

Lessons from the Road

Volume Four

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

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Chapter Seven

DENVER

Turning Away

i

When you turn away from *māyā*
where do you look?

On the plane to Chicago
I noticed the girl
two rows ahead,
but I looked instead
over the wing,
turning within.

ii

When you turn away from *māyā*
what do you see?

Head down, reading
at O'Hare Airport,
feeling a bit restless,

I looked up from
 Prabhupāda's letters
 and saw an elderly, bearded fellow,
 respectable by dress,
 leafing through the pages
 of a porn magazine,
 which he decided to buy.
 Inserting it between the pages
 of the Sunday newspaper,
 he walked off eating his ice cream sand-
 wich.
 At first I was surprised,
 but then I remembered
māyā is no weakling,
 and I returned to reading
 a letter from Montreal:
 "In the transcendental world
 there is no influence of *māyā* or time."

iii

Descending on Colorado:
 a big feed lot of cows.
 How to avoid depression
 while passing through
 cattle country?
 Thinking "They'll be punished"
 isn't solace.
 But a lifetime of Kṛṣṇa consciousness

and the immediate touch
of *japa* beads in my hand.

iv

When you turn away from *māyā*
what do you hear?

From the rear of the plane,
a loud dope-head:
"Where did you get that hairdo?
I've been up four days on coke!
Hare Rāma!"
As we deplaned, he persisted:
"You guys want a few bucks?
Hare Rāma! Got a rose?"
But Madhu was waiting
at journey's end,
with talk of Kṛṣṇa.

From Madhu-maṅgala's log, on the road from Chicago to Denver

"July 2nd: We drove 160 miles to a rest area just past Malden, Illinois, on I-80. Waiting in the rest area I chanted *japa*. Śarad and Bhakta Kent were traveling together in the brown van, pulling the trailer. In the rest area there were six hundred students from all over the world on an exchange scheme. I spoke with three of them from Sydney, Australia. They said they often see

the devotees there on the street corners, but they haven't seen any devotees since coming to the U.S. four months ago. They said the vegetarian restaurant in Sydney has excellent food.

"July 3rd: We drove 350 miles to a rest stop outside Lincoln, Nebraska, on I-80. There we saw a film crew interviewing people. Kent asked them if they wanted to film us. They said they were looking for the ideal American family. They will pay for hotel accommodations and film the family in Fourth of July celebration.

"They had been there all morning, but had not yet found a suitable family. We took *prasādam* and drove to a rest stop in Kerney where we spent the night.

"July 4th: We drove about 200 miles and stopped at a rest stop to cook. A man stopped by the trailer, 'What are you guys cookin' anyhow?' Śarad-bihārī and Bhakta Kent took time out from cooking to speak with him. He told them, 'Everywhere I go people have anger and anxiety on their faces.' He took a *Higher Taste* and *Back to Godhead* magazine and gave a seven-dollar donation. He said he would visit the Denver temple. When he left he said, 'And thanks for the smile.' As we were about to leave the rest stop, a car pulled in with a sign 'Proud to be Irish.' They also had a sign for the Irish rock band U2. But we had already spent too much time cooking and talking, and so we had to leave. As we pulled out, the driver of the 'Irish' car waved, 'Hey, you guys—have a safe journey!' I regretted that in the

passion of leaving I hadn't even given them a *Back to Godhead*."

Our large traveling party (ten men) sometimes seems on the verge of breakup. It is not really a single unit but a conglomeration of fellow travelers. Three of the men are Philadelphia-based devotees, one is traveling on behalf of New York, and two are from the Gītānāgarī Press. All of them have been assigned income quotas on behalf of their temples. When they don't maintain their quotas, which often happens, their supervisors come after me. I say I can't be responsible to fulfill so many quotas, and so we may have to let the men go.

Stage Stop Campgrounds, above Denver

To get here we had to wind up the mountain road. We are in the foothills of the Rockies. There is hardly any flat land, just enough to park. Perched among the pines. When we walk for *japa* it's all up and down. Madhumāṅgala picked wild flowers, bluebells and delicate red and pink buds, and put them in a vase on the altar. It's all idyllic now, but Harry, the owner of Stage Stop, says they get a hundred inches of snow in the winter.

The newest member of our travel party is Bhakta Kent, who joined us in Chicago. This morning when I saw him walking alone through the pine woods, I recalled him saying that he had been following the reli-

gion of the native American Indians. So I asked him about it. But first, I told him all I could remember of Prabhupāda's statements about the natives of America.

Kent said that he lived for a year with a native American family on an Indian reservation at Four Corners (where four western states meet). His American spiritual teacher admitted to him that if he wanted to go "all the way" on the spiritual path, he should "come down from the mountain"—leave the reservation and seek further. According to Kent, the American Indians see God in everything. To them everything is alive. The trees are "people" and they form a "nation." There are also plant people and a plant nation, insects and an insect nation, etc. Everything is animate. Kent was very seriously following this path and was introduced to rites and teachings usually forbidden to white men. But the wife of his Indian teacher was also a fringe devotee of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. She knew the *mahā-mantra* and showed it to Kent. So he followed his native American nature mysticism, but along with it, he went on chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. One day while sitting in the "Sweat Lodge" and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, he had an intense experience. "I don't know what to call it," he said, "except maybe what the Christians called second birth." After that he decided to leave the reservation and seek out Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Reading at the Campground

I have been reading most of the day so far, and I am feeling a bit tired of it. Sitting here in the heat, turning the pages, all alone. I may sometimes be dissatisfied with my reading program and want to give it up in favor of more time spent in another service, such as speaking with people. But once I sacrifice even a little of my reading time, I immediately hanker for it again. As much reading as possible is good. There is never any wrong in sincerely hearing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, section by section. It is always nutritious. And I need it as much as possible. Actually, I should not desire to read less, but more, and better. I should hanker for it constantly, just as the sages who are never satiated by hearing the nectarean messages of Godhead. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The message of the Lord, especially from a personality like Śukadeva Gosvāmī, can never be tiring, even though one may be exhausted from other causes" (*Bhāg.* 2.8.26, purport). And, "One who is fully absorbed in *acyuta-kathā* can never be afraid of anything in this world." It is also stated by Mahārāja Parīkṣit, *śṛṇvataḥ śraddhayā nityaṁ grṇataś ca sva-ceṣṭitam*: "Persons who hear *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* regularly [*nityaṁ*] and are always taking the matter very seriously will have the Personality of Godhead Śrī Kṛṣṇa manifested in their hearts within a short time" (*Bhāg.* 2.8.4).



I came upon Bhakta Kent sitting at a picnic table with books on the flowers and birds of Colorado. He keeps a diary with the names of birds he spots with his bin-

oculars. Since he is from the West Coast, it was a big discovery for him to see a red-headed woodpecker, although I used to see them all the time in Pennsylvania. He said this campground is in a region called Arrapaho, a famous historic Indian hunting ground. I leafed through his books and saw photos of many wild flowers that are blossoming here. One plant produces big puff balls, like the dandelion when it turns to puff, only three times as big. Kent's special find today was a red berry bush called Kinnikinnick, which he said the Indians used to smoke in their peace pipes.

"Is this an intoxicant?" I asked.

"No," he said. "It was given by the Grandfather. (Indian name of



God). It's for spiritual meetings. It's like a perverted reflection of the *tulasī*. I didn't know you were into these things."

"I used to be," I said, "when I was at Gītā-nāgarī."

All around us is a splendid feast for the eyes and ears. Here are wild flowers, soft weeds, and wheatlike blossoms. The air is filled with the whirring of humming birds' wings and bird songs. If you look up, you see the fir-topped foothills of the Rockies and a bright, airy sky. Is it all mundane? Actually, it is all Kṛṣṇa. As I read this morning:

The expansion of Baladeva known as Sankarṣaṇa in the spiritual world is the ingredient and the immediate cause of this material cosmic manifestation. The gigantic universal form is called the Viśvarūpa incarnation of Mahā Sankarṣaṇa. Thus we do not find anything within this cosmic manifestation except the Lord Himself.

—Cc. *Ādi*, 13.75–76

Immediately after these verses, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja has placed another verse from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*: "As the thread in a cloth spreads both lengthwise and breadthwise, so everything we see within this cosmic manifestation is directly and indirectly existing in the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This is not very wonderful for Him" (*Bhāg.* 10.15.35).

The Third Canto description of Vidura's pilgrimage is very instructive. Some of the details I can't follow right now, but I aspire to his attitude: "With a desire to

gain a higher order of pious life, he traveled to the holy places where thousands of transcendental forms of the Lord are situated."

Vidura was without fault, but by intrigue he was thrown out of his palace. He took the reversal in politics as an opportunity, because "it gave him the chance to live alone in a holy place and fully engage in devotional service of the Lord."

Although he was relieved of tribulations, Vidura considered himself contaminated by worldly dealings, and so he hoped to purify himself by traveling to holy places. But Śrīla Prabhupāda warns, the eradication of sin doesn't come merely by visiting the places of pilgrimage and performing one's prescribed duties there: "One should be eager to meet the great souls who are already there, engaged in the service of the Lord."

Some details that I may not follow include Vidura's habit of not lying on a bed, not dressing his hair, not worrying about pleasing society or depending on an occupation. In many ways *sannyāsa* life in ISKCON *does* follow these details. But most important: "One should remain always absorbed in the function of pleasing the Lord. Thus sanctified by thought and action, one is able to realize the Supreme Lord by the process of a pilgrim's journey."

As we approach Boulder and Denver, let me meditate on our purpose: to become purified of false ego by associating with the devotees, assisting in their

preaching work, receiving *darśana* of the temple Deities, seeing the good.

Wednesday Night, Boulder Colorado Preaching Center

Śaṅkara Paṇḍita greeted us in the backyard of the small two-story white house near the campus. He said from fifty to one hundred people come on Wednesday nights, and Saturdays too. Many of them come just for the dinner. They know exactly when to arrive in order to miss the lecture. Sometimes he switches the times, so that when they come for dinner they find it's lecture time. Śaṅkara Paṇḍita described the congregation as "mostly students, hippies, punks, 'dead-heads,' *yogīs*, Buddhists."

He also gave credence to the idea that Boulder is a spiritual *cakra*.

In the temple room on the altar was a large photo of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Deities. "This is Rādhā-Govinda of Denver," said Śaṅkara Paṇḍita. "You have seen Them?"

"No, only the little ones. Last time I was here was 1975."

"Oh? Then it will be a treat for you to see Mahā-Govinda when you go to Denver."

I thought of Mahātmā Vidura's statement that there are billions of *arcā-vigrahas* throughout the universe and they are not idols. It's a special pleasure to travel to the ISKCON temples to hear devotees talk

about their Deity. He is a person, Govinda, Kiśora-Kiśorī, Nitāi-Sacīnandana. And if a devotee-visitor is alert, he soon comes under the auspicious influence of the *arcā-vigraha*. When Śrīla Prabhupāda visited Hyderabad he was interviewed by reporters at the airport, who asked, "Why have you come?" He replied, "I am going to see Balājī."

Upstairs in the guest room, as I lay down, I noticed a close-up photo of Denver's Govinda, shiny black, handsome, with golden eyebrows and Vaiṣṇava *tilaka*. And beside Him, a very lifelike, beautiful photo of the smaller Govinda. I got up from the mattress and took a closer look at the golden Govinda, and gradually He began to resemble Dāmodara of Gītā-nāgarī as well as Gopīvallabha of Boston. I lay down again, and then realized, "That is Dāmodara!"

Śaṅkara Paṇḍita is very genial. He introduced me to the guests with some exaggerated phrases and kept saying "His Holiness." I spoke on the *mahā-mantra*. When I asked for questions, a man asked, "How do you become a *guru*?" I replied that he who is now a disciple becomes a *guru*, but if one thinks, "I am a *guru*," then he is *goruḥ*, a cow. Another man asked how can you tell a real *guru* from a cheater. I began to state the qualifications—"He has to be in disciplic succession, and he must be immersed in Brahman." A mellow, bearded fellow sitting on the front porch leaned toward me through the

open window and said, "Otherwise he becomes a cow."

