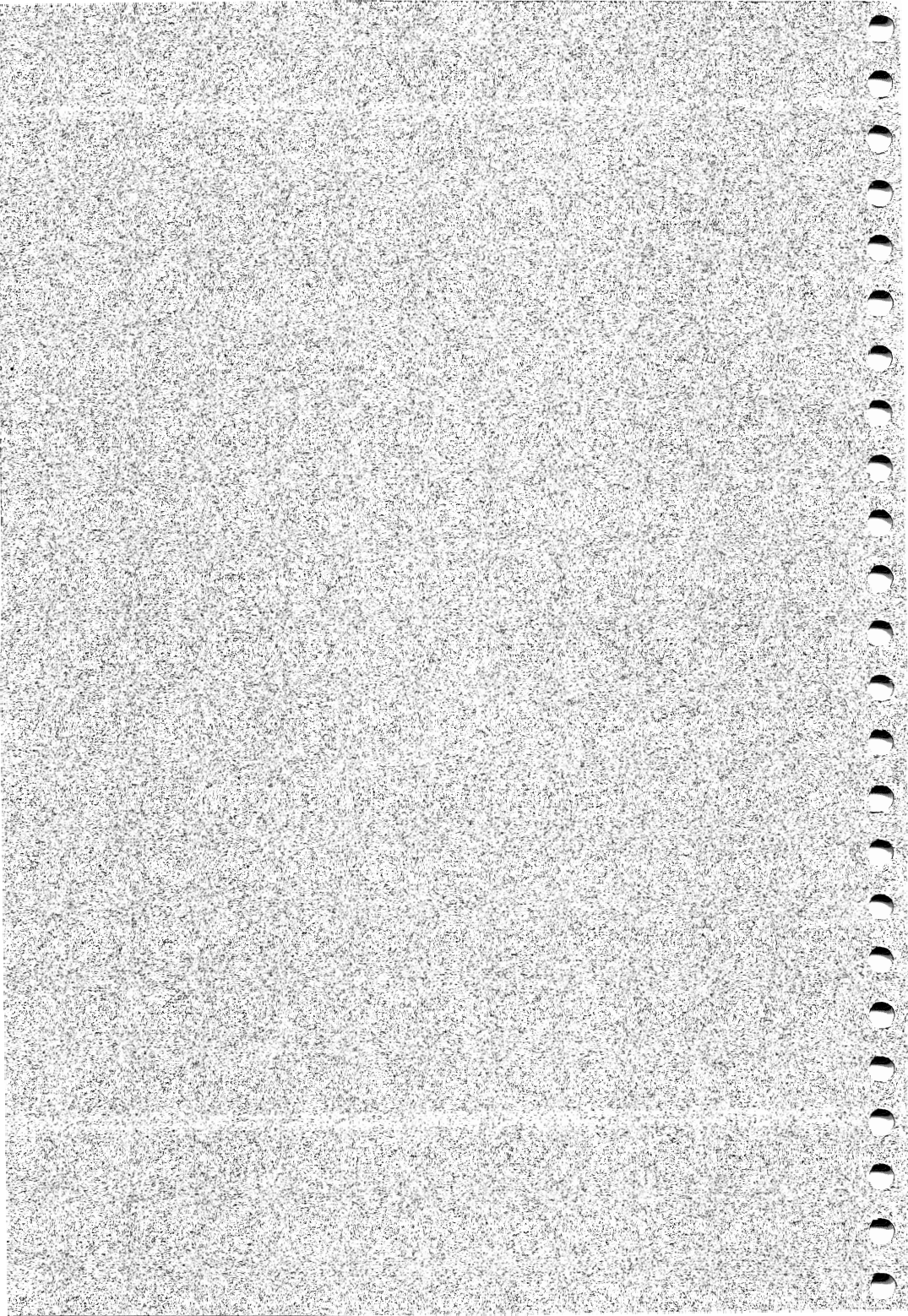


# My Stories

volume two

Satsvarupa dasa Goswami



# MY STORIES

VOLUME TWO

SATSVARUPA DASA  
GOSWAMI

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## Satisfying the Self

The spiritual master is showering us with the rainfall of mercy and it's putting out the forest fire of repeated birth and death.

The story is that he lectured in Melbourne to seminarians in April, 1972 and I read it today. I listened from the viewpoint of one who wants to always follow the preaching *ācārya*. I want to be who I am and yet be his follower exclusively. Is that so difficult? That's what I'm trying for. I feel I must do both. I cannot be his follower and not be myself. Neither can I "be myself" and not be his follower. I insist on both.

