute trouble. They will only bring us closer to Kṛṣṇa.

Reading *Prabhupāda Nectar* and selecting favorite anecdotes to read at the meetings at Gītā-nāgarī. I have to be “up” to do this. I went through the book and collected a few, but then rested for a while. When I came back to it, I wasn't as receptive. I started to feel the anecdotes were too familiar, as if I had already extracted all the juice just by collecting it. It's clear that a certain mentality, even physical sharpness, is required if we want to be sensitive when we hear *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. Wish I had it more often.

This note written at 35,000 feet—a high-wire balancing act. All I see is Māyāvādī white out the window and all I hear besides the buzzing conversations is “it does not look well” echoing in my brain.

We're expecting to go through a little trouble in Toronto at customs when we have to quickly gather our luggage, head through American customs, and catch the flight to Newark. No big deal, I guess, but because Madhu has an Irish passport sometimes it's

difficult. I won't have problems because I am an American coming home. It's just tense.

It's all right. I'm not reading a verse right now, I know, but the next one is ahead. I won't ever run out of *Bhāgavatam* verses. That's what we mean by "deathless nectar." Even at death we will not be shortchanged.

Talking with M. about what I read yesterday in Merton. I said what I found most helpful was his attitude not to look for taste, nectar, or to "get high" from his prayers or duties, but his desire to serve humbly for God's pleasure. Merton found that example in St. John of the Cross. It reminds me of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's "Don't try to see Kṛṣṇa, but act in such a way that Kṛṣṇa sees you."

How about a list before we descend to Toronto? Start with words: *bhāgavata*, baby crying, mental energy up and down, woman with earrings, her husband humoring the baby, *Bhāgavata dāsa*, automatic writ, miracle of the loaves, milk from Gaṇeśa *mūrti*, Sadāpūta Prabhu's explanation of it, avoiding controversies, love to write

collage

courage

envy

in malice—

free the spirit!

Words pour forth

split off

from me.

Half-cooked chunks of carrots, broccoli—no sweets today. Thought the carrots were like a sweet. Talking to Madhu was sweeter. An upswing after painkiller. Toronto.

Trot.

Betsy Trotwood.



Dovetail. Nārada is firm. Use what you have for Kṛṣṇa; don't acquire new material skills if they eat up your time. Work with what you already have. Then *bhaja govinda*. At the time of death, nothing else will help.

Śrīla Prabhupāda ready for lighthearted exchanges even in his last days, but ever fixed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness—his own Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which I worship.

He read his own Seventh Canto, Part Two, when it came out into the night. Oh, to be like him, reading in good consciousness. Śrīla Prabhupāda, please give me that blessing. I'd like to dream again that I am with you, and perhaps we are reading the *Bhāgavatam* together, me listening to you, taking it in, satisfied, complete. You have included everything in your purports, although we often fail to see it. You gave us the essence, although not always the details. May I understand more and more.

Yeah, Merton and St. John of the Cross are right, we should not hanker for a spiritual high but be satisfied to serve. *Tṛṇād api*. Chant from the lowly position that is truth. Give attention, devotion. I need some encouragement.

Plane landing in Toronto. It does not look well if I cannot connect directly to Kṛṣṇa. Where is the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava peak? Hear from guru and learn his mood.

*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* "is now presented with so many faults," but will be welcomed by everyone, "for it is recommended by Śrī Nārada, who has kindly appeared in this chapter."

People are happy to make their plane or family connections at the airport. I see a Japanese businessman speaking in his mother tongue on a public telephone, laughing. Madhu chatted with a young mother who flew from Vancouver on the same plane and had to connect to La Guardia. He left her with the words, "You're almost home now." He has a knack for being personal with people. A young black woman with braids—an immigration officer—asked, "You're comin' home?"

"Yes," I said.

"How long you been out of the U.S.?"

"One week." Said just like a forthright American home-bred Hare Kṛṣṇa New Yorker.

"Have a nice trip," or something like that.

M. detained a bit while the woman asked him how long he was staying in the States and asked to see his return ticket. She was also glad to hear he had enough money to spend while he was in America. He told me she seemed only half-interested in what she was saying.

Now we're at Gate 98 to Newark. Śamika Ṛṣi is supposed to pick us up when we land and drive us to Pennsylvania.

So, Nārada sir, you travel with much more ease than this. I believe it. You move in your spiritual body and you don't carry luggage. While waiting for my luggage, I read my pocket-sized *Gītā*, opened at random at the ninth chapter. Kṛṣṇa says He is the ritual, the seed, immortality, death—everything. He is impartial to ordinary souls, but is especially inclined as a friend to His devotees. Then the luggage traveled around the belt and it was time to go through customs. The guy asked us if there is a central headquarters for Hare Kṛṣṇas. I said no, but we have many branches.

"But in any organization there is some kind of structure and somebody at the top."

"That's our problem," Madhu said, "we all think we're at the top."

The customs guy gave a bored, forced laugh, then let us through. What more could he do? He had already asked us if we had \$10,000 or had received any monetary gifts in Canada. What else was there to say?

I wanted to demonstrate that I could write a *Bhāgavatam* comment even while traveling, but maybe I proved the opposite. In either case, it kept me alive and interested, and definitely helped pass the time. Time to board another plane.



### Stroudsburg, PA

Hearing sweet bird songs again, although the crows are not so sweet. Maybe it's my old friend the wood thrush I'm hearing. I'm so out of touch with its song that I don't remember what bird it is. It's forty degrees and a light rain is falling. I just finished my twelfth round.

I want to talk about present writing. I don't mean writing I'm doing now, but the idea of writing by the author being present in his words. That is, he is investing his heart. Present writing allows the reader to be there with the author, to share the experience, and to see it through his or her own eyes. That's how the *Bhāgavatam* is, and we should be present enough as readers to see that.

Sometimes I practice present writing by delving into my own memories. It's hard to always draw up the heart through the pen, especially when you are bound by a theme. It can be easier to do it by leaving oneself some freedom to emote rather than to argue a point. I look for the blend of *sāstra* with the actual life I am living.

For example, during the few days I'll be here, I plan to leave the house around 5:15 A.M., just as the sky lightens. It's only a few days now before daylight savings time begins, and this morning I saw a man leaving for work at that early hour. He got into his pickup—a formidable vehicle with lights all over it—and drove off like a sheriff or some other official. His engine even had an extra roar to it. He made me feel vulnerable, a pedestrian who didn't belong on the same road as his truck. I couldn't even see his face as he drove past. Anyway, there I was with my beads, caught in the act.

He lives in "The Woods," which is a slowly developing housing development not far from Śamika Ṛṣi's house. After that quick confrontation of hurling metal and flesh, I looked more carefully at his handsome, gray house. It occurred to me that these are his possessions and that they are dear to him. He will have to die and leave them. It struck me as truth. His truck will be idle one day and he is as vulnerable as I am.

The *sāstra* tells us that facing death will give us stronger detachment, but it doesn't always seem to work that way. That's what I mean about blending *sāstra* with life as we actually live it, or closing the gap between our sincerity and our insincerity. As devotees, we're not like the man in the truck, but neither are we like the sage in Prabhupāda's story who, although he was due to live for thousands of years, didn't allow his disciples even to build him a shelter from the sun. What's the use if he was going to die any day now? What is our feeling toward our possessions and toward death—not just our intellectual position, but our emotional response? Have we settled up with the actual source of our happiness? Have we settled up with the actual source of our misery?

We know the philosophy, but do we believe it? Unless we develop love for Kṛṣṇa, then the stuff we've accumulated will drown us. Are we even trying to awaken from our illusion? Do we ask ourselves these questions?

To share sound  
sweet or not  
and light—how a poet  
loves.

We need not fear his words  
we are sharing an *āśrama*  
separate walls divide us  
but seeing Kṛṣṇa in our lives  
is the familiar melody  
when we are alone  
left to figure it out.

We are free to write  
to express what is best  
to please guru  
as we know him.

We have time to think it out  
and if we want something new it  
will come like a  
fugue

spelt backwards  
or another dance  
around awkward crepe paper  
banners hanging from the  
gym rafters.

I have no time to explain it all here.

I have to keep to the beat.

But it will come to us between the cracks  
in the sidewalk in front of Rādhā-Dāmodara's temple  
if we believe He can speak.

I took my first drive in our new Ford Econoline today from  
Śamika Ṛṣi's house to Gītā-nāgarī. It's Saturday, the day after  
Good Friday. Quite a few houses had flags depicting bunnies.  
We also saw plastic eggs hanging on strings from the trees. Saw

only one or two crucifixes, both raw wood and about six feet tall. Both had purple cloths draped around them, but one looked more primitive than the other the way it was stuck in the dirt.

Madhu and I were under the assumption that the speed limit was 55 mph, so we were pleasantly surprised to see signs on the major highways saying we could drive 65. We stopped for a breakfast of muffins, figs, bananas, and *sandesa*, which the devotees had packed for us. I told Madhu, "This breakfast is like a good conversation. You could go on and on, but . . ." and I closed the box before I overate.

By the time we arrived at Gītā-nāgarī I had a headache. I still have it, but I wanted to write.

Our hosts are courteous and attentive, Madhu is working feverishly on the van already, and here I am. What do I need? Just time and a clear head and the determination to write.



Looking for an unrehearsed moment. Taking a break from the structure of this book, even while writing it. Trying to get in touch with myself before the meetings begin.

"I tried to share, but I don't believe, I don't believe, I don't believe"—he said it again and again.

Hear from Sūta, from Śuka—what else can I say? I was probably right to structure this book in this way, and I'm sure I'll pick up the thread again soon, but for now I'm looking for a different mixture. Is that too radical a request?

Thought of writing a book like *The Men In My Life* and leading up to the one who made all the difference. It would be another way to remember my contact with guru.

Thinking it out. I will have a few spare moments this week to write, to think, despite being honored as a senior person. I am not such a great lecturer that I can hope to change people's hearts, but I should prepare to speak anyway as duty.

The ducks are swimming in the stream and  
the wind chimes swing musically.

There's no way to escape the beat  
of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That bass line  
encourages me to come up  
with my own improvised "jazz."

O Śukadeva

this age is late

and it is just before I die.

What else can I do? There seems no way around  
being what I am.

When I am a lone

alone

monk

I want to play for everyone

to find that quality

of a guy speaking alone

but universal (weak word, I know)

to touch us all.

That's the point, the  
 inviolable point  
 and somehow I know Kṛṣṇa gave me this urge  
 to play the pianola,  
 the tremolo  
 in my saffron sweatshirt—  
 midnight blues  
 that bear down on this man  
 disjointed from travel  
 moving into a new place  
 anxious about the classes  
 and who can't think too straight.  
 He's looking for taste, wants to  
 face the dissonance.



After writing all that I decided I don't much need to experiment to break beyond the structure right now. Or rather, I cannot. It makes the whole project too complex. Wait for time to settle it.

At least I will say that I may temporarily depart from this book's structure from time to time to discuss my life, but the



original structure is too good to discard. That doesn't mean it can't be expanded or extended. After all, this is just a poor man's life.

Devotees beginning to arrive. Prepare the lectures. Goldfinches at the feeder—males yellow, females drab. The females eat more seeds, are more skittish.

*April 8*

In my *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* lecture in the temple this morning, I'm preparing to lay a trip on the audience. I have been rewriting the first volume in this series, and was reminded of *Bhāgavatam* 1.1.10, which lists the ills of Kali-yuga and how the sages hoped to do good for all living beings before it got too much worse. I was impressed by the points and wrote a few down.

I don't have that kind of compassion, but I hope it's not hypocritical to at least ask myself and others to consider developing it. We are meant to do the utmost good for people by spreading the *Bhāgavatam* culture. To the degree that we are trying for that, we can also draw encouragement from this verse. No other welfare work has the same, absolute value.

Now, if I were to actually write nakedly, I suppose these thoughts would lead me to discuss my failures as a disciple, my disappointments in how we have gone on collectively since Prabhupāda's disappearance, and other such issues—that gap again between what we say we aspire for and what we are actually trying to achieve. Perhaps I am disappointed that we didn't all turn out to be *mahātmās* after all.

8:30 A.M.

Back from attending the morning program. I met with Godbrothers in a predictable way. The Institute's attendance seems small—only about twenty men and thirty women. I gave my lecture, but felt resistance. Every time I paused, I felt the painful

silence and it was hard to continue speaking. Somehow it was demanding and I couldn't feel the audience. Perhaps I felt I was being judged. I wasn't realizing the philosophy deeply. I couldn't speak from my heart.

What is it we all want? Maybe to be entertained, maybe to be loved, but the world is crying for Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and I didn't have it in me to give it to these people sitting in this room. So I closed my eyes and kept going. I wanted to be humorous, yet meaningful. Couldn't catch the flow. Even technology failed. I wanted to play a tape excerpt from Prabhupāda's lecture, introduced it, then pushed "play." But it was the wrong excerpt. Never did find the right one. Then I had to explain it the best I could.

I think I was also aware of how feeble we all were. We speak about hearing, but don't hear much. There were so few of us in that room, and the whole material world was raging out there, totally misdirected. The fact is, I don't care that much about it. I am no warrior. What was the point of sitting in a temple room with a group of devotees who look up to me and tell Prabhupāda stories? I looked around and felt these things.



4:14 P.M.

Gave my first seminar lecture. It's a writing course and I want them (and me) to get past the official expression of Kṛṣṇa consciousness into real joy, real shame. I think it went well. I asked the class to write a five-minute list based on Swamiji's saying, "It is such a nice thing." What are the nice things they have experienced in Kṛṣṇa consciousness? Then they wrote a second list of things they believed Śrīla Prabhupāda or a pure devotee experiences in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I'll read some of them out tomorrow.

Here are my lists:

Nice things I experience in KC:

- (1) *Prasādam*.
- (2) Being able to speak.
- (3) Being a big shot.
- (4) JS smiling.
- (5) Girls—but not sex with them.
- (6) Shit—being able to say that.
- (7) Dovetailing.
- (8) KC jokes.
- (9) Being honest in KC.
- (10) Being a teacher.
- (11) I like it when I have my way—okay, okay.
- (12) Doing the opposite. Huh?
- (13) Writing, writing.
- (14) Having an expert editor.
- (15) Publishing books.
- (16) Knowing you're helping mankind in the greatest thing.
- (17) Going back to Godhead. That purpose in your life.
- (18) I like being here and writing.
- (19) Lists.

Nice things I believe Śrīla Prabhupāda and pure devotees experience when they say, "It is such a nice thing":

- (1) Seeing Kṛṣṇa.

- (2) Feeling compassion for fallen souls.
- (3) Freeing others from *māyā*.
- (4) Being thrilled in bodily ecstasy.
- (5) Being in contact with Kṛṣṇa and knowing they will soon return to the spiritual world.
- (6) Happiness of leaving material family, etc., and being maintained by Kṛṣṇa.
- (7) Preaching.
- (8) Freedom from fear by awareness of Kṛṣṇa's grace.
- (9) Seeing Kṛṣṇa's hand in their lives.
- (10) Knowing Kṛṣṇa as a cowherd boy.
- (11) Tasting the nectar of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and engaging others in chanting it.

How am I connected to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*? How am I not connected to the *Bhāgavatam*? "You look skinny and you talk skinny," Śrīla Prabhupāda said to Gaurasundara dāsa. I told them that story today. I also told the story of the lean, old horse who tried to cross the river even though it saw stronger horses fail. Don't try for the impossible.

As we left the temple this afternoon Rukmavati handed me a small pot of maple syrup tapped from the trees at Gītā-nāgarī. I didn't tell her, but tapping maple syrup is one of my favorite metaphors for writing. I want to put tubes into as many Kṛṣṇa conscious sources as possible so I can catch the syrup and then serve it as Kṛṣṇa conscious writing. I want to tap dreams, the source of the lists, automatic writing, and test it all for sweetness before I put it in my book.

*April 9*

Yes, it's good to be linked to the *Bhāgavatam* and to be reminded that we are not the center of the universe. I remembered that yesterday, too, when talking to Godbrothers outside the temple room. Sometimes we get wrapped up in our own

identity and in the ping-pong game of conversation that we get lost. The *Bhāgavatam* constantly corrects our vision and focuses us on Bhagavān, the source of everything.

O Bhagavān, I wish to know You, I wish to serve You, and I have heard that You don't advent on earth because You need more servants. You don't need friends to support You, and You fear no enemies. You are all-powerful. You *accept* service from living entities for *their* benefit. Yes. I remember.

We discussed vulnerability. Being open can hurt. It seems crazy to open yourself, and we would prefer to guard against wounds, but it is vital as a devotee to peel off those protective layers and go before Kṛṣṇa. Refusing to be vulnerable is too high a price to pay for emotional comfort. You lose out on so many tender exchanges with Kṛṣṇa. You also become deadened.

I feel deadened today. Headache starting. That's all right because I have my array of medicines to deal with it. No time to write on the *Bhāgavatam* verses for the next few days, so this. Looking for life. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

A Godbrother embraced me this morning. My *daṇḍa* got stuck between us. I felt his body sweaty from *kirtana*. He said, "I'd like to steal some of your time later." Be vulnerable. I can't be anything else anyway. This image: Mercutio stabbed to death by sword thrust said about the wound, ". . . 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but 'tis enough. T'will serve."

She writes to ask,  
 "Do you still write poems?"  
 No, now I embroider  
 literary peccadilloes  
 and dance with headaches.

Big drops of silly April snow fall all day. It's not sticking. Devotees who live here are sick of winter, looking for warmer days.

3:50 P.M.—Written in temple room  
after my seminar lecture

I gave them the assignment, “How do you feel when Śrīla Prabhupāda said that those who have taken seriously to Kṛṣṇa consciousness are not ordinary, they must have cultured Kṛṣṇa consciousness in a past life”?

They mainly thought they had fallen down. We weren’t able to finish.

Hey, I was a yogī?

Well, didn’t I know it!

I was a spiritualist,  
maybe even an incarnation!

Don’t joke, man. I asked them to write how they felt. And what about you?

Me? I don’t feel much. Anything I say would sound like self-flattery. The truth? I failed to go back to Godhead.

Kṛṣṇa gave me another chance.

It doesn’t matter so much to me because just look at me now?

Still, it’s an interesting topic about which we could write volumes, and that’s the purpose of this course.

Two or three senior Godbrothers in attendance, but they aren’t writing.

“You are *sanātana*,”

Śrīla Prabhupāda said. Did he

mean I was Sanātana

Gosvāmī reincarnated?

Or just that I was eternal

like any worm,

a fallen soul?

The phone rings.

It’s astral projection

from a past life when

your wife was a roach

so just clear your head of

strange conceptions  
 if you want to go back to Godhead.  
 I was a rocket jazz poet, a spiritualist on the Lower East Side,  
 born again  
 into ISKCON.  
 "Not ordinary," no, but not pure either.  
 Soon to die  
 like last time.  
 O Lord, take me to You.  
 I want only that.

April 10

We left off in our *Bhāgavatam* narrative with Nārada discussing the two kinds of literature, that which is well composed but lacks direct God consciousness, and that which "is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of the name, fame, forms, pastimes, etc., of the unlimited Supreme Lord." Nārada said that even literature which gives knowledge of self-realization "does not look well if devoid of a conception of the Infallible [God]." There is no value to making more descriptions of karma, "which are naturally painful from the very beginning and transient by nature, if they are not utilized for the devotional service of the Lord?" (*Bhāg.* 1.5.12) I am ready to begin *Bhāgavatam* 1.5.13 at midnight tomorrow.



## Text 13

*atho mahā-bhāga bhavān amogha-dṛk  
 śuci-śravāḥ satya-rato dhṛta-vrataḥ  
 urukramasyākhila-bandha-muktaye  
 samādhinānusmara tad-viceṣṭitam*

O Vyāsadeva, your vision is completely perfect. Your good fame is spotless. You are firm in vow and situated in truthfulness. And thus you can think of the pastimes of the Lord in trance for the liberation of the people in general from all material bondage.

## Comment

In this verse Nārada praises Vyāsa as if to infuse him with confidence after his reprimand. He assures Vyāsadeva that he is competent and empowered to present the best kind of writing. Because he was truthful and followed his vows, he “can think of the pastimes of the Lord in trance for the liberation of the people.”

In his purport Śrīla Prabhupāda discusses the natural desire people have to read books. Unfortunately, they read only books about sense gratification. People want to inquire into the unknown, but because they know nothing about transcendence, they think they can satisfy their desire by reading mundane mysteries or “mundane poems and philosophical speculations more or less under the influence of *māyā* . . . ”

Nowadays, books are not as popular as videos, TV, or movies. People are interested in entertaining themselves according to *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*. Even their religious literature is sectarian and based on physical identification. In short, there is a crying need for the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* culture.



Compose that literature,  
 "Give a page of BTG," Śrīla Prabhupāda  
 used to say,  
 and don't write nonsense.  
 Give even one page of Kṛṣṇa  
 conscious writing and their  
 lives can become perfect.

Write in such a way that they become simultaneously attracted and liberated, drawn naturally to Kṛṣṇa's loving service. Those of us who have been trained by the pure devotee spiritual master should engage in this kind of welfare activity.

Here is Śrīla Prabhupāda's call to devotee writers and would-be writers:

There are thousands and thousands of literary men all over the world, and they have created many, many thousands of literary works for the information of the people in general for thousands and thousands of years. Unfortunately none of them have brought peace and tranquillity on the earth. This is due to a spiritual vacuum in those literatures; therefore the Vedic literatures, especially the *Bhagavad-gītā* and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, are specifically recommended to suffering humanity to bring about the desired effect of liberation from the pangs of material civilization, which is eating the vital part of human energy.

—*Bhāg.* 1.5.13, purport

Śrīla Prabhupāda refers specifically to *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* because these books describe or present Kṛṣṇa's words and activities, "which alone can satisfy the hankering desires of the living being for eternal peace and liberation from miseries." This means we should both distribute these two books and we should compose books that present the same conclusion. We should popularize the *Bhāgavatam* by writing relevant essays, poems, newspaper articles, novels, plays, diaries, and commentaries on the *Bhāgavatam* themes, and in this way, supply what is missing from human society.

Śrīla Prabhupāda states that only liberated souls can describe the Lord's pastimes, yet he has ordered us to write articles exposing the materialist's cheating. We cannot claim that our writing provides us with direct *darśana* of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes as Vyāsadeva and the Six Gosvāmīs experienced, but it might provide us with the tools by which we can advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness as we preach.



I remember when ISKCON began, and I began in ISKCON, there was a ban on reading outside literature. It was scandalous for someone to read a book other than Prabhupāda's at the storefront. Gradually, we have come to accommodate various kinds of nondevotee books, and it's not unusual to find collections of them in the devotees' homes. It seems impossible to completely steer clear of their influence. Therefore, we now see devotees finding ways to dovetail their interest in self-help, healing, spirituality, computers, gardening, and all sorts of things, in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We have become more permissive because our interests are not solidly fixed at Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet. One devotee wrote that he read vast amounts of literature before coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but now "it's next to impossible for me to

spend much time in such reading. It is truly dry and empty. I don't have a reason to look at it, but if I did, I wouldn't last long."

He goes on to say that he finds his spiritual master's writings "gripping." Even his beloved Plato has dimmed in comparison.

Somehow I found his statements startling. I've heard over and over again that chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa changes the heart, yet to see such changes in others—and myself—and in terms of our major attachments, is surprising.

Just as well because Prabhupāda does not compromise in this purport. If we read material that is not centered on Kṛṣṇa, we will become entangled in subtle sense impressions which will carry us away from our identity as Kṛṣṇa's servants. That means we will take another body. Although we tend to revere great authors for their ability to express themselves and to see into the human heart, Nārada assures us that their literature has no value if it awakens only mundane emotion and does not deliver us love of God.

Our minds are composed of layers of sense impressions that extend beyond this one lifetime. If we continue to add layers to what is already there, how will we ever strip ourselves of material designation? We are looking for our core identity; we shouldn't continue to cover it even as we try to uncover it.

I know there is an element of hypocrisy in what I am saying because I myself read "outside" literature in the name of serving Prabhupāda. I can only justify myself by saying that I am trying to use what I read in Kṛṣṇa's service.

Aside from reading such books there is the question of what we write. It is important for devotees to write because people have nothing but mundane literature from which to choose. Often I find in ISKCON, however, that writers are afraid to express their Kṛṣṇa conscious sentiments, or even the philosophy, in idioms other than the usual Vedic model. As long as we remain faithful to the *paramparā*, I do not see the fault in it. Breaking with tradition means breaking with the conclusion;

expressing ourselves in our mother tongue is not breaking with the tradition but fulfilling it. I cannot imagine that the *ācāryas* will not be satisfied to see people's bookshelves lined with novels, poems, dramas, diaries, literary sketches, essays, and any other genre, all explaining Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Why should Kṛṣṇa conscious writing be defined only as scripture? The scriptures are the matrix from which more writing will come. It is natural that ISKCON devotees in the present and future generations will speak to their cultures in their own languages and through their own genres. This is not compromise but a potent form of tactical preaching.

Devotees who write by making cultural expressions do not do so only to preach; they also want to express the heart of Kṛṣṇa as they understand it. This is a further reason why they cannot reject their cultural condition in their writing. If they do not express their hearts, but try only for a calculated effect, such writing often falls flat as cheap proselytizing. Few people are moved by it. People are won over by genuine expressions, not just writing calculated to convert them.

Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged his disciples to write about Kṛṣṇa consciousness within the first months of their introduction to it. He felt we were qualified, or he felt that it would purify us, and he trained us to see things according to a true perspective. He states this in his purport: "Śrīla Vyāsadeva or his representatives are qualified because they are rightly trained to see things in true perspective." It didn't take us long to understand that we were not our bodies, that Kṛṣṇa was supreme, that devotional service was the main work of life, and that we should be faithful to our spiritual master's teachings. With such initial knowledge we fought *māyā* and learned to preach.

For examples of such early writings, we can study the first editions of *Back to Godhead* magazine. Although the contributors had only been practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness for a few months, we had already adopted Prabhupāda's mission to preach

to our fellow New Yorkers in a language we all shared. When a devotee writes like this under Śrīla Prabhupāda's order, he simultaneously attains self-purification and devotional writing intended as preaching. There is no duality between the two.

Noon. Snuck a little time away from other duties to return to the format we were following at Śaraṇāgati: quote a verse, give a summary, field a few questions. It feels like consuming a small meal. We have to go on and work, but return soon for another.

Talked to a Godbrother about community. I had to wonder about his definition of love when it seems that so many people under his charge aren't feeling it. Aside from that conversation, I am ornery, I know. I keep thinking about the individual. I don't like to think of myself as part of a program they call "The Community." Sure, we're all interested in community, but I simply don't share the vision of it developing as many people see it. I suppose it doesn't matter; they have already figured out how I will fit in. The *Bhāgavatam* says the monk (and I'll add monk-writer) needs to be somewhat apart from society in order to function. He wants to contribute to society, he needs society, but he can't be controlled by society.

I don't want to think I am better or worse or right or wrong. I just want to live. I am not working in fields, not on the altar, I am writing at this desk. Does that fit in somewhere? Do I have a say over *where* it fits in? Or am I always to be controlled and subject to a hierarchy of authority? Is that Vedic?

Let the writers and monks work on their own. They won't work against community development. Let them go to the heart of themselves unhampered by others' definition of what they are supposed to contribute.

My Godbrother, I don't think, would have agreed with this. He suggested that we should allow ourselves to be defined and pushed by others, that that would help us surrender. No, I can't do it. Who can tell me in my own particular life and nature what

surrender means? We have already damaged so many people by our trying to control their natures and their personal desires to find Kṛṣṇa in their lives that I can no longer agree to it.

My Godbrother says we shouldn't withdraw and form subcultures. We shouldn't draw our needs from society while hanging back from contributing in ways the society so obviously needs. We should enter the community wholeheartedly, in love. Sounds good, but what does that actually come down to in practice? I don't know. If we don't feel love within the community, we will search for lust.

Still, I won't embrace the town hall meeting, the commune as we have known it. Yes, that's it. I don't want the commune life in the name of community. I want to perch myself on the edge of society, living to discover the truth and then sharing my findings with society. I'm not against community—I want our ISKCON communities to be prosperous and loving—but not at the expense of the individual.

We have seen many such marginal figures throughout history. That is, we have read their books. Every company needs company men, but they also need the objective voice from those who may not be company men but who are willing to warm themselves from the distance in the fire of society. Let them come in from the cold and accept that warmth, these harmless, marginal figures that help us grow toward wholeness.

What if such persons can write (or in some other way express) an honest chronicle and provide unlimited news from the spiritual world? What if in order to do that they must remain politically and socially neutral, not tied to a cause and its concerns? What if their frontier means seeing birds and twigs and roads and fields without impediment?

Ha, what fool asks for  
outskirts as his turf?

Where is love? We all want it  
even more than the post of administrator or poet laureate,

and of course we want meals,  
 wives or not, cabins or not, but books, a fireplace—  
 all without selling our souls.  
 “Yond Cassius has a lean  
 and hungry look. . . . Such men are dangerous.”  
 No, don't starve yourself  
 O artist  
 happy painter of colors on canvas.  
 Celebrate Kṛṣṇa consciousness  
 even from the edges.

### *En route to temple, 3 P.M.*

We're a little late—the car had heart failure and died. Waiting for the van to warm up. Sign on road: “Bridge may be icy.” At any moment . . .

No theme in this course except listening to Prabhupāda speak on tape and finding a heartfelt response. Dear reader, will you go with this interlude and not give up on this book? It's too hard to teach a seminar and write on the *Bhāgavatam* at the same time.

### *In the seminar hall*

Today's assignment was to write of a time you were made to feel insignificant and how this was a good Kṛṣṇa conscious lesson. We played a tape excerpt where Prabhupāda gave the example that everything comes from the infinite Goloka planet and within all this immense space, there is the *brahmajoyti*, then the material universes, and within them, earth. On earth is this one country, and in this country so many cities, and actually, we are very insignificant. Yet we think we are God. I wrote this:

Oh, at the GBC meetings I used to feel tiny. Big members would tell of their preaching and would lecture expertly. I was constantly being pounded by own shortcomings. Maybe that was good for me, but I no longer subject myself to it.

Too reduced  
 and jumped ship during guru reform days.  
 Geez  
 I can barely recall  
 when—I mean,  
 do I avoid that topic?  
 One time I felt small when I realized . . .  
 I'm just the monitor in this class. I don't have to answer the  
 questions.

I feel small  
 when I eat too much and realize that yes, I'm going to die.  
 You got to be small to fit through that tiny opening at birth  
 and at death  
 so give up your excess "fat."  
 Small is beautiful they say,  
 especially when you're smaller than a blade of grass.  
 "You do not know how  
 insignificant you are,  
 yet you think you are God."  
 Melt down, you who think you weigh in at two hundred  
 pounds (or even 130). You are only one ten-thousandth the tip  
 of a hair.





## Text 14

tato 'nyathā kiñcana yad vivakṣataḥ  
 pṛthag dṛśas tat-kṛta-rūpa-nāmabhiḥ  
 na karhicit kvāpi ca duḥsthitā matir  
 labheta vātāhata-naur ivāśpadam

Whatever you desire to describe that is separate in vision from the Lord simply reacts, with different forms, names and results, to agitate the mind as the wind agitates a boat which has no resting place.

## Comment

A boat that has no resting place is always troubled by the wind. It rocks back and forth unsteadily. Such is the nature of the agitated mind. "These are not stories," Śrīla Prabhupāda used to say. Do we want to remain in a rough sea? Why then do we describe things "separate in vision from the Lord"?

The mind is forever searching for novelty. There's the Book-of-the-Month Club selling three selections at a time, and if you buy them, you get another book free—so many new voices in American literature. Even here at Gītā-nāgari people give me books, thinking I might want to sample their writing style. Someone wrote, "Over the past few months I have collected a few secular books written by thoughtful people who are trying to fathom the meaning of their lives. Good writers are good observers, and some have the courage to look at themselves honestly." She sent *The Measure of My Days*, by Florida Pier Scott-Maxwell, and *The Notebooks of David Ignatow*.

From someone else: "Here is a book I've been meaning to send you called *Opium*, by Jean Cocteau. I've had it for years and always find it mystifying and fascinating, mired in the mode of ignorance though it may be. There are some far-out drawings in the back. . . . I hope it isn't a waste of your time to have a look at it."

I've already got Steinbeck's *Journal of a Novel*, and then yesterday, a devotee sent me *Letters Between Friends*, by artists Bonnard and Matisse. The winds rock the boat back and forth, separate in vision from the Lord.

Nārada, of course, is not even talking about nondevotee books. He is referring to Vyāsadeva's *Purāṇas* in which he has recommended the worship of various demigods. "Therefore, Śrīla Vyāsadeva should not have compiled any *Purāṇas* other than the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* because a slight deviation from that may create havoc for self-realization. If a slight deviation can create havoc, then what to speak of a deliberate expansion of the ideas separate from the Absolute Truth Personality of Godhead."

Don't worship all those gods but concentrate on Kṛṣṇa. Don't be interested in variety outside of Kṛṣṇa consciousness but taste only the variety of flavors available in Vaiṣṇava exchange. Some say curiosity is important; Nārada says self-realization means loving the Lord in transcendental love only. By watering the root of *kṛṣṇa-tattva*, all separate interests will be satisfied.

A Godbrother wrote me a personal letter and said, "At the root of all this, I think, is simply a lack of attachment to hearing and chanting. Ultimately I need to be *much* more serious and focused on hearing, chanting, and remembering Kṛṣṇa. That's the real thing, and it includes everything else. But that, of course, is not merely a matter of a quick acknowledgment. Something has to change. One has to get serious and work at it."

Work at it, not by reading *Opium*, I'm sure.

O Kṛṣṇa. I plan and measure my energy to see when the next headache is coming, and in the meantime I express myself.

I think of a rowboat and  
 how it splashes and slaps against  
 the waves—so noisy!  
 The boat drifts from the dock  
 and the rowers are at risk  
 in the wind.

Where is the rudder  
 and the expert captain,  
 the mapped-out course?  
 The motor?  
 The seas are rough  
 and sometimes we shouldn't even venture  
 out to sea.  
 Facing danger means facing the last hours  
 of a life. Is there time to spare on anything but Kṛṣṇa?

One could say that Vyāsadeva was engaged in process writing. It was his process to go through the "mistake" of writing on subject matters other than *bhakti*. Of course, Vyāsadeva wasn't a groping explorer, not a conditioned soul. An ordinary process writer claims he has to go through all the steps and even his mistakes are meaningful in terms of his growth to maturity. I like to think of Vyāsadeva a little like that, searching for the ultimate expression of his heart in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, not finding it easily, then being directed by his spiritual master. His guru does not reject him for his error, but stays with him and gives him the confidence to pursue the highest path. That's one way to look at it.