After the lecture, Śaṅkara Paṇḍita led the chanting. He said that the *kīrtana* would be brief and dinner would soon be served: "So please be patient." He played the harmonium and Satyasena played the *violin*! Haryāśva played *mṛdāṅga* but then put it down



Śaṅkara Pandit dāsa, president of Boulder ISKCON

and started his dancing, inducing others—including guests—to join. Some of the hippies got right into it, and there was even whistling and stomping, girls dancing, beads, beards, funky costumes, a get-together *kīrtana*.

Comments by guests during the feast:

"The Kṛṣṇa temple is real nice. Great food, great music and great women!"

Bhakta Eric: "Have you ever read Śrīla Prabhupāda's books?"

"Yes, I read the *Bhagavad-gītā*."

"What was your conclusion?"

"My what? Oh! Yes, Kṛṣṇa is a cool guy!"

Hari-nāma, Boulder Mall

Devotees from the next place, Spanish Fork, Utah, asked us to hurry up and reach there by July 19 so that I can speak at one of their rarely held congregational meetings. Therefore, we will only stay a day and a half in Boulder and a maximum of four days in Denver.

If I stayed longer I could go out and talk to people. So I tell myself. But I am not prepared enough to do it in just one day. I sit with the chanters and sing and watch the fun. Janmāṣṭamī dāsa approaches a very skinny young man who wears shorts and a beard. He seems so thin he has trouble walking. I guess he is a faster. But he appears to be aggressive and angry—an odd person. Devotees may also appear funny looking,

but at least they are giving out magazines with pictures of Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa conscious essays. As the people of Boulder sail by at lunchtime, some of them accept our charity.

I have heard so much about Boulder, Colorado. One devotee here, Bhaktin Mary, who seems enamored by the mystique of Boulder said, "It's a *cakra*," a spiritual center, unique in the U.S. "Everyone here is worshipping," she said. "Everyone is interested in spiritual life. Even the businessmen in their big suits know that there is something beyond this." Bhaktin Mary came to Boulder seeking spiritual life and *she* found Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Her husband, Sudarśana dāsa says, "The people here are mostly impersonalist, neo-Buddhists. We have to be very patient, about trying to make devotees. But everyone sees us and hears the chanting every day. The whole town of Boulder is very receptive. So we want to be career devotees."

Śaṅkara Paṇḍita: "The people here are also really into sense gratification."

Bhaktin Mary: "But they are not ordinary *karmīs*. They are like *jñānīs*."

I can't taste the nectar of Boulder so quickly. Maybe the *cakra* will pull me back here or maybe I'll catch the secret of wandering and feel more at home wherever we go. If I don't learn the art of surrendering to the nectar of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then I will have to leave my life unfulfilled.



Harināma on the Boulder Mall

Śaṅkara Paṇḍita asked me to meet with the Boulder devotees. Bhaktin Mary asked, "Can you tell us ways to help make devotees?" But they already know. In recent years they have visited every house in the city (50,000) two times. They go every day to the downtown mall and sit down to sing Hare Kṛṣṇa in a melodious *kīrtana*. They hold a feast and lecture twice a week, as well as a cooking class in the university. And they have more ideas. So what can I add to it? I suggested they could concentrate on making themselves devotees by reading together and that may attract people to the spiritual purity of our community. Bhaktin Dana agreed. She said that she was very attracted to the class that the devotees hold every day. She especially likes

how each person chants the Sanskrit. The first time she tried to recite the Sanskrit out loud, she became flushed and embarrassed but the devotees said, "You did it fine!"

"That was a great moment of my life," she said.

"It's like going back to the beginning of school," I replied.

"And I love school," she said.

Arrival in Denver

The temple president, Anuttama, is away while we are visiting. He has allowed me to stay in his house. His rooms are filled with many pictures of Prabhupāda, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Deities, and practical amenities for use in



The International Society for Krishna Consciousness,
Denver

his service. Anuttama has a tape recorder in his bathroom—Agni dāsa *kīrtanas*. Yes, *kīrtana* at every moment, even in the bathroom, or else the mind may go quickly to *māyā*. For example, the house and temple here are on a busy street with heavy automobile traffic. The cars stop at a traffic light just outside the window. Rock music blasts from the car radios. The thrust and stop of the cars and the looks of the drivers are passionate. So *kīrtana* at every step.

By traveling and relocating, I feel disoriented. I have to find out again where to sit, where to lie down, where to set up our Deities. Curious about my new surroundings, I take down photo albums from a shelf and browse through the snapshots of devotees distributing books and singing on *hari-nāma* in downtown Denver. As I try to recommence my *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* study, Śrīla Prabhupāda's purports start speaking at once to my needs.

Uddhava lamented his own fortune also because although he knew Kṛṣṇa to be the Supreme Personality of Godhead, he could not properly use the opportunity to render devotional service to the Lord. He regretted everyone's misfortune, including his own.

—*Bhāg* 3.2.8, purport

This reminds me that I have to go further. . . . I am not surrendering enough. It's one thing to be honest about this, but it's much more difficult to change. People may think I am a nice devotee. . . . But I regret my misfortune.

While leaving the temple after the evening lecture, Kent told me about Mary, a ninety-three-year old lady who lives across the street from the temple and who likes devotees. Mary was sitting on her porch so I went over with Kent and Eric.

Kent opened with, "It sure would be nice if it rained!"

Mary didn't seem to hear so we all went closer. He repeated about the rain, and she agreed. Then she said, "God is in there." She pointed to the temple. "God is in that building over there."

"Yes, He is," said Kent. "It is real nice, too. You know, most people don't know that."

"My daughter, before she left," said Mary, "used to go in your temple a lot. We would sit on the wood floor. The Lord is in there." Mary said that her daughter would never let anyone criticize the devotees. When someone would say something bad, her daughter would say, "You should just go over and find out. They are the most wonderful people around."

"The night she left," said Mary, "she left in this house. She was in my arms. Just before she went away I called out the window to Jack [one of the devotees]. Everyone came running over, filling the room. So many people. It was so wonderful. I just don't know what I would have done without them. Jack was like my son."

"Did they chant when your daughter left?" asked Eric.

"No, I guess I was too chaotic. But when she was on her last breath she rose up saying, 'Mother, I must go. It's time to leave.'

"Do you have to go?" I said.

"She said, 'Oh Mother, it's so beautiful.' She left right after that. I tell you the house was filled with angels. I know she is with the Lord." After saying this, Mary placed her hand on Kent's arm and said, "I don't know what I would do without all of you. You are all so sweet."

"Take care, Mary." We all had goose bumps.

ISKCON Denver Data:

Seventy percent of their income is sent to the BBT. A householder family willing to do reasonable, full-time service in the temple can live in a nice apartment without paying rent. The devotees have friendly and mature relationships among themselves.

Sarva-dṛk, the vice president said, "It is a simple temple. We don't have much depth in preaching in terms of many different projects and businesses. It's mostly just book distribution." I asked him how can they keep up their book distribution spirit even though so many big leaders come and go. He said their preaching mood comes from Śrīla Prabhupāda. They were raised in that consciousness by their temple leaders, so even if the leaders leave, the consciousness remains.

They have favorable neighbors, and even at the

airport where devotees distribute books daily, the employees are friendly.

There are thirty devotees living here now. New-comers visit regularly. (It seemed like every day I saw another new person reading from the song book as we chanted prayers). Within the last five months, six *brahmacārīs* became married. The remaining *brahmacārīs* refer to the marriage wave as "heavy snowfall."

Thirty devotees worship thirteen Deities. This means that many directly cook, go on the altar, dress the Deities, and perform *āratis*.

The temple rooms are kept neat and clean. While we visited, they were just completing a repainting of the outside of the building—beige with burgundy trim and



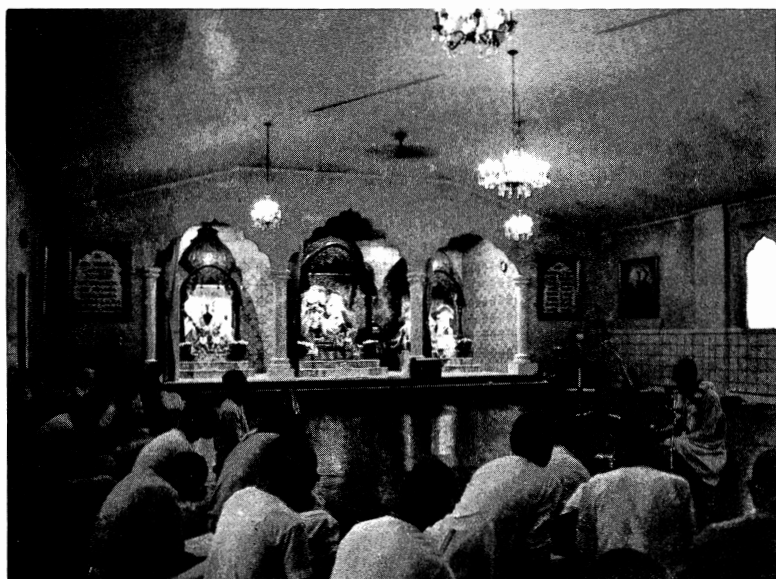
Śrī-Śrī Rādhā-Govinda, Denver ISKCON

black wrought-iron decorations.

After seeing Rādhā-Govinda, I know better how my words cannot describe Their beauty. Especially Her radiant, attractive face. But if I say nothing at all, if I leave Denver temple with no mention of Rādhā-Govinda, it may seem that I didn't even notice. During *darśanas* I kept thinking, *This must be the most beautiful Rādhārāṇī.*

Sunday Feast Data

The temple room has one of the best dance floors in ISKCON. It's made of parquet squares, and the hall is large enough for running and leaping. Usually I advocate that the Sunday afternoon *kīrtana* should be sedate, so the guests can take part without feeling intimi-



Śrīmad Bhāgavatam Class in the Denver Temple

dated by wild steps and too much drum pounding. But in most temples, the devotees become so enthusiastic that the guests are left watching from the sidelines. Yesterday's dancing was very enthusiastic, but it was also entertaining and so exciting that the guests became delighted even from the sidelines.

During the *kīrtana*, layers of false ego were coming off. The staid covering, the mild covering, the illusion that I am a prematurely old man with a bad foot; the don't-lose-your-cool layering, and the layer of worries, "What will others think?"

Govinda jaya jaya, gopala jaya jaya
Rādhā-ramaṇa hari, govinda jaya jaya

We all chanted together, and nothing else mattered. We saw each other for what we actually are. And the Sunday guests could also see *joy in kīrtana*.

Rightly done, *kīrtana* is the best entertainment. And it's the deepest meditation. Look! Even Madhu-maṅgala is dancing! Please remind me never to miss the Sunday Feast *kīrtana*.

After the lecture, one guest's question was so low it was below bottom. An unshaven man sitting close to his girlfriend asked if it was all right to go on chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa while performing "abominable activities." I answered by saying that a sincere devotee may occa-

sionally makes mistakes, but if he intentionally commits sinful activities and goes on chanting, that is the seventh offense in chanting.

But he countered with a Prabhupāda story: "I heard that Prabhupāda said a drunkard can chant Hare Kṛṣṇa while drinking his wine, and it is all right."

By the line of his logic he seemed to be seeking an endorsement for chanting along with black tantric rites. I thought if I said too much I would be committing the ninth offense against the holy name. So I turned toward a man in the back of the room who asked, "Where does Caitanya fit in?" He was sitting in front of a glass case of Prabhupāda's books, so I replied, "If you would really like to know where Lord Caitanya fits in, you can read those seventeen volumes right behind you—*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*."