I don't know the story, but I am pursuing it. Life will be auspicious, he says, if you simply hear about Kṛṣṇa. All right, I have my understanding of that. That means I will give myself the time to hear about Kṛṣṇa. I insist on it.

But do you want to know the whole truth? If you could go back in time to 1974 and the years immediately after that, ask Śrīla Prabhupāda what did he think of my leaving the service of his secretary-servant in order to distribute his books to college libraries in America. I tend to think he didn't probe into why I was dissatisfied. That's my trip, all the soul-searching and regret as to why I didn't stay as his menial servant. But the whole truth . . . You would find out that you are dear to him and you

would find out that you fall short or fail. Are you afraid of that?

A mosquito out here in March chill and gray. All day there were guns pounding. Now an airplane I can't see above the solid gray mass of sky . . . scratching its motor into density . . .

Where is a story?

There was once a bear who looked around in March and said, "Soon I should get up and end this winter-long hibernation. I will come out and start the year of eating. I will eat the berries and I will wander down to the houses of the humans, and if I find them, eat their carrots and whatever I find, for I am related to the hog." He is not afraid.

I have no children or wife. I don't own a house. The mosquito briefly visited this page, but now he's gone. I can tell a story out here if it doesn't rain, but it has begun. Once there was a priest with a collar. He attended a lecture in Melbourne by Swami Bhaktivedanta. He heard the Swami say, "Why not chant the names of God, Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra? What is the difficulty?" And Prabhupāda said, "Read these Vedic books." The priest liked it and he began to chant. He became more interested and bought the books. His Catholic colleague said, "It's all right to have interest in Hinduism and chanting," but they joked and remarked seriously too, "Don't go too far with it." The priest with the collar made immense benefit by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra in addition to his Jesus prayers.

Then Swami Bhaktivedanta traveled to various countries and a few months later he was in Edinburgh, Scotland. Reporters spoke to him and he told them not to be puffed up by their impressive buildings. In the morning no outsiders came, and Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke on the same verse he had spoken on in Australia when the priests heard him. In Edinburgh he asked his disciples to speak on how political situations would change if there was Kṛṣṇa consciousness. One disciple said the leader would teach the people the real welfare. Prabhupāda asked, "What is that welfare?" Another disciple said the leader would stop vices. Then Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "If people take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, *yenātmā suprasidātī*, they will be satisfied with whatever they have. The very principle (or practice) of devotional service will satisfy them. Without any over-endeavor or competition or frustration, they will accept whatever economic situation is given to them (by Providence)." I thought, "Wow. That's a real answer."

I want to follow that preaching *ācārya*. Listen to what he speaks and think over why he says it according to time and place and persons. You can never entirely know his mind, but follow him. Yes, and be yourself.

"O sages, I have been justly questioned by you. It is relevant because there is public welfare in the questions as they are in relation to Kṛṣṇa. This sort of question only can please the self completely" (*Bhāg.* 1.2.5).



What is Kṛṣṇa doing? Who is Kṛṣṇa? Tell us the stories, how He played with calves and then when He grew older, He was given charge of protecting the calves and taking them to pasture. Then He became a cowherd boy. Everyone in the world is asking questions—the press representatives, the lawyers, the animals, and everyone else, all day long, and they are getting answers. But no one is deeply satisfied in self as a result of the questions and answers.

Let us ask questions like those sages at Naimaśārāṇya. Prabhupāda said that you may still go to Naimaśārāṇya and there is a spiritual atmosphere you will feel there. It's near Lucknow in North India. I could try that. I want to be in that place where I can hear the sages asking Sūta Gosvāmī and I can hear my spiritual master. It could be the place is right here.

The raindrops are tinkling and it's getting darker. This is my afternoon story. It's about satisfaction. What is satisfaction? It's when you drop pretension and ambition for fame and other sense gratification. You just inquire about Kṛṣṇa and practice unmotivated hearing and chanting. Your *ātmā* becomes satisfied. But as soon as a person, say, an author, thinks of getting fame or being published, then he is not doing his writing for purification. Be satisfied with the simple service. The *gopīs* pleased Kṛṣṇa and He could think of no way to further reward them—they had already achieved the summit. Be satisfied and all your other desires will automatically come about. Don't put the cart before

the horse. Take what comes as you fully apply your senses in His service and be pleased with what you get.