However we see this pastime, we are in no position to compare ourselves to Vyāsadeva or to judge him. Neither can we understand why Nārada seems to condemn him. What we *can* understand is the instruction that we need to focus on Kṛṣṇa and only Kṛṣṇa. Whatever we have done to dilute our Kṛṣṇa consciousness must be rectified now.

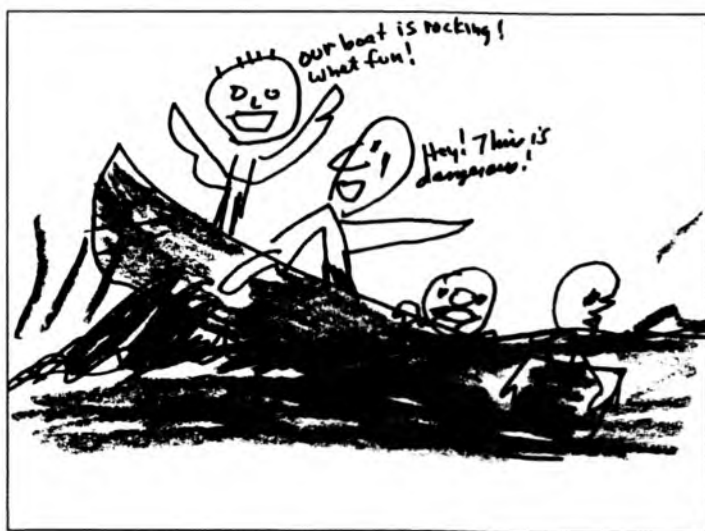
We know that since Kali-yuga's people were unable to follow pure *bhakti*, they needed the Vedic literature other than the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to direct them upward. People are more inclined to enjoy than to perform austerity, and no one can force others to give up sense gratification against their will. Force only leads people to become atheists, which is a worse position than practicing *karma-kāṇḍīya*. Vyāsadeva provided them with a gradual process

by which they could embrace religious culture while still enjoying matter. When they were situated in *dharma*, he took them to the *Upaniṣads* to help them understand Brahman. By writing the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, his process will be complete.

In that sense, Vyāsadeva's previous work was not a waste of time—although it is a waste of time for souls to delay in the material world. There is little time left in Kali-yuga. We need the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

In this verse Prabhupāda also speaks of the confusion caused by teaching people to worship the demigods. He says it leads to pantheism. *Pantheism* comes from the Greek for “everything is God.” Prabhupāda writes that pantheism “creates many religious sects detrimental to the progress of the principles of the *Bhāgavatam* . . . ”

Prabhupāda writes in the same spirit in which Nārada preaches to Vyāsa. He stresses only pure devotion to Kṛṣṇa and leaves no room for other conclusions. Although Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions pantheism just briefly, we are left with the understanding of its inferiority as a religious system.



I stand, arms akimbo, on the porch behind the screen door and shout, "Madhu!" The electric saw buzzes, but when it pauses for a moment, he hears me. Madhu's young assistants tell him I'm calling. "Prabhupāda just took his bath and has no shirt. Where are his clothes? He's waiting." Madhu runs off to get them and I go back to the room where Śrīla Prabhupāda sits waiting. I suspect they haven't washed and ironed his clothes yet. I have been rotating three sets of heavier winter cloth, but now I have to dip into the collection of his lighter silks. Madhu returns and sure enough, the person who was supposed to wash and iron the clothes didn't do it. What can I do but put on the lighter silks? This is how spring began for Prabhupāda this year. I wrapped a *cādar* around his shoulders for warmth.

Thought of Monk today  
as a metaphor for trust  
and love  
for the process.  
I trust in love, the smell of the piano keys  
the Kṛṣṇa conscious tune  
hammered out alone. Deep chords,  
notes going somewhere—  
but where? The discovery during the alone walk,  
the alone melody  
looking for the song that brings space and  
understanding.

Yes, he said, we want to understand you,  
but you also have to allow us to push you  
to surrender  
to us.  
No, then there's no place  
for me at my piano, seeking through the chords.

They say I don't stand a ghost of a chance  
to become a pure lover of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Maybe  
they're right—my love is poor, but I still seek spontaneity.  
Am I a sentimental fool?

Not even a ghost of a chance  
but They rule my heart,  
and I forgive myself  
and others  
and I steer to Kṛṣṇa, opening,  
seeking, renouncing the applause  
(or lack of it)  
in this melody.

The problem is that I once stood in an apartment in a slum,  
looking out at the street, and my heart ached. I was in love, not  
with a person, but with the ordinary world. I had no friends, not  
much youth left, not even any food, but thoughts of that piano  
and the smoke rising from the chimneys of those cold tenements.  
I dreamt I had been oppressed for so long by Lt. Richardson, my  
father—but now I was free on the Lower East Side and hope

my hopes  
had gone down the drain  
with the roaches.

I had only sense gratification and blindness,  
and even then I was alone to sing the blues.

O Swamiji, you came into my life and I *wanted* to surrender,  
I loved you and  
still do.

2:40 P.M.

Riding to my fourth class. One left after this. "You get so  
much out of one sentence by Śrīla Prabhupāda," a lady from  
New Vrindaban said. Sometimes I feel elated when it goes well  
and sometimes let down, but right now I just feel it's hard to

write in a small, swaying car on a winding road. This is the first day at Gītā-nāgarī that it has been warm. I haven't seen much of the spring here. "Not one inch walk on leg." I am a car man all the way.

"Would you like me to write down my gripes? Here's a list of them. Pick one you'd like me to write on."

"No thanks, unless you *need* to tell me."

Another said he's going to a counselor.

We are *all* going to

bump over the hill entrance road to this farm.



## Text 15

jugupsitaṁ dharma-kṛte 'nūsāsatāḥ  
svabhāva-raktasya mahān vyatikramāḥ  
yad-vākyato dharma itītarāḥ sthito  
na manyate tasya nivāraṇaṁ janāḥ

The people in general are naturally inclined to enjoy, and you have encouraged them in that way in the name of religion. This is verily condemned and is quite unreasonable. Because they are

guided under your instructions, they will accept such activities in the name of religion and will hardly care for prohibitions.

## Comment

Nārada criticizes Vyāsadeva's compilation of Vedic literature which is geared toward attaining fruitive results. His reprimand includes the strongest word, *jugupsitam*, "condemned". Although the *karma-kāṇḍīya* literature presents a Vedic plan to engage people in sense gratification within religious codes, Nārada rejects the plan in his instructions to Vyāsadeva. This does not mean that Nārada is rejecting the Vedic intelligence; rather, he is giving a more confidential instruction to Vyāsadeva, one that reveals the purpose behind the *Vedas*. He asserts that Vyāsadeva's attempt to raise people to Kṛṣṇa consciousness by the gradual process will not actually work because people are too motivated by sense pleasure. Therefore, they will be clever enough to avoid the forms of renunciation carefully built into the Vedic plan in the name of religion. Ultimately, the people will abuse the *Vedas*, taking what they want from the Vedic tree and rejecting what they don't want, and never discovering the purpose behind the rituals and prohibitions. Nārada's words foreshadow the appearance of Buddha, who rejected the *Vedas* all together in order to stop animal slaughter.

Materialistic men do not like to hear about renunciation, yet renunciation is required if we are to make advancement in human life. If the *Vedas* offer a choice to such *karmīs*, and permit them to remain in the lower levels of consciousness by avoiding surrender to Kṛṣṇa, the *karmīs* will do so and they will not actually make advancement from material life to spiritual life.

An example of how people draw mundane principles from spiritual literature can be found in the *Mahābhārata*. The heart of the *Mahābhārata* is the *Bhagavad-gītā*, yet people tend to be more attracted to the treatises on politics, economics, and sense gratification than in understanding the principal topic, surrender to



Kṛṣṇa. Therefore Nārada points out that not only do the people become compromised in their search for happiness, but the *Vedas* have provided them the grounds upon which to make the compromise. Thus he advises Vyāsadeva “to directly proclaim that the prime necessity of human life is to realize one’s eternal relationship with the Lord and thus surrender unto Him without delay.”

In the last paragraph of his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda acknowledges that the Vedic scheme for engaging *karmis* may be applicable for some persons. Kṛṣṇa also teaches a step-by-step approach in the *Bhagavad-gītā* when He says that those attached to fruitive work should not be discouraged from their occupations but gradually elevated to self-realization. “This is sometimes applicable for those who are only dry empiric philosophers without spiritual realization. But those who are in the devotional line need not be always so advised.”

Nārada’s vision on how to preach to conditioned souls is sensitive, strong, and farsighted. Śrīla Prabhupāda had a similar strength in his preaching. In his last purport sentence, Prabhupāda speaks of advising a devotee differently than a nondevotee. Everyone needs to be encouraged and instructed, but the preaching should be geared according to the hearer’s level of commitment to the devotional path. Lord Kṛṣṇa teaches a similar principle in the twelfth chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā* when He says if we cannot always think of Him in spontaneous love, then we should follow *vaidhi-bhakti*. If we cannot follow the rules and regulations, then at least sacrifice to help those engaged in spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If we cannot do even that, then we should try to perform welfare work and cultivate knowledge. In His conclusion, however, Kṛṣṇa rejects the gradual upliftment of a conditioned soul by engaging him in his material propensity. Kṛṣṇa’s final word is that we should give up all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Him.

Those who aspire to devotional service are above the ordinary people. They are willing to follow the regulative principles, and

although they may still feel a desire to enjoy their senses, they restrain themselves. By Lord Caitanya's mercy, they soon taste spiritual pleasure by practicing *bhakti* and especially by chanting and hearing Kṛṣṇa's holy names. As their attraction to Kṛṣṇa increases, they become more and more detached from matter.

Those who aspire to devotional service are advised not to disturb those who do not, but who prefer to engage themselves in fruitive work. A renunciant should not encourage others to renounce work. "But those who are in the devotional line need not be always so advised." This is a spirited and compassionate statement. It is an expert and saving instruction to those who want to be sincere and who wish to understand the import of the *Vedas*. The *Vedas* deal mainly with the three modes of material nature, and because they are filled with flowery language promising heavenly pleasures and other rewards, we can become caught in following the prescribed ritualistic activities and lose sight of the purpose. Thus Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to rise above the modes of nature and the flowery language and simply surrender to Him.

When Kṛṣṇa speaks like this, the materialists may become disturbed. They point to texts in the *Vedas* and insist on their definition of *dharma*. Often when we ask them to explain the meaning of *Bhagavad-gītā* they say, "We must perform our family duties," or, "We should follow the *dharma* of our *varṇa* and *āśrama*." Rarely do they accept the actual conclusion.

Kṛṣṇa disturbed Arjuna's concepts of *dharma*, which included the rules and regulations of *kṣatriya* life, and instead instructed him in the purpose behind his prescribed duties. Similarly, Śrīla Prabhupāda compassionately cuts through misdirected and misguided concepts, Vedic or otherwise, and delivers the understanding of pure *bhakti*. Following Lord Caitanya's mood, he did not consider our qualification to receive his instructions, but distributed both knowledge and the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra to anyone who would take it—wherever there was even a spark of willingness.

Because it is our conditioned nature to enjoy, the expert spiritual master replaces material enjoyment with transcendental enjoyment. Immediately Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us the higher taste of *prasādam* instead of *bhoga*, devotional music and dance instead of rock 'n' roll, beautiful Kṛṣṇa conscious poetry instead of the poetry of despair, and practical work aimed at pleasing Kṛṣṇa rather than meaningless jobs in the material world.

He did not give us full access to the *Vedas* because he recognized the trap they might become for those who could not understand their conclusion. The *Bhagavad-gītā* describes the Vedic tree with its intricate weaving of branches and twigs, rituals and prohibitions, in which a conditioned soul might live forever without making his way to the root. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us only the point: Kṛṣṇa is God and we are meant to serve Him. He did not provide us with a method to misuse religion, and in fact he did not provide us with a religion at all. He simply gave us a process by which to become purified lovers of Kṛṣṇa. He saved us from necessarily having to fall into the compromise of religion that Nārada condemns. We do not always recognize how great a gift Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us.



Yes, I admit I too have a tendency to enjoy. Here's a list of ways I do it:

(1) I wear *khādi*, the crudest cloth, to show off that I am renounced. That is, I like to be appreciated.

(2) I write and justify my interest in nondevotee books by saying I am learning writing techniques.

(3) I'm skinny, so I eat more than I need, quoting Prabhupāda, who criticized skinny disciples. (He also criticized fat ones.)

(4) I dovetail.

(5) One devotee wrote that he suspects innovations in Kṛṣṇa consciousness—distrusts KC rock bands, feeding the poor, going back to college, things appended with “for preaching.” He says he'd rather err on the side of caution.

Verily condemned.

Play it safe.

Dull heads—take a risk?

Every man for himself must decide.

Well, there's my list. Śrīla Prabhupāda lectured on 1.5.15 at New Vrindaban in 1969. I want to find it and hear it. He chuckled, he pushed gently, he ordered, he cajoled. When Rāyārāma did not surrender he said, “He was not sincere.”

Verily condemned—the bottom line. Those who are conservative have a longer list of the verily condemned. They don't like things Prabhupāda never taught directly or stamped “Kṛṣṇa conscious.” We could say such literal following is also condemned because it doesn't require the use of the brain or agony over how to surrender. Who knows? To err on the side of caution—anyway, why disturb *anyone's* mind? We all do what we have to do. Just don't engage in sense gratification. We wouldn't want Nārada-Prabhupāda coming up to us and telling us that we had misled ourselves and others or that what we are doing has nothing to do with pure *bhakti*. We don't want to cheat ourselves, so we must look to our motives, both the liberals and the

conservatives. If we are motivated by hardheartedness (selfishness) in the name of pleasing guru and Kṛṣṇa, we are cheating. We should look to see the truth.

"Is it my desire that the devotees be disturbed?" Śrīla Prabhupāda replied.

Don't let *anyone* influence you more than you influence yourself, someone advised me, not him nor her nor the man in the bulletproof vest, not Henry the Eighth,

or Miller or Monk,

Travesty The Trappist,

the girl on high,

the artist buxom and transfixed,

the under-rivals, the plumber, the underwriter gang—

no, they should not even rule in your dreams.

*You* do it, the Swami wrote me, and don't listen to the others. *You do what you know is right and best.*

I just wanted them to listen to Śrīla Prabhupāda's tapes. Is that so liberal?

Oh, inner self, release.

We justify ourselves until Nārada comes to collar us. Does that make the conservatives right that we should not have dared?

What is a bold spirit in comparison to a mud dullard? Can we be accused of *not* being bold and of losing an opportunity to serve? We can only judge by the results.

Don't give begrudgingly like food spared by tyrants in times of war. We are meant to help the people, not kill them by neglect.

A rock band played at Norfolk and a sailor came out and joined our movement. Maybe he does need to go back to college. Who can say? What will repressing him accomplish? Some need counselors, and some are helped. And this guy in his saffron hood wants to help them so he can justify his free lunch. He sings his song of six pence and saddles on his duties. It's his *sankirtana* and he's sure it won't lead him to planets where men in dark glasses live and smoke and play jazz tunes until their

karma turns, and live out their blues-filled lives in that way. He has higher aspirations: pure *bhajana*, pure service, pure love of God and Vaiṣṇavas, and no compromise of that.

I daydream they can get me, those conservatives. They can call me on the carpet and say, "Where were you on the night of the thirteenth?" Where were you when the lune eclipsed and the comet smudged? Don't you know what Prabhupāda *wants*? Here is the proof in this essay (or bulletin).

I gulp. I walk alone. I trip up. I don't want to go much farther. No one should follow my example.

He said you have to show them love and then they will follow. Keep utmost personal integrity and set an example. People will follow the example. Teach the ideals. Push them to do more than they can. They'll find their limits are bigger than they thought.

That other one said it was best to love within a smaller group. He wants to help people one-to-one. He doesn't assume he can lead a whole society by his ideals.

But they don't agree, these two voices. One goes left and the other right, then because of their differences they decide to form a committee to study the problem. After all, alone we are prone to excesses and mistakes, but together . . .

And we compromise and shave it down, find the necessary, or our definition of it, and we no longer hide in our assumed specialness. Let it all come out, darling, and we will decide together what is best for all of us.

"That's what I don't like," he said. And that was a third opinion. Form a new committee to discuss it?

Geez, all the man wanted was a little cornmeal to feed his kids. He was a beggar, after all.

Srila Prabhupāda said he had loving children without the botheration of a wife. Without the botheration of strife, he wants to climb Mt. Everest. I am talking through the sides of my mouth so I don't name names. And there's another reason: I am

not writing propaganda. A little ambivalence never hurt anyone. Rather, it lets these things come through bigger than life itself. I read that in a book on art, in a conversation between a painter and a curator:

Peter stated that it was important for the intent of the artist *not* to be absolutely clear. If the intent is clear, the work becomes only propaganda. Ambiguity is important. If the work reveals only the artist's intention, it is less than what it could be. The work becomes important when the meanings contained are greater than what the artist had in mind when he or she created the work. Ambiguity helps the work transcend itself.

—*Art & Soul: Notes on Creating*, by Audrey Flack

Yes, I picked up that gold from a filthy place, it's true. Should I put it on the Internet? Let me keep it simple and straight, repeating the pure *bhakti* taught by my spiritual master. He said the reason Kṛṣṇa advented was because Brahmā prayed to Him, and because He wants to fight. He sent His devotees from the spiritual world to engage in mock battle with Him. Far-out. Everything is accounted for. No qualms, no regrets. That's the only way to live. Today is another chance to achieve it.

Hare Kṛṣṇas are family, although they often disagree. We sit in each other's midst holding our own secrets too.

Secrets

secrete the

truth onto this page,

drop by drop

blood

of the free spirit.

Put another log on the nonlogical wood stove at

Śaraṇāgati and

break forth to express

what is beyond limited truth. Let words

sit on the page undisturbed. O Kṛṣṇa

Kṛṣṇa—that word contained in essence  
 in essays  
 is our salvation  
 in these complicated times.

Everyone these days has a theory on how best to preach (and how best not to preach). Everyone knows just what to do. Some of us avoid the meat-grinder, although we're flowers too.

We used to think the way to the top was through the ISKCON hierarchy. Now we know it is obedience to guru. If someone says he doesn't accept innovations because he's loyal to Śrīla Prabhupāda, he still has to choose which instructions to follow. No one can do *everything* Prabhupāda said, even in the name of loyalty. Prabhupāda said we should live in the city to preach, we should live in the country to set an example, we should have hope

but often our hopes have gone rancid  
 like bad breath  
 and poor prose,

or too many neat, orderly essays written as official organs of an organization playing it safe. Where is unerring truth? We're *all* looking for it. May we find it in a final fortissimo, our ode to our morning *japa*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda lectured on *Bhāgavatam* 1.5.15 at New Vrindaban in 1969. He told the story of the boatman and the wedding party, and how their anchor was stuck in the mud. Similarly, if we prosecute religious duties with the anchor of sense gratification stuck deep in our hearts, we won't attain Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda also criticized temples that used demigod worship to make money. "Your god is here," they advertise, and pious people pray for material blessings. *Jugupsitam*: this is verily condemned.



#### 4 P.M., After class

American free-verse  
 poet, thoughtful poet—  
 when you die  
 you remain a poet!  
 Swamiji said that.  
 I thought he meant a poet in the  
 spiritual world, because there too you  
 compose songs on the way home  
 not from the temple but from the pasturing ground  
 or the forest  
 or the banks of the Yamunā.  
 You sing of Kṛṣṇa's feats—He killed Agha  
 in a flash! He danced with the *gopīs*  
 and you should have seen His beauty.  
 There is no one like  
 Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

My seminar course is over. It was nice ending on this warm day. The 4 P.M. *ārati* was just beginning and Mother Kaulini opened the wooden Deity doors, but I couldn't stay to see Them. There was another class about to begin.

It occurred to me as I finished the class that sometimes I like to imitate Prabhupāda's speech when I hear him. I mean, his inflections live in my mind and come out in my voice easily. This morning I heard Prabhupāda lecture on a verse from "The Prayers of Queen Kuntī." Queen Kuntī tells Kṛṣṇa that when He leaves, all their name and fame will be destroyed. Prabhupāda paraphrases her words and brings out her mood by saying, "We are the Pāṇḍavas, we are famous people. Why is that so? *Because You are our friend!*"

I read some notes written about music that have obvious relevance to my writing mood. The author spoke about why this

musician's solos were so special. He says that when an improvising artist plays with others, those others are certainly important in helping the musician achieve what he is trying to achieve, and because the music is not written down beforehand, it is up to the accompanying musicians to rise to the occasion and to understand the artist's intention. What is special about a solo, however, is that it provides the artist an opportunity to let out his heart unaided. It also allows the audience to hear the artist as he thinks and sounds when he has chosen to be temporarily complete in himself.

While we may think an artist's overall tone is frenetic, we may find when he is alone that he is reflective, that his tempos relax. That is, playing always with others can be deceptive both for the artist and the audience. A musician is searching for his own ideal sound, and he will explore and perhaps unexpectedly find in a single note or phrase the impetus for a fuller expression of himself. To hear the artist alone allows the audience to perceive art as it is being thought out and discovered. It is a quality that cannot be reproduced in an ensemble. In this case, the author writes that the musician he is studying doesn't sound unprepared or surprised by the directions in which he finds himself moving. Rather, it is as if he were constantly discovering and rediscovering within himself both new and remembered patterns of music.

What is it that makes an artist alone express differently than an artist in a group? Does it make him change his conception of his art? It may in part be that exploring alone frees him to do something unconventional or irregular in terms of rhythm or cadence. It leaves him free from the job of leading others toward his conception and allows him to alter his conception of his art as the discoveries unfold.

Another point I thought important was this: "Like many revolutionaries, he has an almost shocking regard for fundamentals and he tells how he keeps a good beat with his left hand."

I like these ideas as a metaphor for Kṛṣṇa conscious writing. Ultimately, a devotee writer maintains the fundamentals, the *paramparā*, but not without expressing his personal integrity, not without exploring the truth of the *paramparā*'s statements for himself. He has to have a deep grasp of his own roots both spiritually and artistically. The artist wants to discover the essence of both, and that requires going beyond polished and practiced packaging. He needs to go deep within himself to find his own integrity or wholeness. To find that, he needs to play alone and not always with the group. There is room for the ensemble expression, but he may find a completely different conception by expressing himself alone without audience, critics, or those who wish to accompany him. He can't even always be expressing himself in order to communicate. He's not a newspaper reporter, but looking for the softening of feeling toward guru and Kṛṣṇa, toward the world, the compassion in his own heart. It takes freedom to find it and freedom to face it.

5 P.M.

Now that my course is over, I'm looking forward to getting back to the main structure of this book. I feel as if I've been torn away from my more meditative life by my week at Gitā-nāgarī—today I didn't read *Bhāgavatam* at all. I read some letters criticizing me instead. They say we grow on criticism. In this case, a Godbrother spoke to a young man who likes to read my books. My Godbrother told him that there was no precedent in our *sampradāya* for people writing as I do and that I am presenting only mental rambling, not Kṛṣṇa consciousness. So blunt, but not to my face. The young man wrote me and told me about it, his mind now filled with doubt. I had to tell this correspondent that I didn't agree. Describing a devotee's struggles is not nonsense or mental rambling, although I admit it may be innovative in terms of our previous experience with Kṛṣṇa conscious literature. I don't see why we are not allowed to express ourselves personally,

naturally, from our own Kṛṣṇa conscious realization, or even how we will avoid doing so as Kṛṣṇa consciousness spreads through the world cultures. Anyway, I didn't get too much into the discussion, just said some basic things.

Tomorrow I am scheduled to meet one Godbrother, and the next day another. In four days, we begin our disciples' meetings. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

6 P.M.

They cut a furrow through the soft earth in the field across the street. Reminds me of India. Wind chimes just outside the window. Cooler tonight. This sage of apple juice has nothing to say, but recalls better times when he was in tune with his own spirit and the spirit of the *Bhāgavatam* reader. Now he's quiet, a little spaced out, sliding across the floor in his slippers, chanting. O Prabhupāda, you are the director of my conscience and behavior. You know my heart.



## Text 16

*vicakṣaṇo 'syārhati veditum vibhor  
ananta-pārasya nivṛttitaḥ sukham*

*pravartamānasya guṇair anātmanas  
tato bhavān darśaya ceṣṭitaṁ vibhoḥ*

The Supreme Lord is unlimited. Only a very expert personality, retired from the activities of material happiness, deserves to understand this knowledge of spiritual values. Therefore those who are not so well situated, due to material attachment, should be shown the ways of transcendental realization, by Your Goodness, through descriptions of the transcendental activities of the Supreme Lord.

### Comment

Only a rare person, one who has renounced all attachment to material activity, deserves to understand Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The phrase “almost retired” doesn’t refer to the natural forced disability of old age, but to a willing renunciation of material interests to give time for spiritual pursuits. The *karma-kāṇḍīya* rituals recommended in the *Vedas* have indulged people’s materialistic tendencies rather than pull them forward in spiritual life. If Vyāsadeva now writes a book directly glorifying Kṛṣṇa, then they can still be rescued. Vyāsadeva is qualified to write such a book because he himself is expert in the devotional science and detached from material enjoyment.

At first glance this verse may appear disconcerting to us, as if only a rare soul, perfectly detached, can hear about Kṛṣṇa. Even if by the mercy of the pure devotees we ourselves are not left out but can hear something about Kṛṣṇa, what does that mean for the conditioned souls? How will the *saṅkīrtana* movement be spread? Will it always remain small?

Śrīla Prabhupāda makes it clear that even a layman can take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Hearing about the Lord will act as “medicinal doses,” even while we suffer from the disease of ignorance. The *Bhāgavatam* is as good as Kṛṣṇa Himself, so contact

with this literature through the words of expert devotees, will allow even ordinary souls to come into direct contact with Kṛṣṇa.

This point will be stated again at the beginning of the Tenth Canto when Mahārāja Parikṣit requests to hear specifically about Kṛṣṇa: "Descriptions of the Lord are the right medicine for the conditioned soul undergoing repeated birth and death. Therefore, who will cease hearing such glorification of the Lord except a butcher or one who is killing his own self?" (Bhāg. 10.1.4)

In the purport to 10.1.4, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is appropriate and effective only when sincere disciples hear from a bona fide spiritual master, but, "When discourses on *kṛṣṇa-kathā* take place between a liberated spiritual master and his disciple, others also sometimes take advantage of hearing these topics and also benefit. These topics are the medicine to stop the repetition of birth and death."

Although there are many terminal diseases in this world, the disease known as *bhava-roga* by which we are born again and again is the worst. It is caused by attachment to matter. *Kṛṣṇa-kathā* is so potent a medicine that if we are induced to hear it, we will certainly become free of this disease. The disease is symptomized by absorption in illicit sex, meat-eating, intoxication, and gambling, and the proof that *kṛṣṇa-kathā* works is that those who participate in it are freed from these symptoms.

The last part of Prabhupāda's purport to 1.5.16 is dear to me:

The expert devotees also can discover novel ways and means to convert the nondevotees in terms of particular time and circumstance. Devotional service is dynamic activity, and the expert devotees can find out competent means to inject it into the dull brains of the materialistic population. Such transcendental activities of the devotees for the service of the Lord can bring a new order of life to the foolish society of materialistic men. Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His subsequent followers exhibited expert dexterity in this connection. By following the same method, one can bring the materialistic men of this age of quarrel into order for peaceful life and transcendental realization.

Because Vyāsadeva misled the people with his *Vedas*, he should now use his genius to catch their interest and imagination with direct Kṛṣṇa conscious writing. Prabhupāda is firm that this instruction should be adopted by the members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Previously Prabhupāda wrote that Kṛṣṇa consciousness does not need to be presented in a stereotypical way. Rather, we should express our realization in our own words as long as we do not change the original meaning offered by the *paramparā*. Loyalty to the *paramparā* does not require that we become parrots. Rather, we are meant to add our own sweetness by speaking from the heart and in the language that is natural to us and to our listeners.

*Bhava-roga* does not change from one culture to another, although it may have its particular cultural idiosyncrasies. An expert physician will recognize the disease's symptoms, however, and find ways to apply the medicine according to time, place, and person. Formerly devotee-physicians presented the literature in Sanskrit and used a repertoire of metaphors and *slokas* to discuss *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. Nowadays people may not be so receptive to that and we may need to try other methods of expressing the same truth. Such attempts to be relevant are not signs of unfaithfulness to the *paramparā*. As Prabhupāda writes, "Devotional service is dynamic activity, and the expert devotees can find out competent means to inject it into the dull brains of the materialistic population."

The success of our efforts will be judged by the results we achieve. If people who are troubled with *bhava-roga* respond favorably to our attempt to express Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and if we are giving them Kṛṣṇa consciousness without adulteration, then it is pedantic to remain critical toward the innovation. We should be prepared, as Prabhupāda suggested, to package the old medicine in the new bottles. The nectar itself is immortal.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also indicates that the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is not to be defined only by the 18,000 verses we have available to us, but is a phenomenon that goes beyond our measurement.

*Srīmad-Bhāgavatam* is not like ordinary fiction or mundane literature. It is unlimited in strength, and however one may expand it according to one's own ability, *Bhāgavatam* still cannot be finished by such expansion. *Srīmad-Bhāgavatam*, being the sound representation of the Lord, is simultaneously explained in four verses and in four billion verses all the same, inasmuch as the Lord is smaller than the atom and bigger than the unlimited sky. Such is the potency of *Srīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

—Bhāg. 2.9.44, purport

Most ISKCON devotees acknowledge that we can use culture and art to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Nārada will expound on this point more as he continues his instructions to Vyāsadeva. Śrīla Prabhupāda also used the expression “cultural weapons” in his descriptions of how we may preach. But we should know that “culture” and “art” should not be too closely defined or regulated if they are to remain culture and art. They are not static expressions, and as such they are not possessed or controlled. Art is limited only by the imagination, and its use is limited only by the artist's ability to express himself. Kṛṣṇa conscious artists are not mundane, even though they may appear to work with the same creative process the nondevotees espouse. We are not ultimately interested in propaganda, but in essential expression of essential truth.

We hear from Kṛṣṇa book that Kṛṣṇa's associates in Vṛndāvana are the original artists of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. Mother Yaśodā, the cowherd boys, and *gopīs* all composed songs spontaneously when describing Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, each imbued with their own specific mood in relation to Kṛṣṇa. These village people did not regulate their art into propaganda, but glorified Kṛṣṇa from their hearts, genuinely. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura says a preacher (and what is a preacher but a devotee?) cannot be dead; only one with life can preach. Someone who is alive can “discover novel ways” by which to present Kṛṣṇa consciousness and will exhibit “expert dexterity” in that presentation.



Give 'em hell, Harry.  
 The artist exercises his legs  
 on the dancer's barre,  
 does his push-ups and bend-overs  
 and writes on a rainy spring midnight  
 the day after Ekādaśi.  
 Let him wake the people  
 starting with himself.



Empty your hand and see what comes. Here comes the big guy denouncing us to the young people. He says Śrīla Prabhupāda destroyed his diaries. Śrīla Prabhupāda condemned a disciple who asked, "What about my inner life?" He implies that institutional leaders and loyal followers don't lead inner lives. They simply push their shoulders against the wheel, collect money when told to, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and *haribol* upon demand, and forget about privacy, their impurities, their hesitations. Or if they do stop for a breath and acknowledge any shadow of doubt of self-need, they would never admit it in public. "I think" should be done in the closet. Isn't that what Prabhupāda said? After such a life, they go automatically back to Godhead, part of the conveyor belt system exporting people to the spiritual world. Right?

Anyway, this wrangler ain't quittin'. "Blue Denim" brand potatoes—a clever way to sell potatoes, and we've got clever names too—Bliss Bars, Govinda's restaurants, Hare Kṛṣṇa Nuggets—all designed according to time, place, circumstance, persons. No, not rambling minds, but words to inspire Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the honest hearts of honest people.

Hey, did you know that guy who puts down art and self-expression himself plays the zither while he sings Hare Kṛṣṇa to the crowds? And the lyrics he uses in his songs, well, they weren't written by Rūpa Gosvāmī. We're all in it to the end. Was it all right for Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura to sing his heart out in the vernacular of the people rather than in flowery Sanskrit?



Spring—owlets ready to leave the nest. Sometimes you can see them sitting on the branches of trees waiting for their parents to come home. May apples and bluebells, harebells are almost in bloom. April is the month of those beautiful blood-roots. When the woodpeckers arrive and start tapping, you can hear it from a distance.

I just read an article in the *Harmonist* (unsigned). The author writes, "The body is pleased by the enjoyment of free air and the open sky. The troublesome mind is gratified if allowed to roam at will like an unbridled horse, to revel in the beauties of Nature, to gather honey as it pleases from the many-tinted flowers of the groves of poetry. Contrary to this is the impersonal or voidistic point of view, based upon repugnance for all gratification. Neither of these is service to Adhokṣaja—both are service to the akṣaja."



Okay, so let's *make* it service to Adhokṣaja. We are not out hunting owls or gathering herbs, but exulting in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, in Kṛṣṇa's world, in His beautiful creation. When we look at nature we shouldn't forget Him, but proclaim His glories through our appreciation of the beauty He has created. As

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam says, *śṛṇvatām śva-kathāḥ kṛṣṇaḥ, puṇya-sravaṇa-kīrtanaḥ*, “Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the benefactor of all holy persons. Whoever listens to or sings about His messages is sanctified. He appears in the hearts of all who listen to His activities and He destroys the evil propensities in their hearts at the root.”



I finished my morning duties, which included two full meetings. That is, I attended the (fiery) Bhāgavatam class, then had a meeting in my room with a Godbrother. Both lasted an hour. It's now 3:15 P.M. and the headache incurred has gone down. There are a few hours left to salvage. But I'm tired. It took a lot to go through this day.

This morning's speaker said that catastrophes of an unusual nature will come within the next two to five years. He says we are not interested in a doomsday speech, but I couldn't help but feel that was the nature of his preaching. I somehow felt it was a way to encourage devotees to follow a plan to form the community along certain principles and lines because what else will be left? It sounds like there will only be pandemonium, economic collapse, madness out there.

It made me look at my own preaching. Am I doing something now that I will not want to do when the world falls apart?

Should I be living in another way now in preparation? I write and print books, then distribute them—all using modern technology. That could end. As long as I can get a pen, however, I will continue to write regardless. Maybe I should stock up on pens and pen refills.

Those who are intent on survival will not be able to survive, he said, but I think he meant the nondevotees. He said that Kṛṣṇa arranges for the *asuras* to die and the devotees to live, even through famine and earthquakes. He quoted Śrīla Prabhupāda to support his point.

He described Mother Bhūmi revolting from the rape of the earth. He said the polar caps might shift and the earth's climate will change. Psychics and others assure us that all this will take place. Gītā-nāgari should become an ideal village. After class, we all sat peacefully and had breakfast.

After class, I met another of Prabhupāda's servants and he had something else to discuss. He said Śrīla Prabhupāda is present in several ways—books, tapes, example, but also in the society and through his followers. He said we have to examine things and ask ourselves whether Prabhupāda is really coming through to us. It takes introspection.