He laughed, and the next morning he was in the temple room reading along in the song book while we sang *saṁsāra-dāvānala*.

Downtown Denver Hari-nāma

Śaṅkara Paṇḍita was wearing a white T-shirt with the words "Hare Kṛṣṇa" printed in a mist of purple and violet. With his pleasant smile, he was an attractive force against the wall of the *karmīs*. And so also were the women in their gossamer silks, and the beatific *brahmacārīs* who were clashing cymbals. We went to the Sixteenth Street mall, a great place for *hari-nāma*. It

is a mile- long rectangle of stores and offices, with no vehicular traffic except for buses. At lunch hour, it was humming with pedestrian life.

Satyasena, Balabhadra dāsa, and Śaṅkara Paṇḍita led us down the mall lane in a very relaxed yet enthusiastic stroll, waving to people and calling to folks who sat in the outdoor restaurants. I noticed that the people in the outdoor restaurants paused in their eating until we had passed by. I'm not sure why. If anybody responded even the slightest, the devotees smiled or lifted up their arms calling, "*Hari bol!*" If a nondevotee smiled or frowned, he also got "*Hari bol!*" in return. But most people tried not to respond, except for slight facial gestures. I tried imagining what it was like to look up and face the *hari-nāma* party. I felt sure that behind those shy smiles, there was something more. Especially those who tried to ignore us even when devotees smiled in their faces and greeted them, those who looked back with frozen expressions—it was their effort in self-control.

We arrived at a good spot (in front of a closed store) and stopped to dance. A man came by, dragging a six-foot cross in imitation of Jesus Christ. On the cross was scrawled "No Greater Love," and he carried it on his shoulder with a big pad of foam rubber. The cross bearer smiled at us, accepted a magazine, and continued down the mall.

Some businessmen did a mock dance for several

seconds as we passed them, and the devotees loved it. A quiet man with a silent guitar nodded in bare acknowledgement as we passed. A well-dressed black man with a Bible repeated the words "Jesus Christ" as our group of twenty walked by double file. Two teenage girls stayed longer than most, attracted by the devotees—it seemed like they were seeing us for the first time, as they glanced down at their *Back to Godhead* magazines and then up to the devotees' faces. A man at a flower stand gave a shy "peace" sign. As we walked with our long file, an old lady got trapped between the *hari-nāma* file and the wall of the building. She giggled nervously and returned as soon as possible to the main school of fish that flowed down the mall. A spiky-haired blonde man dared to stand and watch us for five minutes, before his girlfriend nudged him and they left.

After an hour I had to leave the party. I crossed the street, looked back at them and felt a tug to rejoin them. Chanting is like that; you think you have only a little taste for it, but when you stop you know it's your life breath. When can I go out again with the *hari-nāma* party? The devotees waved back to me and then continued down the street. They were really absorbed in the chanting, playing in the waves and putting on a good show for the *karmīs*.

Traveling on Interstate 80 West

It's pleasing to see night turn into dawn and to

drive out of the billboard-congested city into the pure land and sky. After two hours we saw our first Western moonscape, an outcrop of weather-worn rocks that appeared like eerie sculptures. Then, "Howdy! Welcome to Big Wyoming."

As we drove along chanting *japa*, Varuṇa mentioned that some devotees were unsettled by my last night's presentation about the *guru*. This confirmed my reluctance to talk about it in the first place. Most of the devotees in Denver are disciples of an initiating *guru* whose duties have been suspended. Despite this misfortune in their lives, these devotees continue with their duties in a dedicated and jolly way. The temple authorities seem to have the trouble under control by entirely emphasizing that the devotees may take shelter in Śrīla Prabhupāda and ISKCON. I also stressed that, yet I added they may have to follow someone else as their living *guru*. For some, my presentation was vague: "Do we need a spiritual master or not?" I think I'll write to them and apologize. On the one hand, they would like to hear more about their situation from someone they respect, but it is more delicate than brain surgery. Some would rather not talk about it at all, or not in a public meeting. Who can completely empathize with those who have lost their spiritual master? One of them said, "So much talk about the spiritual master who has left. I think you should pay more attention to the disciples and how to help them stay."

After chanting sixteen rounds, I reached into my pocket and found a letter from a Denver devotee. Śukadeva dāsa wrote that he appreciated the visit of our *brahmacārī* party. He said that the devotees from Denver used to be known as the Rocky Mountain Boys, but now they are known as the Rocky Mountain Couples. He wrote a song praising *brahmacārī* life, which he said was to be sung to the tune of Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison." Excerpts:

I am sick of lordin' over
the Lord's energy.
Especially the form of woman;
sex life ain't for me.
I want to be a *brahmacārī*.
I don't want no girl.
Babies, *sārīs*, and bangles
are what makes the whirlpool swirl.

My friends all wear white now,
but that ain't for me.
I am fixed on stayin' single;
all glories to the *brahmacārīs*.
I am a simple *brahmacārī*
I live a simple life.
If you want things complicated,
you can take a wife.

Along the way it was mostly plains, but gradually there was more undulation, and yellow daisies, blossoming weeds, cattle with tagged ears, and miles of wooden snow barricades resembling deserted stadium seats. Varuṇa and I talked to keep Baladeva from merging into the highway stripe, the road, and the sky.



Chapter Eight

UTAH

Western Hills Campground, Rawlins, Wyoming



As we drove onto the dry, treeless piece of land, the *brahmacāris* were sitting at a picnic table eating a late breakfast. They were supposed to have reached here about 10:00 P.M. yester-

day, but didn't arrive until 1:00 A.M. They excitedly related to us how they were delayed because the night road was like a speedway of animals: kangaroo rats, jack rabbits, cottontail rabbits, and pronghorned antelope.

"What is a kangaroo rat?" I asked.

"They have mouselike bodies," said Kent, "but a huge tail and big



feet. They can hop out of their predators' jaws."

"But we ran over some," said Caitanya-Nitāi. "We tried not to. We were sometimes driving five miles an hour and waiting for them to pass under the van, but they kept coming, drawn by the headlights." I tried to imagine the scene and the anxiety of the *brahmacārīs* who sounded like the hunter-turned-Vaiṣṇava.

"What we want to know," said Eric, "is whether an animal run over by a transcendental vehicle becomes liberated."

I said I didn't think that our vans were on the level of Arjuna's arrows or Kṛṣṇa's chariot. "We can't speculate," I said, "that every gnat and kangaroo rat that we hit goes back to Godhead. It's good that you tried to avoid killing any creature with the car. But even if we are ordinarily implicated in unintentional violence, our mission in Kṛṣṇa consciousness will absolve us."

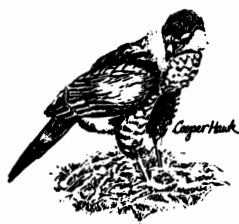
Be Here Now in Rawlins, 3:00 A.M.

A writing instructor suggests that we practice writing "I am a friend to" and list all inanimate objects. I am a friend to this pen, these scissors, the toothbrush and toothpaste, the Kāmadhuk. But what does this mean? Yes, I have a relationship with all objects, but I don't belong to them. As Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, "While moving, sitting, walking, etc., the spirit soul knows he doesn't really do any of this." A Zen follower or pantheist thinks it's enough to be here now, although what

kind of a being he is and what is his purpose, he doesn't know. A Kṛṣṇa conscious devotee also lives for the present moment, but he is guided by higher knowledge. In ignorance, the voidist asserts, "No purpose. No meaning. This is it." I don't want to be that kind of person.

But I am a friend to all those things, those poems, those breakfasts, those lunches, those rounds to chant, the Deities on the altar, my daily bathing of Śrīla Prabhupāda, hearing his tapes, and kicking out doubts. And Lord Kṛṣṇa is the supreme friend from whom comes the precious life-liquid of daily existence, drop by drop. I must also be friendly even to the opposition that is thrown at us and that tests and purifies us. There is a long train rumbling by. Now Baladeva is blowing his nose as loudly as a trumpet, waking up the others. Soon Madhu will be on board.

Bhakta Kent and Śarad-vihārī dovetailed their hiking desire with their *japa* by climbing the small mountain behind the camp. They brought back flowers, juniper branches, and visions of hawks, vultures, and a peregrine falcon speeding by in the thermal currents. ("Guru Mahārāja, he's the fastest animal alive;



they can dive up to one hundred and eighty miles an hour!") And an encounter with an antelope, as told by Bhakta Kent:

While chanting on a quiet meditative pathway, I spotted a male prong-horn antelope. It bounded off over a small hill, jumping on the run for about fifty yards, and then stopping to look back. After I circled the hill, I met up with him again. This time he allowed me to come much closer. I came as close as twenty yards, while the antelope stood ready to burst away. But all of a sudden he just began to walk slowly off to the side. After a few steps he stopped, picked up his ears and listened to the sound vibration of my now audible chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare. He didn't move at all as I walked closer and closer to him. I knew without a doubt that he was becoming absorbed by the *mahā-mantra*. With each step closer I wondered how far he would let me within his boundary of safety. I eventually came too close and off he went. But every fifty feet he looked back, catching eye contact and then continuing on, almost as if not believing what had just happened.

With nothing better to do, two young teenagers go ripping through the hills all day, driving their motorcycles over bumps and ditches. Today, one of them was driving loudly back and forth across the little campground. On one of his close passes, he called out, "Bunch of queers!"

One of the devotees immediately called back, "Come here!"

The biker spun around as if to meet the challenge, but then sped off in another direction. He continued buzzing around like a bumblebee, into the hills and back

past our campsite. He didn't speak, but leered at us. During a slow pass, one of the *brahmacārīs* said, "How are you doing?" No reply. But after dozens of passes, he finally ended his territorial dance and got off his bike. He was a blonde-haired boy about fifteen years old. From thirty feet away he said casually, "Where are you guys from?"

Kent replied, "We're student priests traveling all over the U.S. telling people about God. Many people don't actually know about God." Kṛṣṇa Bhakta dāsa walked up and gave him a *Back to Godhead*, and Eric joined them. They stood around the motorbike talking of Kṛṣṇa and the gear ratios: "Four down, one up." A few minutes more and Kṛṣṇa Bhakta was bobbing down the road on the bike. Then the two teenage bikers and devotees came together.

"Can you say Hare Kṛṣṇa?"

"Yeah. Hare Kṛṣṇa."

En route, Wyoming to Utah

If my travel impressions seem superficial, isn't that also because travel over the land, as well as the land itself, is not worthy of our full attention?

Love is for Kṛṣṇa. This is His land, His sky, His great elements, and the highway was constructed by the brains and muscles of His *jīvas* (*para prakṛti*). But which is more important, the dirt hills of Wyoming or their blissful source? Which is more worthy of attention,

the sunrise or the maker of millions of suns? Are the inane billboards better than direct and poetic messages of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*? I may minimize the glories of the land, but it's not slander. And like everyone else, I am also enamored by temporary life, and I am subject to its forces. Yet, by Śrīla Prabhupāda's grace, I know there is a higher truth. Yellowstone Park, the Grand Tetons, Salt Lake City, San Francisco—these are not the all in all. In fact, the whole universe is no more than one exhalation of Mahā-Viṣṇu, who is an expanded part, of an expanded part, of an expansion of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

I-80 West is the nonscenic pass through the Rockies. We are taking it to avoid the wear and tear on the vehicles and on the human body. It is flat, like a plane runway from which you never take off.

After two hours, while I was sleeping in the back, the van suddenly ground to a halt. Another flat tire.



*Prayer on Interstate 80,
While Changing a Flat Tire*

Holy name of Kṛṣṇa,
I come to You
like a hungry trucker
to his favorite diner.
I am eager, but crude.
I know I need You.
I pray to improve.
(As trucks zoom by).

You reveal Yourself
to one who prays
in the mood of *Śikṣāṣṭaka*.
Please grant me strength
to fight inattention
for my own sake
and for those whom I would help.