## **Hold Onto Your Hats, Folks, I Want to Write Fiction: A Note to SDG**

When I say hold onto your hats, I think of my typists who I want to warn that there's a silly story ahead. There will be cavorting and things I wouldn't want to normally do in front of others. I will fail and trip and so on.

I'm also saying hold onto my hat to myself. I shouldn't say hold onto the hat, I should say throw your hat away and just go ahead and don't be afraid.

This is the story kindergarten where my baby stories can feel free to dabble in finger paints and to do the things that they do because not much more is expected of them. Kindergarten is a place to have fun, with some supervision. They mostly let the kids draw and paint and play blocks. They don't have to come up to any high standards yet. That's my idea of the story kindergarten. But I sometimes find it hard to find the kid within my heart who is willing to play and be his silly self, which is what I'm asking myself to do.

Or at least if I am a helplessly old man now, then at least I can visit the kindergarten kids and tell them a story. The adults, of course, don't like to just hear some story. They certainly don't want me to try out something on them as an experiment. If I do it, it has to be good, up to standard. With the

children, maybe it's different. These are some of the images that come to my mind about story kindergarten and inviting and urging myself to feel at home.

Home is another image. When you think yourself as a guest to a kindergarten, that's still a very formal situation. You wouldn't want to let loose in front of other people's children. Who knows what they would go home and tell their parents? This strange man came into the class and did such and such. But if you're at home and you know that your kids like you to tell funny stories, then that's very good because they want you to tickle them with whoppers. Once you start doing it, then they just want you to do it more and more. They like the way you tell stories when you improvise and tell them in a way that delights them.

But of course, you might say, well, that's pandering to the children's silly tastes. No, it isn't because the parent is not going to tell them foolishness. He's going to want to tell them stories that will educate them. I have read for example that some of the excellence of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is that it doesn't attempt to moralize. It just gets into nonsense. That may be, but a Kṛṣṇa conscious person is going to want to tell a story that has to do with devotees and devotee life and it needn't moralize so deliberately because it's going to happen anyway, just by talking among devotees. You want to do that. You want to tell the triumph of preachers and of *bhāgavata-dharma*, and at least

of Kṛṣṇa over the demons. You want to delight your kids with that, not just with some nonsense.

So, there's more good advice, more good encouragement, but now you have to stop this essay *about* story-fun and go ahead and do it.



## A Writing Workshop: An Introductory Fragment

*Vṛndāvana-dhāma, Kārttika month*

Today my workshop began. I have been hesitating to do this for years, but now I am plunging in. Sometimes devotees ask me to teach writing, but I used to think, "Why should I advocate that people should write? Just because I like to write doesn't mean others should write." Maybe that was just my excuse. Partly it came from my youth. I discovered writing when I was about seventeen years old and it became like a religion for me, certainly more than going to Sunday Mass. I started to write stories, and there was at least one friend, John Young, with whom I used to share them. We would often each write something and then read it aloud to each other. We were full of encouragement for the other's works, and we had the basic right idea, which is that the writings are not to be judged so much as just shared. That was when our friendship and writing was at its best, when we held to that dictum.

But I used to broaden my evangelism about writing and encourage everyone I met to be a writer. Since it was good for me, I assumed it was good for them. But I gradually learned that that's not a fact.

There are people who do want to be writers and who want to get started in some kind of workshop setting. I finally agreed to do it. Not that I claim I'm

a big writer, and certainly not a writing teacher. But let's see what happens.

I have many of Prabhupāda's quotes about writing and how he basically says we should write in *paramparā*, we should write with the authority of the spiritual master. Prabhupāda quotes Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja as saying, "Whether I know it or not, the real reason I write is for purification." We should write down what we hear Kṛṣṇa say in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, then write our own realizations of it. One of the main things I will do is to try and get devotees to feel free enough to express themselves and overcome their inner critics and inner censors. I have read so much of this in different writing books and I practice it myself, so I ought to be able to practice what I preach.

## Scribe and Two Voices

*Haribol*, I'm the Scribe. I write down what the voices say. You can tell who I am by the emblem that's sewn onto my sleeve. It shows a scroll and a feathered quill. I used to wear this emblem proudly when I was a journalist in the Navy. Now I wear it in a Kṛṣṇa conscious way. It's like *karma-yoga* when I write for Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes I write my own stories, but now as scribe, I'm here to take down the voices.

We have two voices today. If they work all right, we may do a series with them. This is the first one in story form. I have worked with these persons before. One is Freeman. He likes to improvise. He's a devotee, but first and foremost he says whatever comes to his mind. His motto is, "First thoughts, best thoughts." Just let him fly and he assures you, you'll get the best results.