Now the devotees who look to me as their guide are arriving, all with their own viewpoints to assert. Where will I turn when the banks collapse and the armies fail to protect the citizens and there are no markets in which to shop. We can chant Hare Kṛṣṇa in a huddle. It doesn't matter. Kṛṣṇa will protect us in one way or another, as He sees fit. Despite the impending doom, I have decided to talk about the letters I received from Śrīla Prabhupāda while I was living in Boston during 1969 and 1970, and I plan to discuss poetry and books to be published and the artist's life—whether it is relevant even in a chaotic society.

Wisps and tufts of breath  
squeak out  
skylarks flying and  
critics say this isn't the art of improvisation.  
I won't be critical.

Solo flight—take off.  
Listen, brother, you said you were a friendly  
soul, hoping to help me become healthy.  
My psychic armor has been stripped from my body.  
Did you know there are only a few kindred souls  
who understand what I mean?  
O skylark, the cars are arriving  
and the wind chimes  
are silent.

Where is our shelter?  
I'm not worried. I will live as long as the ink holds out.  
I already have a lifetime's supply of good humor and  
hope  
from Prabhupāda.

## Text 17

*tyaktvā sva-dharmam caraṇāmbujam harer  
bhajann apakvo 'tha patet tato yadi  
yatra kva vābhadram abhūd amuṣya kim  
ko vārtha āpto 'bhajatām sva-dharmataḥ*

One who has forsaken his material occupations to engage in the devotional service of the Lord may sometimes fall down while in an immature stage, yet there is no danger of his being unsuccessful. On the other hand, a nondevotee, though fully engaged in occupational duties, does not gain anything.

## Comment

We can relinquish our worldly, moral duties if we surrender to the service of Lord Mukunda. Immediately devotees ask, “But what if we enter full-time Kṛṣṇa consciousness out of temporary sentiment and we later fall down? It happened to Bharata Mahārāja and Mahārāja Citraketu.” The answer is given here: Nārada assures us that our service is eternal and we will never forget the Lord’s feet, even in such a circumstance.

Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to this verse in connection with *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.40, “In this endeavor there is no loss or diminution, and a little advancement on this path can protect one from the most dangerous type of fear.” In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes a variation of his translation to *Bhāgavatam* 1.5.17: “If someone gives up his occupational duties and works in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and then falls down on account of not completing his work, what loss is there on his part? And what can one gain if one performs his material activities perfectly? Or, as the Christians say, ‘What profiteth a man if he gain the whole world yet suffers the loss of his eternal soul?’”

It is better to have risked and failed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness than to not have tried at all. Although both Bharata Mahārāja

and Mahārāja Citraketu fell down, they recovered and attained perfection. Ajāmila is another example.

By “temporary sentiment” Prabhupāda means a person who doesn’t know the philosophy, but who joins because others are joining and it seems nice. When the sentiment diminishes, such persons often leave Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Still, everything they did for *bhakti* is recorded and remembered; it is never lost.

We cannot say that Mahārāja Bharata was an infatuated youth. His Kṛṣṇa consciousness was deep and serious, and by the time he was living in the forest, he had risen to the stage of *bhāva*. His “temporary sentiment” occurred during his service when he became attached to caring for an abandoned fawn. Consequently, he took his next birth as a stag. Still, he did not forget his devotional service, and when he finally gave up his deer body, he was able to reestablish his devotional service with greater determination and achieve perfection.

This verse is mainly a glorification of devotional service, even when performed in an immature stage. Śrīla Prabhupāda gives the example of the Indian government’s licensing system for graduating medical students. If after five years of medical college a student passed his exams, he was granted a full degree and considered a doctor. If, however, the student failed the final exam, he was still permitted to practice as a medical practitioner (not a doctor), and although he did not receive the same status or salary as a full-fledged doctor, he was still recognized.

Both success and failure are ultimately useless in the material sense, but even spiritual failure is valuable. Of course, we do not praise failure—falldown is serious and we should avoid it—but devotional service is so powerful and so merciful that we are sure to succeed once we begin, even if our motivation is weak and we face serious obstacles along the way. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “The stress is given here to surrendering unto the lotus feet of the Lord, even if there is a chance of falling down.” Both verse and purport promise that we will never be able to forget Kṛṣṇa, either in this life or in another.

Although *bhakti* is powerful, much still depends on our sincerity of purpose. When we hear of great devotees falling down, we should be sobered. We could fall down easily if even such as they faced obstacles. What creates the likelihood of falldown is *vaiṣṇava-aparādha*. Śrīla Prabhupāda stressed this many times. We are not beyond falldown until we are beyond *vaiṣṇava-aparādha* and until our faith is fixed firmly beyond temporary sentiment. Prabhupāda said that if we have a positive sentiment that brought us to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then we are likely to have a negative sentiment that can drive us out. We have to be fixed in knowledge.

We may take it on the authority of *śāstra* that once a devotee serves sincerely he will never forget Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet. We have to risk everything to please Kṛṣṇa, but we should not be foolish in calculating the risk. By cultivating knowledge of *bhakti*, we will understand how to overcome the obstacles on the path. We will also come to understand Kṛṣṇa's nature and become attracted to His personality. Then although there are dangers in our attempt to extricate ourselves from the material energy, we will find within ourselves the necessary determination to meet and overcome them. We will also know that Kṛṣṇa is protecting us. "Once engaged in the devotional service of the Lord, one will continue the service in all circumstances." Kṛṣṇa guarantees it.

By hearing about Kṛṣṇa, we will insure our quick progress because we will naturally become attracted to Kṛṣṇa. The more attracted we become, the more desperate we will be to serve Him. We are not looking for a comfortable niche in which to settle, but active, loving devotion, something that calls forth both our intelligence and emotions. For that, we have to be prepared to go beyond the fortified wall of self-centeredness.

Nārada says *tyaktvā sva-dharmam*, "Having forsaken one's own occupational engagement" we won't suffer, not if we have renounced them in favor of the attempt to practice *bhakti*. Even



if our devotional career is undertaken out of sentiment and we fail, we will still benefit. No Kṛṣṇa conscious effort goes in vain. "One who does good, My friend, is never overcome by evil." (Bg. 6.40)

We must give up material activity in favor of spiritual life. There are so many family expectations, social expectations, and even self-imposed expectations, but we should renounce those obligations that do not culture *bhakti* and perform all other obligations as an act of *bhakti*. "A transcendentalist engaged in auspicious activities does not meet with destruction either in this world or in the spiritual world."

If we really wish to perform *bhakti*, we cannot be complacent about it. It is wonderful that we are not among the unregulated, bestial men, but in order to make progress we have to fix our goal higher than on material pleasure or impersonal liberation. That is not done automatically, but takes a gradual awakening and realization, all of which stems from hearing about Kṛṣṇa.

Yesterday when I spoke with a brother, I tried to consider what he was saying and be helpful. He said he needed to improve his spiritual practices, and he didn't see how he could make even small changes in his life at this point. I feel the same way. I already am what I am and seem only able to maintain that.

The devotee who spoke about the upcoming apocalypse said at the rate we're going, we won't see Kṛṣṇa consciousness widely adopted during our lifetime, but Śrīla Prabhupāda told a disciple that we *would* see it happen that soon. Then he smiled. "The conclusion is that something extraordinary will have to happen." It's hard to figure it all out.

Nārada's statement, that whatever we do in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is good for us, is another of his arguments to prove to Vyāsadeva that he shouldn't have presented fruitive rituals but only *bhakti*. To pursue fruitive activity means accumulating pious credits, using them up in material enjoyment, then falling

to the lower species. There is no gain. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is all gain. *Eka-niṣṭhā*, one-pointed faith is most important.

This morning I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda recount the meeting between Lord Caitanya and the Chand Kazi. I heard him say that the Lord accused the Chand Kazi of killing his mother and father in his religion. "What kind of religion is that?"

"How is that?" the Chand Kazi asked.

"You kill the cow and bull who are like your mother and father."

The Kazi replied that the *Vedas* also allow for animals to be killed, but the Lord said Vedic ritual killing is different. An old cow may be put into the fire to test the potency of the mantras, but it is given a new life in the heavens. Nowadays, He said, such sacrifices are forbidden. They talked and came to a compromise.

Prabhupāda said that the people will indulge in killing and referred to *Bhāgavatam* 1.5.15—*jugupsitam*, abominable. They use *karma-kāṇḍa* religion to enjoy, and they kill animals only to eat their meat. Lord Buddha appeared to protect the poor animals. You have given them the opportunity to enjoy and mis-spend their lives, Nārada said to Vyāsa.

Today I met with . . . today I move to the cabin . . . It doesn't matter to the world *what* I do anymore than it matters that the cardinal is on the ground under the feeder again. A small wood-pecker too big to stand on the feeder rail grips the rail with his body hanging on the outside—humorous, but also clever.

Our host invited us to stay a few more days, but I declined. He and his wife are kind. I want to attend *maṅgala-ārati* and see Rādhā-Dāmodara. The seminar is over, too, and Gītā-nāgarī will be quieter. Moving this afternoon.

Madhu is working on the interior of the van and painting, just so that we can travel in Europe. Poems have sprung up in the past at road stops. I'm hoping for more. O Kṛṣṇa.

A list of lists:

- (1) Five fire hydrants.
- (2) Forgotten paths.
- (3) Man in gray crewneck sweatshirt.
- (4) Misspelled hives.
- (5) Arenas of sacrifice and concern.
- (6) Who dares to follow “first thoughts are best thoughts”?
- (7) Kṛṣṇa consciousness should be in your thoughts—*kṛṣṇe matir astu*, or something like that, that Lord Caitanya said to Sārvabhauma instead of *namo nārāyaṇāya*.
- (8) Richard Hugo’s book, Knut Hamsun’s book. No need to reread Gorky.
- (9) Albums of regret and past—’66 photos of Swamiji in storefront.
- (10) Letters to answer. There is another dimension beyond the one in which we work.
- (11) I wonder what’s going on in the interior of Vṛndāvana? We can’t know unless we’re pure devotees.

List six reasons we are not pure:

No, the real thing is that we are not attached to Kṛṣṇa. We may get some equilibrium in other areas, but no awareness of Lord Kṛṣṇa in our lives, no taste for chanting—big problems. We may not report our problems, and that’s a sign that we are dead.

No envy—give it up. Letter from Trinidad: roadside hot *roti* shop, chickens gutted here. Lawn mowers sharpened. Broilers. Goats. Too many cars. Fifty-year anniversary stamp for Bob Marley, one dollar and ten cents Jamaican. I will answer that letter—an accomplishment. More will pour in.

## Text 18

*tasyaiva hetoḥ prayateta kovido  
na labhyate yad bramatām upary adhaḥ  
tal labhyate duḥkhavad anyataḥ sukham  
kālena sarvatra gabhira-ramhasā*

Persons who are actually intelligent and philosophically inclined should endeavor only for that purposeful end which is not obtainable even by wandering from the topmost planet [Brahmaloka] down to the lowest planet [Pātāla]. As far as happiness derived from sense enjoyment is concerned, it can be obtained automatically in course of time, just as in course of time we obtain miseries even though we do not desire them.

### Comment

*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* expands our consciousness. We tend to think this life is the all in all, but still we wander from planet to planet, universe to universe, species to species, seeking within each spot-life happiness and wholeness. The *Bhāgavatam* informs us that there is no happiness to be found, at least nothing permanent. Instead, we move forwards and backwards according to our desire, which then drives us to act under the modes of nature, subject to the laws of karma. When our karma is good, we visit the heavenly planets; when our karma is bad, we visit hell. Although each experience we have in the material world feels eternal, it is short-lived and temporary. Therefore, “the philosophically inclined person must not be tempted by such changeable positions. He should try to get into the permanent life of bliss and knowledge where he will not be forced to come back again to the miserable material world, either in this or that planet.”

Nārada's advice? Don't waste time. Don't chase after the will-o'-the-wisp of *karma-kāṇḍīya* so-called success. Those who are intelligent don't chase mirages. “One should not, therefore, waste time with these flimsy things; one should only endeavor to go back to Godhead.”

I'm out walking now on the back road by the cabin. I'm not really expecting some awakening of sentiment, but I am glad to be here. The devotees told me there were floods this year after

the snow, and the water rose within twelve inches of the cabin. The air is still cool, so I think this will be a short walk.

An intelligent person who is philosophically inclined should not waste time looking for that which can never be found in any experience during any life. I have always liked the image of someone going through many lives and never having his basic need fulfilled. It's poignant. It paints the difference between the temporal and the eternal.

It is our duty as disciples to insure that everything we are doing is an attempt to strive for the eternal. What meaning can a walk in the backwoods of Pennsylvania have if it is devoid of such a search? The older we get, the more important this is. For those of us who have been in the movement for twenty or thirty years, at least half of our lives are over. These are the years when we should be seeking more and more quality to our service.

Jayādvaita Mahārāja said something similar. He said he wanted to remind the BBT Trustees to look for their successors. When we were young, Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us many responsibilities quickly, even if we weren't so qualified or experienced. Young people want to do something exciting. Now the older devotees have held onto their posts. It's time to get serious about intensifying our Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Of course, it's not that service has to be renounced, but sometimes we can become complacent when we spend years identifying with a particular service responsibility. This verse discusses giving up that which is not permanent and not living for sense gratification. It's just another way to order us to go back to Godhead.

I've arrived at the old ox power unit. Everything rusting now. Then up into the woods where I walked when I was writing that last chapter of *Entering A Life of Prayer*. At least no one has built any homes up here and it still looks pretty much the same. Today the sky is gray-white, and it's raining a little. Plenty of dead trees in this part of the woods, and quite a bit of debris on

the path. I see shoots of green emerging through the dead leaves on the forest floor.

*Tasyaiva hetoḥ prayateta kovidō*—where is our satisfaction? We have faith that it's found only in connection to Kṛṣṇa. Or so we say, but we don't always know how to go about finding Him in what we experience. No, we don't always know, but we can always aspire to know. Because we still go to Kṛṣṇa mostly to relieve our own heart's burden, we can't always find Him when we look. If we could only learn how to serve Him because we love Him. At least we can continue our search.

"How can we become fixed on attaining the permanent goal and not waste time on other things?"

I'm glad you asked. I just took a walk through the forest where I saw that some trees have died and fallen over during the winter. Now winter is over.

"How can we become philosophically minded?"

"How can we find love of God?"

I'll tell you. Baladeva provided three different desks—one for the typewriter, one for large newsprint, and one for the legal pads. These are like the maple trees I tap to capture Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

"Can we eat? Sleep? Can we defeat our critics who call what we are doing 'wandering'?"

Wandering  
rambling  
rambler  
gambler.

We've been from Indraloka to Pātāla-loka and everywhere in between, but we have not obtained that thing for which we were looking.

Kill the relative.

Find determination to find that which is *sat*. Jaḍa Bharata found such determination after his life as a stag. Sometimes such

circumstances may help. The Lord makes the truth so stark you can no longer avoid it. O Kṛṣṇa.

Glenn is working on the van here in his baggy blue jeans. Now he is filling the wheelbarrow with stones and filling the huge puddle on the path so I can walk over it easily. Baladeva got him to do that. Does he want me to give him something? Mercy? Power? A purpose? He is another wanderer, as we all are. We each need to find the resolute determination to perform only devotional service.



A rough start to  
 our Kṛṣṇa consciousness—  
 want a personally satisfying piece of work.  
 In my case, the ink has to flow just right.  
 Nārada spoke long ago  
 today  
 telling him  
 and what do *I* want?  
 To walk out and find a miracle in the quiet  
 despite the blue jays and the squelch of the mud.

I play as Vedic guru  
 because he said we got to.  
 When  
 O when will we be free of  
 the ache?  
 When? When we love Him more than anything else  
 and have no more attachment for matter?  
 This world without Kṛṣṇa is a corpse.  
 We won't find material happiness here or in Colorado  
 or even on Mt. Everest  
 or amid the dark pines—  
 the list is endless—  
 not before death.



Playing the piano of reverses, blues and preconceived music  
 of the soul—the *Bhāgavatam* script is written in heaven  
 by Vedavyāsa himself.

Each time the master beckoned, we got cold feet. Each time  
 the pen began, it scratched.

I was blue and sentimental. It led to excesses.  
 We were always one way or another and  
 too much in that direction.



A leader said to me, "I  
 know you suspect I'm  
 sweet-talking and have  
 a hidden agenda, but don't misunderstand me.  
 We have to have trust," he says.

We want the truth, speakers,  
 even on this muddy walk along the Tuscarora.

A devotee wrote, "The reason I listen to the Beatles is—if  
 you care to know—that I'm stressed out and philosophy isn't  
 enough. I need immediate feelings. Anyway, George was almost  
 Prabhupāda's disciple, wasn't he? He can't be all bad!"

Wandering, we look in our pockets for old memories. Even  
 Vyāsadeva was dissatisfied with that. Hollow ecstasy.

I'm a poor man's poor man.

He said, "When you have your disciples' meetings, give them  
 something substantial—a balance of your barefoot wanderings  
 in KC Elysian Fields, and the straight skinny (as we used to say  
 in the USN),

the *param-*

*parā*

from the top.

I will and now bow left and right.

## Text 19

*na vai jano jātu kathañcanāvrajen  
 mukunda-sevy anyavad aṅga saṁsṛtim  
 smaran mukundāndāṅghry-upagūhanam punar  
 vihātum icchen na rasa-graho janah*

My dear Vyāsa, even though a devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa some-  
 times falls down somehow or other, he certainly does not  
 undergo material existence like others [fruitive workers, etc.]

because a person who has once relished the taste of the lotus feet of the Lord can do nothing but remember that ecstasy again and again.

## Comment

Even when a devotee falls down, we should still consider him saintly. A devotee is never on an equal level with a *karmī*. When a devotee has once relished Kṛṣṇa's loving devotional service, he will remember the taste of that service again and again.

I remember the first time I read this verse, I wanted to immediately apply it to my own situation. We often look for the scriptures to prove themselves against our personal experience, and especially when we want to soften our hearts toward devotees who have fallen. If we wish to give up judgment, we must cultivate the philosophical understanding. Only knowledge will eradicate our faulty perspective.

What does it mean for a devotee to suffer a material relapse? Whatever it means, we can understand that Kṛṣṇa has not abandoned them, but is working with them to rectify their hearts, just as He is working with us to rectify ours. A devotee is never a nondevotee. Śrīla Prabhupāda compares the punishment a devotee receives to the loving correction a child receives from a parent, whereas the punishment a nondevotee suffers is similar to the suffering an orphan experiences when he is handled cruelly by strangers.

When we try to analyze what it is that drives a devotee back into the material energy, Prabhupāda writes, "A neophyte devotee foolishly thinks of accumulating some material power in exchange for devotional service." It is not easy to give up our desire to possess and control matter. Kṛṣṇa favors such a foolish but sincere devotee by frustrating his material plans. Eventually, we see such devotees' material lives often fall apart. Their families abandon them or their businesses fail, they become ill, or they fall into ill repute. When he has been crushed, he remembers the one

wonderful thing he possessed in his life: the days he spent performing selfless devotional service. He then remembers that there is no other shelter but Kṛṣṇa.

“The devotee who becomes helpless by the will of the Lord is more fortunate than those who are born in good families.” By “fortunate” Prabhupāda means that such helpless devotees are able to remember Kṛṣṇa intensely. A devotee thinks of Kṛṣṇa not because he has been trained but because he is spontaneously attracted. Attraction to Kṛṣṇa completely dissolves interest in material enjoyment. “A pure devotee continuously remembers the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and does not forget Him even for a moment, not even in exchange for all the opulence of the three worlds.”

Those who are put into distress have a special advantage because it is easier to remember Kṛṣṇa intensely during times of duress. It is almost as if for a neophyte, the cry of devotion cannot arise unless we are feeling some kind of pain or difficulty. That is because we lack the awareness of how vulnerable we actually are. We are in need of Kṛṣṇa's help at every moment of our lives, but we still consider ourselves the doer. As we advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the cry to Kṛṣṇa becomes motivated by love and not by distress, and we come to see the world as void without Him.

We cannot force miseries to descend upon us to help our Kṛṣṇa conscious meditation. Queen Kuntī prayed for calamities to come so that she would never forget Kṛṣṇa's protection, but few of us can pray like that with any sincerity. We simply do not have the courage. Therefore the *sāstras* teach us how to find the essence of life even while experiencing relative peace. We have to hear and to develop our Kṛṣṇa conscious intelligence. Then we will want to cultivate the mood of calling to Kṛṣṇa from the heart, and we will understand that whether we are suffering acutely in this world or not, we are always in distress without Kṛṣṇa's protection. Are we not suffering from the hard wall of our inattentive chanting?

This particular verse refers to a devotee who, even when fallen, remembers Kṛṣṇa favorably. That is his sincerity. When he is forced to suffer in prison or in the prison of materialistic family life, his devotion wends its way to the forefront of his mind. There are others, however, who blame guru and Kṛṣṇa for their falldown. They say that the restraints placed on them by *vaidhi-bhakti* have denied them their rights to enjoy their senses. Gradually, as they plunge again into intoxication and illicit sex, they choose to see guru and Kṛṣṇa as enemies. They commit offenses to the Vaiṣṇavas. Thus their return to Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet may be delayed.

Sometimes devotees hear of this verse and think it is easier to fall down and be forced to remember Kṛṣṇa by their suffering than to walk the more arduous path of a strict follower. We even hear that it could take us millions of lives to perfect ourselves, but if a person practicing *bhajana* in Vṛndāvana engages in sinful activities, he will be cursed to become a hog or a dog for one lifetime, after which he will be able to return to the spiritual world. Therefore, committing sinful activity in Vṛndāvana seems to be a quicker path. Still, Śrīla Prabhupāda does not advise we follow such a path. First, he says, it is a waste of time to take birth in an animal species. Also, we do not want to go back to Godhead only out of spiritual sense gratification but because we want to be pleasing to Kṛṣṇa. Better we follow the Kṛṣṇa conscious *siddhānta* and develop our spiritual nature for Kṛṣṇa's pleasure.

In order to remain strict in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we have to fix our goal. If the goal is fixed, even if we are not able to remember Kṛṣṇa at every moment, we will not deviate from the path. Fixing our goal will help us to be self-satisfied even before we attain ecstasy in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The previous verse describes who are "actually intelligent and philosophically inclined." We should practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness with clear intelligence and be able to recognize, even in the beginning stages, how we have been freed from suffering by Kṛṣṇa's grace.

Kṛṣṇa knows how to handle each of us expertly. He may fulfill one devotee's material desires while crushing another's. Some of us will be rectified by gentle correction and others need to be plunged into misery. Kṛṣṇa is a person and He respects the needs of our own personalities in this regard.

A devotee would not exchange his meditation on Kṛṣṇa for all the world's opulence. This is not rhetoric. Kṛṣṇa conscious remembrance is an eternal jewel; material opulence is fragile. No one can hold it for long. With just a little puncture we can be forced to leave our bodies. When Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva offered opulence to Prahlāda, Prahlāda replied that his father had owned innumerable riches, but in a second he had had it ripped away by the Lord. What was the use of such temporary kingdoms?

A devotee is *rasa-graha*, one who has tasted the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet. He experiences a kind of ecstasy even before the awakening of *bhāva*. Devotional service is dynamic, and it is never lost to us. We can pray to realize this according to our fullest capacity and make it true to our actual experience. In this way, the *Bhāgavatam* verses will become the guiding light of our lives.

7:45 P.M.

I looked out the window, but not at the creek. One doesn't look at this creek; he just flows along with it. Looked at *Diary of a City Priest* and was interested to read how the author is a loyal but frank dissenter toward his Church. He talks about how he struggles with false ego, writes honestly.

Being here shows me that I am no longer a Gītā-nāgarī resident, although I walk the back road twice a day. I am just a visitor. I have prepared the topics I will discuss with disciples at the meetings, and I am determined to keep a hand in this book as I go through those days. I have enough verses to last a lifetime, and I have a structure that will not crumble.

A devotee wrote to say, "I like reading *Radio Shows*, but when you talk about art and how writing is art, I become confused. I

don't like that part. But there's enough other stuff to keep me interested."

I thought, "Maybe you don't like me to talk *about* art, but if you like *Radio Shows*, then you should know that the book is a form of art in itself."

A new list? Twelve bromides  
 eighteen slipped-past-me sentences  
 the stories of men in my life, and dogs, and cats  
 and maybe apartments.

But those things happened before I became a devotee. Yeah, tell them anyway. But I want to have the guts to tell of the men I have met since I became a devotee. That's what I would really like to do—like Rāyārāma and those guys, Murāri. I'm looking for a good story, but also the truth.

Another list? Cane for walks,  
 two sticks I found in the woods,  
 a ground hog running fast to get home before I got close,  
 birds, deer, deer hunter,  
 the letter from Amnesty International in my mail asking  
 me to help them save someone from pain—give  
 at least \$25 right away, more can come later.

Then ISKCON's pitch for a golden, lotus-filled pool containing water from 1008 holy places. Pay for a sample and pour it over your Prabhupāda *mūrti* on Vyāsa-pūjā. I will put water from the Livey in Scranton and

water pipes  
 and Rādhā-kunḍa—anywhere—and with whatever devotion  
 I can muster  
 I will rub his back.

He's right to say I'm rambling, but he's  
 wrong to say it's not KC.

Pros and cons. We'll be interested to see your own  
 brand of "the pitch" when you are alone with disciples  
 on the 18th. The *paramparā*, the *param-*  
 papa

the goods delivered  
if I can only  
remember my spiritual master  
with love.

We assume we are always under Kṛṣṇa's vigilance and that He is both capable and that He loves us. He may punish us as He likes, and we will know that it is only to bring us closer to Him. We require that much faith. The faith is Kṛṣṇa, the punishment is Kṛṣṇa, the holy name is Kṛṣṇa, and Kṛṣṇa is the only shelter. We can see Him in the storm, on a cool, gray, April day, and everywhere else, because we have once tasted the nectar of His lotus feet.

If we want to be able to call out to Kṛṣṇa even when we are not in distress, we can't be counting our material blessings. This is an age of positive thinking through self-help and psychotherapy. We don't *want* to be down, and we don't want to have low self-esteem. Neither do we like to feel guilt. Rather, we spend a lot of time visualizing ourselves as happy, cheerful people. We reject despair and look for more and more self-confidence. These things have a certain place, and we all want a good balance in our personalities, but we shouldn't find that balance at the expense of ignoring or repressing the soul's cry for the awareness that all we really want is Kṛṣṇa and we don't have Him yet. Not only that, but at the rate we're going, we may not find Him in this lifetime. We have to get down to the heart's despair that we are not achieving the goal of our lives and we have to feel it. We have to be prepared to feel in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

This is similar to what Lord Caitanya expresses in the *Śikṣāṣṭakam*, as paraphrased by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura: "When, O when will that day be mine? When my offenses ceasing, taste for the name increasing, when in my heart will Your mercy shine?" Kṛṣṇa is dealing with us each personally, and He is allowing us to taste the mood we wish to taste. If we are actually looking for

material well-being without understanding the goal of life, we may find it, but we won't find Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, introspection and self-honesty is essential to the practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. What do we actually want?

*Rasa-graha*. Gives me faith to preach. Even if someone who comes to Kṛṣṇa consciousness later falls down, he will never become a *karmī*. Rather, he will have tasted and will remember the sweetness of that taste throughout his life, and then he will come back to full shelter. We should, therefore, spread the holy name widely.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa,  
Kṛṣṇa.

They are gathering, a small group of devotees. One has "Among Friends" splashed across the front of his sweatshirt. I didn't tell him to take it off. When he did take it off, I saw he wore a T-shirt with a shack and a sun on it. It looked like a simple stick figure or a Chinese letter. The shack symbolizes free-writing. A man once sat in a shack and learned to let his hand move freely, to say, "Yes, I want to write." The sun in the picture is just the sun. You could say it refers to the passage of time. Sometimes I had the sun just rising on the left (east), and sometimes it appeared at high noon or setting to the right (west). That man and his friends read Kṛṣṇa book out in that shack during some of those times.

Do you think different words come to a devotee who is *rasa-graha*? What does it mean to remember the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa's service? I remember the sweetness of serving Kṛṣṇa's pure devotee. I am doing it still. Now my duty is to remind these devotees and to try to inspire them in their Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We are meant to have a bond of love. Do we? Some of us may be playing a role, or think we are, but the love can be confirmed when we speak together.



God helps those of us who recognize our helplessness, but we don't have to fall down to understand our actual position. Prabhupāda said, "Don't make Kṛṣṇa rescue you from the prostitute's house." Kṛṣṇa's representative, the spiritual master, may have to return in another life just to rescue a fallen devotee. Śrīla Prabhupāda asked us not to make him come back.

Glorious is the master who never abandons his disciple but  
 grabs him by the hair and pulls him away from the  
 gypsies, and glorious is that disciple who obeys  
 and believes  
 and is active  
 in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

How to cry out when we are not in material distress? O Kṛṣṇa, can we please chant Your holy name? Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī said we have to water our couch with tears. Prabhupāda said we should learn to cry for the Lord, we should learn this one small technique. O Kṛṣṇa, please give us Your mercy when we chant. Let us perform our duties quietly and find the love within our hearts. Please help us not to harm others. You are the source of remembrance and we have no other hope. Please help us to remember You always. Please allow us to serve You.

When I say three prayers as I place a dish before my *mūrti*, when I walk to the temple, when I wash and dry my body after a bath, I want to always be praying to be simple in Kṛṣṇa's presence, to know that He is present in everything I do and am, to know that I am fallen and that only He can lift me up. I pray to reciprocate with His kindness by sharing Him with others. A pure devotee is not interested in material enjoyment and he renounces even the most subtle connection to the material world. I too want to renounce those connections.

## Text 20

*idaṁ hi viśvaṁ bhagavān ivetaro  
yato jagat-sthāna-nirodha-sambhavāḥ  
tad dhi svayaṁ veda bhavāṁs tathāpi te  
prādeśa-mātram bhavataḥ pradarsitam*

The Supreme Lord Personality of Godhead is Himself this cosmos, and still He is aloof from it. From Him only has this cosmic manifestation emanated, in Him it rests, and unto Him it enters after annihilation. Your good self knows all about this. I have given only a synopsis.

## Comment

The Supreme Lord is both personal and impersonal. His impersonal feature is manifested as the material energy. As the *Vedas* state, *sarvaṁ khalv idaṁ brahma*: everything that exists is the Supreme Spirit and His emanated energies. Since the Supreme Lord is eternal and full of bliss and knowledge, His creation is partially eternal, full of knowledge, and beautiful. When covered by *māyā*, the conditioned soul becomes unaware of God and His parts and parcels. The conditioned soul is then as useless as a limb that has been severed from the body.

Śrī Nārada advises Vyāsa to teach the entrapped souls about Lord Kṛṣṇa as the cause of all causes. Human beings can never become equal to or as great as God. Rather, they must accept the Supreme Lord's supremacy and agree to render Him loving service. "Your good self knows all about this," Nārada says, and he advises Vyāsadeva to expand on this idea in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. God is the greatest and we should surrender to Him. That is the message of both *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, and "that is the only business of the perfect human being."

Śrīla Prabhupāda states that we must all accept the Lord's supremacy and render Him loving service. The next sentence is

striking: "For this they have been created." We often forget this basic truth. We were created to give pleasure to God. How wrong it is to misuse our free will to do something else. Although it is Kṛṣṇa who gives us the ability to do anything we like, we were created to give Him pleasure. To return to Him, we should not deny Him the purpose of our creation.

Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote this purport at the beginning of the 1960s, and in it he scoffs at the sputniks. As is still true today, the scientists in those days were seen as earthly gods and their achievements in outer space were heralded as glorious. Prabhupāda was not impressed. It is not science that is wrong, but scientific study carried out and applied in defiance of God's laws. The *Vedas* are full of science, but they teach that science must be practiced by knowing and serving God.

In *Diary of a City Priest*, Father McNamee says he is suffering from an inner desolation. He lives in an inner city parish where he must open his door day and night to hustlers and the poor looking for food or money. In one scene, he goes to a housing project and sees a disused elevator shaft, where he hears a child plunged to its death. The priest says to the nun who has accompanied him, "What did He have in mind?" He is referring to God, and asking why He allowed such a thing to happen. It's an agnostic remark, and the nun replies in kind, "I don't know, but He should to go back to the drawing board."

I sympathize with these religionists who face so much human misery that it strains their faith in God's mercy, but we expect more from theologians. We expect a priest to be convinced to possess a theology that explains the reasons behind human misery and which doesn't blame God for our suffering. It's not such a riddle. I think Prabhupāda once wrote a letter to Yadunandana dāsa of Boston about how to respond to the misery he saw at the hospital. We have no power to alleviate it materially. This priest gives out small amounts of money and helps people in the futile

effort of dragging themselves forward for another day, but his welfare work is dragging him down emotionally and straining his spirituality. He feels as if he is living on the front lines of a war. It is spiritual to help people with actual life problems, but it can't stop with helping the body. Prabhupāda said we should first nourish the soul; the improvement of the material condition will follow naturally, either in this life or in the next.

Material welfare work is a whirlpool and I have to commend those who are able to withstand the pressures. But that doesn't make it any less futile. We cannot change people's karma. We are simply not in control of that. I think Father McNamee has realized that by the end of his book.



### *Taking a walk*

It's as chilly as March today, but there's not a cloud in the sky and the sun is bright. In an hour and a half or so we'll have our first meeting at the cabin. I'll be reading from the letters Prabhupāda wrote me. I'll do the best I can. I'm not an emphatic or dramatic speaker, so this will be a quiet performance. Still, the basic relationship of spiritual master and disciple weighs on us all, and it implies that we are bound to follow the four rules and chant sixteen rounds to honor the commitment. So it's serious.

Woodpecker—loud! Ice almost all gone now that April is half over.

News from the world seeping in—China conducting “war games” in Taiwan, and the U.S. sending aircraft carriers close to the site. The U.S. Secretary of Defense said, “We have the best damned navy in the world. If we want to go through that strait we will.” Killings and more killings, and if not actual killings, then threats of killings. And elections, promises, miseries, lawsuits, declarations, deformations—nothing but human misery. Even the peace conferences can’t solve it, as Prabhupāda said they wouldn’t. All peace conferences end in sending in the troops.

England’s beef banned all over Europe because of mad cow disease. England considered killing eleven million cows just to be done with it.

And so the karma builds.

A tiny *jīva* reading the news gets his head spun around. Can’t say that it’s not real stuff, although we know each detail is as temporary as the froth appearing on the ocean. Better to read the *Bhāgavatam*.

Yes, but don’t we have to know that Iran is against America and that Bill Clinton and Bob Dole have different stands on the issues? Don’t we have to know how the Congress and senators are dealing with the measure to stop late abortions, by which the government allows doctors to bring the baby into the birth canal and then cut the baby in two? How else can we be relevant? Is that true?