Please grant me taste
so that when I chant
and when I speak of *hari-nāma*,
people will be touched.

If you think I will misuse
the taste of ecstasy,
then please help me

clear my pride.
I know I am abusive,
but I want to qualify.
Now it's time
(the tire is changed)
for me to do my part,
chanting holy names.

Baladeva insisted on getting another tire so that we don't have to drive without a spare. We wandered off the interstate two times trying to find a used tire at 7:00 A.M. It's like the desert out here, and yet the same unoriginal chain stores are present: Burger King ("Summer Means Whopper and You"), Best Western Motel, Texaco, Pizza Hut, Safeway . . . everything is standard money-making, and without cheer for the heart. It's hard, at least for me, to see Kṛṣṇa in all of this. One writer advises, "Caress the divine details," meaning that a writer's realm is not the abstract, but the particular. We should love the particular and record it so that we and the world will not forget. But these American commercial chain stores have lost the particular. The spirit soul wants to protest against this. He wants to assert his own individuality. And if we don't speak out, we may get consumed in the exchange of seller and consumer.

I will not buy a Big Whopper! I am not a

Woolworth customer. And even if I take part here (as we must, buying a tire at Sinclair), still we are something else, something wonderful not recognized by the sellers. The Sinclair salesman invites us to buy a bargain, but I don't want it.

I want to do some radical act.

"Here, take one of our magazines."

Heading west, the road remains flat, but there is no mistaking this area for the Midwest. Wind-carved hills are visible now, some shaped like pyramids, or hills with the tops cut off. And in the distance, barely perceptible, toward the south, our first sight of snow-capped mountain ranges.



We begin to see spectacular landscapes, small mountain ranges carved vertically and horizontally by rain and wind. Because different layers of rock have different degrees of hardness, the erosion is uneven, creating stone faces, heads, and shapes of bodies. Some of these mountain peaks resemble ancient redstoned

temples of India, complete with intricate figures of demigods, columns, and *cakras*—or so it seemed to me, as the mind played.

Into Heber City, Utah, where we saw green pasture valleys and massive hills, the Wasatch Mountains. As we were about to stop at a scenic overview, we came upon the Kāmadhuk, leaning forward with a flat tire. They had no spare tire or wrenches, and so Madhumaṅgala had gone ahead to the nearest town.

"Why are these things happening?" I asked, "Is today Thursday?"

"Yes," Varuṇa said, "In India they call Thursday 'Bṛhaspati,' the day when things are expected to go wrong."

We finally arrived, two hours late, at the state park campgrounds near Salt Lake City, where the *brahmacārīs*, Caitanya-Nitāi, Eric, and Kent, were waiting with their van. They had gone twelve hours before us to find a campsite, but they too had encountered difficulty. Eric was delighted to tell me about it. "The van broke down with vapor lock," he said, "and we had to go into 'Buck Snort Saloon' to make phone calls. They had this wall all covered with graffiti. So after the phone call we asked if we could write something on the wall. The bartender said, 'Yeah, great idea. We never had Kṛṣṇas in here before.' So he gave me a pen, and I wrote, 'Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare

Hare.’ And ‘By His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and your life will be sublime.’ And then I drew a two-foot high picture of Lord Caitanya with His arms up. They started asking questions. But it was a hellish atmosphere, so we left.”

More Thursday jinxes: the *brahmacārī saṅkīrtana* van broke down. The tent blew over and bent the metal poles. The leak in the Kāmadhuk roof returned. But we are satisfied chanting together and listening to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*.

Taking Rest in the Wasatch Mountains

Drips of rain ending,
twilight talk,
the plants are standing erect.
I will probably have
the usual dreams,
mixing devotion
with worldliness.

But I'll rise at 2:00 A.M.
to share with the Vaiṣṇavas
that special mercy
the Lord allows
the early riser.

On a *japa* walk at 5:30 A.M. we saw a young deer, like the one in the painting of Gopāla Kṛṣṇa where He is sitting on a rock. We also met a skunk who walked by with his tail up, and later, a large porcupine. Seeing the fields filled with boulders, Madhu and I spoke about Bhīma and Hanumān who used to pick up big rocks and throw them at the enemy.

Coming Down from the Mountain

As we enter Salt Lake City, we haven't decided where to go next. The painting salesmen and *sankīrtana* men are not bringing in much money nowadays. If we can't afford to move on, we don't know where we could stay. At least tonight and the next few days are scheduled. We are going to a home program tonight at Mr. Jaiswal's house in Salt Lake City. After that, we drive to Vatsala Prabhu's house in Provo, where we can park our vehicles. In the morning we will drive to the ISKCON temple in Spanish Fork, Utah, home of the KHQN radio station.

Salt Lake proves that ISKCON can still be young and pioneering. They have been here three years so far, first with only the radio station. Now a temple and a restaurant have been added. I admire the patience of those who have come, and who are working from slow beginnings, making friends, constructing a house, maintaining the radio. Our travel version of patience is to keep moving, trying to pay for new tires and engine

repairs, trying to remain confident that it is all worth it. And writing back home.

As we approached the radio station, the two-hundred-foot tower with blinking red lights appeared like a temple for glorifying Kṛṣṇa. Radio KHQN operates from a small building, but devotees have just completed construction of a two-story house and temple. We entered for the 6:00 A.M. *ārati* and beheld a large *mūrti* of Kṛṣṇa on an altar within an alcove, as well as Gaura-Nitāi Deities and a Śrīla Prabhupāda *mūrti*. Through the window behind the Deities, the sunrise over the mountain was like a backdrop to the altar.

After the *Bhāgavatam* class, Vatsala asked about life in the heavenly planets. This is a subject of special interest to the Mormons. We conjectured about the life of dogs and cats in the upper material planets, and how one might accrue *karma* to get a body like that. Later, we talked more about the Mormons. The devotees affirmed what we had experienced in the campground, that Mormons are open-minded and like to discuss Kṛṣṇa consciousness, although their own commitments run deep. We all agreed that meeting Mormons is a relief from the narrow-mindedness of the born-again Christians.

In Denver, Sarva-dṛk told me that young Mormons are very receptive to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He said that one of their holy books states that a Mormon should not

eat meat except during famine, war, or winter. The devotees reasoned with the Mormons that in these modern days of supermarkets, central heating, hats and coats for everyone, winter is not so harsh that one should have to become a meat-eater, as one might when faced with the crisis of famine. In recent months Mormons at Salt Lake City have attended vegetarian cooking classes held by devotees, and some of them have stopped all meat-eating. At the campground, the elderly couple next to us were Mormons. The man said he regularly hears our radio station, which broadcasts from Spanish Fork. "I like what you people say. I even put KHQN on one of my automatic buttons as a favorite station."

If I were to live here I would probably study the texts of the Church of Latter-Day Saints and see their visitors center, but since we are only here for a few days, it doesn't seem practical. For pure spiritual taste and nourishment, I don't need to go outside *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

For me, the most interesting thing about the Mormons is their phenomenal success. They were once scorned and severely persecuted as a dangerous cult, and now they dominate Utah and gain influence throughout the U.S. and the world. Partly, their success is due to expert organization in terms of tithing the congregation, as well as the commitment to preaching by all Mormon youth, and well-planned education—all

of which are lacking in ISKCON. The Mormons also gain ground because their message is congenial to the American way of family happiness—the temporary dream elevated to a status of eternal heaven. We may never be so popular. But if the standard for success is the beauty and truth of a religion's teachings, then Kṛṣṇa consciousness should be first. And chanting of the *mahā-mantra* is the easiest practice. The golden era of Lord Caitanya's movement may yet appear as the full moon over all the world, provided devotees are sincere and determined to sacrifice for *sāṅkīrtana*.

Hari-nāma in Liberty Park, Salt Lake City

On the way to the park, I discussed with Vatsala more about the Mormons. Now I think I have heard enough. We arrived in the park about 12:30 P.M., sat down on a nice patch of grass near a pond and a merry-go-around, and began singing. Most people who walked past willingly took a magazine. I wanted to deeply meditate on the chanting, and it was a pleasure to do so with Vatsala leading the singing and expertly playing the harmonium. I thought, "My responsibility is simply to carry the tune in response, to play the *karatālas* in time, and to pay attention, to go deep into the holy names." I thought, "Other devotees will take care of *mṛdaṅga* playing, give out magazines, and talk to passersby, and Vatsala will take care of the lead singing. I will chant and hear."

One hour went by very quickly.

"Only two people didn't take a magazine!" said Bhakta Kent. Baladeva told of the middle-aged couple who had steered their bikes over to our spot as soon as they heard our chanting. The man had been to Māyāpur twenty-five years ago on business. They asked many questions about our chanting—"Why just one *mantra*? What does it do for you?"

I can tell you what it does for you. It makes you want to go on chanting. An hour is too soon to stop.

For the Sunday Feast lecture I chose the verse that ends with the words *ante nārāyaṇa-smṛtiḥ*: Your success "is to remember the Personality of Godhead at the end of life" (*Bhāg.* 2.1.6). I often speak on this, because it is a strong subject matter for a discourse. But then I usually hesitate, thinking it may be too heavy. After all, the guests have to come to the feast with some seriousness, but also in order to have a good time. And here is this bald monk talking for half an hour about death and the futility of all worldly pursuits.

I tried to lighten the talk with the story of the scholar and the boatman, but the message was the same—the only thing worth learning is that which will save us at the time of death. I also had to keep in mind the fact that ninety percent of the people in the audience were Mormons. I didn't want to flatly contradict their scriptures.

When I asked for questions, at first there were none, so Vatsala raised his hand. He asked, "What if one's own religion differs from what you have spoken from the *Bhāgavatam* about the importance of thinking of God at the time of death?" I replied that if one checked with his own scriptures, surely he would find the same teaching. The only one who would challenge this would be the atheist who thinks that at the time of death everything goes black and is finished. One man, who held his female partner's hand even while questioning, asked for practical applications to the teaching "always think of God." I gave examples of day-long activities such as one's work, play, or bodily maintenance, and how one can link these to Kṛṣṇa. "Whatever you do, do it as an offering unto Me." He seemed unconvinced by what I said, and even puzzled.

On the whole, the feast program went smoothly, especially when Vatsala asked everyone to get up to "stretch your legs" and participate in "the dance." Some joined us and we went around in a big circle, clapping and singing the *mahā-mantra*. Those who didn't sing or dance looked on approvingly.

During the feasting, I went over to the man who had questioned me to try to satisfy him further, but he was talking about his university courses, and so I did not broach the subject matter further. I remained unsatisfied, thinking, "Why couldn't I convince you that everything we do will be tested at the time of death? Can I give

you further examples?" Instead of talking with him, I served him his portion of salad.

And now it is early the next morning, and I am still thinking about the man who seemed puzzled. Was I unclear in my presentation? Was it too unsettling a topic? As I review my Sunday lecture, I am convinced that it was right and that it was an appropriate topic even for a Sunday Feast crowd. If the talk left me unsettled, that's my personal problem. The real point is not that I should be praised as an outstanding speech-maker, but whether I can remember Nārāyaṇa at the time of death.

Govinda's Restaurant, Provo, Utah

As we entered, Prabhupāda was singing the *bhajana*, "*Nārada Muni*." There were a few customers. Vatsala was moving back and forth overseeing the buffet and the table service. In beard and neat dress, he is a friendly, welcoming presence within Govinda's. His son Locana is also friendly and open, in a more simple way. Vatsala's wife was cooking in the basement.

"Here is the pea soup that people can't get enough of," said Baladeva bringing bowls of *dāl* to our table to complement our servings of salad, rice, *sabji*, and rolls with butter.

I overheard Vatsala talking to two old ladies. "Who is the figure with the elephant head?" one asked.