The other person is Kṛṣṇa conscious man. He writes in *paramparā*. His motto is a quote by Śrīla Prabhupāda in a letter to a BTG editor: "Assimilate *Bhāgavatam* and express it in your own words in a literary career."

I asked these two persons to each write a story. I wanted it to be on a specific topic, but Freeman said that was too restrictive. The assignment is just that they each write a story. It can be fiction or nonfiction. But short, short for a starter. Here goes.

### Freeman's Story

You don't know what love is/until you know the meaning of the blues.

Lambert Hendrik and Ross. I am not a jazz player, not an Indian *tabla* man, not a Bach fan or a Chuck Berry record collector. I am a servant of the servant of the servant of those sincerely desiring to be a devotee of Kṛṣṇa. If it's music, then we shall be a voice singing pure, crying *kīrtana*. We want that, not chaos and freedom. But be ready to blow your mind as freedom calls. Śrīla Prabhupāda says that freedom is the pivot in all activities. Devotional service is free. The pure devotees may give it or withhold it as they desire. It's free to anyone.

So my story . . . Once there was a small snail who wanted . . . No. Once there is daylight, you can see. When you get too free, I admit you get tongue-tied. You want to say something before it comes. But free to stop when something doesn't interest you.

You may, dear reader, think at this point, "I am also free to turn off this rap and I think I'll do it right now." Yes, please feel free to leave. I prefer it. I only want a few friends.

The whirring top. I can also quiet down. There was once a story in me. He was only a baby boy and peed in his bed. He was a *gurukula* student in India. He was an American living in India. His mother knew he peed in bed . . .

*Ah, come on, do better than this.*

Hey, who is this, the critic? Scribe, who is this critic? I thought this was *my* story. Turn out those other voices, will you? I know I only have a few

minutes left to finish my story. Well, this story is already half done. Don't hold your breath if you are expecting a formal story. That one about the *guru-kula* boy is true. I read it in a newsletter. His *mātā* sent him a big stack of diapers. He was too embarrassed to use them and he put them under his bed. One day he came to the *āśrama* and found all the little Indian boys running around wearing the diapers. It had become the latest fashion.

I know that's not very serious or Kṛṣṇa conscious and that's my problem. I just speak what comes and it's not always so good. But I am always likely to improve with time. Anyway, who wants formal stories? I don't.

I want to be a devotee in happy times as well as difficult and find always a voice to speak what's actually happening as I see it. That's honest, right? I will then be adaptable to any situation because I won't be afraid. I don't come out with these things in public. I'm a private guy. But I sez what I sez. If I can get warmed up, I'll tell a story. Right now I don't feel too much at ease here because I don't know the audience or the location and so on. If I can establish some rapport with the Scribe and the flow of this venture, I'll do better. I can talk, but when he says "story," I don't know. I am willing to learn.

The peace march terminates at the alphabet soup. Surrender to God is the end of all works. Let us not imitate Adolph Hitler or anyone obnoxious. We each have a spirit soul. Real individuality is in



our nature as eternal servants of Kṛṣṇa. That's enough for now.

### Kṛṣṇa conscious man's Story

Of course, I can tell a story, but nothing concocted. We've heard that one time Prabhupāda was present and he asked his disciple, Hanumān dāsa, to give the lecture. In the midst of the lecture, Hanumān began to tell some non-śāstric Indian story. It went on for quite a few minutes. Then Prabhupāda interrupted and said, "Speak from the *Bhāgavata*!" The devotees said that Hanumān dāsa looked like he had been punched in the stomach when Prabhupāda said that. I don't want to get punched in the name of being a storyteller.

But all the *ācāryas* tell stories. There are different kinds of stories. One kind is if we tell something that happened to us, but with a Kṛṣṇa conscious purport. Prabhupāda told so many little stories from his own life. He said that when he was living in Bombay, his oldest son went to school there and became an object of ridicule for the other children. Why? Because his son became the best student in the class and they were envious and said, "You are from Bengal . . ." They picked a fight with him on these flimsy grounds and Prabhupāda remembered many years later how his son reported the position. And our spiritual master incorporated it in a lecture about envy.

One time I visited a rural Hare Kṛṣṇa center in the middle of winter. Everyone had a wood stove, and there was one in the cabin where I stayed.