4:05 P.M.

Walking again. We had a good morning session with a balance of answering questions and presenting material. Tonight we will have a *kīrtana*. I’ll tell them beforehand that I’m going to sing the only original Hare Kṛṣṇa tune that Prabhupāda introduced in New York City in ’66, and that the tune doesn’t have any turns or changes to it, although I may go up in the keys

a few times. I want them to be prepared for apparent sameness. We will all have to get over our restlessness, hear the holy name, and pray to Kṛṣṇa.

Because Kṛṣṇa is His name and of all the methods of attaining Kṛṣṇa, this is the best and the easiest. It's most suitable for us in this age. If we could taste the holy name, if we could overcome our offenses . . . The only way to express our hope for that stage is to go on chanting.

As for this book, I have already alerted myself and now my readers that I may not move through one verse a day while these classes are going on. At least I will free-write in the morning and try to keep on the topic of Nārada and Vyāsa. The mail is growing on my desk. I have piled it in two columns. It's not as high as the World Trade Center yet by any means, but up they go, those two columns, I need to keep them within reason.

*April 19*

Headache today, but I was able to clear it by noon and will give the afternoon class. Śrīla Prabhupāda once said, "Charity begins at home," and advised us to give out *prasādam* at the airport to his own followers who were seated around him.

Constructing melody castles in the air, making flights  
 playing with the creative energy  
 in bits of song. I remember my first experiences  
 loving to hear the improvised music  
 found, in all places, near my home, the sticks of Staten Island,  
 not far from Mt. Loretto's cows in pasture.  
 I fantasized one night the Stan Getz playing the Tottenville,  
 then taking a break  
 to look at large-eyed cows.  
 I look at large-eyed cows here  
 at Gītā-nāgari  
 and make similar flights

into my imagination  
 for Kṛṣṇa  
 to love Kṛṣṇa more  
 with my whole self  
 and no guitar or alto sax—  
 just a pen and a pain-free head  
 and the *Bhāgavatam* as my lodestar  
 in its softness, now  
 brighter light.  
 Two Brothers like the sun and moon dispel the  
 cheating darkness in the heart.  
 I can't tell you more than that.  
 No, I'm not afraid  
 to die,  
 he says with  
 sentiment and  
 ends this song with a flourish  
 like a signature.

One day so different from another. Chanting.

I seem to be always measuring my own strengths and weaknesses. Pain behind the right eye this morning. I'm supposed to narrate a slide show this evening, but we'll see if I'm up to it. Maybe someone else should narrate.

Trees budding. Warm today—it must be seventy degrees—and I have too many clothes on. The body never seems comfortable no matter how hard we try to make it so.

Still, I'm fortunate. There are men my age who are physically debilitated but who still have to go to work. They manage it by filling themselves with painkillers and other forms of intoxication, and try to shut off the terrible drudgery of their days. All they have to look forward to is one kind of sense gratification or another, and a chance to express their bitterness. They spit out the pain, then get drunk, have sex, try to find release in one way

or another by gratifying the senses. But the pain never really leaves. It's a loveless life for the most part. I'm fortunate in that sense, although I too have my aches and pains.

Someone wrote me a letter to tell me how she felt enthusiastic while preaching and it transformed her attitude. Do you know what that's like? Well, some people live constantly in that fire.

Reminds me of Jayādvaita Mahārāja telling his Prabhupāda memories and how he saw Prabhupāda always absorbed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. How the devotees loved him. Then Jayādvaita Mahārāja says in his uncompromising way that such-and-such standard that Prabhupāda set should never be abandoned.

But we do depart from those standards these days, and it seems to put a chill on things when we think about it too closely. Mahārāja called it the "restructured Prabhupāda," a Prabhupāda who says that whatever we do is fine. The actual Prabhupāda corrected even his oldest disciples and gave absolute standards.

## April 21

I decided that since I'm not following my structure here during these meetings, I would speak on Nārada's instructions on "the cause of all despondency." That way I could do three things at once: speak straight from the *Bhāgavatam* on the fourth and fifth chapters of the First Canto, discuss how we can apply these teachings to our own lives, and introduce this book and discuss how I have decided to treat the topics.

As I prepared my outline for the meeting, however, I discovered that I didn't want to read the free-writing that accompanied that section. The meetings are now at peak attendance. It's the weekend, and even the devotees who work are now here. Some of the devotees who have come have not maintained an active relationship with me through correspondence, and some have even brought their families and friends. It has created almost a lack of intimacy. Still, I have to wonder what it was that I found intimidating about reading that section.



A quick answer would be that my free-writing feels more intimate to me and an intimate relationship is best exchanged on a one-to-one basis. That is, I can write and they can read and it doesn't have to be turned into a public performance. Also, there wasn't much time in the one-hour class to cover the discussion on despondency. Anyway, it was interesting to meet that block.

### *Afternoon*

Took three pills today to kill pain, and then had to cancel the 5 P.M. meeting. It was meant to be a question and answer session, and devotees handed questions in ahead of time. They wanted me to speak about Gaura-Govinda Mahārāja's passing away and the *ṛtvik* movement. The pain is finally beginning to ebb, and I have decided to take this last walk in the warm sunshine. Since the other day, some spring flowers have bloomed, but I don't know what they are called. If I lived here long enough, I'd find them out one by one. It will probably be a year before I return, and I'm taking this walk in a farewell mood. If I was staying, I would have the opportunity to see things getting greener day by day. The big skunk cabbages down by the creek are already a dark green, and the spring flowers are starting to surge through the woods. Their lives are brief, though, I know. By the time May comes, they will already be fading. By summer it's all downhill for the flowers.

## Text 21

*tvam ātmanātmānam avehy amogha-dṛk  
parasya puṁsaḥ paramātmānaḥ kalām  
ajam prajātaṁ jagataḥ sīvāya tan  
mahānubhāvābhyudayo 'dhigaṇyatām*

Your Goodness has perfect vision. You yourself can know the Supersoul Personality of Godhead because you are present as the plenary portion of the Lord. Although you are birthless, you have appeared on this earth for the well-being of all people. Please, therefore, describe the transcendental pastimes of the Supreme Personality of Godhead Śrī Kṛṣṇa more vividly.

## Comment

Nārada has spoken to Vyāsadeva as a disciple, reprimanding him for writing inferior Vedic literature that caters to people's enjoying spirit. We have accepted Nārada's criticism of Vyāsadeva because he is Vyāsa's guru. Now Nārada speaks on a different level, addressing Vyāsa has the plenary incarnation of the Supreme Lord, possessed of perfect vision (*amogha-dṛk*), and rather than reprimanding Vyāsa or even presuming to instruct him, Nārada makes a request: "Please describe the transcendental pastimes of the Supreme Personality of Godhead more vividly."

Śrīla Prabhupāda informs us that Vyāsadeva is not dependent on a spiritual master because he is the spiritual master of everyone, but Vyāsadeva is teaching us that everyone must accept a spiritual master and follow his instructions. Even Lord Kṛṣṇa, Lord Rāma, and Lord Caitanya accepted spiritual masters. Therefore, it is an inconceivable *līlā* that Vyāsa is performing when we see him bewildered and in need of instruction. It reminds us of the bewilderment Arjuna experienced when he acted like a conditioned soul and inquired from Kṛṣṇa. Arjuna's bewilderment brought Kṛṣṇa to reveal the *Bhagavad-gītā*; Vyāsadeva's bewilderment leads to the creation of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

Vyāsadeva descends into this world to enlighten and deliver fallen and forgetful souls. He is Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, who appears as Vyāsadeva to free people from the bondage of material existence. The Supreme Lord arranges that the Vedic literatures be presented for this purpose. Although the people now have a religious method by which they can follow *dharma*, *artha*, and

kāma, and even find impersonal liberation, Kṛṣṇa desires that all conditioned souls have the opportunity to hear of pure devotional service unto His lotus feet. Vyāsadeva will thus present the excellent Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam at Nārada's request.

When we are reminded that Vyāsadeva (or other empowered devotees) are only playing the part of an ignorant person, we may wonder why they bother. Knowing that their illusion is not real may steal from our own identification with Vyāsadeva's dissatisfaction. After all, Vyāsadeva was never distressed, but was only trying to teach us by example. All that may be true, but as students, we accept that the Lord and His devotees have a reason for the things they do.

Besides that, we should be assured of what is certainly real. That is, there was real feeling and faith in Nārada and Vyāsadeva's guru-disciple relationship. Vyāsa simultaneously played the part of a disciple and gave love to his spiritual master. Therein lies the taste. In Vṛndāvana, Kṛṣṇa plays the part of a dependent child and cries for His mother and father's attention. Kṛṣṇa is not an ignorant child in need of affection and protection, but is the all-knowing, all-powerful Supreme Personality of Godhead. There is no dichotomy between the two. The fact that He is all-powerful does not mean His childhood pastimes are superficial. Rather, that knowledge enhances our appreciation because we see the All-powerful lovingly and willingly reciprocating with the love of His devotees.

When Kṛṣṇa plays the role of a subordinate lover or devotee of His devotees, He does it thoroughly. Kṛṣṇa does *everything* super-excellently. Thus it is His inconceivable nature as the Supreme Lord that enables Him to simultaneously come under the spell of *yoga-māyā* as a cowherd boy, yet remain the universal controller. There is a similar dynamic happening in this pastime between Nārada and Vyāsa.

The empowered incarnation of Kṛṣṇa came to this work to teach us the importance of performing devotional service. The

Vedic literature, we are discovering through this pastime, was presented to gradually elevate conditioned souls, but its ultimate purpose is that we learn pure devotional service. If the Vedic literature falls short of glorifying Kṛṣṇa exclusively, then it is possible for us to become lost in the *Vedas* and to miss the point. This is the point in Nārada's instructions to Vyāsadeva.

The other lesson this pastime teaches is that everyone, no matter how educated or mystically equipped, needs the help of the spiritual master.

In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions that all incarnations accepted formal spiritual masters. Devotees sometimes question Prabhupāda's use of the word "formal." We prefer to think that when a seeker of the truth searches out a guide, it is because he needs someone to fill the vacuum in his heart. Naturally, he will search for someone knowledgeable and devoted, someone with whom the formal connection quickly becomes a heart connection. This brings us back to the same point: when Kṛṣṇa and His pure devotees act as ordinary beings, they play their parts deeply and sincerely. Vyāsadeva's connection with Nārada was formal—that is, he formally accepted Nārada as guru and did not minimize his position. If Vyāsadeva had not accepted a spiritual master, then others would have also considered themselves above that Vedic regulation.

In order to illustrate that Vyāsadeva (or Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya Mahāprabhu) did not need a spiritual master because of his transcendental nature and position, Śrīla Prabhupāda uses the word "formal" to indicate that he agreed to act the part of the disciple. However, once accepting the role, he entered the guru-disciple relationship not merely as a gesture or with disdain or disinterest, but wholeheartedly, as an ideal disciple.

First, I just want to mention that I'm glad to be back on track with the *Bhāgavatam* verses, even though today was a travel day. Now, the point is that everyone requires a spiritual master if

they wish to free themselves from birth and death. The spiritual master is the via medium to Kṛṣṇa.



Vyāsa was acting,  
Nārada too  
but they were true  
disciple and guru.  
Don't try to figure it out  
with your "puppy brain."  
Accept the loving dealings of  
the Lord and His *parīṣads*  
and learn the lesson:  
we need guru,  
we need Kṛṣṇa,  
we need freedom,  
the pivot of devotional service.  
No love can be forced.

I'm glad to be back in this shack. Nothing is perfect in this world. Pour out your sentiment about that. What is the deep dissatisfaction in *your* heart? You have no dissatisfaction? Yes,

that is your fault. Vyāsa understood that because he wasn't fully glorifying Kṛṣṇa, he felt empty,

hollow

a shell.

And you,

you don't love Kṛṣṇa as

you'd like to,

want to,

hope to,

must.

A young man said, "Would you tell us now that we're assembled how you feel about the passing away of your topmost God-brother?"

I didn't get a chance to answer that.

I am here to write this PMRB. Do you remember how it goes?

*You put your right foot in;*

*You put your right foot out;*

*You put your right foot in,*

*And you shake it all about.*

*You do the Hokey-Pokey . . .*

Coming home from the movies in 1947 or earlier to our one-floor apartment on 76th Street in Queens, singing that song from some Western we'd seen. I know my memories won't save me. Did you know that old me gets tired out like old cigars? Others become frantic and throw bold colors on a canvas. Nārada says they should save themselves by describing Kṛṣṇa's pastimes vividly. It's vividness he wants, not vague generalities and categorized knowledge. Vivid means "with love." Vyāsadeva will become more vivid in the Tenth Canto where he describes how Kṛṣṇa plays the flute and calls the *gopis*, and when he describes their separation from their Lover. Other poets will take off from there—Rūpa Gosvāmī, Jiva Gosvāmī, Sanātana Gosvāmī writing of Rādhā-kunḍa, Govardhana, and Sanket.

By the time Vyāsadeva composed the *Bhāgavatam* he was an old man and had lived a full life. He lives on still in the

Himalayas. It's the end of April and now the spring beauties, those tiny, five-pointed star flowers, are carpeting the creekside at Gītā-nāgarī along with the yellow trout lilies and Dutchman's britches—

fleeting April flowers  
now tell us, Phillip,  
what you need to do to write this book.  
Tell us why Vyāsadeva accepted a guru  
and why you need one too.  
Isn't it already clear?

Well, long ago,  
Kṛṣṇa consciousness came to the West  
and was accepted by us  
in 1966.

I joke like I'm like an old Civil War veteran,  
but they're all dead now.  
What do you really feel? You are alone and can speak free  
and hear *kṛṣṇa-kathā*  
as the only solace  
to a dissatisfied heart.  
You are alone and can go beyond  
the inevitable hypocrisy that comes  
when you speak too much to others.

O Vyāsa, Vyāsa,  
can my melody meld with your melody  
and my hopes match yours?  
I am alive and seeking Kṛṣṇa consciousness  
as you recommend.  
I am sweet and sometimes sour, I know,  
but the meetings are over  
and I'm alone again looking for that high note  
coming from my soul

like a sax player searching for the pitch  
 and the regular theme  
 then his own theme  
 his own tremolo of spirit.  
 The trees here are not gilded or ivory, and the sunshine falls  
 plainly on this page  
 and I am fast becoming an old man  
 O Vyāsa  
 O Nārada  
 I'm mixed but praying to come to Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet.  
 That's my goal, my effort.  
 I know you can help me,  
 and I trust you completely.

## Text 22

*idaṁ hi pumsaḥ tapasaḥ śrutasya vā  
 sviṣṭasya sūktasya ca buddhi-dattayoḥ  
 avicyuto 'rthaḥ kavibhir nirūpito  
 yad-uttamaśloka-guṇānuvartanam*

Learned circles have positively concluded that the infallible purpose of the advancement of knowledge, namely austerities, study of the Vedas, sacrifice, chanting of hymns and charity, culminates in the transcendental descriptions of the Lord, who is defined in choice poetry.

## Comment

This is Nārada's summation. All knowledge culminates in the transcendental descriptions of the Lord, who is known as Uttamaśloka. Vyāsadeva should therefore write in that spirit. We may say that what Vyāsadeva wrote previously was wrong because it was incomplete, or we may say that everything he has



done has led up to where he is going now. In any case, direct Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the goal. "Please do it more vividly, O incarnation of God."

Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport doesn't specifically focus on Vyāsadeva's need to describe Kṛṣṇa consciousness more directly but on the need for *all* educated persons to do so. Vaiṣṇavas do not deny the value of academic or artistic pursuits, but they are interested only in those pursuits as they are dovetailed in devotional service. "This perfection of life culminates in the realization of the Supreme Being, Viṣṇu."

Unfortunately, most so-called learned persons fall under the spell of *mahā-māyā* and perform their work to increase their sense gratification, not to glorify God. It is wrong to understand anything in this cosmos as separate from Viṣṇu. Nowadays, such thoughts are considered fundamentalism. People have forgotten both the purpose and the source of their own lives. Therefore, when they do seek out the divine, they stop with themselves and become impersonalists.

This purport recommends using art, science, philosophy, psychology, and all other branches of knowledge solely in the Lord's service. We may take Prabhupāda's encouragement in this regard for our endeavors in these fields. Live your life and occupation, but make it Kṛṣṇa conscious. ISKCON is a preaching mission. "Art, literature, poetry, painting, etc., may be used in glorifying the Lord. The fiction writers, poets and celebrated littérateurs are generally engaged in writing of sensuous subjects, but if they turn towards the service of the Lord they can describe the transcendental pastimes of the Lord." If we fail to do this, we are acting on nescience.

A common question in this regard is whether devotees should make a thorough study of a material field of knowledge in order to preach to people in that field, or whether that study is a distraction from pure *bhakti*. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura offered this guideline: one should turn over to Kṛṣṇa

whatever talents he already possesses and he should not invest intense energy in gaining more material knowledge. Aside from the preaching value, it is not necessary to gather more material knowledge.

Therefore, devotees have often advised those who have come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness with a high material education to continue to use it in Kṛṣṇa's service, and those who have not, to preach in any way they can. "Advanced people are eager to understand the Absolute Truth through the medium of science, and therefore a great scientist should endeavor to prove the existence of the Lord on a scientific basis." We imagine great scientists becoming Kṛṣṇa conscious and then turning over their knowledge or influence to prove the truths of the *Bhāgavatam*. Although God cannot be proven by material scientific methods, people are so mesmerized by science that they tend to be impressed when the same spiritual information is considered from a scientific point of view. Similarly, one who is well versed in professional philosophy or logic can fashion theistic arguments that rigorous thinkers will accept.

Still, although this kind of preaching is valuable, it is not always advisable for someone who is already on the *bhakti* path but who does not possess such education to invest time and energy to acquire it. The value of such material education has to be judged according to time, place, and person. To acquire a material education a devotee may have to risk his spiritual life. He must attend the mundane universities and associate with nondevotees. Not everyone can withstand the pressure academic studies place on their *sādhana* either.

Māyā is expert in entrapping souls. We may go off to school saying we're going to study anthropology so we can prove God's existence to the others in that field, and find ourselves sliding into a nondevotee's mode of thinking. If we are going to attempt such a serious infiltration into the material world to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we should first have a strong foundation in

*bhakti*. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “All ‘knowledge’ not engaged in the service of the Lord is but nescience.” As Śrīla Prabhupāda told the artist-disciple who wanted to study and imitate the Western artists, it will take a long time to establish your reputation as a painter, and in the meantime your Kṛṣṇa consciousness may go to hell. Even in the name of preaching we should not pander to nondevotee ideas or standards. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the most important attainment in life. If we become proficient in *bhakti*, it will not matter how much material education we have, people will be attracted.

Your writing is fatally parochial  
an ex-college friend said and I replied,  
“Maybe.”

But I would rather be  
immortal among devotees  
and pleasing to God than  
famous in the three worlds as  
a mundane poet.

The information we get—that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the cowherd boy of Vṛndāvana, and all the pastimes so specifically delineated in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and other Vedic literature—is not found anywhere else, and neither can you discover Kṛṣṇa just by having feelings. You have to have knowledge. Education means to understand Kṛṣṇa’s personality and pastimes. Only then will we want to connect the feelings we have for God and the information we have about Him and find our own heart’s expression. It’s a vital use of human energy to gather *this* type of education. And it is this kind of education we hope our ISKCON members will gain more and more by reading Prabhupāda’s books and applying the philosophy to their lives. We can appreciate that people who were brought up in other cultures, without information of Kṛṣṇa, are now coming to Kṛṣṇa

consciousness by Prabhupāda's grace. Prabhupāda wanted the whole world to discover Kṛṣṇa consciousness, although it has remained buried in Indian heritage for centuries. We want to both convince ourselves of the purity of the path and convince others, and it takes concentration on finding our own Kṛṣṇa conscious heart. We cannot pass on what we do not possess.

The best education, and what should be the first education, is to learn to connect the information we have of God to the feelings we have for Him. It's a kind of natural theology. If someone is Christian or Muslim, they have been brought up in a cultural expression of God consciousness, but Prabhupāda preached that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is nonsectarian. *Bhakti* is present in all true expressions of God consciousness, and it is certainly naturally present in our hearts. Therefore, we should become grounded in our own feelings, but base them on the knowledge we gather about Kṛṣṇa so that our feelings and the reality of Kṛṣṇa are in harmony. Kṛṣṇa is a person. To understand what that implies is deep. If He is a person, we can experience His presence. He is our dearest friend, and He is most inclined toward the devotees. What do we know of Him so that we can become most inclined toward Him?

Sometimes devotees think we are meant to study *śāstra* without investing personal feeling or expressing personal thoughts or responses to it. They consider the personal thoughts inferior at best and a deviation at worst. I don't agree. Where is our connection between who we are moment to moment and Kṛṣṇa? We need to search that out. How can we possibly experience the truth of the scripture if we don't try to realize it in our day-to-day existence? Our realization will come from such experience, not from imagining ourselves as ideal followers, or even from living in the gap between being ideal followers and conditioned souls. We have to face ourselves as we are and experience Kṛṣṇa consciousness through that experience.

## List

(1) Whist.

(2) Flowers of spring—I get the feeling they're coming and going too fast. If you invest love in spring flowers, you will be cheated, they're so temporary. Bluebells bloom only for a few days.

(3) Forty seasons, sixty seasons—too old to even see the flowers. Better chant Hare Kṛṣṇa while there's still time.

(4) My doctor gave me a book and asked me to read about the nervous system and how it relates to pain, the brain, and all that. I say I have little time and I hate homework.

(5) Austerities, Prabhu. We all have them.

Convert the moon  
the U.S. highway  
offer the university campus  
as if it were a plate of  
food—“*nama om viṣṇu-pādāya*”—  
offer it to Kṛṣṇa. But is it a dish  
He wants and  
are you capable of  
giving it to Him pure?

Learned circles agree (among the Vaiṣṇavas at least) that the infallible purpose of learning is to glorify the Lord.

What if—aside from universities and what I may learn there to make money or to preach—I don't draw Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* well, or even Kṛṣṇa alone, or Nārada? What if I fail at trying to be a success?

We'll probably be asking that question on our deathbed.

I mean, what if we couldn't go  
on one *pada-yātrā* after another,  
sing only *ārati* and other approved songs from  
the Vaiṣṇava songbook,  
eat only temple *prasādam*,

obey all the GBC's rules and  
 follow the guru so strictly  
 at every moment—  
 who didn't spout much from the university  
 and who never referred to  
 Franz Kafka  
 who corrupted my youth?  
 What if at death we are left with our reminiscences  
 and see only a sordid past  
 and an unsuccessful one.  
 Can we finally be satisfied  
 at death  
 to read only  
*ISKCON World Review*,  
*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*,  
 and that's it?

Are we already too worldly, even without attending the university? Are we already stumbling? Someone wrote, "You gave your youth to ISKCON and got so stressed that your health broke. Now you have no medical insurance and they don't care."

Who? I have no regrets. I'm living as I like.

At death we will do what comes naturally.

We will see that repression has accomplished nothing.

What is art and how do we use it in Kṛṣṇa's service? What tune does it sing? Does it mean only Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa? Yes, it does. "Caitanya," "Kṛṣṇa"—the essay passes. But how to say that we heard Kṛṣṇa killed the demons and liberated each one, that He loved *gopas* and *gopīs*, that He's almighty? How to put Kṛṣṇa on our lips and in our minds and hearts? How to be convinced, silent, poetic, dark?

Dark? Yes, to know the night of the soul, and secrets are kept in the dark. How to pray.

Great devotees make music or science, blueprints, grow tomatoes, raise children, although in pain sometimes—but everything to please Kṛṣṇa. A devotee tells us of “the music of the spheres.” He invents and improvises ways to help people come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He communicates, is coherent, questions and answers, then goes alone and feels his love for Kṛṣṇa. The Pāṇḍavas walked unafraid up the mountain. Other sages have adjusted their glasses on the bridge of their noses.

The doctor asked, “Why don't you take a day off from your labors and do something relaxing (although, of course, Kṛṣṇa conscious)? It might help your respirator and the muscles in your head would not become tense. You will become more productive.”

Well, it's hard to limit a guy who's already limited.

A devotee is not sentimental but heartfelt.

## A List

Science—prove there is a Cause.

Music—show that in any chaos or unhappiness, the Lord is the cause. Happiness comes from turning to Him.

Math—one plus one is two and all is God. The Complete can't be subtracted or added to. One before the zeros.

Art—paint God as controller of all and if you dare, His name and form by scriptures, but do it good.

Kṛṣṇa—my Lord. All words are Yours.

Pray—Kṛṣṇa, please let me serve You.

Knowledge culminates in praise of Kṛṣṇa. We all know we have to be honest, that it's important, but some people push honesty and it gets tiresome. They get on a mundane trip and sometimes even blaspheme in the name of honest expression. That's when you hit the limits of so-called honesty. No, knowledge must end in glorification of Kṛṣṇa, who advented in Mathurā and then moved to Gokula. Did you know that someone on the Lower East Side saw a photo of Prabhupāda and said, “He thinks with his heart”?

## Text 23

*aham purātita-bhave 'bhavam mune  
dāsyās tu kasyāścana veda-vādinām  
nirūpito bālaka eva yoginām  
śuśrūṣaṇe prāvṛṣi nirvivikṣatām*

O Muni, in the last millennium I was born as the son of a certain maidservant engaged in the service of brāhmaṇas who were following the principles of Vedānta. When they were living together during the four months of the rainy season, I was engaged in their personal service.

## Comment

Nārada begins his autobiography in a matter of fact way, discussing even his past life as if it happened yesterday. Just imagine what it is like to have access to past-life memories. Perhaps it would help us be less attached to our present material identity.

I find it interesting that Nārada, speaking as Vyāsadeva's spiritual master, suddenly switches topics and begins to speak of himself. We expect it will be relevant to Vyāsadeva's situation. Even if Nārada decided to speak of himself as spontaneously as Śrīla Prabhupāda occasionally did, we would welcome it. The person *bhāgavata* is no different than the *Bhāgavatam*. By observing such a devotee's life, we can find guidance for our own lives.

In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda immediately explains what we are to gain from hearing of Nārada's previous life: "Service of the devotee is more valuable than service of the Lord." Nārada was born of "insignificant parentage"—Nārada mentions only his mother, not his father, and his mother was a maidservant. As a boy he served the brāhmaṇa guests who stayed with them during the rainy season. Prabhupāda's point is that even if one is lowborn, he can become elevated by associating with saintly persons. It happened to Nārada and it can happen to us. "The





We can transform the world into a meditation on Kṛṣṇa  
 as Nārada was transformed  
 into a sage  
 and as the wind's music moves from one sound to another  
 but is never quite usual. The devotee seeks new ways  
 in the old  
 to see  
 the truth  
 of the sun on the page  
 and the blue-green of the ink.  
 It's not a matter of just letting loose while remaining with the  
*Bhāgavatam*.

We are not ragtag devotees  
 but trying to communicate through this Indian book  
 published in '62.  
 Did you know a mouse tried to gnaw through the cabin door  
 at Gitā-nāgarī  
 at night  
 and the wind was as soft as the weather?

Madhu preparing the van to be shipped across the Atlantic.  
 Where will it all end, in ruin? The risk is always there. When I  
 rested this afternoon I fell into a half-dream about that, how not  
 only our life in the van but everything will one day wind down.  
 What did Keats write, "Sometimes I have been half in love with  
 death"?

Yes, but there is no death, not for long. Soon enough you are  
 thrust back into another womb. You give up your seniority, your  
 plans, your so-called freedom and start over. And Kali-yuga will  
 be worse next time around. We should be thoughtful about  
 what's coming down the road for us. Is it more pain? We take  
 ourselves so seriously now, but what does it mean?

Rauschenberg put newspapers fifty-four feet high on display  
 in the 1960s. That was his art. Geez. The Philistines didn't  
 know *what* was up.

## List

Twenty girls, forty guys.

Life histories.

Past lives.

J. says he can do it—in two minutes he can take a client into  
past life regression.

I was a barber of Seville,

a seventeenth century maidservant—see? I put an imprint in  
my hand in fresh cement. Let's go back to Lyons, France, and see  
if it's still there. Yes, it is! Transmigration is true!

O Nārada,

I don't want to leave this body and become an ant  
but want to learn from guru to transform my world  
this zoo

into the spiritual world.

"By service of the bona fide spiritual master, the Lord con-  
sents to reveal Himself in proportion to the service rendered."

It is not in our control. All we can do is express our desire to  
attain it and act on that desire as much as we are capable. "As  
they surrender unto Me, I reward them accordingly."

Who am I writing this for? I want to preach to y'all out there  
so that you will do more to please guru, Kṛṣṇa will reveal Him-  
self more, and this world will become more like the spiritual  
world, at least while we're stuck down here. I'm preaching to  
myself and ex-President George Bush, the people of Harlem and  
everywhere. We are all in this hell together.

I should

we should . . .

"New Tompkins Square Park" said the sign the young devotees  
held up. They were Russian, and they were holding *kīrtana* on a  
grassy area at ISKCON Māyāpur. Prabhupāda was in attendance  
in his *mūrti* form, and the men and women danced to reenact the  
1966 pastimes of Swamiji and his first band of disciples.

“The wonder of an atmosphere surcharged with devotional service”—they’re talking about the scene at the inn when the *vedānta-vādīs* were present. The atmosphere was surcharged even though it was no festival organized by a committee and attended by thousands of people. It was surcharged—Nārada was surcharged—by being in the presence of his gurus. Their hearts were surcharged with loving devotional service. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that when a soul is not acting according to his constitutional position of serving Kṛṣṇa his situation is called *māyā*. When we serve Kṛṣṇa, *māyā* dissipates. We serve Kṛṣṇa through the pure devotees.

O Gurudeva, please allow me to become an instrument in your service. I dreamt you were surrounded by many devotees, and my own service to you was to write a diary or newsletter of your activities. You approved of my service and I felt you were helping me to focus my energies as you wanted them focused. You indicated what you wanted me to do.

When we speak of art, we are really speaking of the art of surrender. Nārada was an artist of surrender. He cleared the sages’ plates and living spaces and heard them speak. The spiritual master tests a disciple and then draws him close for more austerities and more hearing. If the disciple indicates he prefers his comforts, he cannot hear more and the relationship cannot grow. Nārada did not set that example.

Diary as service? That’s what the dream said and how I live my life. People invent their own services and offer them to guru. After his disappearance, assignments come from the authorities who may claim to be in touch with guru’s desire. We usually start with partial surrender, offering what we like to guru and keeping some for ourselves. That may be true no matter who chooses the service.

In any case, we must serve guru if we are to avoid *māyā*. Prabhupāda expects us to preach. That means helping others. How

we preach was not so closely defined. We are allowed to use our own intelligence to fulfill his command, as long as we remain enthusiastic and humble.

The wonder of an atmosphere surcharged with devotional service—we tasted that with Śrīla Prabhupāda. How was it possible for us to meet someone like him? I can only assume it was Kṛṣṇa's arrangement. I don't know if it was a reward for past piety, but whatever brought it about, I'm grateful.

Now I want to progress further. Sometimes I feel there is little hope left for me in this life. I seem to have gone as far as I'm capable. Although I spent my youth thinking I would advance as I got older, I now realize that I expended my major energy when I was young. I look back at those days and see now how feeble I have grown. I have to move over to the "New Tompkins Square Park" at the Māyāpur temple, and even that I find too noisy. Young Russian devotees will glance up at me, a has-been. I need to lie down.

Yes, the *bhakti-vedānta* was kind to me, but still I've grown old. What more can I do to surrender now?

Well, I'm not dead yet. Where's there's life, there's hope. My spiritual master was a young old man. At seventy-five he was driving himself to preach in lecture halls around the world. When we was eighty-two and he was living out his last months, he spoke to a full room night after night in Hrishikesh and admonished the Māyāvādis. He continued to preach up until the end, writing his *Bhāgavatam* purports under impossible physical conditions. Perhaps I too will receive his mercy in this way and write up until the end. No, I should not be morose as if I no longer have his mercy.

The wonder of an atmosphere surcharged with devotional service. O Prabhupāda, may I approach you? I came up to you this morning. It was cool overnight, so I added a light wool *cādar* to the one already on your shoulders, and I dreamt of you.

Prabhupāda, I am growing old with you, and I am still pleading for your service. I know I can do more than I am doing, but I don't know how to make it a reality. You can transform the whole material world into the spiritual abode. Devotees want to know if this means that each individual disciple comes to see everything as spiritual, or whether this world actually becomes like Vaikuṇṭha.

It doesn't matter; the statement can be taken either way because one leads to the other. Prabhupāda, you said our love for you will be tested by how we cooperate to maintain the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement after you left us. We are trying, Śrīla Prabhupāda, to work together.

Running out of time. Thinking I might be helped by reading a poet's syntax, I looked at the anthology, *A Gathering of Poets*, written to commemorate the killing of four students at Kent State University in 1970. (I remember that event. We joined the flow of people in Boston-Cambridge who converged in a big lot outside Harvard University Stadium. Some made speeches and we took the opportunity to sing Hare Kṛṣṇa. People stopped to watch, then the protest authorities protested against us. Our *kīrtana* was drowning out their speeches. At first we refused to stop—I can't remember what followed—but I remember the dust rising from our "smoking" *kīrtana*.)

Anyway, as I went through the book, I came upon this line Ginsberg wrote in 1976: "Stand up against governments, against God . . . / Absolutes are Coercion." He says other things, some agreeable, some not: "Advise only myself . . . / If we don't show anyone, we're free to write anything."

Especially when we are off the *vyāsāsana* (if we were ever on it). The wonder of an atmosphere surcharged with devotional service. I like it to be quietly surcharged. I spent some time this morning massaging Śrīla Prabhupāda and hoping the headache would be subdued. Took a *japa* walk.

Little by little we can expect Nārada's story to unfold. His story is not a history that involves twenty-five characters described in one thousand pages like a Dostoyevsky novel, because Nārada spent most of his life wandering alone. And, of course, Kṛṣṇa appears in Nārada's tale. It's a great, simple, personal, intimate, inconceivable story of a five-year-old boy serving *sādhus*. We imagine him standing in the doorway, listening to their talks. Perhaps they invite him in. They can detect that he is interested; perhaps they can see that he is not ordinary. He'll be Nārada when he grows up.

Now let Nārada tell his story.



### Text 24

te mayy apetākhila-cāpale 'rbhake  
 dānte 'dhṛta-kṛīḍanake 'nuvartini  
 cakruḥ kṛpām yadyapi tulya-darśanāḥ  
 suśrūṣamāṇe munayo 'lpa-bhāṣiṇi

Although they were impartial by nature, those followers of the Vedānta blessed me with their causeless mercy. As far as I was concerned, I was self-controlled and had no attachment for sports, even though I was a boy. In addition, I was not naughty, and I did not speak more than required.

## Comment

Nārada tells us that he received special attention and mercy from the Vaiṣṇavas. He admits he was gentle and self-controlled, and that those qualities may have made them more inclined to him.