Vatsala began to describe that Śiva thought his wife was with another man so he cut off his head, but then he discovered that it was his son Ganesh, and . . . When he finished the ladies politely replied, "Thank you."

Lokanātha came to our table with a delicious grilled cheese sandwich. He had made it himself. Then while we were eating vanilla ice cream, Vatsala came and we spoke about the hopes for the two-week-old restaurant. He has built the entire thing himself—booths, decor, and kitchen. And now his family, wife,



and three boys work to maintain it. It is mid-summer, with only eight thousand of the thirty-six thousand Brigham Young University students present in Provo. "How was it today?" I asked.

Vatsala looked out the front window thoughtfully. "It's steady, but nothing great."

It's a normal restaurant, clean and neat, and yet pictures of Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda are everywhere. And Prabhupāda is singing. As each customer leaves, Vatsala exchanges friendly remarks: "See you later."

"All the best."

"Is it up to par?"

"Yes, very good."

As we were about to leave, a middle-aged lady, the local hairdresser, entered. She ordered confidently, "One Bhīma burger to go."

This is the same Hare Kṛṣṇa restaurant which Prabhupāda personally introduced in 1974. Surely he is pleased with Vatsala's branch in Provo, Utah.

Radio KHQN

I don't get nourishment from New Age music, and I don't need rock music as background to Kṛṣṇa conscious discussions. But I appreciate that "they" need it in order to tune in to KHQN, "The message radio of Utah Valley." According to a survey, a thousand people are tuned in every minute during the fourteen-hour daily programming. And the message is definitely not watered down.

During the last two days on KHQN, I heard a room conversation with Hṛdayānanda Goswami, a fascinating story of Haridāsa Ṭhākura narrated by Amalabhakta, “*Bhāgavatam* Round Table” with Caru Prabhu and guests, “The Vedic Observer,” and many messages advocating surrender to Kṛṣṇa and exposing the ignorance of those in *māyā*. Fourteen hours a day! So if the folks out there need the lure of music to tune in to 1480 on the dial, why not?

I recorded some of my poems at the station, and a few hours later they were put on the air. New Age music in the background increased the emotions.

One of the biggest lessons from the road is that we have been traveling on a dubious financial basis. I mean the *brahmacārīs*’ earning money by nonpreaching methods. Today we have decided that we should stop nonpreaching *saṅkīrtana* and eventually phase out the door-to-door painting sales. If this means we don’t have enough money to travel, then I am willing to accept that. Rejecting nonpreaching methods of *saṅkīrtana* is also a form of preaching. We will have to depend more on Kṛṣṇa and on donor businessmen who wish to support us. Although I would like to keep moving quickly, to gather and disseminate good news of ISKCON, I have to be realistic.

I had thought that if somehow or other I could

continue a rapid pilgrimage pace and write about it, that would be my topmost service to ISKCON. But if I travel on a road that is false, it will also show through my words. A thoughtful person will estimate, "This pilgrimage for seeing good in ISKCON is fine, but there is something amiss here, and he is not telling us about it."

Of course, it is possible to be *too* fastidious, in a material sense, about our implication within the age of Kali. For example, if a person refused to ride on automobile tires because he heard that they had animal products in them, or if he refused to eat anything but organically grown food, or if he refused to obey the law because the government supports nuclear weapons—then he could not move efficiently as a preacher. We know that Kali-yuga is all-pervading, yet we are granted immunity, provided we stay always in the shelter of chanting, hearing, and working to spread Lord Caitanya's movement. But we should not compromise in spiritual life, or there will be a taint on the result.

For example, we have to always observe Vaiṣṇava etiquette. If in order to advance my own aims as Prabhupāda's servant, I intentionally hurt and jeopardize another devotee, that is impure service. And if, as a leader, I employ devotees in tasks which visibly weaken them or pollute them, then that will eventually bear rotten fruit for both me and my followers.

So yesterday we did it. They wanted to sell straight books, although this would mean a significant drop in

income. So yesterday the men went out all day in Salt Lake City and sold Prabhupāda's books as best they could. As a result they are feeling transcendently happy. Now we have to face the results of this purification.

Saṅkīrtana Results

Jagannātha-Kṛṣṇa dāsa met a friendly Mormon woman majoring in psychology at Brigham Young University. She said that she had pursued her mission in Holland, and she and Jagannātha-Kṛṣṇa exchanged a few phrases in Dutch. He showed her the *Bhagavad-gītā* verse where Kṛṣṇa says, "There is no one more dear to Me than he who preaches to the devotees." He tried to relate to her the necessity for strict vegetarianism, and she agreed. She took a copy of *Science of Self-Realization* and gave a donation. Jagannātha dāsa also approached an athletic trainer who said, "You are talking to the *wrong* person! I am an apostolic preacher." Then the man shouted, "I rebuke you in the name of Jesus Christ!" Jagannātha-Kṛṣṇa dāsa said this reminded him of the *Īsopaniṣad* verse that says those who are engaged in the culture of ignorance must enter into the darkest region of ignorance, but worse still are those who are engaged in the culture of so-called knowledge.

Caitanya-Nitāi dāsa said that at first he was afraid to surrender to straight book distribution because hiding behind paraphernalia was easier. He said, "You

don't have to deal with atheistic onslaughts in a very personal way." But he remembered the purport of *Bhagavad-gītā* [18.65] where Prabhupāda says there is no need to worry even about keeping one's body and soul together; Kṛṣṇa will see to that. Caitanya-Nitāi met a group of young people who were very attentive and interested. Even after he spoke to them and left, they kept coming back to him wanting to hear about Kṛṣṇa and the philosophy. One girl named Kelsie was particularly fascinated and listened wide-eyed while he spoke about Kṛṣṇa. She kept saying, "I want to learn how to chant. Are you coming tomorrow? Please, I want to chant with you guys. It sounds so nice."

Another man bought a *Science of Self-Realization* from Caitanya-Nitāi and then kept coming back to talk about it. He said, "Now this book is really popular. Yeah, everyone wants to read it, but I told them they will have to wait till I'm finished." Another boy, Mike, claimed to be an atheist, but he also kept stopping by to talk and ask good questions.

Bhakta Eric was amazed at the friendly curiosity for Kṛṣṇa consciousness on the part of the young kids of Salt Lake City. Eric said, "If we came out distributing books all day, every day, we would become more Kṛṣṇa conscious and make devotees and our movement would get bigger and bigger and the *lakṣmī* would come." The young kids seemed to be waiting for "something," and several of them begged devotees to

come back with musical instruments to sing with them. Not long ago Bhakta Eric was a punk rocker from New York City, and so he knew how to relate to the punk rockers and rock 'n' rollers of Salt Lake City. He told them, "There's a lot more than just hanging out in the streets." He has been out now three days in Salt Lake City, and every day the same kids come up to him, ask questions, and take more books. "They like the devotees," said Eric, "and they like the way we look and what we say. We just have to preach, and Kṛṣṇa will send them. What they want is what *I* wanted, someone who would tell me the truth, because there are so many cheaters and they are tired of being cheated. But when we preach purely, then they want to make the final move to become devotees."

Goloka-Vṛndāvana dāsa met an actor named Patrick Stewart, who said he is now appearing in a Sydney Pollock movie. He had never heard of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. When Goloka told him that we abstain from material enjoyment and don't go to films, Patrick couldn't believe it. "He was extremely enthusiastic," said Goloka, "to assert that we should enjoy to the fullest extent the works of persons like Mozart, Shakespeare, da Vinci, Einstein. He said that these are 'deities for the human civilization.'" He challenged Goloka, "Why can't you enjoy these things?" Goloka replied that Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that all glorious creations spring from a spark of His splendor—

so imagine how wonderful He Himself is! Patrick agreed to the logic of God's greatness, but didn't seem to think about it because he was so enthusiastic about his "mode of goodness happiness."

When Caitanya-Nitāi returned in the evening from book distribution, he said, "I know that anyone who is authorized can meet people and preach, but we just want to be book distributors. I can see how, when many books go out, the spiritual master is happy!"

Provo Campground

Doctor Kamlesh flew in from San Francisco to examine me. He said my eyes are shiny and my aura is brighter. When I told him that the headaches still occur, although less frequently, he said, "Something is wrong." He decided it was because of too much travel and living in a motorhome with petrol fumes. He prescribed that I stop traveling for one or two months. There was no point in arguing with him while he was here, but I doubt that I can follow his advice on travel. Śarad-vihāri dāsa is learning some new Āyur-vedic recipes from the doctor, and we've purchased some new medicine—but tomorrow we head northwest for Idaho, Washington, Canada. . . .

Appendix

tendency for constant amnesia, and so he has to counter this with deliberate remembrance of Kṛṣṇa. The advanced devotee remembers Kṛṣṇa out of love—he cannot help but always think of Kṛṣṇa as his beloved master, friend, child, or lover. The *sādhana-bhakta* also as a willing, submissive disciple of his spiritual master, keeps himself in constant touch with Kṛṣṇa by chanting His names, hearing about Him in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class, and by carrying out services for the spiritual master in association with other devotees.

But *māyā* is strong. We are sometimes told that *māyā* does not *attack* us, but rather we go to *māyā*, as a moth goes to the flame. Yet until we keep a safe distance, the flames of *māyā* will reach out for us. If we are serious about getting free of her clutches we shouldn't play a game of seeing how close we can get to *Māyā*. Sometimes *Māyā* comes as a temptress, alluring us to think that material life is more attractive than duties in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Sometimes *Māyā* assumes a different phase and delivers waves of crushing blows, threatening to drown us in defeat and sorrow. Therefore, a disciple who attempts to always stay in Kṛṣṇa consciousness sometimes comes under the illusory spell.

Lord Kṛṣṇa declares that a sincere devotee who may occasionally appear to succumb to his old illusory connection with *māyā* is actually still His devotee. He forgives occasional mistakes and doesn't hold them against His devotee. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

The material contamination is so strong that even a *yogī* fully engaged in the service of the Lord sometimes becomes ensnared; but Kṛṣṇa consciousness is so strong that an occasional falldown is at once rectified. Therefore, the process of devotional service is always a success. No one should deride a devotee for some accidental falldown from the ideal path, for, as explained in the next verse, such occasional falldowns will be stopped in due course, as soon as the devotee is completely situated in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

—Bg. 9.30, purport

These statements, based on the *Bhagavad-gītā* verse *api cet su-durācāroḥ*, should not be taken as a license to do nonsense, but they should be taken as assurance for the sincere student. He should continue his fight against *māyā*, and Kṛṣṇa will help him to ultimate victory.

In the prayers of Dhruva Mahārāja, Dhruva compares the Supreme Lord to a cow who protects its calf from attack. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments, "A devotee must be very sincere in his devotional service; then, although there may be many things wrong on the devotee's part, Kṛṣṇa will guide him and gradually elevate him to the highest position of devotional service" (*Bhāg.* 4.9.17).

I once received similar encouragement from Śrīla Prabhupāda in a letter he wrote to me in 1968:

Yes, it is as you say, therefore we should always keep ourselves engaged so that there is no possibility of falling down. So far mistakes done imperceptibly by such devotee engaged in Kṛṣṇa conscious activities, *sva pādam mulam bhāgavatam priyasya*, they are excused by the Lord as it is stated in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

The old adage is useful here, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." We should never consider defeat or hopelessness in our "war" against the illusory energy. Śrīla Prabhupāda makes this point in a letter to the lady who was critical of devotees: "We cannot expect that all of a sudden your countrymen, who are addicted to so many bad habits, will give up eating flesh, taking intoxicants, having illicit sex life, and so many other nasty things, and overnight become great, self-realized souls. But just being initiated as Kṛṣṇa's devotee puts one in the topmost category of human society."