Within a few days I learned the many little arts of how to use the wood stove. The weather was twenty degrees below zero, so maintaining a continuous fire was a necessity. In my lecture to the devotees there, I compared the importance of reading Prabhupāda's books to the importance of keeping that fire. The audience was very attentive and they laughed when I told them of my own trials and errors in learning how to operate the stove so that the room wouldn't become smoky, or the fire go out because I put in pieces too big or that I burned the wood too fast. Without my true life adventures of the wood stove, *and the importance as a matter of life and death of keeping that fire going*—my appealing to them that it's important to read Prabhupāda's books might have sounded like the same old thing. There should be a discipline and a point in telling stories. Then it's in the service of Kṛṣṇa and not just a yarn for yarn's sake.

Śrīla Vyāsadeva knew well the importance of stories, so the *Bhāgavatam* is full of them and so is *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. We're certainly safe if we repeat the stories that come down to us in the sacred books.

When Lord Caitanya first took *sannyāsa*, He journeyed with His close companions, led by Lord Nityānanda Prabhu, on His way to Jagannātha Purī. Sometimes He stopped in temples and heard the stories of how those temples had been established, and special pastimes involving the temple Deity and His pure servants. One such story was that of Kṣīra-corā-Gopinātha, who stole milk for His ser-

vant, Mādhavendra Purī. Lord Caitanya went to that temple and experienced the ecstasy of chanting the holy names before Kṛṣṇa. He then sat in a relaxed way with His dear companions and heard the story about Gopinātha from the lips of Lord Nityānanda. In former days, Mādhavendra Purī visited that temple. He was on a mission for his Gopinātha Deity of Vṛndāvana. Mādhavendra Purī saw the offerings of condensed milk being made to Gopinātha in Remuṇā, and he thought that he would like to taste them and then be able to prepare such *prasādam* for his own Deity. Then Mādhavendra Purī caught himself and realized that he had been desiring to taste food before it had been offered to Kṛṣṇa. Feeling ashamed he then left the temple, feeling he was not fit to stay there. Mādhavendra Purī then passed the night chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa in the marketplace. In the meantime, Kṣīra-corā-Gopinātha, in the middle of the night, appeared to the *pūjārī* in the temple on the pretext of a dream. He told the *pūjārī*, "Get up at once and come into the Deity room. I have stolen a pot of condensed milk for My devotee, Mādhavendra Purī. You will find it hidden behind the cape of My robe." The *pūjārī* did as he was told and was amazed to find that the Deity had actually stolen one of the pots and kept it there. The *pūjārī* then took it into the marketplace and cried out: "Is there a person here named Mādhavendra Purī? Please come forward. You are very fortunate. Lord Gopinātha has stolen this pot of condensed milk for you." Such are the dealings of the Lord and His pure devotee.

### Scribe

So that's it. Usually these voices of Freeman and Kṛṣṇa conscious man are integrated. But we scribes take what comes through, what we hear. Sometimes the voices insist on being separate and given their own space. The main thing is that everyone should be Kṛṣṇa conscious. Śrīla Prabhupāda says that in the material world, especially in a country like America, everyone has their own opinion. I say something, but you don't agree with me and I don't agree with you. However, in the spiritual world, there isn't that kind of "pluralism." Everyone is an individual, but they have the same opinion. They know how to express it in different ways to increase the varieties of pleasure for the Lord and His associates.

## What is the Goal of Your Life?

I wrote a list today of things that could happen to prevent my continuing life as a wanderer to IS-KCON places. The obstacles included breakdown of health, world war, loss of income, and a few others. I also noted that a human has a nesting or settling down tendency. But I want to keep going (like that Zen poet, like *sādhus* of India, *parivrajikācāryas*, like Śrīla Prabhupāda himself and Nārada Muni . . . ). I didn't mention that I would have to stop my life by death. Yes, of course, that's obvious. I didn't have to mention it.

Now I dare to say I hope I can keep resisting a home base. I had a dream the other night that I was being honored somewhere as a guru, and I didn't like it. The reception was by people who didn't know me, and they were filling a room with inappropriate gifts that I couldn't use. When I walked up the stairs, one disciple kept grabbing at my ankles, claiming that he was assisting me to walk that way. "Stop!" I said. "Leave me alone." I was disgusted.

Well, that may happen if you choose a residence. Widows may come there, roll up their sleeves and say, "I have come to serve you for life. I will take over the kitchen. What would you like for lunch?" (I remember when I became temple president in Dallas. One of the ladies set up in the room next to the president's office. She then introduced herself



as my secretary, ready to do my every bidding. Although it was a chaste offer, her intimacy frightened me.) Be a rolling stone and gather no moss or widows or children or mortgages . . .