In this purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda introduces the word “*bhakti-vedāntas*” and defines it as “the true followers of Vedānta.” Thus we know they are pure devotees of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is both the knower of Vedānta and the goal of the *Vedas*. They are obviously also preachers, and their mission was to raise people from their fallen condition to the level of devotional service.

Nārada is describing a time when *varṇāśrama-dharma* was still intact in human society. It was not unusual for a five-year-old boy to go to *gurukula* and become disciplined as a *brahmacārī*. Nārada already possessed favorable qualities. He was already self-controlled, disciplined, and obedient—all the qualities necessary for a disciple in relation to the spiritual master.

I like to think of Nārada because he seems to epitomize how even a fallen soul can receive the mercy of the devotees if he can be gentle enough to both respect them and hear from them. Most of us came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness as young adults. We were born in spiritually backward societies with little or no training in discipline and gentleness. In this way, we are disadvantaged. At the same time, we were blessed with the association of a pure *bhakti-vedānta*, Śrīla Prabhupāda. Even those who came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness after Śrīla Prabhupāda’s disappearance can receive his association through his books and through his faithful disciples. The lack of qualification by birth does not matter.



Still, as we progress in devotional service we begin to wonder whether our lack of qualification will hold us back from the ultimate goal. It may and it may not. Pure devotion performed under the guidance of a pure devotee can overcome *all anarthas*, and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is also the express method for purification. There are no material impediments to *bhakti*, and we can achieve pure love of God the moment we surrender ourselves fully at His feet. To say that we must attain more qualification through birth in a devotee family (or some say an Indian family) would be to minimize the potency of the holy name. *Bhakti* is so powerful that it can purify even the filthiest place (*tivreṇa bhakti-yogena yajeta puruṣaṁ param*). Our hearts are not so filthy that they cannot be cleansed by the holy name.

That said, I will add that it also depends upon our sincerity. We *are* at a disadvantage in that our hearts are filled with mundane impressions, abuses, ignorance, and lust. We cannot say how long it will take for us to clear these impressions and to fill our hearts only with Kṛṣṇa. Ultimately, our success is not in our own hands; we are dependent on the mercy of guru and Kṛṣṇa. At the same time, we can attract their mercy more by deepening our own sincerity. Therefore we cannot count how many lives it will take us to go back to Godhead, but we can pray as Mahārāja Parikṣit prayed that if we do come back next life, let us be completely dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, possess a friendly serving attitude toward His devotees, and feel compassion for all living beings. If we are not perfect at the end of this life, may we always meet and serve the *bhakti-vedāntas* life after life (*tāṇdera caraṇa-sevi-bhaktasane vāsa/ janame janame hoy ei abhilāṣa*).

We are dependent on the *bhakti-vedāntas*. They have the potency to lift us above our material conceptions if we take their association. They also have the power to bless us; their words do not go in vain because Kṛṣṇa has given them the power of attorney to distribute His mercy to whomever they see fit. When they see a spark of sincerity in any being, they bless that being. When

the potent *bhakti-vedāntas* met the spiritually fertile Nārada, the inspiration to perform *bhakti* was “injected with acumen into the soul of the boy.”

Thinking of Nārada as a child makes us think of our own children. Parents have a great responsibility in raising their children in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and if they do not discharge it, they are liable to be punished by the laws of karma (*gurur na sa syāt sva-jano na sa syāt*). A parent must work to free his dependent from recurring death. Although the parent cannot control the destiny of the child, he or she must perform the duty of giving the child as much spiritual training as the child can hold. This was Gour Mohan De’s mood in raising Śrīla Prabhupāda. Although he arranged for him to marry and work in the world, he prepared his son for a devotional life. Thus when Prabhupāda met Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, he was receptive and immediately inspired by his mission.

Self-discipline is an important quality for a disciple. When we live in the guru’s *āśrama*, the discipline is enforced, and therefore the *āśrama* is a good place to receive training. When the time comes to leave the *āśrama* and become married, we should be trained enough that we do not lose all sense of self-discipline. *Brahmacārī* discipline and *gṛhasṭha* discipline have their differences, but they also have their similarities. Both are bound by vows. Any respectable human being will keep his promises. Prabhupāda said if we cannot follow our spiritual vows we are no better than animals.

Therefore, if we find ourselves living outside the *āśrama* and no longer hearing the temple wake-up calls, then we have to hear our own wake-up call and live an honorable life. We promised the spiritual master at initiation to be disciples. How can we now disobey his instructions?

And if we have already lost our self-discipline and are in need of finding our way back to the spiritual master’s feet, we should start with establishing the desire to come under the

guru's sway again. Rather than waiting for the *bhakti-vedāntas* to arrive at our door during the rainy season, we should go out and seek their association. When we find them, we should serve them and make their service our life and soul. The first service they will require is that we be sense-controlled and obedient.

Although it's true that we may appreciate Kṛṣṇa consciousness and the devotees even if we are unable to follow, our appreciation will be distant. It will not burn in our hearts. We must make a personal endeavor to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness if we want to achieve the goal. By following the spiritual master's order we will feel revived mentally and spiritually. It is only the life of no discipline that brings about degradation and exhaustion.



Took a walk this morning under the pink sky. I heard the robins, their song remembered from deep in my childhood. When I started from the house, three or four dogs ran at me. They belonged to the people across the street with the "Beware of Dog" sign on their lawn. It was a little daunting to walk through the gauntlet of howling dogs, so I went and found Madhu, who came out with a stick. By the time he arrived, however, the dogs had dispersed.

Now I'm drawing Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and other forms. Trying to find the freedom in my hand.

As I drew I thought of how we sometimes deliberately turn the focus off ourselves and talk about Kṛṣṇa—Kṛṣṇa who killed Pūtānā, Kṛṣṇa who lifted Govardhana Hill, Kṛṣṇa who created the robins, Kṛṣṇa who created the cosmos, who is the universe. In other words, we repeat the *śāstra* according to what we perceive. Then it seems we run out of steam and have to get back onto more “temporary” matters. That's because we don't know Kṛṣṇa as well as we know our own lives. We only know Kṛṣṇa secondhand, you could say, from books.

I reject the idea that our experience contains no Kṛṣṇa conscious truth, but neither can I say we have so much direct experience of Kṛṣṇa. I know why I don't have that experience, and I can argue with those who judge or even with myself. What I do know is the conditioned perceptions that filter through and how that becomes aligned with my desire to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I ought to be more philosophical, I suppose, when I analyze my experiences and perceptions, but I prefer to live on the gut level, then go deliberately to the *Bhāgavatam* and try to feel something. It's how I'm trying to develop love.

Well said, old mole.

I am disciplined  
in this forest shack.

I was not a recipient of *kṛpā* at *such* a young age  
was twenty-six  
already  
and since then  
I have lived  
a checkered career.

O Muni, give me spiritual acumen  
as soon as possible and let us not misuse it.  
Let me play this trumpet well.

O Nārada,  
 it is demanding to be totally sense controlled in this world  
 but I am inclined  
 toward your mercy  
 and discipline  
 and my own Śrīla Prabhupāda.  
 Zounds!

There's no way but discipline  
 kept in the boot camp or on your own.

Disciplined. Rise early and be willing to practice. Athletes are disciplined, and so are killers, prisoners—all without profit. Śrīla Prabhupāda used to say disciple *means* discipline. He *must* follow. The guru teaches love of God by the process of rules and regulations, and following them requires discipline. It has a military edge to it, but not too much. Later, you develop the taste to follow, then become spontaneous in your expression, then come to love Kṛṣṇa and appreciate His mercy, want to serve.

Well, this dog is housebroken. He's a soldier mechanic and doesn't deviate an inch from the line. Up early and in the shower, marks his body with *tilaka* in all twelve places, surrender to that rule.

Is he singin' the blues, the rules a burden?

"Tote that barge, lift that bail, get a little drunk and you land in jail." No, there's no jail in ISKCON—not yet. We will just be turned over to Yamarāja if we are so undisciplined that we are not even *trying* to be Kṛṣṇa conscious. Or if not, we will find our sense desires reacting in this life and the next and we will suffer.

No, I have no complaints about discipline and sense control. I just want to say that they have to become internalized, part of our nature, or they will rebound and we will not remain obedient. If the soul is awakened to loving devotion, and if the mind is whipped into shape, and if we learn to be submissive and don't lose our beads (as I did in a dream last night), then there is hope for spontaneous love to arouse our hearts and we will do the necessary to get to Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet.

Still, sometimes we become a little unhinged, not seriously, but because we need to know ourselves. What does Whitman say? "I loafe and invite my soul,/ I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass." We are not following him, I know, but we too seek ease within the discipline so that we can be ourselves and not a mechanical, wind-up soldier. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not all the tightening of the gut under the cold shower. We get too old for that sometimes, and maybe even too infirm, and occasionally we want to ask for leniency in our case.

Permission granted, but that doesn't mean we're exempt from basic Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It also doesn't mean that if you need to drop out of a few duties in order to get in touch with your heart and your fears we should inform your confreres that you are now flaky.

Nārada was a good boy and plain. He was a likely candidate to receive mercy and the sages liked him, although they were generally impartial.

We want to know if Kṛṣṇa still loves us if we can't maintain the discipline at every moment.

"What's the matter, Haridāsa? What is your disease?"

"My disease is that I cannot chant my rounds."

Haridāsa, you were already liberated. You didn't need to chant your quota anymore. Still, you were sorry.

We are not liberated and we have no excuse. Sometimes, we're not even sorry.

"But do you forgive me? Do you love me even if I can't follow the discipline?"

Yes, but return to your status as disciple.

Marry off your children

and again tie that knot in your *dhoti*.

Where's your *sikhā*

and your persistence in the face of pain

and doubt?

You are not condemned, but rise up again.

Guru and disciple  
discipline and obedience.  
Don't let your senses lead you to hell.  
Find love instead  
in your own nature,  
and find freedom from the fears  
grown in attachment.



Forgive us our exclusive devotion. It's all we have. Flashback image of Swamiji in *khādi* in his apartment. He was barefoot and quiet, and we wore black denims. I was so young when he rescued me during that summer of 1966. That will be the swan song I sing on my dying day. Years ago a GBC man joked that I was dying, but I perked up long enough to pull my head above the water and prove him wrong.

Now I'm on my own  
 with my Prabhupāda  
 and Kṛṣṇa's love  
 and words  
 which I repeat.  
 I don't live in the āśrama-dorm anymore,  
 but have a separate room  
 thank God.

## Text 25

*ucchiṣṭa-lepān anumodito dvijaiḥ  
 sakṛt sma bhuñje tad-apāsta-kilbiṣaḥ  
 evaṁ pravṛttasya viśuddha-cetasas  
 tad-dharma evātma-ruciḥ prajāyate*

Once only, by their permission, I took the remnants of their food, and by so doing all my sins were at once eradicated. Thus being engaged, I became purified in heart, and at that time the very nature of the transcendentalist became attractive to me.

## Comment

Nārada describes the specific ways in which he associated with the *bhakti-vedāntas*. First he mentions that he honored the remnants of their food. When food is offered to Kṛṣṇa, it becomes *mahā-prasādam*. When the *mahā-prasādam* is then offered to a pure devotee, the remnants are called *mahā-mahā-prasādam*. The *śāstras* state that one should never consider *prasādam* ordinary food; it is nondifferent from Kṛṣṇa, just as Kṛṣṇa and His holy name are nondifferent. In that sense, Kṛṣṇa's pure devotees are also Kṛṣṇa (*arcye viṣṇau śilā-dhir guruṣu nara-matir vaiṣṇave jāti-buddhir*). The *Mahābhārata* states, "O King! A person with little



piety can never develop faith in Lord Govinda, His mercy, His holy name, or His pure devotees.”

Nārada said he took the *prasādam* with the Vaiṣṇavas' permission, but Prabhupāda says in the purport that such foodstuffs may be taken even without the devotees' permission.

Prabhupāda mentions pseudodevotees and alludes to the practical obstacles that may prevent us from realistically entering the path of devotion. All obstacles can be overcome when we gain the association of genuine pure devotees. They infect us with their good qualities when we hear from them, serve them, and honor their *prasādam* remnants. Their infection means we too gain attraction to the Supreme Lord's names, pastimes, qualities, and form. There is no better advice we can give an aspiring devotee than to seek out the association and service of a pure devotee. Śrīla Prabhupāda said if we spend our time with drunkards, we would become drunkards; similarly, if we spend time with devotees, we will become devotees.

Nārada states that by only once honoring the remnants of the devotees' *prasādam*, “all my sins were at once eliminated. . . . I became purified at heart and the nature of the transcendentalists became attractive to me.” Attraction to Kṛṣṇa is called *ruci*, and we attain such taste after the initial stages of *śrāddhā* (preliminary faith), *sādhū-saṅga* (association with devotees), *bhajana-kriyā* (following the rules and regulations of initiation), *anartha-nirvṛtti* (giving up unwanted habits), and *niṣṭhā* (attaining steadiness). After *ruci* we attain *āśakti* (attachment), *bhāva* (initial love), and *prema* (blossomed love). Kṛṣṇa-*prema* also has stages, and Rūpa Gosvāmī describes them all in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and *Ujjvala-nilamaṇi*. Nārada appears to have gone through the preliminary stages quickly. As he states in the previous verse, he was a recipient of special mercy. If we receive *kṛpā* we can become perfect instantly, or perhaps the mercy takes the form of gradual development.

To me this verse sounds magical. *Prasādam* can cause an immediate transformation. *Sādhū-saṅga* is infectious—we become

purified by osmosis. However, our receptivity to such infection requires our proper behavior, right attitude, and service attitude. If somehow or other we stumble into the association of devotees but we are offensive, then we will not receive a positive result. Even our initial attraction may be dimmed by later offenses. Without minimizing the value of *sādhū-saṅga*, we have to admit that the precious association of *sādhū*s bears fruit in a fertile heart, but in a barren heart it can react only slowly.

Nārada's example is, of course, extraordinary, but even if we do not expect to be as immediately successful as Nārada was, we can understand the necessary stages before attaining *ruci*. We must become purified of sins first. In Nārada's case, he was purified because he honored *prasādam*. Whatever impurities he had were immediately washed away. Our coverings may have been accumulated for lifetimes, and our taking to Kṛṣṇa consciousness not so wholehearted. Therefore, Prabhupāda does not teach these principles without awareness of the realistic obstacles we face.

What I find outstanding in Nārada's testimony is how quickly he developed the taste for spiritual life. We imagine that he had little training before meeting the *sādhū*s, and neither did he appear to live a brahminical life. We often talk about taste and admit how dryness can occur even in the life of a sincere practitioner. *Sādhū*s advise us to persist in our devotional practices even when we feel dry, and assure us that our main motivation in practicing *bhakti* should not be to enjoy spiritual taste. Actual happiness comes from pleasing Kṛṣṇa and His devotees. In humility a practicing devotee should stick to his practices and not think that until he has reached *ruci*, he is not doing anything worthwhile. If taste is the only criterion, then we would quit before we reached the goal.

The same sequence of purity of heart and spiritual happiness is described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 5.5.1 in Lord Rṣabhadeva's teachings to His sons:

*ṛṣabha uvāca*  
*nāyaṁ deho deha-bhājāṁ nṛloke*  
*kaṣṭhaṁ kāmān arhate vid-bhujāṁ ye*  
*tapo divyaṁ putrakā yena sattvaṁ*  
*suddhyed yasmād brahma-saukhyam tv anantam*

Lord Ṛṣabhadeva told His sons: My dear boys, of all the living entities who have accepted material bodies in this world, one who has been awarded this human form should not work hard day and night simply for sense gratification, which is available even for dogs and hogs that eat stool. One should engage in penance and austerity to attain the divine position of devotional service. By such activity, one's heart is purified, and when one attains this position, he attains eternal, blissful life, which is transcendental to material happiness and which continues forever.

Austerity, the trouble taken to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness, is prior to the attainment of a pure heart. Without the austerity, we cannot cleanse the heart of *anarthas*. It takes personal commitment to the path to make advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, even though it is not by hard work that we become purified but by Kṛṣṇa's grace. This is similar to Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's edict, "Don't try to see Kṛṣṇa, but act in such a way that Kṛṣṇa sees you."

When we speak about associating with a pure devotee and how to avoid pseudodevotees, we may wonder whether it's actually possible to contact a pure devotee during this lifetime. What if I had missed Śrīla Prabhupāda's association and had learned about Kṛṣṇa consciousness only after 1977?

By Prabhupāda's grace, we can at least have his association through his teachings, books, and mission. "He reasons ill who says that Vaiṣṇavas die, when thou art living still in sound." Even so, it is important to have a living example of pure devotion to emulate. At least we have the benefit of seeing the sincerity of Prabhupāda's sincere and experienced followers. Following the

process of *bhakti*, which has been followed eternally in *paramparā*, we can still approach the Deity, hear the sacred words of the *Bhāgavatam*, taste the *mahā-prasādam* and *mahā-mahā-prasādam*, and become purified. We can still be infected with Śrīla Prabhupāda's nature even if we did not have his physical association.

If, however, we decide that there are no pure devotees now existing, that we missed the opportunity to find such a devotee in this lifetime, that such devotees existed only in the past, then we remove ourselves from the mercy which still flows like a river through the *paramparā*.

Only once he took the *prasādam*. The Lord's remnants and the association of Vaiṣṇavas—neither are ordinary.

How to find the taste? Don't be down on devotees but see the good

or how can you be purified?

Yes.

In my case? I ate a minnow. I committed twenty sins a minute and then met a devotee (pure), but I didn't surrender everything

not yet

but lived a public act *mahā-bhāgavata*—you know.

I am talking in public now.

A child is crying.

Obstacles on the path—superficial citing of Śrīla Prabhupāda's name, grabbing at him like a drowning man caring only to survive.

It's 4 P.M. O pure soul,

O self,

remove the obstacles and chant the holy name. The day is almost gone.

Are you aware of that?

I once went to Nārada-kuṇḍa and saw mice drink from cups of water on the altar. I didn't understand it because I was from the West. Then I sat on the bank of the *kuṇḍa* and read from *Nārada Bhakti-sūtra*, hoping to receive Nārada's blessings before writing my own commentary to finish Śrīla Prabhupāda work.

Bless me, Prabhupāda. I too am a greedy beggar. You make your *prasādam* available to me two times a day because I offer something to you. If only I could do it honestly and prayerfully and with faith and love, but you are kind to me in any case. Nārada taught Vyāsadeva over five thousand years ago, and now it's almost the twenty-first century. How is it that his words are still fresh?

We want to feel the freshness and the focus of it. Although we want to apply the lessons included in each verse and purport, sometimes we want to just hear and relish them as part of the audience. We don't have to intellectualize them all the time, but can feel proud of Nārada's success and learn to long for the same. Yes, we know it takes discipline, obedience, and sense control, and that we need to learn to glorify Kṛṣṇa, but to really understand the flow of these verses we have to understand the flow of *bhakti* exchanged between guru and disciple. Sometimes before we jump up to enact it in our own guru-disciple relationships, we need to just sit down and watch and feel what we need to feel. Nārada took the *sādhus'* permission to honor the remnants of their foodstuff. We should also ask permission to honor the remnants of these teachings as they are given in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

Almost had a hard time getting up at midnight this morning. Thought of the doctor's advice to sleep late. I'll do it another time. It's too easy to pass up the opportunity to consider the *Bhāgavatam* and to write what I know, what comes to me. I need to maintain the discipline of it.

Let's get back to Nārada. He is picking up a piece of vegetable, or perhaps a wet fragment of a *capāti*. He isn't gobbling it

down greedily, but honoring it. How else could his eating have become so explosive for him in Kṛṣṇa consciousness? We eat *prasādam* every day, but it doesn't have that effect. It all has to do with the mentality, and of course, with Kṛṣṇa's plan.

What was it like? Whatever dirt was covering his mind was at once purified, and the nature of the transcendentalist became attractive to him. All obstacles were removed as soon as he contacted the substance.

In *The Nectar of Devotion* Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that we should not doubt the miracles listed—by once seeing Lord Jagannātha on the cart, a bum goes back to Godhead. He said it happens to some people, not to everyone. Touch *prasādam* to your tongue and become a saint. Touch Kṛṣṇa's name to your tongue and ear and become mad with love. You just have to keep at it.

Nārada, can I reach beyond the  
distance to you  
to your boyhood as  
you exploded into pure  
Kṛṣṇa consciousness, removed  
all sins  
honored a remnant  
of food left on a plate  
by a saint in your home?

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura also sings  
that whenever he honors *prasādam*  
a new life experience opens  
and when he honors three drops of  
*caraṇāmṛta* from the Lord's lotus feet, he feels ecstatic.

And what was the result? Did you develop a bold, compassionate spirit? You began to travel around the world alone, and later you preached.

Once only I took the remnants too. This is not fiction. Dr. Hopkins smiled in a NYC hotel room when I and another

devotee visited and presented him with a newly published volume of the *Bhāgavatam* (Śrīla Prabhupāda was still with us then). I was enthusiastic and recounted how wonderful the *Bhāgavatam* was with its accounts of devotees like Nārada, who at five suddenly became a devotee. Dr. Hopkins smiled. "It's a wonderful story." Bless his soul and his generosity.

"After the elimination of all sins or obstacles on the path . . . one can have perfect taste, one can have transcendental emotions, and at last one is situated on the plane of loving service of the Lord."

## Text 26

*tatrānvaham kṛṣṇa-kathāḥ pragāyatām  
anugraheṇāśṛṇavam manoharāḥ  
tāḥ śraddhayā me 'nupadam viśṇvataḥ  
priyaśravyaṁ aṅga mamābhavad ruciḥ*

O Vyāsadeva, in that association and by the mercy of those great Vedāntists, I could hear them describe the attractive activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa. And thus listening attentively, my taste for hearing of the Personality of Godhead increased at every step.

## Comment

Tasting the *prasādam* cleared away the boy's sins and he became attracted to the transcendentalist's nature. He was thus able to relish the *bhakti-vedānta*'s main offering, *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. We have read previously about the glories of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, as in the verse *śṛṇvatām śva-kathāḥ kṛṣṇaḥ, puṇya-śravaṇa-kīrtanaḥ* (*Bhāg.* 1.2.17). We have also read that attraction to hearing the *sāstra* may be enhanced by rendering service to the Vaiṣṇavas. The boy rendered service willingly and pleasingly, and when he honored the

sages' *prasādam*, he performed a pure act of *bhakti*. And he received the result of pure devotion: he became more inclined to hear *kṛṣṇa-kathā*.

The reciprocation was complete when the *sādhū*s in turn desired to help him taste the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Thus the relationship between guru and disciple developed.

The verse mentions the Lord's activities, and Śrīla Prabhupāda states that since Kṛṣṇa is Absolute, seeing His form, hearing of His activities, and chanting His names are equally beneficial. There is no doubt now that the *bhakti-vedāntas* who came to the boy's home were not impersonalists but devotees of the Lord whose main engagement was *kṛṣṇa-kathā*.

Kṛṣṇa descends to this world and displays His pastimes so that people will become attracted to them. Narrating the Lord's deeds fulfills the people's desire to hear good stories. When we spend our time hearing stories of mundane heroes (or anti-heroes), we waste our time and become "addicted to the three modes of material nature." Mundane stories may seem to provide an escape from the "real" world, but because the heroes are temporary and ultimately fallible, we fail to make the real escape. Actually, hearing about mundane heroes draws us away from Kṛṣṇa into a world built upon illusion.

Hearing about Kṛṣṇa is nondifferent than seeing Kṛṣṇa, and since Kṛṣṇa is the all-pure, *kṛṣṇa-kathā* cleanses the heart of *anarthas* (*naṣṭa-prāyeṣu abhadreṣu nityaṁ bhāgavata-sevayā*). The more pure we become, the more active and eager we become to increase our relationship with Kṛṣṇa by offering loving service. "The whole idea is that simply by hearing about the Lord's pastimes one could become one of the associates of the Lord."

As Nārada heard and attained perfection, so can those of us who practice sincerely, with respect for the *bhakti-vedāntas*. Hearing is the recommended process.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "By hearing about the Personality of Godhead, from within, all accumulated sins of the mundane



creature are cleared." The phrase "from within" suggests that hearing the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* must not be performed as an external ritual. Since it is the heart that has to change, we must hear deeply and submissively, and with faith. Such hearing is on the platform of *śraddhā*, and it will lead to the higher stages of *bhakti*. When our hearing is steadily attentive and faithful, we will begin to develop taste. We are all spirit souls. Therefore it is natural that from such hearing, our original consciousness will be revived.

Rṣabhadeva advised His sons that we attain the human form only after many, many lives. It's such a rare occasion, and a rarer opportunity, because only in the human form is our consciousness awake enough to hear properly. Cats and dogs hear sound vibration, but they cannot respond with higher consciousness.

Devotees are sometimes dissatisfied with the ritual of attending the *Bhāgavatam* class. Sometimes they attend the class only because they are forced. In one temple I visited, the president took attendance at the *Bhāgavatam* class. Whoever was absent was not allowed to have breakfast. We hear devotees complain that their attendance is a kind of *niyamāgraha* or following the rules and regulations only for the sake of following. Where is the magic when they listen? They walk away after class feeling as empty as when they began. Often they blame the speaker for his or her inability to inspire the listeners.

The complaints are often justified, and some speakers are almost guaranteed to put their audience to sleep. It's unfortunate when dynamic subject matter becomes the topic of an uninspired presentation, or when the speaker fails to prepare or even maintain his own interest in the topic. Still, there is responsibility on both sides. Both speaking and hearing the *Bhāgavatam* are sacred acts. The *Bhāgavatam* states that both speaker and hearer are purified, and even the place where the *Bhāgavatam* is recited becomes spiritualized.

While it is the speaker's duty to prepare both by study and by living a devotional life, it is the hearer's responsibility to draw

nectar even from a devotee less advanced than Śukadeva Gosvāmī. Attentive hearing helps a speaker's confidence, and when a hearer can then draw out the essence of a speaker's presentation and ask for further clarification, the speaker also becomes more enlivened and may be better able to access his personal realization of the topic.

Śrīla Prabhupāda mentioned in an earlier purport the obstacles we may face on our path. One of the obstacles we face is that we are not sitting to hear the *Bhāgavatam* with Sūta Gosvāmī. Neither are we the potent *bhakti-vedāntas* or the super-receptive boy Nārada.

It is also true that the morning *Bhāgavatam* class should not be our only meeting with the *Bhāgavatam* in the day. If we want to receive Kṛṣṇa's *darśana* in this lifetime, part of our expression of eagerness will be to approach the *Bhāgavatam* again and again out of our own attraction to reading it. When we read privately, there is no bar from our association with Śrīla Prabhupāda, Śrīla Vyāsadeva, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, and Mahārāja Parikṣit.

Some persons who join the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement fail to develop an attraction for hearing the *sāstra*. They are attracted to the communal life or to receiving shelter from the material world, and this is favorable to their *bhakti*, but their devotion cannot become strong without hearing and chanting. Each of us has the responsibility to help those with less attraction by ourselves relishing the *Bhāgavatam* and allowing *bhāgavata-kathā* to flow from us in a pleasing manner. Speaking *kṛṣṇa-kathā* should become the focus of our communal or even solitary life. It is our personal relationship with Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

We talk about *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, but how often do we discuss it? Why are we always so busy elsewhere? The same with our chanting. I admire those devotees who *do* something about their shortcomings in this regard. I know one devotee who decided to join Vṛndāvana's twenty-four-hour *kirtana* party just so he would

be sure to be chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa for six hours a day. It's not the particulars of the service that matter, but the mood of finding a practical solution to our lack of taste.

I am now 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 today. Still, I can meditate and try to hear the song. Life is beating away through our veins. Don't 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 *sāstra*. Yes, I know about that. The heart wants something now, but what? Not the beat of rock 'n' roll or jazz or the classics. The heart wants a real hero to love, not someone temporary to stir temporary, material emotions. All material romance ends in tragedy and we see suddenly that we have wasted our lives. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura sings, "I did not attain attraction for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa." I didn't 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 . . .

He (she) says it's not enough to study the incarnations or even to tell the Viṣṇus apart. I need a piano or a tremolo or somebody pickin' a guitar

need to dance

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

my . . .  
soul?

If we can only refrain for a little while, and adjust our hearts, ask our own selves why we don't yearn for God as we yearn for

fulfillment. Thérèse of Lisieux cried out, "You please visit me and be my only lover," and she signed it, "a hysterical teenager for Christ." She was prepared to suffer  
to play that tune.

When the millenniums changed and the hoary sages gathered,  
although birds were treeping outside  
and I couldn't go out to play  
I stayed with you.  
If this is true  
then my life is well worth . . .

Get off it, man, this ain't  
no airport waiting lounge.  
You need to *fuel*.  
You need to be where  
the *bhakti-vedāntas* are  
and not where those well-intentioned,  
mellow,  
expert-at-play-yet-  
millions-of-miles-away-from-love-for-Govinda  
guys ply their trade.  
Come out to the grass slope  
in Tompkins Square Park  
and sit with the Bhaktivedanta.

Nārada's story was told long ago, and it was lived out in another millennium. What has that got to do with now? Now it's 1996. I first met a *bhakti-vedānta* in 1966 and he was kind to me. That is another kind of now. Now I hear truck horns on I-80 although it's after midnight. Another now will occur when I die.

What's the point? On what are you reflecting?

I'm saying that the truth is so true that although it happened long ago, I can see it before my eyes as if it is happening in the

present. Yes, that's what we want when we read the *Bhāgavatam* narrations, especially the descriptions of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

Don't remain vague. "The service of Lalitā is my *bhajana*," Rūpa-maṇjari sings. In the morning Kṛṣṇa gets up and blows His buffalo horn. Crack the time barrier. The spiritual world exists in the eternal present. We have to break away from our conditioned (and conventional) conceptions about what is real and what is not, what is past and what is not, what we need and what we do not. Śrīla Prabhupāda created a society by which we can achieve this breakthrough into understanding Kṛṣṇa's transcendental pastimes and qualities. He also expected us to share what we discover with others.

We are surrounded by *sādhus*. There's a *sādhū* living in Rāghava Paṇḍita's cave, a *sādhū* in the northwest, *sādhus* in ISKCON temples who rise early to chant before the Deities in halls lit only by the altar lights.

She complained, "We go to the *Bhāgavatam* class but are not inspired. Isn't it rare? The potency, I mean. Is it wrong to follow my heart and not attend if a dull speaker is reading the *Bhāgavatam*?"

Isn't what rare? The *Bhāgavatam* is not dull, and we have as constant an access to it as we ourselves desire.

This is a poor man's approach to reform  
of a society  
of a self.

Only once did Nārada honor the sages' *prasādam*. Later, in his eternal position, he began to enter Kṛṣṇa's *lilā* freely. One time he went to Vṛndāvana near the end of Kṛṣṇa's *kaiśora* activities and said, "I have seen Your *lilā* and will see You kill the demons. In a little while (tomorrow?) You will kill Kāṁsa, and then You will marry many wives." He spoke of both past and future as he spoke to Govinda. Another time he went to Dvārakā to see how Kṛṣṇa managed to live with 16,108 wives. He wanted to appreciate Kṛṣṇa's *aiśvarya*. Nārada was amazed to

see that Kṛṣṇa had expanded into 16,108 forms and was able to engage with each of His wives in a different palace in all ways appropriate for an ideal householder king.

O Lord, O energy of the Lord,

"the whole idea is simply

by hearing about the Lord's pastimes

one can become one of the associates of the Lord."

Saw an ad in *Hare Kṛṣṇa World* for a magnet that said, "Today is Ekādaśī." You can stick it to your refrigerator. We're branching out into all kinds of little businesses, we Hare Kṛṣṇas, and we're straining to relate them all to the *sāstra*. Another ad said, "Kṛṣṇa is the taste of water," so buy my distilled water. The magnet was only \$10. Buy a plot in heaven. Join our club and give money.

We have to live. Better to be at least related to Kṛṣṇa.

I think the Ekādaśī magnet is a great idea, but \$10?

Living costs.

So he writes on a morning in April, still wishing to get beyond the mundane demands and forget for a while that there is anything *but* Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and a sage named Nārada recalling his boyhood. O my beamish boy.



## Text 27

*tasmims tadā labdha-rucer mahā-mate  
 priyaśravasy askhalitā matir mama  
 yayāham etat sad-asat sva-māyayā  
 paśye mayi brahmaṇi kalpitam pare*

O great sage, as soon as I got a taste of the Personality of Godhead, my attention to hear of the Lord was unflinching. And as my taste developed, I could realize that it was only in my ignorance that I had accepted gross and subtle coverings, for both the Lord and I are transcendental.

## Comment

Nārada's initial taste for *kṛṣṇa-kathā* flared up and became constant and permanent. He understood his own spiritual nature as transcendental and his bodily identification as illusion.

Nārada's experience shows that spiritual realization is not whimsical or insignificant. When you attain it, you definitely change your outlook on life. Material life, which is the normal consciousness of most people, is as different from spiritual life as darkness is from light. Other metaphors that are used to convey the change from material to spiritual awareness: washing away the dust from the mirror of the mind, or waking up from a dream.

Śrīla Prabhupāda describes subtle and gross bodies and how both may be engaged in Kṛṣṇa's service. The seventh chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā* describes that the gross body is composed of earth, water, fire, air, and ether, and the subtle body comprises mind, intelligence, and false ego, by which one identifies the self as material. Both gross and subtle coverings bind us and cover our knowledge of God, but when we meet a pure devotee, our original consciousness can be awakened and we can again reclaim ourselves as Kṛṣṇa's servants. Once a devotee takes seriously to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he doesn't divide his interests between matter and

spirit, but engages both gross and subtle bodies in *bhakti*. “Such realization of transcendental activities is made possible by many, many years of apprenticeship in devotional service, but simply attraction of love for the Personality of Godhead, as was developed in Nārada Muni, by hearing, is highly effective.”

We will have to apprentice for many years first. Sometimes an extraordinary person is given an honorary degree from the university without having to attend classes, but most of us should not expect that. We will have to work through the system. In *bhakti*, the system is *sādhana*, and only after years of practicing it will we begin to see the first lights of spontaneous love, and even then we cannot count our years of devotional service and expect spontaneous devotion to arise at any time. Our success will be based on the quality of our *bhakti*. Therefore Śrīla Prabhupāda said that pure love of God can be obtained in a moment, or we can fail to attain it even after millions of years.

Nevertheless, it's expected that one who strives for pure love of God will gradually attain it. After all, we are spiritually transcendental, and the *bhakti* method we have received from Kṛṣṇa through the *ācāryas* will remove our coverings and restore us to our original nature.

When we understand the nature of an apprenticeship, we know that we will require to be taught by masters. We shouldn't resent the senior devotees who, although not always perfectly gentle, try to bring us forward in spiritual life. We should also not resent the restraints placed upon our service or think that such restraints prevent us from expressing whatever love of God we possess. In the beginning we surrender more with our intelligence than with our emotions, and it should be our intelligence that guides us to understand either the point or the silver lining behind the restraints.