Although we may use the analogy of war and soldiers in the fight against *māyā*, yet the devotee's best fighting stance against the formidable foe is to take shelter of the Supreme powerful. This is the way to fight *māyā*. "Those who have surrendered unto Me can easily cross beyond it." I should not think that I have the power to resist the attraction of beautiful women or wealth or the desire to be worshipped as a topmost leader. Neither do I have the power to remain confident after being dealt knock-down blows from bodily disease, persecution by enemies, or withering attacks of climate and storm. I am just a tiny *jīva*, and *Māyā* is a demigoddess, riding a lion and bearing a trident. But I may exert my will, in any situation, to remember the Supreme. I can pray, "Please protect me; don't let me fall down. Please allow me to serve Your devotees. Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare

Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.” When we call to Lord Kṛṣṇa with faith, even in the time of the greatest *māyā* storm, Kṛṣṇa will not abandon us. He has promised: “Always think of Me, become My devotee, worship Me and offer your homage unto Me. Thus you will come to Me without fail. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend. . . . I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear” (Bg. 18. 65–66).



Our emphasis should not be on fear of *māyā* but on praise of our protector, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. *Māyā* will automatically subside when she repeatedly sees our serious attempt to serve her master. Nevertheless, we should respect *Māyā* as the police superintendent and avoid getting on her list of rascals to punish. The nondevotee may laugh at us as we carefully avoid entering his cinema house and as we deny his invitation for a cigarette or liquor, illicit sex, music, etc. Let him laugh and enjoy. We can see through the eyes of the scriptures that the material enjoyers are like moths entering the flame. And we will work to save them if possible. But first we have to save ourselves: “Physician heal thyself.”

We will receive some bruises and knock downs along the way, since we are all, to some degree, miscreants. Otherwise, why have we come to live in *Māyā*’s

prison house? But if we have been fortunate enough to accept the lotus feet of *guru* and Kṛṣṇa in this lifetime, then even our bruises are different. They are learning experiences, spiritual assets, purification. "Never again," the sincere devotee vows as he tastes the last token of reactions to his past sinful desires. We will not give up our desire to serve Lord Kṛṣṇa, even when we seem unable to do it. And we will always be confident that He is with us, protecting and guiding us. If we work like that, without consideration of defeat and hopelessness, we will surely be promoted to the stage of pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

EXCERPTS FROM RECENT LETTERS

Don't Waste Time in Controversy

I am trying to stay out of controversies, even though my position is not neutral. I want to go on with my own preaching, as a faithful citizen to ISKCON, and not waste my life energy day by day, by trying to find out what is the latest position of the different parties and what is the propaganda and counter-propaganda, etc., etc. Even when parties make propaganda against me, I prefer to remain silent. Only if somebody really presses me as to my opinion do I reluctantly give a response.

The Art of Karma-yoga

You ask me what I think of your desire to become a householder and earn a livelihood in society. I think it is all right and natural for a householder. But be very careful that you don't become too much of a *karmī*. To become a successful *karmī* you have to really dedicate yourself body, mind, and words to the service of *māyā* and money. And Kṛṣṇa asks the same thing for the service of the Lord. So one has to strike a balance or compromise when he goes into the material world to make money. Do your material duties, but keep them at a minimum. Also try to do your duties for Kṛṣṇa so that they are not *karma* but *karma-yoga*. This art is taught by Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā* when He tells Arjuna to

engaged in his occupational duties but to think of the Lord always.

Preaching by Writing to People

I am pleased to hear of the progress of your correspondence-course preaching. You mentioned that it is small-scale preaching and yet you like to be encouraged in it. Certainly even to reach one spirit soul is significant. And most important, it will keep you engaged and purified in trying to serve Kṛṣṇa. It must be a bit difficult with your children to do much outward preaching, yet by letter writing you can actually cultivate people. So go on with it, either through correspondence course or by personally writing to people who show a little interest. You may think of the different persons you correspond with as your “students” and care for them and culture them, sending them good news and encouraging them. In this way you can preach. I am pleased to hear that you are also helping in your husband’s business and that it is enlivening to you. After all, the *gr̥hastha* has to do some business, so it should not be a drudgery. We should be engaged for service of the Lord.

A Foundation of Sādhana

Thank you for keeping strong in the morning program. We may have so many big ideas for preaching or ideas for becoming a businessman for Kṛṣṇa and so

many other plans, but how can we build without the strong foundation? That foundation is associating with the devotees in the morning, regularly hearing the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, and developing a relationship with the *arcā-vigraha*, chanting *japa*, etc. Keep strong in the basics, and then you will be successful.

Serving in Vṛndāvana

As much time as you can spend in India will be to your credit. Prabhupāda wrote in one letter that Vṛndāvana is the only place on the earth where Kṛṣṇa is automatically manifested. So it is a great advantage for you to not only live in Vṛndāvana but to render service to the *dhāma* in Prabhupāda's temple, Krishna-Balarām Mandir. Yes, be very careful not to commit any offenses in Vṛndāvana, as they bear a worse result than offenses committed elsewhere.

Be Compatible with your Āśrama

I have read about your desire to remain *brahmacārī*, to study and make money for Kṛṣṇa and yourself. I sympathize with your desire to take an advanced course in English so that you will be able to communicate fluently. You say you also want to study computers and make money but to continue to live in the temple. Whether you can do all that and live in the temple is up to the authorities there. But the traditional understanding of the *brahmacārī* is that he does not do

any extra earning. Personal earning is for the *gr̥has̥thas̥*. If you want the kind of security that money can bring, then you may also have to consider whether it is compatible to remain in the dependent state as a *brahmacārī* of the temple. There is nothing wrong with making money and doing the computer studying, but it should be compatible with your *āśrama*.

Art in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness

You are right to say that we have to strike a balance between trying to learn techniques of art in writing and at the same time giving straightforward, full Kṛṣṇa conscious *siddhānta*. I think that this balance is sometimes like walking a tightrope. Sometimes artists criticize any attempt to introduce specific spirituality into writing. There is a common saying about religious poets that they tend to be "more piety than poetry." So we may disappoint our artist friends and their standards of art by attempting to be "too much" Kṛṣṇa conscious. But the other possible failure is that we may disappoint Śrīla Prabhupāda. Considering this, one might say, "Well, then to hell with art." But as you say, we want to make our Kṛṣṇa conscious presentation more powerful and attractive by art. Therefore, the tight-rope balance.

There is an instructive letter by Śrīla Prabhupāda on this subject matter, one dated April 8 and one April 13, 1968. Śrīla Prabhupāda, of course, stresses Kṛṣṇa consciousness. You and I have been discussing the

statement, "Life is short, art is long." For most artists, this saying is a call to lifelong dedication to craft, with the implication that one never becomes fully perfect. Śrīla Prabhupāda paraphrases the same saying, but with the urgency on the side of attaining pure devotional service:

But to come to the point of a reputed artist will require long duration of time. And our time is very short. We have to finish our Krishna consciousness during our lifetime, and we should not waste a single moment for anything else. According to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, a man is famous who is known as a great devotee of Krishna. So if there is not possibility of selling our pictures immediately on presentation, I do not think there is any necessity to improve our artistic craftsmanship. We should be satisfied with our pictures hanging in our different temples. But we may not sacrifice our valuable time for becoming famous artists so that pictures may be sold like hotcakes.

We do have to work on technique. But I think that technique should be approached solely with the viewpoint to improve our Kṛṣṇa conscious writing. I think the way to stay safe is to always try to please the Kṛṣṇa conscious audience, and not be so concerned about the others. If sensitive and intelligent devotees, like those you mentioned, can appreciate that you are preaching the Kṛṣṇa conscious message effectively, because of your artistic expression, then you are on the safe side, and you can feel satisfied. I think it is important that we develop artistic integrity and artistic association, *among devotee artists*. We should have good *sat-saṅga* among ourselves and always see the balance.

Allow me to give you another example from a book I read about the Japanese poet Basho. The writer compares Basho to another writer, Dogen.

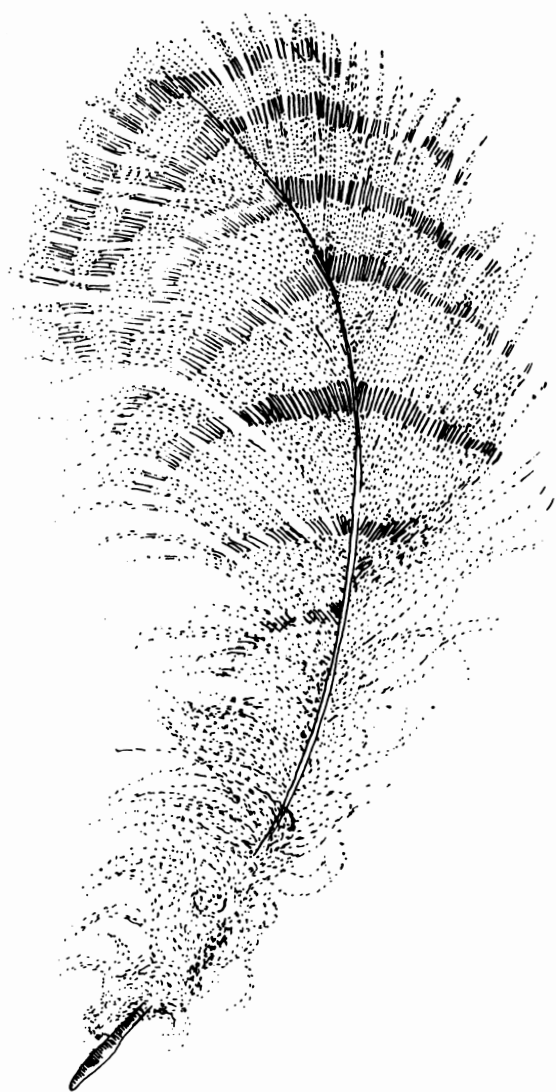
Dogen, who introduced Soto Zen to Japan, wrote poems that were meant to encourage disciples. Dogen did not think himself a poet; he was like all Zen masters, a guide, whose mission was to point minds to enlightenment, and the poems he wrote were meant only to serve that end. Basho, on the other hand, was conscious of being an artist, and *saw the conceptual, whatever its application, as the enemy of art.*

Another way of saying this is that the artist may be willing to give his reader an experience which might lead to revelation, but he is not willing to really point directly to the revelation. He is not a teacher. Although he may be a more pure artist, it seems to me that he is a lesser human being. Especially when the teaching is Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If we can make our own, new definition of Kṛṣṇa conscious art and artist, then there will be no question of leaving out the direct teaching or the artistic glorification of Kṛṣṇa. But because there is such a deep tradition of the "pure" artist as something different from a spiritual teacher, both in the East as well as the West, we will always be criticized by the devotees of art. So I think we should be like Mādhavendra Purī who bid them all good-bye and was satisfied by worshipping Govinda.

When writing teachers, editors, and critics encourage us to become devotees of art and to devote our lives

in that way, we have to tell them that we have something more important to accomplish.

On reviewing the above statements, I think I may have expressed things too much as an "either/or choice." Please forgive me, and I would like to hear your opinion. I know there is also a possibility of a devotee-artist reaching a very wide audience. But for myself, I am afraid of the risk. And Kṛṣṇa has placed me in a fortunate position where I have an immediate first responsibility of writing for my disciples. But I wait to hear more from you on this subject.



A Summary Study of Śrīla Ragunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's ŚRĪ VRAJA-VILĀSA-STAVA

Based on the translation by Kuśākratha dāsa
by Satsvarūpa dāsa Goṣwami

Ragunātha dāsa Gosvāmī begins his prayers glorifying Lord Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in Vṛndāvana with a humble request for help from Lord Kṛṣṇa and His devotees. He describes himself as a conditioned soul who is bound up by the "highwaymen"—lust, greed, anger—and he prays that the heroic devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa will free him. He further prays to Lord Kṛṣṇa to give him a drink of *kṛṣṇa-prema* so that he can become strong and heroic enough to resist the enemies that attack the conditioned soul. In this way, Ragunātha Gosvāmī places himself among the *nityā-baddha* living entities and accurately describes their condition.