I will live in all the warm families of ISKCON. I will visit Rādhā-deśa in Belgium and see their full-costumed dramatic presentation on Janmāṣṭamī. I'll savor the *prasādam*. I'll travel. I'll lecture.

Oh, so much talk about yourself and what you do. Why don't you talk of Kṛṣṇa? Are you going to reach His lotus feet within five years? What's the use of traveling ("like that Zen poet") if you are not thinking of the Lord of Vṛndāvana-*dhāma*?

Yes, you are right, you are right, unseen voice. I want to travel to expand the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement and I travel to be free to read and write and to please my spiritual master with honest preaching. I'm just saying, however, that I'm satisfied, I'm happy to do it—is that wrong? Is it suspicious if a man says he has his goal and that it is to practice the life of *parivrajikācārya*? Maybe I should keep my mouth shut on this, as well as on many other matters, lest by revealing plans they be interrupted (that's a Cāṇakya *śloka*).

But I wanted to tell a story and it's Saturday morning. March winds are blowing puffs of clouds through a blue Italian sky. I thought, "This is an ambitious theme for a story, my life goal." So I have told my goal an external sense: the plan to keep homeless while staying in the homes of many ISKCON places one after another. It also has an internal side to it.

But if I were asked in public, “What is the goal of your life?” I would answer differently. The public response should be more philosophical and universal. To hear it should be beneficial for all kinds of people. It should, of course, be true and not a hype. My goal is to attain *kṛṣṇa-prema*, but I think it’s unattainable. Or it sounds too proud to say that I want it and expect to get it. Rūpa Gosvāmī says that it will take *koṭi-janma*, many, many lifetimes, before we can attain *lauḷyam*, the intense greed required for *kṛṣṇa-prema*. Therefore my goal is to become as Kṛṣṇa conscious as possible. To please Śrīla Prabhupāda. To remain a devotee until I die and go out thinking of Hare Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda and Lord Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa consciousness—while kicking out material desires with my last kicking strength. I will die to this body and take a next life for furthering my goal of *kṛṣṇa-prema*.

That is my goal and that goal I can attain by the grace of the *paramparā*. Śrīla Prabhupāda gives me confidence. Just stick to this path you’re on now, even though you seem to be going so slowly. You may reside in one place or another, that’s a relative concern. Take your choice and be happy with it. Write your writings, tell stories as you go, and poems and songs, whatever. Build a fire from wood. Pray for mercy to hear the holy names. The ultimate goal is to serve forever in this life and the next with fearless, unalloyed *bhakti*.

## **My Story Time Or Time to Tell My Story**

This is my story time, but I come to it with emotions that I don't know if I want to express. I was talking just now with Madhumaṅgala and we were reminiscing about Prabhupāda and America. I was saying how Prabhupāda deeply impressed us and we were hopeful and even innocent about how the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement would become influential in our country. Then I began to outline my own feelings about this over the years and how the anti-cult movement in the late 1970s really dealt a blow to my own optimism. I began admitting that I had overreacted and become somewhat insular and even a bit paranoiac. I started talking about bitterness and alienation and I gave examples of ex-patriates like James Joyce of Ireland and D.H. Lawrence of England and how they left their countries and never went back. I surprised myself by the rush of emotion that came by talking about this. I may have stumbled on something important about myself, some deficiency that I ought to face up to and overcome.

This is real energy, yet it doesn't seem like a thing I want to bring to my story time. It's something that I am personally grappling with, and a reader may be interested, but I haven't boiled it

down into something clear, and certainly not a story, and certainly not a piece of fiction.

Should, should, should. A devotee should not be afraid. A devotee should mix with the nondevotees and give them Kṛṣṇa consciousness. A devotee should meet the obstacles and get strong and serve Kṛṣṇa. A devotee should not have any paranoia about his fellow countrymen not liking him. A devotee should not even identify with this country, but should understand he is pure spirit soul, part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa. I am not this body, therefore I am not an American or Irishman or Italian.

When I expressed to Madhu that I felt more comfortable in Europe than America, he joked, "Actually, you're Irish. You're Irish and Italian." I mumbled, "Transcendental."

I like to think I'm a transcendental poet trying to make a contribution to ISKCON. Why so thin-skinned? In fact, I even feel this way in my own transcendental "country," the *International Society for Krishna Consciousness*. I want to make my contribution, but don't always feel appreciated. This means I'm just thin-skinned and looking too much for honor. Better to go through the world happy about serving Prabhupāda in any capacity and wherever you happen to be, wherever your service brings you.