It's a question of taste. Don't seek material *rasa*.

Yes, but isn't the whole world the Lord's and any fine sentiment we may find there also Kṛṣṇa conscious?



No, only if you add Govinda, the one before the zeroes.

A spring day—sixty degrees—and white blossoms on the trees, finally unwrapped from their winter protective coverings. I dreamt of Kṛṣṇa last night. I was playing harmonium, but He slipped away when I looked at my watch. The mode of passion doesn't enable us to live in delicate perception of Vaiṣṇava truth. The mode of passion keeps your head spinning, and the things you taste are elusive and not always what you want or even true. They are certainly not under your control. Better to stick to the more stately measure of time and live in obedience to an inner clock. Look to Nārada for an example. Listening for a sign.

I'd like to paint like mad this afternoon unless He directs me to some new frontier. I'm after taste. I admit it. I have a mundane heart, wet and misused, and I can't always talk straight. O brother, I am your servant, but I won't work with no taste. I am no *sahajiyā*. I know the bad guys from the good guys. But I'm a senior citizen and I got my rights to seek out taste of love of God.

Unflinching flavor of  
*kṛṣṇa—sūrya-sama and tamasi mā jyotir gama.*  
 Once in the light—  
 speak Vedic truth  
 even before you have fully realized it.

Do what is favorable to your own Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We are planning to arrive in the Baltimore area where I will speak for several nights on the First Canto, reviewing what I have written here. I will also speak the *Bhāgavatam* on travel days at temples. Of course, when traveling and preaching you never know which verse you will get. One day you may have to speak from the Fourth Canto and the next you will be speaking from the seventh.

Nārada speaks to me. Does he speak to you too, dear reader? He says (anatomy of a spiritual conversion) that he became

attracted to the nature of a transcendentalist and that he realized he was not his body but transcendental, like God.

After that, we don't hear whether his health was always good, or whether he had headaches or sniffles or something serious like pneumonia. When he traveled later, we don't know if he ever flinched. The *Bhāgavatam* says he was fearless, but I wonder if he ever met a snake and was momentarily surprised. Or whether he sat down and cried, not exactly lonely for his mother and his previous life, but facing its loss and perhaps letting those feelings go. I doubt it happened. He had understood himself as separate from his body and saw himself only in relation to Kṛṣṇa. Yes, there's hope, but let's not get ahead of ourselves in the story.

We are not so powerful as Nārada, and this is no longer Satya-yuga (or whatever yuga it was when he was born). We are no ordained *āveśa* incarnations as Nārada was. Still, we have *mahā-prasādam* and a *bhakti-vedānta* to show us the way. We have begun to leave the darkness behind and enter the light in our many years of apprenticeship.

“ . . . for both the Lord and I are transcendental.”

“My sweet Lord,

I really want to know You . . .

but it takes so long—my Lord.”

## Text 28

*itthaṁ śarat-prāvṛṣikāv ṛtū harer*  
*viṣṇvato me 'nusavaṁ yaśo 'malam*  
*saṅkīrtyamānaṁ munibhir mahātmabhir*  
*bhaktiḥ pravṛttātma-rajas-tamopahā*

Thus during two seasons—the rainy season and autumn—I had the opportunity to hear these great-souled sages constantly chant the unadulterated glories of the Lord Hari. As

the flow of my devotional service began, the coverings of the modes of passion and ignorance vanished.

## Comment

There is no doubt now what kind of *munis* his visitors were. They were continually engaged in *saṅkīrtana*, glorifying the Supreme Lord. The boy heard from them continuously. So it was not just one nibble of their food remnants, but the day after day, month after month, nourishment of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda describes the flow of devotion and how it may awaken in any soul. The pure devotees are already flowing with *bhakti* and nothing can stop their expression of it. As the river flows toward the sea, the devotees flow unto the ultimate goal of transcendental love, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. If an onlooker even observes a free-flowing devotee, his own blocks will be washed away and he will become free of the material modes of passion and ignorance. Then he too will begin to flow toward the goal.

I like to think of this image when I come upon a swift flowing river or stream. Sometimes you see them in a forest coursing over rocks into little waterfalls. It's so primal! Or the sacred rivers of India, even when quiet, have a strong undercurrent that can wash you away if you are not attentive. Whenever I remember this verse I pray, "Please let my current of *bhakti* be activated by my proximity to the great souls who chant Hare Kṛṣṇa."

We are speaking about the flow of devotion, but we are not necessarily speaking about *rāgānugā-bhakti* as opposed to *vaidhi-bhakti*. There are differences between the two processes, but when we follow Prabhupāda, we follow a *vaidhi* that will lead us to the spontaneous stage. We can at least begin to flow even in the regulative stage when we practice our *sādhana* with sincerity. It may take us awhile to enter the full current.

Or we can think of another example. The spiritual master awakens the seed of *bhakti* in the heart and we water it continuously with hearing and chanting, weed our garden, and watch

the creeper of love grow toward Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet. In that sense, the goal of *vaidhi* is not different than the goal of *rāgānugā*.

The only real rule in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is to never forget Kṛṣṇa. The main processes to fulfill this rule in both *vaidhi* and *rāgānugā* practices are to hear and chant (*śravaṇam kīrtanam*). *Bhakti* is never dry or superficial (although our attempts to practice it may be). Rather, the regulations provide the channel by which our *bhakti* is contained until it is mature.

We are fortunate in ISKCON to have Śrīla Prabhupāda still flowing in our midst through his purports. Even his tributaries (disciples) can lead us to the bigger river of his mercy, and his mercy will carry us to the ocean. From Prabhupāda's purports flow the commentaries of the previous *ācāryas*, and from their commentaries flows Kṛṣṇa, the infinite ocean of love of God, who comes to us in the form of different rivers and streams, which all return to Him again.

When we talk about flow, we are not talking about the mystical or Taoist conception of going with our karma or the "universal order." According to such mystics, to go against the divine direction is only to create friction and ultimately difficulty for ourselves, but they do not recognize who is the source of that direction. We are interested only in flowing toward Kṛṣṇa. Let us not be vague in our understanding of spirituality.

The *bhakti* flow is a devotee's personal current of glorification of Kṛṣṇa. It is propelled by our singing of Kṛṣṇa's names, forms, qualities, and pastimes. It is not concerned with those who wish to stand on the muddy banks of fruitive gain, impersonalism, worldly religion, or atheism. The *bhakti* flow is not concerned with the inevitability of nature's laws but with the person behind those laws. The flow of *bhakti* is the confidential and eternal relationship of the soul with his Deity. Only pure devotees can enter it fully, but those of us who are fortunate enough to associate with pure devotees can begin to wade into the stream.

And no one should forbid others from entering the flow. The rules and regulations don't forbid the development of spontaneity

but encourage it, and when we impose the rules on others in our preaching, we should do it with that understanding. There is always a risk that we may capsize when we hit choppy waters, so it is important to have a good boat and a wise and experienced captain. It's also important to keep the fuel of our thoughts pure. The river will not carry cheaters.

I don't know, sir, someone said to me recently. Can I go with the flow of watching the football game on TV and yet still enter the *bhakti-mārga*?

Restrain,  
refrain—

even when you're errant don't leave the current. Learn to dovetail everything in Kṛṣṇa's service, and drop off all that baggage that is hampering your journey. We have no more need of karma.

I hereby resolve to make the effort to stop all other tangent flows and to move beyond the position of observer of the *bhakti-mārga*. Let me become caught in that current and not the current leading to heaven or hell or Taoistic mountaintops not peopled by those who yearn for the *rūpānuga* path. I am meant to associate with Śrīla Prabhupāda's people despite their faults and mine, and I am meant to flow in the river he has created, even when the channel feels narrow, even when I think the water is low or there is danger from rocks. He is my captain and I am on his boat.

My *anarthas* must be like the filth floating in the Ganges. Constitutionally I am pure, but I am covered with lust, anger, greed, envy, and laziness. I can't seem to shake them off before entering the water, so I will have to allow the water to wash them from me.

Prabhupāda's devotees find their entrance into the flow through his books. There he teaches us clearly how to practice *bhakti* and how to free ourselves from *anarthas*. Through his mission we learn to serve guru and Kṛṣṇa and to ascertain the

proper balance between emotion and knowledge for each stage of the journey. We have to remain open and vulnerable to the spiritual master, and be prepared to accept both his encouragement and his reprimand without wanting to dam the river or get off the boat. We have to follow with that much grace until we are old. Then we will naturally flow out of this life and to his lotus feet where he will take us where we need to go to continue the process. We pray only to be accepted and maintained throughout our attempts to follow. The spiritual master has breathed life into us. Now we should thank the Lord for whatever resolve He is giving us to become *eka-niṣṭhā*, single-minded in our desire.



## Text 29

tasyaivam me 'nuraktasya  
 praśritasya hatainasah  
 śraddadhānasya bālasya  
 dāntasyānucarasya ca

I was very much attached to those sages. I was gentle in behavior, and all my sins were eradicated in their service. In my heart I had strong faith in them. I had subjugated the senses, and I was strictly following them with body and mind.

## Comment

Nārada again lists the qualities he possessed that enabled him to hear from the sages as a disciple. How important faith is. It carries us over our *anarthas* and the familiarity with both the *sādhus* and the knowledge we receive that sets in over time. Faith protects us from always seeking the cheapness of material novelty even when our minds are restless, and it allows us to be satisfied and to grow with our spiritual master into understanding spiritual variety. Life is short and it may take years to master even the basics of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Śrīla Prabhupāda sarcastically remarks that the material world is such a nice place that there is danger at every step. We need our teacher to lead us forward.

I love to hear Nārada say he was attached (*anuraktasya*) to the *sādhus*. Good. Strong faith, strict following, controlled senses—these are required qualifications if we want to become an unadulterated devotee. Plain and gentle.

When we meet such an unadulterated devotee, even if we cannot understand exactly what his surrender is, we can understand that he is completely dedicated to Kṛṣṇa. To have his association is to possess a rare treasure. We pray to serve such a person. “He knows the Personality of Godhead as the Supreme Proprietor and all others as His servitors.”

We should use our whole minds and bodies to follow him. “A neophyte devotee must faithfully serve the pure devotee, and he should be very much obedient and strictly follow the instructions.” Śrīla Prabhupāda lifts the discussion out of the realm of Nārada’s life story, out of the realm of history, and puts the responsibility to follow his example into our hands. That is the

point of the *Bhāgavatam*'s histories. Nārada was determined; now we should be determined in our lives.

Prabhupāda also warns us not to become misled by pseudo-devotees. That means we have to make a personal investment in understanding what *bhakti* is and what it is not, what purity is and what it is not. If we are not prepared to make this investment of time and energy, it is possible to be misled.

We should also be careful not to misuse our association with the pure devotee. Although the *śāstras* say that by meeting a pure devotee we are guaranteed to go back to Godhead, "meeting a pure devotee" means following him sincerely. If we do not possess (or develop) the qualities Nārada describes in himself—plainness, gentleness, submission, obedience, faith—then how can we go back to Godhead? Our inability to develop these qualities is a sign that we do not yet identify with the pure devotee's goal. Therefore, we have no reason to go back to the spiritual world. Meeting a pure devotee is not like buying a product from the store that comes with an ironclad guarantee. The guarantee is related to how we make use of the opportunity we have been given. Of course, Kṛṣṇa promises that if we think of Him we will return to Him, but we actually have to think of Him with love. We have to do our part. It may take us more than one lifetime to achieve the necessary devotional desire to carry us beyond this world.

This verse contains a list of good qualities we need to develop: *anuraktasya*, *praśritasya*, *hatainasah*, *śraddhā*, *anucarasya*—a devotee is attached to the devotees, obedient to them, free from sins, faithful, sense-controlled, and follows strictly.

Each of these qualities has to be lived out through a lifetime. It's not that when the spiritual master returns to the spiritual world, we break our faith and find a new guru. We do not want to be ashamed when we meet him again. We need to remain obedient to his order and intelligent enough to flow with it over the years, we need to work on *anartha-nivṛtti*, clearing the



unwanted habits of anger, madness, fear, illusion, uncleanness, and so many others, and we want to always remain attached to the devotees. We have to serve in a total way.

Madhu walked with me a little ways this morning in case the neighbor's dogs were out. The weather was cool but pleasant, and the birds sounded like a full orchestra. I remarked to Madhu that when we go to the spiritual world, the atmosphere will be wonderful. Everything that is pleasant here will be increased a millionfold, but the suffering will be nonexistent.

"Let's go there."

"You have to be attached to Kṛṣṇa, not just to enjoying the bird song. But yes, let's go there."

I shouldn't think that becoming attached to Kṛṣṇa is a difficulty to be surmounted. It's natural, and it is the enjoyment in spiritual life. Unfortunately, we have decided to wait to attain such love. I wonder why? Is it that causeless envy Prabhupāda has described?

I went through a block yesterday of not wanting to draw anymore. Then Madhu gave me a few tips, remembering his own experiences with music. He said he had a garage outfitted with recording equipment so that he could instantly work with any song ideas he had, but when he didn't feel like going out there, he wouldn't force himself. Otherwise, the pressure would become detrimental to his creative process. Yes, any expression has to be voluntary and can't be forced.

I then adopted an attitude of detachment. I stopped trying to face the block head-on and was able to relax. As a result, this morning I was able to pick up a brush and start painting. The lines were bold and relaxed at the same time, and I felt I broke through and created an image that was not didactic. Rather, it was what I wanted to say. It felt good.

It occurred to me that this is similar to the problem of becoming attached to Kṛṣṇa. There has to be some play to it.

This morning as I was writing I felt serious, even sober, and that mood served my purpose well, but when I began to paint I felt more playful and more willing to just be myself. If you hesitate or are too timid in your desire to express your own Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then you get stuck in the “I should be” and “I should not be” syndrome. You begin to imagine that your personal Kṛṣṇa consciousness has to come up to some preconceived standard that has nothing to do with your own heart. It doesn’t work. We have to be bold enough to enter the flow of our personal feelings toward guru and Kṛṣṇa.

At one point I was wondering if I could experiment in paint on the poster boards that Baladeva brought me. I had tried working on a smaller page, but I felt the urge to swing my arm. I went to the poster boards and felt freer. It’s not that everything I did came out beautifully, but my getting into the process was a success. I especially liked assembling a particular collage containing images of myself with Prabhupāda. I drew scribbly antics in the background and then felt I wanted to preserve this real-to-me piece. I was there with the master.

## A List

Frankincense  
 incense  
 incense holder  
 āraṭi paraphernalia  
 Rādhā-Dāmodara’s *darśana*  
 the mind’s ability to control itself.  
 Alas my mind wandered  
 when I stood before Them.  
 “Please bless me,” we beggars cry,  
 “I want only *bhakti*.”

A list of good qualities as the clock runs out:  
 Gentleness—just do what they say.

Self-control.

Attached to *sādhus*.

Not brainwashed, but prepared to subdue interest in matter.

Strict following.

Sensible.

Unwilling to listen to contradictory tendencies, but taking the chance of going for the highest.

Willing to flow in rapid waters but remain gentle  
single-minded

aware of the panoramic Kṛṣṇa conscious life  
even when it's difficult.

Trusting in Kṛṣṇa's protection.

Willing to read *sāstra*—if you don't open your *Bhagavad-gītā*, how will you stay in touch with Him? How will you remember that He carries what we lack and preserves what we have?

"Having come to this temporary and miserable world, engage in My service. . . . He who thinks of Me at the time of death comes to Me [by incessantly chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra]."

*This flow.*

Knowing that although Nārada lived millions of years ago and was an ideal *śiṣya*, the *bhakti* process is still valid and will work on you. That kind of simple faith in Kṛṣṇa's promise.

I imagine meeting Prabhupāda at the end of this life, perhaps going to his room somewhere and being recognized by him. In an instant he sees, with some disappointment, that I am still a little mad with vanity. The negative qualities have not been completely washed out. "All right," he says, "those qualities are superficial. Let's get rid of them." He cleans my heart as I stand on the floor in his room, and my heart fills with *kirtana*, then regret for my failures, then a mood of begging him to keep me with him.

### The rules

- (1) No handball playing.
- (2) No smoking.
- (3) No eating meat.
- (4) No illicit sex.
- (5) No frivolous sports.
- (6) Attend classes. Read books.
- (7) Go on *saṅkīrtana* in one way or another.
- (8) Further the aims of the KC movement. Don't work against it or remain outside of it.
- (9) Tolerate—others and yourself.
- (10) Wear *tilaka* in twelve places.
- (11) Be gentle and not a rebel.
- (12) Don't imagine you are being cheated.

### Text 30

*jñānaṁ guhyatamaṁ yat tat  
sākṣād bhagavatoditam  
anvavocaṁ gamiṣyantaḥ  
kṛpāyā dina-vatsalāḥ*

As they were leaving, those bhakti-vedāntas, who are very kind to poor-hearted souls, instructed me in that most confidential subject which is instructed by the Personality of Godhead Himself.

### Comment

Now Nārada speaks of their leaving and how before they left him, they taught him the most confidential knowledge (*guhyatamaṁ*). Lord Kṛṣṇa also teaches confidential knowledge to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. That is, that we are meant to surrender exclusively to Kṛṣṇa and that He will protect us. We

should not fear. The Supreme Lord is transcendental to all living beings and is the source, maintainer, and annihilator of the universes. It is He who teaches devotional service age after age, although only the devotees are qualified to receive the most confidential part of His instructions.

Ordinary knowledge can be elevated to *aham brahmāsmi*, we are not these bodies but spirit souls. Thus we can understand the impersonal Brahman. When knowledge becomes more confidential, a *yogī* can comprehend the Paramātmā (indwelling guide and witness in everyone's heart). The most confidential of all knowledge is to know Lord Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Truth and to surrender unto Him in loving service in this world and ultimately in the spiritual abode.

Beyond that knowledge (Bhagavān realization), there is something higher. Mother Yaśodā does not recognize Kṛṣṇa as Bhagavān but as her own child whom she loves. Sometimes she scolds Kṛṣṇa to teach Him right from wrong. Who can comprehend such intimacy? Even beyond Mother Yaśodā's love there is a higher love, which scholars such as Rūpa Gosvāmī have analyzed as more intimate. That is, the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*. Among the *gopīs*, the most intimate exchange takes place with Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. This relationship is so sublime that Kṛṣṇa appeared as Lord Caitanya just to taste the nature of Her love when expressed in separation from Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is full of confidential and still more confidential knowledge. We earn access to it by our interest, austerity, and ultimately our willingness to sacrifice everything for the beloved Śrī Kṛṣṇa (*laulyam*). Those who are indifferent to *kṛṣṇa-kathā* remain outside of the devotional circle by choice. In this way they suffer, although they are convinced they are enjoying.

It's raining and I'm in the shack celebrating another Ekādaśī. They saw a black bear out here this morning, foraging in the neighbor's yard—a big fellow, like the bears at Śaraṇāgati. Imagine, a bear in the suburbs!

O black bear of the woods, now you are on my mind. Will you come up behind me while I'm musing in the woods? Will the shack (which is made only of screens and rafters) keep you out if you try to enter either in hunger or in anger? I never used to pay attention to the noises of leaves or squirrels, but now who knows what could be making those noises? Could be the black giant of Stroudsburg.

O Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa.

The *bhakti-vedāntas* had to leave. Brahmānanda said that the day he received news that Śrīla Prabhupāda had left this world, he had to hang up the phone and immediately give the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class. He was to speak on this verse stating that the *bhakti-vedāntas* were kind to the fallen (*dina-vatsalāḥ*), so they stayed longer than they would have just to teach Nārada. Eventually, however, they had to leave. Therefore before departing, they gave him the most confidential knowledge. Brahmānanda cried when he realized he would have to speak on *this* verse. O Bhakti-vedanta, you have given us the best, and now you have left us.

Prabhupāda, you were so kind to us. I wonder, when I read this verse, whether the sages called Nārada in at the end and told him that they were now going to give him something better than they had previously taught him. Śrīla Prabhupāda hinted at everything right from the beginning. I guess it could be said, however, that until he gave us the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* he had not revealed the most confidential knowledge. He also gave us *The Nectar of Instruction* and told us about Rādhā-kuṇḍa. Was it possible then for us to understand it? Is it possible now? It is possible to move prematurely toward advanced understandings. Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't dwell on the discussions of living at Rādhā-kuṇḍa. He didn't even allow us to do so while he was with us. He wanted us to live in the ISKCON temples or to make our homes into temples. But he gave the confidential knowledge freely and with trust.

Kṛṣṇa gives us the nutshell in *Bhagavad-gītā*, and Prabhupāda too presented that right from the beginning. He taught us to

surrender, or at least to *want* to surrender. He gave us Kṛṣṇa in His beautiful Vṛndāvana form, and explained to us the nature of the highest forms of love of God, and he gave it freely, as freely as he gave initiation in the beginning. That was his mercy and we now have to fulfill his trust.

My Prabhupāda left and I am now fifty-six years old. Nārada had his whole life ahead of him—he was only five years old when his gurus left. My life is almost over. I want to go back to Godhead, but I don't seem to have a strong enough desire to earn it. I say I can't increase the austerities I am already performing. I think I've done as much as I can—or as much as I want to do. But I know it's not enough. I don't want to face calamity, and I only hope that if it comes anyway, I'll cry out, "Save me!" Such desire to be rescued is not in itself pure love for Govinda, but at least it's something.

Not enough. Consider this.

It seems we need the body to cooperate with our attempts to surrender, but as the body ages, it's harder to motivate it to act. It's also harder to remain insensitive to its demands. I take care of my body as best I can and try not to be absorbed in it, but it stops me from going out and preaching as I did when I was younger. It's not a matter of surrendering to pain and the tedium of dragging the body from engagement to engagement, but learning how to absorb the mind despite the body's reluctance? How to get beyond the limits of an embodied life?

Yesterday for the first time this year I heard the wood thrush. There was no mistaking that it was him (or her). She sang all morning until the rain came down heavily. Water was running down Brislin Road in sheets, but I was cozy in this house with the large windows overlooking the forest.

Omitted some poems from a collection we intend to publish.

Madhu is working on the van and wants to go out to buy some tools for his labors. He knows what he needs and no one

has been able to supply them. He has to go out himself. I didn't ask him what he thought of this purport. I saw him going through the yellow pages and thought he probably wouldn't want to switch gears so suddenly.

I asked him if he could dry off the desk in the shack instead, but he returned and said it's not practical to sit out there right now. Gusts of wind are blowing rain in through the screens. It will blur the ink on the page.

Prabhupāda gave us confidential knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, but we haven't quite realized it yet.

Nārada, we will read, prayed to know and see and be with God. When I write a comment on that I imagine I'll say, "Of course, *we* don't expect to meet such success. We don't even *want* to see God; we want *Him* to see *us*." But we do want to see Kṛṣṇa too. We want to pray for that. This confidential knowledge that Nārada received was instructed by the Personality of Godhead. It is His knowledge, His love.

○ Kṛṣṇa, please reveal Yourself to us.

○ Kṛṣṇa.

We must be prepared to serve; not just prepared, but in love with serving You. We have to be prepared also to not be understood in our attempts to surrender, it's such a personal path. We have to be prepared for anything. It has come to this.





Kṛṣṇa is my well-wisher and I want to meet Him, but I seem pitifully attached to the easy life provided by my mental conception of myself. That seems more important to me than seeking and finding God. If that weren't true, I would cry when I chant His name. Instead, I work until my thumb aches and hope to preach through my books. I say I'm not looking for the thrill of seeing a brilliant light and God appearing instead of a plain, mortal vision of evergreens in April, but I am.

Then select your weapon—club, bow and arrows, or pen.

I'll take the pen.

And where do you wish to fight?

Here, alone, fashioning words into items of surrender.

Did they know this boy was to become the immortal Nārada? Perhaps not. Sages give knowledge freely and don't have to know what Kṛṣṇa does with the souls who receive it. Kṛṣṇa used them to prepare the immortal Devarṣi. "Of sages among the demigods, I am Nārada." A spark of Kṛṣṇa's splendor.

## Text 31

*yenaivāham bhagavato  
vāsudevasya vedhasaḥ  
māyānubhāvam avidam  
yena gacchanti tat-padam*

By that confidential knowledge, I could understand clearly the influence of the energy of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the creator, maintainer and annihilator of everything. By knowing that, one can return to Him and personally meet Him.

## Comment

Nārada will now explain the nature of the confidential knowledge he received from the *bhakti-vedāntas* (and which Arjuna received from Lord Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā*). This is it: only by devotional service can we understand Kṛṣṇa as He is.

Kṛṣṇa's unlimited energies are generally described under three headings: spiritual, material, and marginal. The spiritual energy manifests the eternal spiritual planets. The material energy forms the world of nescience, death, and the illusion of happiness. The living entities are originally spiritual, but because they can come under the influence of matter, they are considered marginal. The *jīvas* are compared to the margin of land (the beach) which is sometimes covered with water and sometimes dry. They can remain under Kṛṣṇa's protection or live under the influence of His material energy. The most confidential part of knowledge is spoken by Lord Kṛṣṇa when He says that the covered *jīvas* should return to Him by giving up all other religion and surrendering to Him.

But only those who have tasted devotion to Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet are interested in His proposal, "and only such devotees enter the kingdom of God to see Him personally and serve Him personally."

Nārada's life story is an example of the success of attaining eternity, bliss, and knowledge, but "the ways and means are open to all, provided one agrees to follow in the footsteps of Śrī Nārada Muni."

Vaiṣṇava theology discusses the Supreme Lord's energies in detail. Sometimes the details differ slightly according to the four Vaiṣṇava *sampradāyas*. It is mentioned that there are nine energies, and sometimes it is said that the Lord has twelve internal energies—Śrī, Bhū, Nilā, Bimalā, Ramā, etc. We also hear that Rāmādevī carries Mahā-Viṣṇu's glance in order to impregnate the material energy (*prakṛti*) for the purpose of creation. This is mentioned in the *Brahma-saṁhitā* as well as in commentaries by various *ācāryas*.

I am satisfied to know that there are three basic energies and that I, as marginal energy, have made the wrong choice and come under the influence of matter. Fortunately, I have the capacity to transfer to the spiritual world, by guru and Kṛṣṇa's grace.

We may assume that even in the practicing stage, devotees in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement are serving in the spiritual

energy, but we obviously want to know why so many of us are in anxiety? Prabhupāda once gave the analogy of a person who is rescued from the ocean by climbing into a boat. When he first boards the boat, he may not be a good boatman, and he may rock the boat or fall exhausted to the bottom. Nevertheless, despite the deficiencies, he is no longer drowning. Similarly, even while under the protection of the spiritual master's orders, we may still manifest symptoms of material anxiety, but if we remain fixed in service, we are no longer part of the material energy. Gradual and determined service will help us become expert boatmen and we will soon cross the ocean of birth and death.

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda states that the pure devotees enter the kingdom of God where they personally see and serve Kṛṣṇa. I once stated that we hope in some future life to be able to serve Kṛṣṇa directly in the spiritual world. A devotee challenged me and said that as far as he understood, we were already serving directly through our ISKCON services.

It is true that Deity service, book distribution, studying the *Bhāgavatam*, and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa are all direct service to Kṛṣṇa, but when these services are performed without full realization and purity, we cannot say that we are serving Kṛṣṇa on the same level that *rāgātmikā-bhaktas* are serving. In this verse and purport, Prabhupāda specifically describes the completely liberated stage whereby one attains his spiritual body and actually returns to the spiritual world. He is referring to those who are capable of engaging with Kṛṣṇa in one of the four principal relationships either as servant, friend, parent, or lover. By the service we perform here under the spiritual master's direction, we earn the right to go to the spiritual world and enter into our eternal service relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda writes that we attain the kingdom of God "by giving up all engagement in the material world." At a glance this phrase may seem contradictory to the spirit of *yukta-vairāgya*, but there is no contradiction. We should give up the essence of

material activity, sense enjoyment, and use everything material for Kṛṣṇa's pleasure.

Therefore this purport should be a source of hope for an aspiring devotee. Although a devotee is pessimistic about material happiness, he is optimistic about attaining spiritual happiness. We can attain our heart's desire, Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet, and see Him and serve Him personally. He whose names we have chanted, whose activities we have praised, whose form we have worshiped, to whom we have offered countless obeisances—that all-attractive Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa—can become ours if we follow in Nārada's footsteps and become situated in the spiritual energy.

Prabhupāda writes, "One can easily understand the Lord's various energies by devotional service." On the other hand, this confidential knowledge can only be understood by pure devotees. How then is this knowledge easy to attain if only pure devotees can understand it?

Prabhupāda said Kṛṣṇa consciousness was easy for the simple and pure and difficult for the crooked (*durātmā*). It is all based on our sincerity. If we chant Hare Kṛṣṇa with the prayer to remain attentive, even if we are not always successful, if we offer Kṛṣṇa food with the sense that it is to please His senses and not our own, if we work for the Lord's pleasure and remain detached from the results, if we preach according to the spiritual master's order—these are the building blocks of our surrender. But we are stubborn. They say it's easier to surrender when we have 10,000 years to practice yoga. I'm not so sure about that.

"Easy" doesn't mean automatic. Surrendering the false ego is always difficult for a conditioned soul. It may be easy to give two hours a day to chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, to follow the four rules, and to stay within the bounds of the guru's instructions, but it's more difficult to give up envy and to surrender our concept that we're actually more important than Kṛṣṇa—to actually turn over everything to Him and become His servant. Hard stuff for a confirmed egoist.

"If you're so smart, how come you're not rich?"

What about this one: If you're so much of a devotee, how come you're still in the material world in material consciousness?

"If you're liberated, why don't you go back to Godhead right now?" a crazy boy asked Śrīla Prabhupāda at the Boston airport.

Śrīla Prabhupāda replied, "We have purchased our ticket to Montreal. We are assured of going there. It's just a matter of waiting until it is time to go."

Tell Mukunda (Lord Caitanya said) that it will be millions of lifetimes before he can be with Me again. Mukunda rejoiced to hear that he would one day return to the Lord's direct association.

Both a cobbler and a *brāhmaṇa* asked Nārada to ask Lord Nārāyaṇa how long they had left in the material world. The *brāhmaṇa* learned that it would take lifetimes for him to achieve liberation and he was peeved. He thought he was *pakka*, but he lacked faith in the Lord's inconceivable potency. The cobbler was simpler, but more devoted.

Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home.

While hoping to enter Goloka, we have work to do

floors to wash

and songs to sing in the rain.

No foolishness, but

Kṛṣṇa's holy names.

Prabhupāda is our Nārada. Following in his footsteps means preaching the divine command—what he wants from us.

Gentle power. Nārada's quality.

The sages taught him the most confidential knowledge of Bhagavān. That means they injected him with their own enthusiasm and awakened his inherent capacity to relish *kṛṣṇa-kathā*.

What if we had contact with a genuine, empowered *bhakti-vedānta* but still our *ruci* flickers? Misuse of free will. It's a choice that we make. We're marginal.

My dear mind, you are a human and not a fabulous red-headed woodpecker who swoops through the forest until he finds

the right tree, and then *rap-rap-rap!* You are a gentle soul in a human body and capable of understanding Kṛṣṇa. All it takes is time and effort. A woodpecker drills and his head absorbs the shock. It's easier to imbibe Kṛṣṇa consciousness. All we have to do is open our hearts. If we surrender at least to the process, taste will grow and become firm.

Look at the chips fly—that wood-chopper is working hard at the base of a dead trunk. Imagine the insects' terror as they hear that monster drilling from outside. Take shelter, O marginal self, in the internal energy and become qualified to transfer yourself to Kṛṣṇa's abode.

When I draw nowadays, it's always faces, faces—eyes, noses, mouths, oval-shaped heads—and then I paste on the *tilaka*. I draw mostly men (not me) and a few women (because I don't want to leave them out). All become Vaiṣṇavas as soon as I apply the *tilaka*. It's how I convert the world. I even took photos of Kafka and Anne Frank off the covers of their books, pasted them onto poster board, and applied neat red *tilaka*. Images without themes sometimes. I try to clarify it for others, but that's not always possible.

From a book on art:

Besides the dominant archetype, each of us also has lurking in the shadows, shunned images who have un-lived potential . . . Whom have you exiled from your soul? Reaffirm your interests to accept and honor these parts of yourself. Play with them like old friends . . . They are the openings to knowing the roots of your creative self.

## Text 32

*etat saṁsūcitam brahmaṁś  
tāpa-traya-cikitsitam*

*yad īsvare bhagavati  
karma brahmaṇi bhāvitam*

O Brāhmaṇa Vyāsadeva, it is decided by the learned that the best remedial measure for removing all troubles and miseries is to dedicate one's activities to the service of the Supreme Lord Personality of Godhead [Śrī Kṛṣṇa].

### Comment

Nārada stops his personal story here, as if he'll speak no more about it, and begins to preach to Vyāsadeva about the art of devotional service. This is the practical aspect of the most confidential knowledge he learned from the *bhakti-vedāntas*.

The verse refers to the best way to remove miseries. *Karmis* work constantly for this end both on the individual and the collective levels. Unless our actions are sanctioned by Providence, however, "no plan or no remedial measure can actually bring about the desired peace and tranquillity." This is a hidden, ignored factor: God has to sanction. The *Bhagavad-gītā* describes the five factors of action: place, endeavor, senses, the doer, and the will of Providence. When we ignore this fifth factor, we waste valuable energy in trying to relieve our misery by manipulating only the four factors. This is not intelligent.

One might ask, "But what can I *do* about Providence? It's out of my control." Nārada advises that we dedicate our activities to the Lord's service. Śrīla Prabhupāda enumerates how various workers may carry this out. "If one is a learned scholar, scientist, philosopher, poet, etc., then he should employ his learning to establish the supremacy of the Lord. Try to study the energy of the Lord in every sphere of life."

Similarly, the *kṣatriya* should be a statesman or warrior on the Supreme Lord's behalf. The *vaiśya* should spend his hard-earned money for the Lord's cause. (After all, the money belongs to

God and it will return to Him regardless. We don't need to accumulate karmic reactions by trying to possess it.)

The most direct way to become relieved of misery is to hear *kṛṣṇa-kathā* from self-realized sages. We should make our lives simple so that we have the time to hear constantly. If we are not able to minimize our material commitments, then at least we should dedicate them to God. Since the Supreme Lord is the ultimate sanctioning officer, if we dedicate our acts to Him, He will be satisfied and we will become free of misery.

Devotees often wonder whether Nārada is presenting this *karma-yoga* formula as a second-best suggestion. He is aware that it is rare for someone to engage all his time in *śravaṇam kīrtanam* because it is difficult to hear with submission when there is little faith. Until faith becomes firm, we tend to be restless. Furthermore, it is rare to find qualified speakers in this world because devotees themselves are rare. Therefore, what else can we do but dedicate our other activities to the Lord?