How ludicrous is the man who is bound up and surrounded by enemies but who stubbornly considers that he is the master and enjoyer! A devotee never makes this mistake of false pride and neither does he ask for material relief from pain. What he asks for is strong spiritual awareness so that while he endures old age or disease, or when *māyā* attempts to weaken him through the pushing agents of the senses, the sincere devotee continues remembering Kṛṣṇa and always expects His mercy.

Beginning his poetic treatise of Lord Kṛṣṇa's Vṛndāvana-*līlā*, the author first offers obeisances to the land and people of Vraja. He then yearns for the vision of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in the forests of Vṛndāvana. As with all realized visions of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's verses flood us with numerous details of the persons and places associated with Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is never alone. According to the Vaiṣṇava *siddhānta*, the full glory of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is His enjoyment with His parts and parcels. Although the Supreme Lord is self-sufficient and does not need a mother, father, lover, or friends, in order to increase His supreme bliss, He is always surrounded by loving associates. Lord Kṛṣṇa exists with both unlimited and limited potencies, and this is the proof of His omnipotence. *Aṇor aṇīyān mahato mahīyān*: "He is greater than the greatest and smaller than the smallest."

Lord Kṛṣṇa exists eternally as the supreme one. He also exists as the supreme two, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. He also exists with His friends, parents, animals, and the land of Vṛndāvana. Every blade of grass in Vṛndāvana and every drop of Yamunā water are also part of the bliss of Kṛṣṇa. The relatively insignificant material worlds are also Kṛṣṇa's, but they have become separated from the bliss. It is only in His Vraja pastimes that we see Lord Kṛṣṇa surrounded by His most confidential associates, the Vrijābāsīs, who never cease for a moment in pleasing the Lord in *rasas* of love.

Śrīla Ragunātha Gosvāmī declares, “Even today affectionate Lord Kṛṣṇa enjoys the very sweet nectar of transcendental pastimes there”—in Vraja. Of course, we cannot buy a ticket to Vṛndāvana and expect to go and see Kṛṣṇa and taste the sweet nectar. That will not be possible unless we become a pure servant of those who are Kṛṣṇa’s eternal associates. Until we become Kṛṣṇa conscious, even if we go to Vṛndāvana in India, we will remain in bodily and mental consciousness. Lord Kṛṣṇa and His associates and paraphernalia are eternally existing in the same Vṛndāvana where He appeared 5,000 years ago, and “a wonderful sweetness becomes manifest in the hearts of those who understand the nectar of this place.”

In twelve consecutive verses, Ragunātha dāsa Gosvāmī describes the associates of Kṛṣṇa who act as His protectors in Vṛndāvana. Beginning with Kṛṣṇa’s mother and father, Nanda and Yaśodā, these devotees all reciprocate with Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *rasa* of *vātsalya*, or parental mellow. Some of them are uncles, some are grandparents or elderly friends, and some of them mix the *vātsalya-rasa* with other tastes, but all of them feel ecstatic attraction to Kṛṣṇa and a desire to guide and protect Him. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Person and needs no protection; rather, He is the protector of the whole existence: *eko bahūnām yo vidadhāti kāmān*. But through the agency of His *yoga-māyā*, He allows

His dearest associates to see Him as the object of their concern and protection.

How does child Kṛṣṇa create an impetus for parental love in His devotees? *The Nectar of Devotion* describes, "Some specific provocations for parental love of Kṛṣṇa are listed as His blackish bodily hue, which is very attractive and pleasing to see, His all-auspicious bodily features, His mildness, His sweet words, His simplicity, His shyness, His humility, His constant readiness to offer respects to the elderly, and His charity. All of these qualities are considered ecstatic provocations for parental love."

Always absorbed in thoughts of his son, Nanda Mahārāja gives charity to the *brāhmaṇas* and repeatedly begs for their blessings. Whenever Kṛṣṇa and His friends were late in returning home from the forest, Nanda Mahārāja would immediately get up on the small shed built on the roof and would watch for Him. In a worried state of mind he would remain on the roof until he could at last indicate to his wife that Kṛṣṇa, surrounded by His little cowherd friends, was coming back with the calves. Then Nanda Mahārāja would point out the peacock feather on his child's head and inform his beloved wife how the child was pleasing to his eyes.

Of mother Yaśodā, Raghunātha Gosvāmī states, "She is prepared to give her life many millions of times to protect Him from even a single drop of perspiration."

If for a moment mother Yaśodā cannot see Kṛṣṇa, she cries like a cow frightened for her new-born calf. As soon as she rises in the morning, mother Yaśodā first of all offers her breast milk to Kṛṣṇa and begins to chant *mantras* for His protection. She decorates His forehead and binds His arms with protective talismans. Even the *tilaka* she places on Kṛṣṇa's forehead is protective. After all, He is a delicate little child, and so she prays that Viṣṇu may protect Him in His risky pastimes.

Along with Nanda, mother Yaśodā also becomes anxious when it is time for Kṛṣṇa to return from the pasturing ground. If she thinks it is getting late, she strains to hear the sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute, and milk begins to flow from her breasts. Sometimes she goes within the house and sometimes she comes out, constantly looking to see if Govinda is coming back along the road. In appreciation of mother Yaśodā's *vātsalya* mood, one of her friends addressed Kṛṣṇa as follows: "My dear Mukunda, if mother Yaśodā, the Queen of Gokula, is forced to stand on fire but is allowed to see Your lotus face, then this fire will appear to her like the Himalayan mountains, full of ice. In the same way, if she is allowed to enter in the ocean of nectar but is not allowed to see Your lotus face, then even this ocean of nectar will appear like an ocean of arsenic poison." Mother Yaśodā's anxieties sometimes caused her severe headaches and other bodily ailments. And all of these emotions became intensified when Kṛṣṇa left

Vṛndāvana and put all of His devotees into the ecstasy of separation. At that time, mother Yaśodā cried constantly. Sometimes, she prayed humbly, and sometimes she became restless like a mad woman, addressing the *kadamba* tree, "Where is my son?" Rūpa Gosvāmī writes, "Let the anxiety of mother Yaśodā of Vraja, always expecting to see the lotus face of Kṛṣṇa, be glorified all over the universe!"

Raghunātha Gosvāmī also mentions Rohiṇīdevī, the mother of Balarāma, and also Balarāma Himself, as devotees who love Kṛṣṇa with protective sentiments. Rohiṇīdevī is an expert cook for Kṛṣṇa and always gives her sincere friendship to Nanda and Yaśodā. Balarāma's sentiments are mixed with the *rasas* of friendship and servitude toward Kṛṣṇa. He knows the supernatural power of His younger brother Kṛṣṇa, but out of love for Him, He never leaves Him alone in the forest even for a moment. Balarāma's protective affection for Kṛṣṇa is illustrated in this statement to Subala, "My dear friend, please inform Kṛṣṇa not to go to Kāliya lake today. Today is His birthday, and I wish to go along with mother Yaśodā to bathe Him. Tell Him He should not leave the house today."

Parjanya Mahārāja is Kṛṣṇa's grandfather, and he is expert at delighting his grandson by speaking into His ear many joking words. Variyaṣī-devī is Kṛṣṇa's grandmother, and she worships Him with loving words, calling Him "the moon of grandsons." Variyaṣī-devī is so

happy and proud of her grandson that her feet no longer touch the ground when she walks.

Upānanda, who is handsome and wears a great white beard, is the respected prime minister in the council chambers of the King of Vraja. He considers Kṛṣṇa millions of times more dear than his own life, and he delights in his nephew Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Ragunātha Gosvāmī prays that Upānanda may always stay in the government council and protect the land of Vraja.

Sunanda is Nanda Mahārāja's younger brother. He pleases Kṛṣṇa by giving Him palatable dishes made with buffalo yogurt. He worships Kṛṣṇa with every breath. Upānanda's son Subhadrā is an older friend of Kṛṣṇa, who serves on the council of Nanda Mahārāja. He regularly offers Kṛṣṇa good advice for His protection.

Kṛṣṇa's nurse, mother Ambikā, was frightened that Kṛṣṇa would be hurt by demons, and so she prayed to the goddess Durgā, who granted her a boon that her son Vijaya would become a powerful hero able to kill many demons. Thus Vijaya calls loudly, "Where are the demons? With ease I shall shorten their lives." All of Kṛṣṇa's older friends try to protect Him from mischievous persons, and sometimes they bear weapons. It is described in *The Nectar of Devotion*, "One of the elderly friends said, "My dear Maṇḍalībhadrā, why are you wielding a shiny sword as though you are running toward Aristāsura to kill him? My dear Baladeva, why

are You unnecessarily bearing that heavy plow? My dear Vijaya, don't be unnecessarily agitated. My dear Bhadravardhana, there is no need to make these threatening motions. If you will all look more closely you will see that it is only a thunder cloud upon Govardhana Hill; it is not Aristāsura in the shape of a bull, as you have imagined."

Bhāguri Muni is the learned chief priest of Vraja. Everyday he chants *mantras* for the protection of each of Kṛṣṇa's limbs. In this way, all of Kṛṣṇa's protector-devotees in Vṛndāvana express their love for Him, by "mistaking" that Kṛṣṇa could not possibly take care of Himself without their concern, since He is just a little boy. By the *yoga-māyā*, they think themselves superior to Kṛṣṇa and think that without their taking care of Him, He could not possibly live. In *The Nectar of Devotion* one devotee prays to all the parents and protectors of Lord Kṛṣṇa as follows: "Let me take shelter of the elderly parental devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa. They are always anxious to serve Kṛṣṇa and to maintain Him, and they are always so kind to Him. Let us offer our respectful obeisances unto them for being so kind to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is the parent of the whole universe!"

The author of *Śrī Vraja-vilāsa-stava* next describes a few of Kṛṣṇa's boyhood friends in Vraja. Their mood is that Kṛṣṇa is their equal. They are Kṛṣṇa's ecstatic friends. It is natural that they should think of

Kṛṣṇa as their equal, since their bodily features, qualities, and dress are the same as Kṛṣṇa's. Fraternal love for Kṛṣṇa is provoked by His strongly built body, and His many qualities which they appreciate in intimate friendship. As friends they are always ready to help in Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. For example, when Kṛṣṇa was holding up Govardhana Hill, they suggested that one of them could hold the hill for Him, or at least give Him a chance to change hands so that they could massage His left hand.

Śrīdhāma is the most expert and clever of the cowherd boys. He very much resembles Kṛṣṇa, and if for a single moment he cannot see his friend he trembles with anxiety. He is considered to be the chief of the confidential friends, and he likes to challenge Kṛṣṇa in joking friendship.

Kṛṣṇa's friend Subala never, even in a dream, lets go of the hand of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He often takes part in assisting Kṛṣṇa in His conjugal love for Rādhā. His body trembles with love for Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa's *brāhmaṇa* friend, Madhu-maṅgala, induces the laughter of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa with a host of comic speeches and gestures. He plays the part of a greedy *brāhmaṇa* and eats more than others, especially *laḍḍus*. He begs Kṛṣṇa, "If You give me one more *laḍḍu* then I shall be pleased to give You my blessings so that Your friend Rādhārāṇī will be very much pleased with You."

In the Twelfth Canto, Twelfth Chapter, verse 11 of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, the highly exalted nature of Kṛṣṇa's friends is described: "Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead to the learned transcendentalists, He is the supreme happiness for the impersonalist, He is the supreme worshipable Deity for the devotee, and He is just like an ordinary boy to one who is under the spell of *māyā*. But these cowherd boys are now playing with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, as though they were on an equal level! These boys must have accumulated heaps of results of pious activities to enable them to associate with the Supreme Personality of Godhead in such an intimate friendship."