I don't want to feel guilty about the fact that I am on an inward path even within ISKCON. I wrote an essay that they published in an ISKCON com-

munications journal, "The Inner Life of a Preacher." I was happy to make that statement so openly. It was a contribution to all the managers and preachers reminding us that not just I, but every one of us need to concentrate on our inner life or our *sādhana*, our chanting on beads and our reading of Prabhupāda's books, our right behavior. So if that's what I believe, then let me stick up for it. Some may like it and some may not.

I remember one time a reporter said to Prabhupāda in Dallas that it must be very draining to be a Hare Kṛṣṇa devotee in America. Prabhupāda didn't understand her point right away and she clarified, "Because people are against you." Prabhupāda replied that some people are against us and some people are for us. Then he asked her, "Aren't some people against you and some people for you?" She admitted it was true. Prabhupāda then said his devotees are not fickle.

Hare Kṛṣṇas not fickle. Not fickle and not sour pickles, not too delicate rose blossoms that shatter at the touch. Not snarling dogs either, nor dogmatists. Not hippies, but happies. Damn it, I'm going to reform and be happy about my own situation. Let me make hay while the sun shines, churn my inner longings of chanting and hearing and writing. Go forward too, when I get the call, to meet people and preach. If when walking down the street I get a cat call, "Hey Hare! Get a job! Where did you get that hair cut?!" Then just write it off as some nonsense by a fellow spirit soul who doesn't know better.

That's my story time. Fact or fiction? Mostly fact. When so many emotions are running through you, you can't sit back and "write a story about a young man named Sat dāsa who felt persecuted by his countrymen who are under the impression that he was a brain-washed zombie. Write it in three scenes and five acts and show that Sat dāsa undergoes a dramatic change due to the conflict that is introduced in the second scene and resolved in the last."

*Haribol*, I'm a real person. See you at the *prasādam* hall. If you love me, then I'll love you. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda. Let us show our love for him by how we cooperate together—and somehow get this message out and into the mainstream of America and all the other so-called countries on this earth.

## Visiting Relatives

A fourteen-year-old boy went into a crowded bakery with his uncle. His uncle was Sal. The bakery was called Buddas and was famous in Great Kills for its hot rolls. The bakery gave out cards with numbers on them as you entered the store. The store was so crowded with customers that everyone had to wait for their number to be called. Uncle Sal taught his nephew a cheating trick. He picked up some old cards that had been discarded on the floor with numbers on them which had been called earlier. Uncle Sal said he was only kidding and wouldn't actually use them.

The boy enjoyed his uncle's company, but there was nothing really to say, was there? No God consciousness. Śrīla Prabhupāda says this is what is most needed, and yet people all over the world are forgetful of it. They don't know the cause of their suffering. They seek peace and happiness in the world. They don't hear the pastimes of God with any interest. The television shows that they watch are simply chewing the chewed, the affairs of men and women, as in those days we used to watch "I Love Lucy" and the Korean War.

Uncle Sal and his nephew got back into the car and continued talking and joking.

In our family, we observed religion as a matter of ritual and as a way to preserve law and order in the universe.

The uncle and his nephew rejoined the family gathering at the Guarino's house. The women were a little more inclined to the sentiment of religious worship, but alas, they too did not know how to share it or how to restrain anyone from their lust and greed. They mostly stayed in the kitchen and cooked and talked among themselves. I looked from adult to adult, from cousin to cousin, and no one was in God consciousness, certainly not me. At best I looked within myself for satisfying private desires, and a desire to be somewhere else, doing something else . . . All the relatives' coats were crowded in the closet and piled on the bed.



## From Aunt Mary's to Lord Caitanya

I can't get back to aunts and uncles very freely. What do you wish to write? I wish I were closer to nature. Then sit in a wet chair outdoors at dawn and tell a story.

Well, children, your uncle was once a child. He used to visit his uncles and aunts. They had a mirrored coffee table with an attached cigarette lighter that your old uncle used to like to operate and set off sparks. There was a painting of a bare-chested fairy lady with wings who sat by a pond and looked at her reflection. There was rattan furniture on a closed-in porch above a sycamore-lined street in Brooklyn. They had Hoffman's soda in the refrigerator, and yes, Aunt Mary had hairy legs. Once I stayed overnight at their house. They had a silky-edged blanket and a traveler's clock by the bedside. Everything was new to me then, and adventurous. I woke in the morning to the baby talking of my cousin, another Stephen.