While all this may be true, it doesn't relieve us of the responsibility to immerse ourselves in hearing *kṛṣṇa-kathā* for as much time as possible each day. Nārada has presented a potent combination: working for Kṛṣṇa, and hearing regularly to cleanse the heart. Work alone will not suffice. Unless we hear about Kṛṣṇa from *śāstra*, we will not be able to meditate upon Him as we work. Thus there will be no *samādhi*.

In a faithless world we don't expect people to believe that Kṛṣṇa is the sanctioner, but in a society of devotees we expect people to understand Kṛṣṇa as the supreme controller. When the devotees are neophytes, they learn to dovetail their material desires by engaging body and mind in work they will offer to Kṛṣṇa. This allows them the opportunity to exchange personally with Kṛṣṇa. From the *śāstras*, and now from our own experience, we then begin to perceive how and why Providence gives sanction.

Ultimately, Kṛṣṇa is independent, and as the Supersoul sanctioning the activities of the living entities, He is also neutral.



But Kṛṣṇa is inclined toward His devotees—toward those who are inclined toward Him. He personally exchanges with His devotees. Śrīla Prabhupāda was able to see Kṛṣṇa's hand in everything he did. In the purport he explains that one cannot cross an ocean even in a suitable boat and a patient cannot be cured even by an expert physician if Kṛṣṇa doesn't sanction it. When Prabhupāda was crossing the Atlantic on the Jaladuta, he experienced two heart attacks that would have killed any other man his age. He also experienced a heart attack in 1967 in New York City. Prabhupāda said that Kṛṣṇa saved him so that he could carry out His mission a little longer. Thus Prabhupāda's Atlantic crossing was miraculously calm, and Prabhupāda survived according to Kṛṣṇa's will.

There is a common saying that one should think that everything happens only by God's will, yet one should act as if everything depends on our own efforts. A devotee is interested only in pleasing Kṛṣṇa in everything he or she does.

It's not always clear whether or not Kṛṣṇa is pleased if we judge by the results of our efforts. Devotees may work hard on book distribution but distribute few books; others may arrange for an ambitious preaching program and it receives little attention. Since Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate sanctioner, we can be assured that whatever happens is happening by His will. How He chooses to act and the results we receive are not necessarily linked to His pleasure at our attempts to make an offering. Having thousands of people attend a festival is not necessarily more pleasing to Him than if no one attends. Our ability to please Him is based on something more sublime; it is based on our ability to offer love.

Still, a thoughtful devotee worries over this point, and perhaps this is also Kṛṣṇa's plan to keep the devotee always praying in a humble mood, never quite confident that he has become pleasing to Kṛṣṇa. It is a way for Kṛṣṇa to bring us closer to Him sooner.

The aspect of this verse and purport that speaks most directly to me is the phrase, "If one is a . . . poet, then he should employ

his learning to establish the supremacy of the Lord.” When Prabhupāda mentions our particular service in any purport, we feel his permission to go ahead and offer what we are doing to Kṛṣṇa with the assurance that this is the goal of our work. That is the kindness of the spiritual master, that he tries to engage in Kṛṣṇa’s service those propensities we already possess.

The more sincere the devotee, the more we seem haunted by the doubt whether we are fulfilling our propensities more for our sense gratification than Kṛṣṇa’s pleasure. How can a devotee fully surrender his personal interest and vocation so that it is actually transformed into practical devotional service? I can’t answer that question cheaply, and I doubt I will ever be satisfied with any response. It’s something that has to be sought out deeply within the heart in our own relationship with guru and Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa is kind to let me run on the outskirts of the Centennial. I even heard one of the Centennial leaders remark, “Much of the Centennial is cosmetic.” He wanted to do something of a serious, lasting nature. Another leader said that the Centennial’s mainstream activities were inspiring, but he felt we should do things in 1996 that will live on in 1997. Use this year as an occasion to improve ISKCON and to revive preaching. Each person may have his own angle on how to do that and what to emphasize, but all of us want to demonstrate our affection for Prabhupāda. Show that we love him by cooperating with devotees, by launching

a big effort to bring Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the masses.

Light 100 firecrackers

write 100 poems

distribute 100 *laddus*

perform 100 serious acts in

100 *paṇḍāls*,

with 100 buses on the move

to preach in 100 towns.

100 times 100 books distributed!

O 100—

and me only 1.

A hundred little acts or

don't count them.

They don't have to be ten times ten

or a hundred times one.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was practical—he wanted to see a tangible result. I too live in our activist ISKCON and submit an offering. Kṛṣṇa, serving You is demanding.

### Text 33

*āmāyo yaś ca bhūtānām  
jāyate yena suvrata  
tad eva hy āmayam dravyam  
na punāti cikitsitam*

O good soul, does not a thing, applied therapeutically, cure a disease which was caused by that very same thing?

### Comment

Too much milk causes diarrhea, and diarrhea is treated with milk in the form of yogurt. Material activities cause repeated birth and death. How to stop the cycle? Not by newer and newer varieties of material enjoyment, not by making our material activities “organic” or “natural” or uninhibited or guilt-free. To cure the material disease we need to remove the material quality. We have to spiritualize matter. How do we do that? “The material conception of a thing is at once changed as soon as it is put into the service of the Lord.”

Matter was not created for our enjoyment, and we should not try to enjoy it as if it were, but that doesn't mean we should

reject material things. Rather, we should use them in Kṛṣṇa's service. Material life is a bad bargain, but the best use of the bad bargain is to use the body and the sense objects in devotional service. It is not really in our power to spiritualize this universe, but we can express our desire to serve Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa can transform matter by His grace. The *Vedas* state *sarvaṁ khalv idam brahma*, "Everything is spirit." This does not mean that Kṛṣṇa is ultimately impersonal, but only that all energies emanate from Him.

Conservative devotees are quick to remind us that it's easy to misinterpret the principle of *yukta-vairāgya*. We need the spiritual master to direct us, and after his disappearance, we need a good conscience. But aside from being too liberal, it is also possible to be too conservative. To find the proper balance it is important to understand the purpose behind the spiritual master's instructions before we try to apply them.

Other devotees worry that they are so habituated to trying to control matter that they cannot conceive of using matter in a spiritual way. They wonder if they wouldn't be better off rejecting matter. Better to learn to use matter and to become a more useful servant. Lord Caitanya's followers are not in the same mood as the extreme *tyāgīs* who sit alone in holy places. Their preaching spirit is dynamic, and they are prepared to use whatever it takes to accomplish their aims—typewriters, cars, airplanes—for Kṛṣṇa. Preaching frees us from sense desire because it is such a purifying activity.

How do we know when to renounce something or when to spiritualize it? We have to inquire from the spiritual master, and we have to be aware of our own life cycles. Something we reject at twenty may be useful at sixty. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is an active principle, not a stagnant one, and we are meant to use our sense of self to make Kṛṣṇa conscious choices throughout our lives. Our decisions will also be determined by our *āśrama*. A *gṛhastha* may accept all kinds of things a *sannyāsī* must reject. For better or worse, experience is our best teacher.

The self-realized soul faces no impediments in spiritual life, yet he does reject many things undesirable for his service to Kṛṣṇa. When he does dovetail matter, it's simply because he needs something for his service and not to appease his sense desires.

## May 30

All right, I'm back in the poor man's seat after a three-week hiatus.

Where did you go?

New York City, Philly, Baltimore, Boston.

You could have been writing there.

Yeah, I know.

Why did you resume now?

Oh, it just occurred to me one night that I could. Someone told me they were "a little shocked" to hear I had stopped. Someone else said . . . Anyway, I listened and thought, "If they think it's important, I should."

I also had a chance to read some of it aloud to a mixed group, some interested and some hearing it for the first time. I read a straight commentary part about Nārada praising Vyāsa although Vyāsa was the disciple. Then I came to the spot where I was recalling the song, "You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out" and I couldn't read further. I apologized and backed out. Then I tried another verse and found something more harmless. It was good for me to feel again the beauty of the natural descriptions and to catch by instinct when the audience was getting bored.

Don't want to be long-winded in the writing. Whitney Balliett said that John Coltrane played solos as long as it takes to eat a good meal—he meant a ten-course dinner—from beginning to end. Long's all right if you have conviction to carry both writer and reader.

Anyway, I'm back and we're about to leave for England and Ireland as soon as the van gets shipped over. It was supposed to

leave two days ago by boat, but when they got into the driver's seat they couldn't start it because of the theft prevention device. Madhu outsmarted himself. We missed that boat.

So, dear sirs and ladies, white and black and yellow—dove-tail them in Kṛṣṇa's service. Permissive advice? But you know, you can't enjoy matter and then claim your enjoying spirit as Kṛṣṇa conscious. Sometimes our attitudes are painfully stark.

The airplane, the exercise, the do's and don'ts, the guys who know better than me. I was going to tell him how some people study religious societies, how the police check speed by radar and airplanes, that spring turns to summer and it has yet again, but I thought I would be quiet. So often I don't speak.

I still have that book by the seventy-five-year-old lady (who writes young), written while she was alone in Maine one winter. I'll let you know if I learn anything from it. As for *Moment's Notice*, I'm not gaining much. They are devotees of expression and I worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. We worship the *sādhus* and they give us a photo of Monk at his piano. Another photo inside showed an aged, creased Chet Baker. Everything is Brahman, I guess, but because *they* don't recognize it, it's hard for us to use it. Listen for the little voice to guide you.

The woman in Maine said that while alone and not talking, she heard a clear voice within her. "I became aware that the interior voice, so often before stifled or stilled entirely by what I thought others wanted to hear, or what I considered to be socially acceptable, grew gratifyingly louder, more insistent . . . with nothing to interrupt it, it now commanded my entire attention. I listened hard to it, more intently than I had to the talk of my friends in the world." I'd like to hear a voice like that in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

They were listening as I read, but some found it hard. I might have found it hard if I had had to listen to all that philosophy and I was like that girl who was feeling guilty to be with her

boyfriend when she knows her guru considers it illicit sex. The other man I no longer recognized. We had lost contact for over ten years. He'd said once that a non-Hindu couldn't be guru. He was surprised I no longer remember his name.

We're changing matter into spirit. I was a devotee thirty years, then forty, then fifty—then I was old and stone-faced, slackened skin under the neck, fat, frog-eyed, but reading poets and trying to dovetail it. Tired.

## Text 34

*evam nṛṇāṁ kṛiyā-yogāḥ  
sarve saṁsṛti-hetavaḥ  
ta evātma-vināśāya  
kalpante kalpitāḥ pare*

Thus when all a man's activities are dedicated to the service of the Lord, those very activities which caused his perpetual bondage become the destroyer of the tree of work.

## Comment

Karma causes *saṁsāra*, perpetual bondage. "The propensity for enjoyment may be turned into the desire for serving the mission of the Lord." *Karma-yoga* means performing "work for which one has a natural tendency." Dovetailing not only stops karma but brings us to Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet, but it must be done in the association of devotees, in service to them. That's the only way we can come to know Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura explains that there is a difference between the direct practice of the nine principles of *bhakti* (*śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam*, etc.), and the subsidiary or supporting (*gauṇa*) activities which assist *bhakti*. Thus we could say that working for Kṛṣṇa is not *bhakti* unless we are

thinking of Kṛṣṇa as we work. In his wonderfully encouraging way, however, Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasized that when we work for Kṛṣṇa, it is *bhakti*. In Los Angeles he said that the devotees who were planting the rose bushes around the temple were performing yoga as good as any *aṣṭāṅga-yogī* because the rose bushes were for Kṛṣṇa's pleasure. He requested us to perform so many activities, and even indicated that we should not expect to sit down and meditate on Kṛṣṇa instead of working.

Kṛṣṇa states in *Bhagavad-gītā*, "In all activities just depend upon Me and work always under My protection. In such devotional service, be fully conscious of Me." (Bg. 18.57) In his purport, Prabhupāda writes, "While working in that way, one should think of Kṛṣṇa only: 'I have been appointed to discharge this particular duty by Kṛṣṇa.' While acting in such a way, one naturally has to think of Kṛṣṇa."

Prabhupāda seemed to think that it would be natural for a person engaged in working for Kṛṣṇa to be meditating on Kṛṣṇa's name, qualities, or pastimes. He did not discourage us into thinking our work was simply a support for the more esoteric processes of Kṛṣṇa conscious meditation. Prabhupāda even defined *kīrtana* as any service glorifying Kṛṣṇa.

But Prabhupāda also intended that our work would be guided by the spiritual master:

One should, however, note that after doing something whimsically he should not offer the result to the Supreme Lord. That sort of duty is not in the devotional service of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. One should act according to the order of Kṛṣṇa. This is a very important point. That order of Kṛṣṇa comes through disciplic succession from the bona fide spiritual master. Therefore the spiritual master's order should be taken as the prime duty of life. If one gets a bona fide spiritual master and acts according to his direction, then one's perfection of life in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is guaranteed.

—Bg. 18.57, purport



Commenting on Nārada's instruction, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that a neophyte devotee "must render loving service physically and mentally without reservation" to the self-realized souls and unalloyed devotees of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. We may question ourselves as to whether we are able to muster *loving* service, or whether our service is "without reservation." Even in the beginning we must feel a spark of love, but even if we feel only a spark, the process itself will churn our hearts. When loving service is attained, our attraction for Kṛṣṇa will burst into flames.

Railroad express of my words starts up again  
slowly.

My words have to be on the right track and  
I need space  
to be deep  
to find depth  
and freedom  
and something that compels  
my surrender.

A writing teacher states, "The only true obstacle to writing creatively is a lack of faith that appears as fear and self-judgment."

Afraid it may not be Kṛṣṇa conscious, I judge what I write practically before it gets out of the pen.

"We wanted to confess our sins, but there were no takers," says the poet Miłosz. No one wants to hear it—not clouds or sky or animals or friends—and, Miłosz says, it would be too humiliating to pay a psychiatrist "just for listening." What does he want to confess? "That we used to see ourselves as handsome and noble/ yet later in our place an ugly toad/ half-opens its thick eyelid/ and one sees clearly: 'That's me.'"

Yes, I unload literary references. I hope the devotees don't mind. Some might, and some know more about the heart than I do.

That's okay. My train clacks on the tracks pulling the cars behind it. Śruta-kīrti said he was present one day when Śrīla Prabhupāda finished chanting a round on his beads, moved a counter bead and said, "I finished my sixteen rounds and now I can do any damn thing I please."

"Come back home to Boston," said an elder *brahmacārī* in an announcement after *maṅgala-ārati* yesterday. He also gave me the flower Rādhā had held in Her hand. Last letters as I went out the door.

A toad on the road home—the asphalt highway and a friend driving. The facts are not always as important as memories and dreams—the road not taken (too bumpy).

I finished what I had to say about the verse and it's getting late. I always have to turn to *japa* next and that's good. "I'm no beatnik," a disciple said. He was too young to have been one. The Smithsonian is running a Beat Generation exhibit. The black man, Imamu Amiri Baraka, remains angry, but I have to turn away. I live in a different society with a different message. Still, I glance into their worlds and their words sometimes from a distance (or when they are pushed in my face), and see the humanity expressed. I live in an ISKCON world, which is not perfect by any means. It too is peopled by devotees of all races because anyone can participate. I mean, if you go to India and there's something wrong with your visa, you can go straight to Nepal and they will treat you right. Usually, Mother India is okay too, though. What do I know of either? I only heard all this from Gitā-nāgarī dāsa, who is wandering in the Himalayas at the moment.

No, ISKCON is not perfect and the parliamentarians are not the only answer, although they're needed.

Nārada says we can use anything (almost anything), in the Lord's service, but got to check it out first with the TP and the GBC and BVD and SMD and so many authorities before it's free

of whimsy. Right. But don't forget to consult your own heart. There's a limit to both sides. You could wind up following someone or other and end up in jail for killing somebody. I don't know, I don't want to judge, he said, and neither do I. I only want to play this typewriter of my inclination.

Another question is whether to write for product or for process. If you say you're writing for process, I still have to ask about the process. How is it part of the Kṛṣṇa conscious flow, artisan or otherwise? You have to be practicing *vairāgya* and *jñāna* and not cheating yourself at death. You want to go out thinking of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, not some place in Newark where the poets and musicians are improvising and you need to take birth as an Afro-American to get fully into that culture. If I have to be born any color, then let it be pleasing to Kṛṣṇa, who is more beautiful than newly formed rain clouds and the hue of millions of cupids. If that's not possible, then let me be born again as an insect in the heart of a Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura poem.

## Text 35

*yad atra kriyate karma  
bhagavat-paritoṣaṇam  
jñānam yat tad adhinam hi  
bhakti-yoga-samanvitam*

Whatever work is done here in this life for the satisfaction of the mission of the Lord is called bhakti-yoga, or transcendental loving service to the Lord, and what is called knowledge becomes a concomitant factor.

## Comment

Work or service done to please Kṛṣṇa should not be thought of as karma. It may resemble ordinary work—we may plant rose

bushes, scrub pots, write or sell books—but when we do it as *bhagavat-toṣaṇam*, it does not generate material reaction. *Bhakti-yoga* is not only transcendental to karma, but it is also above *jñāna*, mental speculation aimed at knowing the Absolute Truth.

What is Kṛṣṇa's pleasure? Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The Lord does not want His sons . . . to suffer the threefold miseries of life. He desires that all of them come to Him and live with Him, but going back to Godhead means that one must purify himself from material infections."

When we work to please Kṛṣṇa, we purify ourselves and become eligible to go back to Godhead. This also pleases the Lord. Other knowledge doesn't lead even to salvation. Nārada already discussed this point with Vyāsadeva: *naiṣkarmyam apy acyuta-bhāva-varjitam*, "Knowledge of self-realization, even though free from all material affinity, does not look well if devoid of a conception of the Infallible (God)." (*Bhāg.* 1.5.12)

As knowledge without devotion leads us nowhere, so work without sacrificing the results to Kṛṣṇa leads only to material bondage. "Work done as a sacrifice for Viṣṇu has to be performed; otherwise work causes bondage in this material world. Therefore, O son of Kuntī, perform your prescribed duties for His satisfaction, and in that way you will remain free from bondage." (*Bg.* 3.9)

The specific service the *sādhus* recommend is *śravaṇam kīrtanam*, which delivers us spiritual enlightenment by Kṛṣṇa's grace.

Devotees often ask whether the time spent serving the Lord before we are fully purified is actual *bhakti*. Although there are śāstric references to the technical subdivisions of *bhakti*, Śrīla Prabhupāda's main thrust was that any sincere service for Kṛṣṇa is within the *bhakti* camp. In the beginning, our service is compared to an unripe mango; later, our service ripens into pure devotional service.

Still, it seems that even a lifelong worker in Kṛṣṇa's cause continues to have difficulty shaking off imperfections. One wonders when and how our *anarthas* will be removed by the process of

practicing *bhakti*. We can only take refuge in faith. Kṛṣṇa helps us in various ways as the guru in the heart (*caitya-guru*) and as the spiritual masters whom we serve in this world (*sikṣā-* and *dikṣā-gurus*). We chant Hare Kṛṣṇa under guidance, and that itself purifies our hearts. At the time of initiation and afterwards, a sincere *sādhaka* strives to eliminate sin in his life. Prabhupāda refers to a “gentleman’s determination” in following the vows we accept at initiation. This *dṛḍha-vrata* will bring about the gradual removal of *anarthas*. Bit by bit, by our own efforts and by the purifying effects of the *bhakti* process, the dirty things flee from the heart (*naṣṭa-prāyeṣv abhadreṣu nityaṁ bhāgavata-sevayā*).

A critical observer may continue to find imperfections even in a sincere devotee. In some cases, these imperfections are just like “birth defects” and Kṛṣṇa may overlook them. What is not fully removed in this life will be removed in a future life because Kṛṣṇa will insure that we maintain contact with the process until we are fully immersed in love of God.



Questions on *bhakti* arrived with this verse:

Are we the source of our own talents?

What about women? Why does God say He wants His sons back if we are all females?

How come there's a node in the prose and a blank in the heart, a pit in the nog? Why is there a full stop at the end of a sentence and why is it written in black and white?

Why isn't everyone Kṛṣṇa conscious?

What about Ezra Pound? In the later part of his life he decided that he had spoken enough and should take time to listen. He went silent.

How come he and T. S. Eliot didn't become Kṛṣṇa conscious if they were so smart and if Kṛṣṇa consciousness is so sublime?

How come this world don't know nothing?

Hold on,

hold on, you're

foaming at the mouth.

What is the definition of *bhakti-yoga*?

Why was it so cold this spring?

Why did you take three weeks off from writing PMRB, and what is your present mood? I heard you were just moonlighting on this project. Got a job on the side? Which do you love better?

I don't want to talk about all this stuff. It's too private.

Prabhupāda says you don't need a certificate to prove you are Kṛṣṇa conscious. You will know when you are free of sex desire and other material desires. Check yourself out. Ultimately, *when* that moment comes is up to Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not only being free of sex desire. It means being pleasing to Kṛṣṇa.

Nearing the end of this chapter.



## Text 36

*kurvānā yatra karmāṇi  
bhagavac-chikṣayāsakṛt  
gṛhṇanti guṇa-nāmāṇi  
kṛṣṇasyānusmaranti ca*

While performing duties according to the order of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one constantly remembers Him, His names and His qualities.

## Comment

Kṛṣṇa is the proprietor of everything in this world. Even those who worship the demigods for a material objective must worship Viṣṇu as the Yajñeśvara.

A pure devotee is different from a materially-motivated demigod worshiper. The *bhakta* not only sacrifices his works to Kṛṣṇa, but he constantly chants His names and remembers Him while he works.

Śrīla Prabhupāda advises that a *gṛhastha* businessman give a major portion of his income (fifty percent) to the Kṛṣṇa conscious cause. Moreover, he should also preach on Kṛṣṇa's behalf. This is the Lord's order. Lord Caitanya encouraged us to preach by singing, dancing, and taking *prasādam*, guided by pure devotees.

We want to know if we can reach a stage in devotional service where while working, we can always be chanting, and while chanting, receive the Lord's *darśana*. I have already asserted that washing pots for Kṛṣṇa is devotional service and not ordinary work, but while working in the kitchen in Kṛṣṇa's temple, if a devotee's mind is situated at Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet as he scrubs, his Kṛṣṇa consciousness is deeper than the Kṛṣṇa consciousness of a neophyte whose mind is absorbed in the Brooklyn Dodgers. We have faith that there is such a stage of advanced devotional service before we ever experience it ourselves. The Lord's pure

devotees in the spiritual world, and the rare ones in the material world, give evidence by their activities and writings that this is so. "All the liberated souls in ancient times acted with this understanding of My transcendental nature. Therefore you should perform your duty, following in their footsteps." (Bg. 4.15)

"A person who is fully absorbed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is sure to attain the spiritual kingdom because of his full contribution to spiritual activities, in which the consummation is absolute and that which is offered is of the same spiritual nature." (Bg. 4.24)

Even the mundaner is advised to labor cheerfully. How much more so, then, does the devotee become happy within as he labors for Kṛṣṇa? In the beginning, much of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is discipline—we have to practice the discipline of controlling the mind while we chant, we have to be disciplined enough to avoid sinful activities—but that discipline gradually becomes easier, our activities move closer to prayer, and our remembrance of Kṛṣṇa becomes more constant.

Perfection is achieved not just by a tiny portion of ourselves—the mind or intelligence—but by the whole self when we engage mind, body, intelligence, and heart in Kṛṣṇa's service. Therefore, it is important to make the sacrifice. That is, to turn over all our possessions to Kṛṣṇa. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings:

(1) O Lord, nothing further remains that may be called "mine." Father, friend, brother—You alone are all these to me.

(2) My friends, wife, sons, and daughters are now Your servants and maidservants. Whatever care I take for them is only as they are related to You.

(3) Declaring that my wealth, family members, home, and wife are truly Yours, I continue as a mere servant to dutifully protect them.

(4) For the purpose of Your service I will earn money and bear the expense of maintaining Your household.

(5) I know nothing of what is good or bad; I simply render my service. I am but a watchman set to guard the properties of Your household.



(6) I exercise my senses only according to Your direction, and thus I desire to hear, see, smell, and taste.

(7) I no longer do anything for my own pleasure. Bhakti-vinoda says, "Your pleasure is the essence of everything."

—Śaraṇāgati, 2.5

Prabhupāda focuses on the percentage of income that should be given for Kṛṣṇa conscious purposes. ISKCON devotees are sometimes bewildered by his mention of fifty percent. How could we survive materially if we gave that much? One devotee even wrote, "How do I follow an order that both logic and reason say is impossible?" Another wants to know if money spent to maintain his house and car is money spent in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or does Prabhupāda mean that the money must be turned over to a temple?

It's not my place to make such estimations, and we have only Prabhupāda's purport to apply to our individual circumstances. Rūpa Gosvāmī set an ideal example when he managed to give fifty percent of his earnings to the *brāhmaṇas* and to use the other fifty percent for maintenance and emergencies. The more we enhance the quality of our lives by using everything we have in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the more even our maintenance expenditures will become an act of devotional service. Prabhupāda sometimes said that Kṛṣṇa keeps accounts, so He will see that we are doing our best to put all our money, efforts, and feelings into His account and not mispending anything on ourselves.

Prabhupāda also writes that no one will disagree to partake in a function where music, dance, and refreshments are offered. Of course, some people will refuse to take part, and that is just as well. We don't want atheists and people of demoniac nature crashing Lord Caitanya's party. Even Lord Caitanya didn't allow such persons to enter the Śrīvāsāṅgana. As far as possible, however, Śrīla Prabhupāda liked our parties to be open. Everyone is welcome to taste *kīrtana* and spiritual discourse. Anyone who has even a little purity of heart will feel at least a shadow of the

happiness a devotee feels. Thus Prabhupāda writes that the *Bhagavad-gītā*'s message can be preached only among devotees and not among those who have practiced no austerity, charity, or sufficient education in spiritual culture.

In one sense that means that the devotees have to create more devotees from the unqualified people by introducing the purifying effects of *kirtana* and *prasādam*. It also means that everyone is constitutionally a devotee, and by their preaching, the devotees uncover that quality in some of the people to whom they preach.



Writing this on Memorial Day weekend in America. Thinking about Prabhupāda's statement that only devotees can understand *Bhagavad-gītā*: a preacher preaches to himself as much as he preaches to others. He also needs to hear the voice of a friend in the night, the voice of Kṛṣṇa speaking through him and

directing him to surrender. Even the preachers are poor men, and if not, they see themselves like that.

What are they *doing* this Memorial Day weekend? Trying to enjoy, dying in car accidents while those whom they memorialize died on battlefields. Does Memorial Day mean anything to me? We are supposed to think of the thousands who died for their countries in wars. Often towns celebrate the day with a parade and veterans give patriotic speeches. The Boy Scouts get out there with the brass bands and pounding drums. Most see it just as a long weekend, a day off from the factory.

Bran flakes, hepatitis, words, slithering off like nouns. Some of them are mean and slim, like snakes, and some are bloated like the rat I saw that had been flushed into the New Delhi sewage system. Some are clean and transcendental, like clouds. None originate in me, but are gifts from Kṛṣṇa. One would like to pick up such words from the ether carried on the saffron particles of the words emanating from the lotus mouth of the spiritual master.

Swoon. That makes me think of the Kumāras, who once smelled the *tulasī* leaves offered at Lord Nārāyaṇa's lotus feet and were converted. Or "touched"—touched on the head by the Lord's conch as Dhruva was, or by the Lord's hand, like Prahlāda. And the *gopīs* . . .

I could be touched so that when I speak words that come to me they would all be *brahma-jñāna*. But it seems before being touched, I have to first accept discipline. The regulative principles of freedom. It's not that I want to free-write even more than I want to glorify Kṛṣṇa, and I have to show Kṛṣṇa that I want to use my tongue and my pen in His service as best I can. If He desires, He can make me dance. When that moment comes I will not be giving only fifty percent and wondering how I will survive materially, but a hundred percent and completely intoxicated by the sweetness of His name. In Goloka all walk is a dance, all words are a song. Sometimes I can appreciate that even here.

Have you heard the tall trees whisper the Lord's name and dance in the breezes? Where is that atmosphere surcharged with *bhakti*?

A poor man wants to know.

When, O when will that day come

when we will be ecstatic in the *kirtana*?

It doesn't mean the dance will get faster

like the dance of the whirling dervishes—maybe

not. Maybe the music will slow, become more stately,

and the dance will be more contained

and focused

and even an old man will be able to spin to it,

an old man will go crazy for the Lord and spin like a top

sober but spilling over with happiness. Nārada says that's the standard. Work will merge into spontaneous *samādhi* and the *gopīs* are the highest example of this. Until *suddha-sattva* descends, we can't fake it. Don't induce hot tears.

Dreams full of threat and violence. People in the dream doubted, "Is this killing necessary?"

"Yes," I said, "we have to hack away with these mighty swords to push on the Kṛṣṇa conscious mission. Show no mercy to the enemy!"

Enemy? What do you mean?

Mean streak. Genuine enemy. Survival?

Then I awoke, came down the stairs, and read this verse and purport recommending "good singing, dancing and refreshments . . ." Lord Caitanya's path is so easy. It was Arjuna who had to kill the enemy, not us. All we have to do is use everything we have and are in Kṛṣṇa's service. That's all Śrīla Prabhupāda asks of us.



*Last words this morning*

I'm grateful. I was with my spiritual master in another dream. Hari Śauri Prabhu approved of something I did, but then it became obvious I was demanding too much. We all want to be number one most of the time. I thought, "I need to learn to be content reading, chanting, and serving others." We will each get a turn to reveal who we are and to lead the charge, but even then we should be serving.

Serving,  
serving,  
we hit ourselves over the heads with  
these words.

A Godbrother left Kṛṣṇa consciousness and said he didn't think there were "pat answers" to existence. He preferred the mystics Emerson and Ginsberg, he said.

I prefer something different, something more humble.  
But yes, we repeat words,  
especially those that come to us from the spiritual master.  
Any little realization is worth repeating and we each—  
I—speak up.

Czesław Miłosz, an eloquent and deeply feeling poet, wrote at eighty of the gratitude he feels to be a poet. "At every sunrise I renounce the doubts of night and greet the new day of a most precious delusion."

Painful,  
poignant,  
existential—the delusion I embrace, a  
poet's life  
but speaking truth  
in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.  
A poet wants no pat answers  
but evanescent ones,  
mystical realities  
elusive but true

like the Supersoul in the heart  
 and Lord Caitanya's *kirtana*.  
 I'm sorry we repeat ourselves but  
 what else is there to say?  
 Hey loco  
 hey Goloko  
 dance for the Lord.



### Text 37

*om namo bhagavate tubhyaṁ  
 vāsudevāya dhimahi  
 pradyumnāyāniruddhāya  
 namaḥ saṅkarṣaṇāya ca*

Let us all chant the glories of Vāsudeva along with His ple-  
 nary expansions Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Saṅkarṣaṇa.

### Comment

Nārada has described that all endeavors must be aimed at  
 pleasing the Supreme Lord, and while working we should

remember Him. Now he exclaims the Lord's names in a mantra beginning with *om* and followed by the names of Lord Nārāyaṇa's first four expansions (*catur-vyūha*) in Vaikuṇṭha.

Devotional service progresses from mixed to pure, from *śrad-dhā* to *prema*. The source of all Nārāyaṇa's expansions is Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the original Supreme Personality of Godhead, so we can understand that the most confidential instruction Nārada gives to Vyāsadeva is that one should always chant and remember Kṛṣṇa's glories along with those of His plenary expansions.

Prabhupāda states, "Those expansions are the original Deities for all others truths, namely either *viṣṇu-tattva* or *śakti-tattvas*." Yet these forms are manifest in the Vaikuṇṭha planets, not in the topmost planet, Goloka Vṛndāvana. Lord Caitanya's followers worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, and we respect but do not worship Lord Nārāyaṇa in His plenary expansions. It is sometimes said that Kṛṣṇa's first expansion in Vṛndāvana, Balarāma, is the sustenance of existence even in Goloka Vṛndāvana. Because of Balarāma, the Lord's pastimes can take place in the fields, mountains, waters, and skies of Goloka. Aside from that, the statement that the *catur-vyūha* is the source of all other *viṣṇu-tattva* and *śakti-tattva* is not taken as pertaining to the confidential realm of Goloka.

In Vṛndāvana, the first *śakti-tattva* expansion is Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and from Her all other *śakti-tattvas* emanate as Her plenary portions. "Just as the fountainhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa, is the cause of all incarnations, so Śrī Rādhā is the cause of all these consorts." (Cc. Ādi 4.76)

Regarding chanting the names of the Lord, the *sāstras* state that "one thousand names of Viṣṇu are equal to one name of Rāma, and three names of Lord Rāma are equal to one name of Kṛṣṇa." (Bhāg. 1.19.6, purport) Thus there is relative importance even among God's holy names.

In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to the "progressive march of transcendental devotion" for the Lord. Since everyone is

making gradual progress, a neophyte devotee sometimes maintains his envious attitude even on the devotional path as he judges the advancement of others. Such envy detains him. The gradual progress of *bhaktas* is not the same as climbing the economic or social ladder of success. If envy leads someone to try to thwart another's attempts in devotional service, our own service will be hampered. As stated at the beginning of the *Bhāgavatam*, "This *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* propounds the highest truth, which is understandable by those devotees who are fully pure in heart." Śrīla Prabhupāda remarks there that *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is transcendental to all activities meant to satisfy the senses. All such activities are competitive. "But the transcendental devotees of the Lord are not only free from material envy, but are well-wishers to everyone, and they strive to establish a competitionless society with God in the center." (*Bhāg.* 1.1.2, purport)

Progressive devotional service culminates in *prema* expressed through our individual relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Time reveals to us the service for which we are ready, and over time, we see how we are progressing naturally toward the goal. The more we advance, the more personal we can become in our expressions of love for Kṛṣṇa. We can also seek out like-minded association by which we can express ourselves in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

But even such opening up of Kṛṣṇa conscious emotion should be done under the guidance of the spiritual master. We should never assume that we are ready to express our eternal relationship in a particular mood with Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana. Such realization is very advanced. Śrīla Prabhupāda did not reveal his own personal relationship with Kṛṣṇa, and we should not presume too quickly to know ours. Once a guest, who was not even Prabhupāda's disciple, impudently demanded that Prabhupāda reveal the man's *svarūpa-siddhi*, Prabhupāda deflected him by saying that he did not know his *own svarūpa*. The *svarūpa*, or spiritual form which Śrīla Prabhupāda openly professed and encouraged us to adopt is expressed in the *Śikṣāṣṭakam* verse *tṛṇād api sunīcena*. We



should know ourselves as Kṛṣṇa's eternal servants, and understand that we are lower than a blade of grass. We should be prepared to offer all respects to others. Acting on *that svarūpa* means chanting Kṛṣṇa's name constantly, serving Kṛṣṇa without reservation, and wholeheartedly surrendering to guru and Kṛṣṇa. If we are successful in cultivating such humility, we will naturally come to understand the details of our eternal service relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

When I first read in *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* how a devotee aspires to follow a particular liberated soul in Vṛndāvana, I asked Prabhupāda to tell me more about it. He said I should not try for it at the present, but that it would be automatically revealed to me when I was ready. He also quoted his spiritual master: "Don't try to see Kṛṣṇa, but act in such a way that Kṛṣṇa will see you." When we are ready, the spiritual master will reveal our eternal relationship with Kṛṣṇa to us. When that revelation will take place depends on our purity.