The most wonderful of all the *rasas* in Vṛndāvana is the conjugal attraction of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, especially in the relationship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. At different times, all the residents of Vṛndāvana participate in the conjugal *rasa*. Even outside of Vṛndāvana great devotees of the Lord praise the love of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*. For example, when Śukadeva Gosvāmī speaks in the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* of the loving affairs of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, he appreciates the conjugal *rasas*. And at the time of his disappearance, Bhīṣmadeva, recalled memories of Lord Kṛṣṇa in the *rāsa* dance. It is natural for Kṛṣṇa's boyfriends in Vṛndāvana to assist Him in His dealings with the *gopīs*. Kṛṣṇa's confidential friend Ujñvala as well as Subala sometimes work as messengers between the parties of

gopīs and Kṛṣṇa when there are quarrels. Admitting the powerful influence of Ujjvala, Rādhārāṇī once said to one of Her friends: "My dear friend, it is impossible for Me to keep My prestige! I want to avoid talking to Kṛṣṇa anymore—but just see! There again is His friend Ujjvala, coming to Me with his canvassing work. His entreaties are so powerful that it is very difficult for a *gopī* to resist her love for Kṛṣṇa, even though she may be very bashful, devoted to her family duties, and most faithful to her husband."

The cowherd friends of Kṛṣṇa take great pleasure in seeing their hero conquer the minds of the young girls.

The elderly *gopī* Puṇamāsī daily arranges the secret rendezvous of Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. She also tastes the nectar of happiness in seeing the pastimes of the divine couple.

Rādhārāṇī's father and mother, King Vṛṣabhānu, and Kīrtidā-devī, also partake in the loving exchanges of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes they oppose Rādhā's love for Kṛṣṇa, since they try to maintain Her respectable marriage. But because of their great love for their daughter, they are always meditating about the welfare of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.

As we hear Śrīla Ragunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's descriptions, we become more aware that Vraja-dhāma is a very intimate village. Many of the residents are related to one another, and all are friends. Certainly everyone

knows and loves Kṛṣṇa. We get the impression that Vṛndāvana must be a small village. Yet in the spiritual world of Vṛndāvana there are countless eternal associates of Kṛṣṇa, all enjoying with Him. Therefore, by the potency of *yoga-māyā*, Vṛndāvana-dhāma may simultaneously appear to be a pleasantly limited neighborhood, yet at the same time, Vṛndāvana expands unlimitedly, enabling countless living beings to enjoy a close relationship with Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Mukharā-devī angrily and deviously places many obstacles to stop the amorous pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. They are her grandchildren, and her apparently opposing mood is just another provocation of the *yoga-māyā*—to increase the intensity of love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Lalitā-devī is one of the very intimate *gopī* friends of Rādhārāṇī. She teaches her friend Rādhā the art of jealous anger. One of her remarks is recorded in *The Nectar of Devotion*, "I am sorry to see that Kṛṣṇa has still not given up His smiling over cheating You. I do not know how You could repose all your loving propensities upon this lusty young boy from the neighborhood of the cowherds." In actuality, Lalitā is flooded with the nectar of intense love for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and yet she appears affectionately arrogant in Their presence. She also daily arranges for Their rendezvous, and thus her jealous anger is an art in conjugal affairs.

Viśakhā-devī is "the place where the youthful

divine couple enjoy affectionate and playful joking pastimes.” Her transcendental singing eclipses the voices of the cuckoos.

Gopī Vṛndā-devī is filled with great love for the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and she decorates the groves of Vṛndāvana with fragrant flowers and helps to create the festive atmosphere for her dear friends.

Kuṇḍalatā narrates the latest news of Lord Kṛṣṇa to Rādhārāṇī. She glows with friendship and playfulness for her friend.

The *gopī* Dhaniṣṭhā-devī uses clever tricks to arrange for Rādhārāṇī to meet with Kṛṣṇa in the groves of Nandīśvara Hill.

The *gopī* Nandimukhī left Avantīpura and joined the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the land of Vraja out of a great longing to meet Them.

The river Yamunā also partakes in the conjugal affairs of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. When They enter the Yamunā, she happily smiles at Them with her foam and splashes with the beautiful hands of her waves.

All of Rādhārāṇī’s *gopī* friends inspire Her in one way or another to take part again and again in loving pastimes with Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes they rebuke Kṛṣṇa, but sometimes they also rebuke Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī when they are moved by the appeal of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Thus they encourage Her to go again to Kṛṣṇa. Ragunātha dāsa Gosvāmī states, “Bowing my head I take shelter of these dear friends of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, who daily

arrange for Her to enjoy transcendental pastimes with Lord Kṛṣṇa."

(To be continued).

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POEMS FROM THE ROAD

It Would Be Nice

It would be nice
if all Godbrothers were at peace,
united against *māyā*,
no one fanatic.

Let everyone admit
we are all little leaders
with one source-leader.

It would be nice—
no one building his own empire,
everyone assisting in the one mission,
no one thinking he's better
than everyone else.

In the absence of unity
at least each one
should follow the *sādhana*
and preach in peace.

It would be nice
if the demons desisted,
but that's not possible.

The justice system
is a Kali-yuga haven,
awarding huge sums
to girls who cry in court.
We have to see the good:
the pain
of hearing blasphemy
is a sign of our love for Kṛṣṇa.

Our invincible asset
is the pure and naked desire
to preach.
And no one can take away
the right to chant,
as proved by the devotees
in the USSR.

It would be nice
to have influence and power,
but Kṛṣṇa wants to see
how humble we are.
He's ready to give everything
when we preach in peace.

*Maitreya's Change of Heart
(From the Third Canto)*

Śrī Kṛṣṇa sat
against a young banyan tree
on the Sarasvatī bank.
Although the whole creation
takes shelter in Him,
He took shelter there.

In His transcendental body
with blissful, gentle eyes,
blackish hue, yellow silk,
and with a particular glance
He spoke to Uddhava,
who sat before Him.

Maitreya Muni was also there,
but not yet a pure devotee.
It was mercy for him,
when Uddhava said,
O Supreme Lord, Your acts
seem contradictory:
You are unborn,
yet You're the son of Vasudeva:

LESSONS FROM THE ROAD

out of fear of demons
You fled and built a fort;
and You married many wives,
although You are satisfied in self.

As the Lord assured Uddhava,
of His transcendental form
and as He blessed him
with next-life transfer
to the spiritual world,
Maitreya became aware,
and he dropped his speculation
in favor of the Lord.
He yearned for loving service.

Gurur na sa syāt

How can I
take my disciples all the way?
I don't have the strength
to advise them,
"As you die, think of me."
But, "As you die,
cling to His name."

"And as you live,
chant and study
Gītā and *Bhāgavatam*,
and serve every day."

A *guru* is one who
goes into the woods
to find his student
who was lost all night.

A *guru* who thinks,
"I am a *guru*,"
is a cow.

As we serve together,
let them see me
taking shelter.
They will get the idea.

HOW TO GET OUT AND STAY OUT OF MĀYĀ

As practicing devotees, we often speak of Lord Kṛṣṇa's powerful external energy, known as *māyā*. A pure devotee is completely free of *māyā*, but one who is striving to improve (a *sādhana-bhakta*) is sometimes troubled. He even worries, "Am I still in *māyā*?" For purposes of improving our Kṛṣṇa consciousness, let us review the meaning and function of *māyā*, and how we may become free of her influence as soon as possible.

In a *Bhagavad-gītā* purport, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, concisely enunciates the teaching of the *Gītā* as follows: "A living being, as Kṛṣṇa's eternal servitor, cannot be separated from Kṛṣṇa, and his sense of being an identity apart from Kṛṣṇa is called *māyā* " (Bg. 4.35). So the false sense of an existence apart from Kṛṣṇa is called *māyā* , "that which is not" (*ma*—not, *ya*—this). But how did the pure soul come under this illusory influence and when? How can we get out of this predicament?

The answers to these questions are found in the Vedic literatures and it is most crucial that we become educated in the scriptures, under the guidance of the spiritual master. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Mahārāja Parīkṣit asks Śukadeva Gosvāmī, "O learned *brāhmaṇa*, the transcendental spirit soul is different

from the material body. Does he acquire the body accidentally or by some cause?" (*Bhāg.* 2.8.7) To this, Śukadeva replies, *ātma-māyām ṛte rājan*: "It is by the Supreme Lord's own energy that His eternal servant is put into forgetfulness." But then why does the Lord put us into such forgetfulness? The answer is, because we wanted it. Due to a misuse of our partial independence, we may at any time be unwilling to serve the Lord, and we may even desire to become equal or as powerful as He, although we are not fit to become so. When we desired this impossible dream, the Supreme Lord allowed us to forget our actual relationship with Him, and He placed us in a dreamland utopia where we may try to become the Supreme Lord and enjoyer. As far as we can remember, it was always this way. The *Bhagavad-gītā* confirms, "All living entities are born into delusion, bewildered by dualities arisen from desire and hate" (*Bg.* 7.27).

But Lord Kṛṣṇa never abandons His eternal parts and parcels, and therefore He comes Himself into this world of *māyā*, delivers Vedic knowledge, and sends His representatives in disciplic succession, just to bring us back to our original, non-*māyā* existence of eternal happiness and knowledge. When Kṛṣṇa recommended to Arjuna that he should approach a spiritual master, the Lord said, "Having obtained real knowledge from a self-realized soul, you will never again fall into illusion, for by this knowledge, you will see that all living beings

are part of the Supreme, or, in other words, they are Mine" (Bg. 4.35).

As we all know from experience, becoming completely free of *māyā* is no easy task. *Mama māyā duratyayā*: "This divine energy of Mine is difficult to overcome" (Bg. 7.14). But when a fortunate human being contacts Lord Kṛṣṇa in the form of the spiritual master, he gets the clue as to why he is suffering, and he revives the hope that he can attain eternal freedom and happiness. In most cases, liberation doesn't happen in one magical stroke. When a devotee understands, at least theoretically, that he should not identify with *māyā* but with Kṛṣṇa, he undergoes a change of heart. But until he is factually self-realized, he is sometimes puzzled. He feels himself to be a half-creature, one who still belongs to the material world, yet aspires to his spiritual identity.

When nondevotees observe a neophyte devotee, they also sometimes find the devotee to be an odd, unlovable fellow. His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda knew well that his followers were in this struggling stage, and he felt great compassion for his "poor students." In a letter to a woman who met some of Śrīla Prabhupāda's disciples and found them to be imperfect and unloving, Śrīla Prabhupāda defended his disciples, but he also analyzed their discrepancies. The letter appears in *Science of Self Realization* and is well worth studying.

To give up one's life completely for serving the Supreme Lord is not an easy thing, and *māyā*, or the illusory, material energy, tries especially hard to again entrap those who have left her service to become devotees. Therefore, in order to withstand the attack of *māyā* and remain strong under all conditions of temptation, young or inexperienced devotees in the neophyte stage of devotional service will sometimes adopt an attitude against those things or persons which may possibly be harmful or threatening to their tender devotional creepers. They may even overindulge in such feelings just to protect themselves, and thus they will appear to some nondevotees, who are perhaps themselves still very much enamored by the material energy of *māyā*, to be negative or pessimistic.

Prabhupāda went on to say that when a devotee of God actually comes to the mature stage then he becomes "constantly enlightened, always positive, not negative, as you say. The advanced devotee is the friend of everyone."

This is the mature stage and is possible for all of us, especially for those who have already begun, in earnest, the process of *bhakti-yoga*.

But let us consider again, the stage when one is eager to be free of *Māyā* but is still troubled by her influence. Since the basic definition of *māyā* is to think that there is an identity aside from Kṛṣṇa, we should defeat this forgetfulness by regularly remembering that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Personality of Godhead, *smartavyaḥ satataṁ viṣṇu, vismartavyo na jātucit*: "One should always remember Viṣṇu, one should never forget Viṣṇu" (*Bhāg.* 11.5.32).

The neophyte must humbly admit that he has a