Still, that does not mean we cannot express whatever *bhakti* we are feeling, but our expressions will naturally be human and humble. If we imitate or pretend, our attempt to express *bhakti* will not carry these symptoms.

The sunshine is not so warm yet and cool winds are blowing through the dark wine maple leaves on the tree in the yard. I see kids playing with a wooden airplane, then with a bat and ball.

Nārada is rounding out this fifth chapter. He has taught the *siddhānta* and now as if relaxing, exhaling, he chants *om namo*, like Prabhupāda's "Hare Kṛṣṇa!" He recites Lord Nārāyaṇa's names and we feel his worship.

## List

- (1) Liter (of milk to be served to Kṛṣṇa).
- (2) Absence of Māyāvādi thoughts.
- (3) Fear of the absurd—avoid it.

(4) Kṛṣṇa conscious eagerness to hear, even when we don't feel good.

(5) Happiness of Coca-Cola—what does that *mean*? It's not even good for your health, and come to think of it, not pleasing to the tongue. Too fizzy and too sharp unless you crave such stimulation.

(6) Think now. Calm down.

(7) Conchshell, although bone is contaminated. Axiomatic truth.

(8) Cow dung—same thing.

(9) *Īsopaniṣad* where this is described. Remember when we first read it and heard Yamunā dāsi sing *om pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idam* on the “Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Temple” album?

(10) Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra first chanted by Śrīla Prabhupāda in the West. Anyone who comes after him should acknowledge their debt.

All matter can be transformed into spirit, so the great ṛṣis ask about the confidential stuff. It's devotional service. Then he chanted this mantra in syllables. The confidential knowledge is to chant the holy name as the Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana did. Everything will be revealed to us as we sit at the feet of our *bhakti-vedānta* and hear from him, not only during the rainy season but always. That's it. There is nothing else.

Nārada concludes his teachings as Prabhupāda often concluded his lectures: “Let us have *kīrtana*,” and then he himself would lead the singing.

Now you may tumble as you like. Bring the kids out for a game of softball. Remember the time the Navy took the sailors to a deserted beach in Italy for beer and a softball game? It was stupid, a drag. I wandered off in the sunshine and walked by the sea, but hadn't yet learned how to yearn.

Those years. Bob Dylan had just arrived and Ginsberg was already well underway with *Howl*.

No, I don't want to talk about that. I tell you, you kids nowadays have your hardcore music and it's even approved in Kṛṣṇa

consciousness, and you've got your fizzy drinks. What more do you want? I'm a straight shooter and I'll be going on to the next verse in just a minute. I plan to finish this chapter and this book before I leave the old U.S. That's my idea of a good time.

The kids eye him suspiciously, notice the skin under his chin beginning to sag, his eyelids which always seem half-closed, his eyes bleary-tired—an old guy for sure. Marriage, or hope of that, renounced. Stays indoors all day sitting on his fanny, and doesn't dance wildly in *kīrtanas*. That's okay for him, they think, but what about us? If we can't play ice hockey or even play with iced drinks (he frowns upon it), and if he won't even let us count the *japa* we do while driving as part of our sixteen, and if he always wants the girls in *sāris* with their hair covered, what do we do for fun? At least he should let us discuss our *rasas* with Kṛṣṇa in the spiritual world—and if he doesn't, we know someone who will. *Om namo bhagavate tubhyaṁ*, indeed.

And off they go, ten  
 Pinocchios in search of *mṛtyu*  
 and good times  
 in which to be reborn.  
 But it's true, the old admiral  
 is salty  
 although he hasn't been to sea  
 in many a year  
 'cept in his poems  
 his mind  
 his memories,  
 his pen dancing before  
 his eyes like the vision of a spectral  
 Blake-made-into-a-Vaiṣṇava.  
 I say, we aren't sure *who* we  
 can trust these days  
 except Prabhupāda—and who  
 will you hear to even  
 tell you that?

I dared to draw Them with my awkward, irreverent hand. The great ṛṣis, the four Viṣṇus—the one in the center is Nārāyaṇa, and the two on either side—no, there are five. I never get it straight. Kṛṣṇa, Baladeva, Nārāyaṇa, then Vāsudeva, Pradyumna, Aniruddha, Saṅkarṣaṇa. Then the second Saṅkarṣaṇa, then the four, then Mahā-Viṣṇu. Anyway, you get the idea.

Showing off one's ignorance is no boon, Boone. I just saw a photo of initiations I held about six years ago. Half of them are already gone. One or two I couldn't even recognize. One just wrote me that Jesus Christ personally recruited her and she resents what she got in ISKCON. So what? Are these the people you are trying to please by showing that you stumbled over the names of Viṣṇu's expansions? Alas.

No, we just need to chant. That's all that matters and that's all I want to give, even to those whom Jesus Christ personally recruited: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. That and the light of the *bhāgavata*.

## Text 38

*iti mūrty-abhidhānena  
mantra-mūrtim amūrtikam  
yajate yajña-puruṣam  
sa samyag-darśanaḥ pumān*

Thus he is the actual seer who worships, in the form of transcendental sound representation, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Viṣṇu, who has no material form.

## Comment

We cannot realize the all-spiritual Lord with our present senses. He can be perceived, however, through sound. Even materially, when we cannot perceive something with our eyes,

we are able to realize it even from a distance by sound. The sound-experience of Kṛṣṇa is not vague or impersonal. It is a full experience of Kṛṣṇa, who possesses the pure form of eternity, bliss, and knowledge.

The verse states *mantra-mūrtim amūrtikam*, which means that by sound-form one can realize the Supreme, who has no material form. *Amūrti* does not mean He has no form at all.

To truly receive the mantra we have to hear with our spiritual senses. To chant such *suddha-nāma*, we have to be willing to chant without offense. Chanting materially or mechanically is not chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa in essence.

The prayer meaning of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is "O Energy of the Lord, O Lord, please engage me in Your service." We ask Kṛṣṇa for various kinds of menial services performed for the spiritual master and for Kṛṣṇa's mission. Chanting the holy vibration of Kṛṣṇa's name is itself a first-class service. Thus it is not by a mental creation of sound that we draw near to Kṛṣṇa, but through the holy sound chanted in a service mood. Devotional chanting, aloud prayer: "We have already discussed developing a taste for hearing and chanting the holy sound. It is done through the medium of service to the pure devotee of the Lord." (*Bhāg.* 1.2.17, purport)

*Harer nāma harer nāmaiva kevalam*. Chanting the holy name is the *yuga-dharma*, the prescribed practice superior to all others and most effective in this age. We may occasionally see devotional pictures of Kṛṣṇa in His *līlās*, and it is good for us to worship the *arcā-vigraha*, but chanting precedes everything.

The transcendental sound, whether the mantra or the Vedic instructions, must be received from the "transparent agency of the bona fide spiritual master" and practiced under his direction. The nature of the guru's transparency can be explained. The spiritual master represents Kṛṣṇa in disciplic succession. The bona fide spiritual master was an attentive student of his own guru. Now he is qualified to teach others. He carries the

scriptural teachings in his heart, and he worships Kṛṣṇa according to the *pāñcarātrikī* system. He delivers knowledge not by electrical shock but in a tangible exchange with his disciple. He does not concoct what he is speaking, but he speaks what he has realized as the truth. The guru may not know Kṛṣṇa in full because no one knows Kṛṣṇa in full. Still, the *sāstras* declare that the spiritual master is Kṛṣṇa's direct representative, even when the spiritual master presents himself with humility.



Now to free-write. That doesn't mean the teacher blows the whistle and we all escape into the playground like unleashed animals. We want to continue to discuss the valuable lessons the *Bhāgavatam* contains, but perhaps in smaller groups. We walk off by a quiet stream and discuss what we've heard with a

confidential friend. Or perhaps we go alone, observing nature and allowing our bodies and minds to assimilate the spiritual master's words. Only a fool is glad when lessons are over and he can engage in frivolous sports.

I remember in grade school on the last day of the school year, the kids would run out of the building roaring. We'd gathered together and some even ripped up their notebooks while everyone screamed, "No more teachers, no more books! No more teachers' dirty looks!"

No more singing the national anthem—

"O say can you see  
any bedbugs on me  
if you do  
pick a few  
and I'll fry them for you."

No,  
no.

He's the actual seer, he who realizes God and worships Him (who has no material form) by chanting, by sound. The *yajña-puruṣa* appears by *mantra-mūrtim amūrtikam*—easily in sound.

Day and night I work in this dark world without seeking the connection. O Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, I have wasted my life. Please don't kick me away. Don't neglect me. Please give me mercy.



Found this poem, more direct than most, in Bly's anthology of sacred poetry from around the world. It's by Ansari, but there's no note who he is or what culture he's from. India?

*Friend, It's Time*

Friend, it's time to make an effort,  
 So you can become a grown human being,  
 And go out picking jewels  
 Of feeling for others.  
 Through the help of holy men  
 And the good that comes from waiting on them,  
 Hopefully your cheeks will grow pale,  
 And your enthusiasm for exciting life  
 Will get paler and paler.

O Kṛṣṇa. I look forward to chanting *japa* with You in the woods. I want to pray something special, but I am what I am. I have already spent years neglecting You in Your holy name. If only I could recover from *that* illness.

Srila Prabhupāda said if you can't work, then chant Hare Kṛṣṇa as Haridāsa Ṭhākura did. He said ISKCON would maintain us if we followed that program sincerely—but not if we spent our time eating and sleeping in the name of chanting.

O Prabhupāda, you knew we couldn't do it. We were no Haridāsa Ṭhākuras. You gave us so many things to do. Right now, Madhu is trying to ship the van to Ireland, but first he has to read the owner's manual. He is also learning to play the fiddle. Kirtana-rasa is a lawyer; he needs the money to support his family. Sometimes he has to chant his rounds in traffic.

I chant my own rounds in the traffic jam of my mind while driving all over the universe. Please give *japa* a chance, I tell myself again and again. I try to chant when there's less traffic, early in the morning. Hare Kṛṣṇa. Those who drive and chant are good souls. We hear the guru's words and allow them to enlighten us and please us and carry us through life. Then we are chaste. O Kṛṣṇa, You have been kind.



## Text 39

*imaṁ śva-nigamaṁ brahmann  
 avetya mad-anuṣṭhitam  
 adān me jñānam aiśvaryaṁ  
 śvasmin bhāvaṁ ca keśavaḥ*

O brāhmaṇa, thus by the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa I was endowed first with the transcendental knowledge of the Lord as inculcated in the confidential parts of the Vedas, then with the spiritual opulences, and then with His intimate loving service.

## Comment

Nārada addresses Vyāsa (O brāhmaṇa) and declares that he (Nārada) attained first transcendental knowledge, then mystic *siddhis*, and finally love of God, all “by transmission of the transcendental sound.” Chanting the holy name allows us to commune with Kṛṣṇa, and that is nothing less than experiencing the “whole spirit Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa.”

Nārada is explaining his case not to prove that he is an exception, but to teach the principles by which all sincere devotees may become successful. Śrīla Prabhupāda: “One can obtain all the facilities which Nārada attained by perfecting the chanting process of the sound representation of the Lord.” Anyone can become successful provided he follows the process laid out by the disciplic succession through Nārada’s representative and serves him in earnest.

Nārada describes three stages, and we may wonder whether every devotee must pass through them. In other words, do we have to explicitly make a deep study of *śāstra* and perfect ourselves in *jñāna*? Do we have to attain the eight mystic *siddhis* before we can practice the advanced stages of *bhakti*?

The *aṣṭa-siddhis* are described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*'s Eleventh Canto:

Among the eight primary mystic perfections those three by which one adjusts one's own body are *aṇīmā*, becoming smaller than the smallest; *mahimā*, becoming greater than the greatest; and *laghimā*, becoming lighter than the lightest. Through the perfection of *prāpti* one acquires whatever one desires, and through *prākāmya-siddhi* one experiences any enjoyable object, either in this world or the next. Through *īśitā-siddhi* one can manipulate the subpotencies of *māyā*, and through the controlling potency called *vaśitā-siddhi* one is unimpeded by the three modes of nature. One who has acquired *kāmāvasāyitā-siddhi* can obtain anything from anywhere, to the highest possible limit. My dear gentle Uddhava, these eight mystic perfections are considered to be naturally existing and unexcelled within this world.

—Bhāg. 11.15.4–5

Śrīla Prabhupāda has also described these perfections in *The Nectar of Devotion*. There he says that they are material opulences; modern science has already attained most of them. Therefore man is able to fly in the sky, drill under the earth, and engage in other gross and subtle manipulations of matter. Thus it is not necessary for a spiritualist to specifically cultivate these perfections in order to move forward toward *bhakti*. Rather, these perfections work within the illusory energy, and we attain them by learning to manipulate *māyā*'s subpotencies. The potencies themselves are part of the illusory energy.

The Eleventh Canto verse states that the *aṣṭa-siddhis* “are considered to be naturally existing and unexcelled within this world.” This refers to the fact that all these talents and achievements are existing in full (“natural and unexcelled”) within the Supreme Personality of Godhead. A *yogī* attains only an insignificant expression of Kṛṣṇa's mystic potency, who is known in *Bhagavad-gītā* as Yogeśvara, the Lord of all mystic potencies.

Since everything can be used in Kṛṣṇa's service, the eight perfections can also be used, but a pure devotee is not interested in them. In the Fifth Canto, Rṣabhadeva states that He does not trust His mind and so will not use the mystic perfections in Kṛṣṇa's service. If we were to possess these perfections, we may, out of pride, claim ownership over them. We may think we are great mystics, that we have power, and we may forget to give credit to Kṛṣṇa. We may lose our humility and thus our devotion.

Śrīla Prabhupāda used to say that he could not produce gold or perform the types of miracles that many yogīs are advertised as performing, but he performed the greatest miracle by converting cynical, sin-addicted Westerners into clean-hearted, aspiring Vaiṣṇavas who follow the rules and regulations of Vedic life. Even for that Prabhupāda refused to take credit. He said it was Kṛṣṇa's potency working through the devotees.



If I had them mystic *siddhis* I'd get this book written without having to go at it one word at a time with this leaky pen, faulty typewriter, and wavering inspiration. I'd make it first-class, a polished gem. I'm not that interested in touching the moon

with my finger, but since people doubt Prabhupāda's books because he said *yogis* could do that, I would demonstrate it for their astonished satisfaction. Yep, if I had them eight *siddhis* I could dazzle the people. No one could catch me because I could become smaller than the smallest and get out by the keyhole, or I could make my body huge, just for fun, and scare 'em all.

But what's the use? Mystic *siddhis* don't create a pure heart, although you could turn the vote in your favor and get elected president of the United States and get everyone to stop killing cows.

Actually, this purport is about something more important than the eight *siddhis*. It states that by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa without offense we can ascend to *bhāva*, the preliminary stage of *prema*. That's a more interesting point to a Vaiṣṇava.

No one asked much about it because it takes us back to the perennial questions: How do we avoid the ten offenses? How do we protect ourselves from falldown?

We protect ourselves by not falling down. And if we do fall down, we pick ourselves up. We already took the vow. There's no point in discussing our weakness now. It doesn't matter anyway because as long as we stay in guru's shelter, the mercy we receive is absolute. All we have to invest is a little love and a lot of determination to increase it. Kṛṣṇa will help. Kṛṣṇa is the Yogeśvara; He can do anything.

We don't need *siddhis* before we surrender. We're getting older—my face is falling and I can't keep my youth no matter how much Chyavan Prash I eat in the mornings. We need to find spirit. We need to learn to *want* to chant without offense. Prabhupāda holds Nārada's success out to us and then tells us to follow.

## List

Eight *siddhis*, ten offenses,  
and a partridge in a pear tree.

Frivolous sports, dancing with the New York City Ballet Team whose summer home is Saratoga, we noticed we were not

converting anyone to Kṛṣṇa consciousness in this way. We had to get more serious and put up signs on the telephone poles. When people come, we won't teach *siddhis* but the perfection of chanting Kṛṣṇa's name.

It is encouraging that Śrīla Prabhupāda has given so much stress to the chanting. Such a simple process. We don't have to go in for severe austerities or hours of study in the Sanskrit Vedānta—things not possible for most of us. We just have to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa sincerely as often as possible.



Chant one round before finishing this purport and you will be in a better position to tell us, "Communion with the Lord by transmission of the transcendental sound is nondifferent from the whole spirit, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. It is a completely perfect method for approaching the Lord." Otherwise, where will you find realization? At least practice what you preach.



### Text 40

*tvam apy adabhra-śruta viśrutaṁ vibhoḥ  
 samāpyate yena vidāṁ bubhutsitam  
 prākhyāhi duḥkhair muhur arditātmanāṁ  
 saṅkleśa-nirvāṇam uśanti nānyathā*

Please, therefore, describe the Almighty Lord's activities which you have learned by your vast knowledge of the Vedas, for that will satisfy the hankering of great learned men and at the same time mitigate the miseries of the masses of common people who are always suffering from material pangs. Indeed, there is no other way to get out of such miseries.

### Comment

Remember Nārada's purpose in coming to see Vyāsadeva? Vyāsa was feeling despondent. Nārada told him he had not fully broadcast Kṛṣṇa's glories. Now Nārada is repeating that instruction: "Please glorify the Supreme Lord's activities out of your vast knowledge." He has already reprimanded Vyāsadeva, then praised him, then ordered and encouraged him. Soon Vyāsadeva will act.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was such a preacher in relationship to his spiritual master. His spiritual master ordered him to preach in the English language and to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness throughout the world. Śrīla Prabhupāda successfully disseminated Kṛṣṇa consciousness further than any previous ācārya on earth.

As the *Bhagavad-gītā* describes, there are four kinds of pious people and four kinds of impious people. Nārada advises Vyāsa to preach to both. The *Bhāgavatam* is for everyone—any “sincere soul who actually wants his own welfare and peace of mind.”

There appears to be a contradiction here. The *Bhāgavatam* verse states that the presentation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's activities will mitigate the miseries of common people, but in his purport Śrīla Prabhupāda states that this refers to the four kinds of “bad men” mentioned in *Bhagavad-gītā*: “Those miscreants who are grossly foolish, who are lowest among mankind, whose knowledge is stolen by illusion, and who partake of the atheistic nature of demons do not surrender unto Me.” (Bg. 7.15) In summation, Śrīla Prabhupāda comments that these four kinds of people “never surrender unto the lotus feet of the Personality of Godhead in spite of all scriptural and authoritative advice.”

Well, can they be delivered or not? In general, they cannot be delivered, although there are exceptions. The exceptions are discovered when the pure devotees and their assistants give “gallons of blood” to try to save all the conditioned souls. “Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu, who is the incarnation of Godhead as divine master, delivered the typical *narādhamas*, the brothers Jagāi and Mādhāi, and showed how the mercy of a real devotee is bestowed upon the lowest of mankind. So the *naradhāma* who is condemned by the Personality of Godhead can again revive his spiritual consciousness only by the mercy of a devotee.” (Bg. 7.15, purport)

Lord Caitanya propagated the *bhāgavata-dharma* to benefit everyone, and “the lowest among human beings can be delivered by this submissive hearing process only, but unfortunately

they even refuse to give an aural reception to these messages.” Therefore, if the four kinds of impious men stubbornly remain in those categories, they cannot be delivered.

Thus the apparent contradiction is resolved. As long as the demon remains demonic at heart, he cannot be delivered, at least not immediately. He can, however, be engaged in *ajñāta-sukṛti* and in a future life reap the benefits of such unknown service. Everyone is pure by nature, and everyone is a *bhakta*. It is only due to the influence of the modes of nature that we identify ourselves with our coverings. When the coverings are washed away by hearing and chanting about Kṛṣṇa, we will all become submissive and enlightened regardless of our previous impiety.

Sometimes devotees wonder how we can preach to people in their impious condition if they are offensive. The scriptures warn against preaching the glories of the holy name to the faithless. The *Bhagavad-gītā* also states that we should not disturb the minds of the ignorant or faithless.

Prabhupāda took the risk. All preaching is a risk. If our motivation is to bring people back to Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa will insure that even those who are offensive receive some positive effect.

I selected this verse (1.5.40) once to be printed on the back of a subscription card we inserted in *Back to Godhead*. Because the back of the card was blank, I decided to print this verse on it. I thought it had popular appeal and universal application. I remember liking the preaching spirit in Nārada’s awareness that descriptions of God will benefit everyone. I particularly liked how Nārada included both the learned (*vidām*) and the uneducated. I thought some BTG readers might flatter themselves as learned seekers, while others would admit to being common sufferers, and this verse applied to all.

Sometimes I think I am still filling the blanks with *Bhāgavatam* verses, then inserting the “subscription cards” into my writing. Please read the *Bhāgavatam*. Do not leave the books



lying dormant on your shelf. As Vyāsadeva was despondent, perhaps you are sometimes despondent. How will you find the cause unless you open the book? How else will you preach?

O Kṛṣṇa, I have exposed myself on this page as a poor preacher and a poor man. Please reveal Yourself to me as You promise in this verse. Let me too become a better conduit of Your mercy. Let Your message enter under the doors and through the hearts of me and I all those I know.



## Glossary

### A

**Ācārya**—a spiritual master who teaches by his personal behavior.

**Aiśvarya**—majesty, opulence.

**Akrura**—Kṛṣṇa's uncle.

**Ānanda**—bliss or happiness.

**Anartha**—unwanted things; material desire.

**Aparādha**—offense.

**Arjuna**—one of the five Pāṇḍavas. Kṛṣṇa spoke the *Bhagavad-gītā* to him on the Battlefield of Kurukṣetra.

**Āśrama**—a spiritual order: *brahmachārī* (celibate student), *gṛhastha* (householder), *vānaprastha* (retired), *sannyāsī* (renunciate); living quarters for those engaged in spiritual practices.

**Aṣṭāṅga-yoga**—the mystic eightfold yoga system propounded by Patañjali.

**Ātmā**—the soul or living entity.

**Ātmārāma**—those who find their pleasure in experiencing the self.

**Āyodhyā**—Lord Rāmacandra's capital city.

### B

**Bhagavad-gītā**—lit., “song of God.” The discourse between Lord Kṛṣṇa and His devotee Arjuna, expounding devotional service as both the principal means and the ultimate end of spiritual perfection.

**Bhāgavata**—anything related to Bhagavān, especially the Lord's devotee and the scripture, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

**Bhāgavatam**—see: *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

**Bhaja**—the imperative form of “to worship.”

**Bhajana**—devotional activities.

**Bhakta**—a devotee of Kṛṣṇa.

**Bhakti**—devotional service to the Supreme Lord.

**Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura**—the spiritual master of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda; an *ācārya* in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya*.

- Bhaktivedānta**—a title conferred upon Śrīla Prabhupāda by the Gaudiya Math, meaning “one who has understood that the conclusion of Vedic scripture is *bhakti* (devotional service).”
- Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura**—an *ācārya* in the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava disciplic succession; the father of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.
- Bhāva**—the stage of transcendental ecstasy experienced after transcendental affection.
- Bhava-roga**—the disease of material existence.
- Brahmā**—the first created living being and the secondary creator of the material universe.
- Brahmacāri**—a celibate student living under the care of a bona fide spiritual master.
- Brahmajyoti**—the bodily effulgence of the Supreme Lord which constitutes the brilliant illumination of the spiritual sky.
- Brahman**—the impersonal aspect of the Absolute Truth; spirit.
- Brāhmaṇa**—those wise in the *Vedas* who can guide society; the first Vedic social order.
- BTG**—*Back to Godhead* magazine.

## C

- Cādar**—a shawl.
- Caitanya (Mahāprabhu)**—lit., “living force.” An incarnation of Kṛṣṇa who appeared in the form of a devotee to teach love of God through the *saṅkīrtana* movement.
- Caitya-guru**—the Supersoul.
- Capāti**—a whole-wheat, griddle-baked flatbread.
- Caraṇāmṛta**—water that has washed the Deity.
- Choṭa Haridāsa**—an associate of Lord Caitanya.

## D

- Daṇḍa**—a staff composed of three long sticks tied together, carried by Vaiṣṇava *sannyāsis*.
- Darśana**—vision; audience.
- Dhāma**—abode; the Lord’s place of residence.
- Dṛḍha-vrata**—a determined vow.
- Dvārakā**—the city where Kṛṣṇa ruled in His later pastimes as a king.

## E

**Ekacakrā**—a village in the district of Birbhum, India, where Lord Nityānanda took His birth.

**Ekādaśī**—a day on which Vaiṣṇavas fast from grains and beans and increase their remembrance of Kṛṣṇa. It falls on the eleventh day of both the waxing and waning moons.

## G

**Ganeśa**—the demigod in charge of material opulence and freedom from misfortune.

**Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava**—a follower of Lord Caitanya.

**Gāyatri**—a prayer chanted silently by *brāhmaṇas* at sunrise, noon, and sunset.

**Gītā-nāgari**—a spiritual farm community established by Śrīla Prabhupāda in central Pennsylvania.

**Gokula**—the manifestation of Goloka in the material world.

**Gopī**—a cowherd girl; one of Kṛṣṇa's most confidential servitors.

**Govinda**—a name of Kṛṣṇa, meaning "one who gives pleasure (*vinda*) to the cows (*go*) and senses (also *go*);" may also refer to Lord Caitanya's personal servant.

**Gurukula**—a school headed by the spiritual master.

## H

**Hare Krishna Land**—name of the ISKCON temple in Mumbai, India.

**Hari-nāma**—lit., "the name of the Lord."

**Harināma**—public chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*.

## I

**ISKCON**—acronym of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

**Īsopaniṣad**—one of the 108 principal Vedic scriptures known as the *Upaniṣads*.

## J

- Jagannātha**—lit., “the Lord of the universe”; may refer specifically to the Deity of Lord Jagannātha in His temple at Puri.
- Japa**—individual chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra while counting on beads.
- Jiva**—the individual eternal soul or living entity; part and parcel of the Supreme Lord.
- Jñāna**—the process of approaching the Supreme by the cultivation of knowledge.
- Jñāni**—one who approaches the Supreme by cultivation of knowledge.

## K

- Kaiśora**—a youth between the ages of eleven and fifteen.
- Kali-yuga**—the present age, which is characterized by quarrel and hypocrisy.
- Kāmsa**—a demoniac king who tried to kill Kṛṣṇa during His childhood pastimes.
- Karatālas**—hand cymbals used during *kirtana*.
- Karma-kāṇḍa**—a portion of the *Vedas* detailing sacrifices for material elevation.
- Karmī**—one engaged in karma (fruitive activity); a materialist.
- Khādi**—homespun cotton cloth.
- Kirtana**—chanting of the Lord's holy names.
- Kṛpā**—mercy.
- Kṛṣṇa**—the Supreme Personality of Godhead.
- Kṛṣṇa-kathā**—topics spoken by or about Kṛṣṇa.
- Kuṇḍa**—a lake or pond; generally refers to one of the sacred ponds in Vṛndāvana.
- Kurtā**—a tunic-like men's shirt, commonly worn in India.

## L

- Līlā**—pastimes.

## M

**Mahā**—a Sanskrit prefix meaning “great” or “large.”

**Mahā-bhāgavata**—a devotee in the highest stage of devotional life.

**Mahābhārata**—the history of ancient India, compiled by Śrīla Vyāsadeva which includes the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

**Mahā-bhūta**—any one of the gross elements of material creation (earth, water, fire, air, or ether).

**Mahātmā**—great soul.

**Maṅgala-ārati**—the first Deity worship of the day, performed an hour and a half before sunrise.

**Mantra**—sound vibration that can deliver the mind from illusion.

**Mārga**—path.

**Mathurā**—the city where Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared and to which He later returned after performing His childhood pastimes.

**Māyā**—the external, illusory energy of the Lord, comprising this material world; forgetfulness of one's relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

**Muni**—a sage or self-realized soul.

**Mūrti**—a form, usually referring to a Deity.

## N

**Naimiṣāraṇya**—a sacred forest in central India, considered to be the hub of the universe.

**Nanda**—Kṛṣṇa's father in Vṛndāvana.

**Nārada-bhakti Sūtra**—instructions on the science of devotional service, written by Nārada Muni.

**Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura**—a Vaiṣṇava spiritual master in the disciplic succession from Lord Caitanya and writer of many standard Vaiṣṇava hymns.

**Nectar of Devotion, The**—Śrīla Prabhupāda's summary study of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*.

**Nectar of Instruction, The**—an authorized English translation of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*.

**New Vrindaban**—a spiritual village established by Śrīla Prabhupāda near Wheeling, West Virginia.

## P

**Paramparā**—the disciplic succession of bona fide spiritual masters.

**Parāśara Muni**—a great sage and the father of Śrīla Vyāsadeva.

**Parikṣit Mahārāja**—the emperor of the world five thousand years ago who heard *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* from Śukadeva Gosvāmi and thus attained perfection.

**Prabhu**—lit., “master.” Added to a devotee’s name by another devotee to show respect.

**Prabhupāda, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami**—Founder-*ācārya* of ISKCON and foremost preacher of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the Western world.

**Prahlāda Mahārāja**—a great devotee who was persecuted by his demonic father, but who was protected and saved by Lord Nṛsimha.

**Prasādam**—lit., “mercy.” Food which is spiritualized by being offered to Kṛṣṇa and which helps purify the living entity; also referred to as *prasāda*.

**Pūtana**—an evil witch sent by King Kāmsa to kill baby Kṛṣṇa, but who was killed by Him and thus achieved liberation.

## R

**Rādhārāṇī (Rādhā)**—the eternal consort and spiritual potency of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Rāgānuṣāṅga-bhakti**—devotional service following the spontaneous loving service of the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana.

**Rāma**—as part of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, refers to the highest eternal pleasure of Lord Kṛṣṇa; also refers to Lord Balarāma, the first plenary expansion of the Lord.

**Rāmacandra, Lord**—the *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa who appeared as the perfect king, and whose full history can be found in Vālmiki’s *Rāmāyaṇa*.

**Rāma-navamī**—Lord Rāmacandra’s appearance day.

**Rasa**—the spiritual essence of a personal relationship with the Supreme Lord.

**Rṣi**—sage.

**Ruci**—lit., “taste.” A stage in the practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in which one develops a natural attraction or “taste” for the activities of devotional service.

**Rukmiṇi**—Kṛṣṇa's principal queen in Dvārakā.

**Rūpa Gosvāmī**—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

**Rūpānuga**—a follower of Rūpa Gosvāmī.

## S

**Sac-cid-ānanda**—the qualities of eternality (*sat*), perfect knowledge (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*), possessed in totality by the Supreme Lord and in minute quantity by the living entity.

**Sādhaka**—one who practices regulated devotional service.

**Sādhu**—saintly person.

**Sādhu-saṅga**—the association of saintly persons.

**Sahajiyā (Prakṛta-)**—a class of pseudodevotees who take the conjugal pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* cheaply and who do not follow the proper regulations of *vaidhī-bhakti*.

**Sampradāya**—a chain of disciplic succession through which spiritual knowledge is transmitted.

**Sanātana**—eternal.

**Sanātana-dharma**—lit., “eternal duty.” The eternal occupation of the living entity, which is service to the Supreme Lord.

**Sanātana Gosvāmī**—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

**Sandēśa**—a Bengali sweet made from fresh milk curd.

**Saṅkīrtana**—the congregational chanting of the holy name, fame, and pastimes of the Lord; preaching.

**Sannyāsi**—one in the renounced order of life.

**Saraṅgati**—the process of surrender. A collection of songs by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura. The name of an ISKCON farm in British Columbia, Canada.

**Śāstra**—revealed scripture.

**Satya-yuga**—the first of the four ages in the cosmic cycle of time, characterized by the absence of vice and the predominance of the mode of goodness.

**Siddha**—perfected yogī.

**Sikṣāṣṭakam**—eight verses of instruction in devotional service written by Lord Caitanya.

**Six Gosvāmīs**—six great disciples of Lord Caitanya who wrote many books on devotional service and who established the seven major temples in Vṛndāvana.



**Śloka**—a stanza of Sanskrit verse.

**Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam**—the *Purāṇa*, written by Śrīla Vyāsadeva, which specifically points to the path of devotional love of God.

**Śukadeva Gosvāmī**—the sage who originally spoke the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to King Parikṣit just prior to the king's death.

**Sūta Gosvāmī**—the sage who recounted the discourses between Mahārāja Parikṣit and Śukadeva Gosvāmī to the sages assembled at Naimiṣāranya.

**Svarūpa**—one's original spiritual form.

## T

**Tattva-sandarbhā**—one of the seven *sandarbhās* written by Śrīla Jiva Gosvāmī as his commentary on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

**Tilaka**—auspicious clay markings that sanctify a devotee's body as a temple of the Lord.

## U

**Upaniṣads**—108 philosophical treatises that appear within the *Vedas*.

**Uttama-adhikāri**—a topmost devotee.

## V

**Vaidhi-bhakti**—the process of following the regulative principles of devotional service under the guidance of a spiritual master, in accordance with revealed scriptures.

**Vaiṣṇava**—one who is a devotee of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa.

**Varnāśrama**—the Vedic social system of four social and four spiritual orders.

**Vedas**—the original revealed scriptures.

**Vedānta-sūtra**—Śrīla Vyāsadeva's summary of all Vedic literatures explained in short aphorisms.

**Viṣayī**—materialistic persons or activities.

**Vrajavāsi**—a resident of Vṛndāvana.

**Vrata**—vow.

**Vṛndāvana**—Kṛṣṇa's personal abode, where He fully manifests His personal qualities.

**Vyāsadeva**—the original compiler of the *Vedas* and author of the *Vedānta-sūtra*, *Mahābhārata*, and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

**Vyasāsana**—a special, elevated seat, reserved for the speaker of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

## Y

**Yajña**—sacrifice.

**Yamunā**—a sacred river in India, which Lord Kṛṣṇa made famous by performing pastimes there.

**Yasodā**—Kṛṣṇa's mother in Vṛndāvana.

**Yuga**—an “age.” There are four *yugas*, which cycle perpetually: Satya-yuga, Tretā-yuga, Dvāpara-yuga, and Kali-yuga.

## Acknowledgments

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

Bhakta William Webb  
Guru-sevā-devī dāśī  
Kaiśorī-devī dāśī  
Keśīhanta dāśa  
Lalitāmṛta-devī dāśī  
Mādhava dāśa  
Prāṇadā-devī dāśī  
Rādhā-ramaṇa dāśa  
Tulasī-priyā-devī dāśī

Special thanks to Rūpa-Raghunātha dāśa for his kind donation to print this book.

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