"Yes, but what was Kṛṣṇa conscious about that?" ask my children today. I readjust myself on the wet chair and feel it starting to dampen me through my *dhoti*. I hear cars on a distant highway.

"Uh . . . It wasn't Kṛṣṇa conscious. Can we go indoors to finish this story? I'm feeling cold."

"Yes, Uncle, whatever you say. Just tell us something spiritual."

The group relocates to the back compartment of a Renault van. There is a built-in desk and cot there. The old man sits on the cot and his children around him, some beside, some on the floor, and some like birds, perched on crevices above him.

He hums a *bhajana* tune about Lord Caitanya and wishes he could forget himself and forget that some people are still angry with him.

"Tell us . . ."

"In contrast to my visit to my Aunt Mary's apartment, there is the visit of Kṛṣṇa to Dvārakā, or the visit of Śrīla Prabhupāda to San Francisco. We are in the material world for only a short duration. Let us read a verse. Hand me that book, Deedee."

A young *brahmacārī* reaches to the book indicated by his teacher and hands it over.

"No, this is not it. You have given me a book by Franz Kafka, which I keep here for research. I want a *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* volume."

The old man then begins reading a sublime narration from Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī's book. At first, it was hard for them to adjust to it. It seemed formal, or was it demanding? It was difficult to adjust because they had allowed themselves to be away from the scripture for so long. It was like breaking away crusts and molds. A most painful experience is trying to walk again after you remove your casts. The first steps are excruciatingly painful, but then—you have to do it. You go slowly and you get strength.

He read some and made some likable commentary in his own words. They heard the section

in *Antya-līlā* where Nṛsimhānanda Brahmācārī cooked for Lord Caitanya and also for his Deity, Nṛsimhadeva.

"In his meditation, he saw Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu quickly come, sit down and eat all three offerings, leaving behind no remnants." Nṛsimhānanda Brahmācārī was upset because now his Nṛsimha Deity could not eat and had to fast. "If the master fasts, how can the servant live?" Nṛsimhānanda dāsa cooked again for his Deity. The next year Lord Caitanya confirmed that these extraordinary acts took place not in some imaginary meditation by Nṛsimhānanda Brahmācārī, but in actuality.

The Lord said, "Last year in the month of Pausa, when Nṛsimhānanda gave Me varieties of sweet meats and vegetables to eat, they were so good that I had never before eaten such preparations" (*Antya* 2.77). The devotees in the van felt satisfied.

(The rest of this is optional, free-write.)

The cold morning was not so bad. The children peeled off in layers. They were dreams and figments. The author was left blinking tears of fatigue. He was an apple in a house. Fortunately, he felt the presence of the fire of digestion in his belly. I can't do more than this, but I ought to.

What's an uncle to do,  
who lives in a zoo  
of his own mind's demands?  
How is he to chant,

he can't  
when the mind gives no peace.  
Then walk in your yard,  
alone and hear the mantra, it's not a rhumba  
or a tantra,  
but hear the *mahā-mantra*,  
just hear and then I do  
and I think I'm touching Your feet  
until the end of time.

The old man made a date to read *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* again.

## Stories for Good

Art is to communicate—but what and to whom? These little stories of mine are practical teachings to my disciples and friends. It's a pact they are willing to enter. So much good will is shown by the audience, but sometimes we feel a bit forced and we do it anyway . . . A wife drags her husband to the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class. The father drags the teenage son one more time (but after this, Billy will say, "You go if you want, Dad. It's *your* thing. I don't wanna go. I've heard it a million times").

Sages go to Naimaśaraṇya out of a different motivation. They sit up straight although they may be over a hundred years old. The speaker is highly qualified, Sanskritist, Vedāntist, and pure devotee of Bhagavān. He knows *kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam*. That meeting is special, yet even there, he tells stories. Because stories hold interest and we shall not be ashamed to say, they entertain. The sages also smiled to hear, and they were moved, when Kṛṣṇa and His school friend Sudama went hand-in-hand to fetch wood in the forest for their *gurudeva*. Kṛṣṇa Himself liked to hear the story years later. Five hundred years ago, Lord Caitanya sat and heard stories from Lord Nityānanda.

Some stories we've heard many times. Some may be new. The old ones are not bad just because of being old. On TV recently, the same old stories, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* were told to new and

old generations for many weeks running. Pious people draped flower garlands over the TV while watching the sacred episodes.

My story tonight is to look at the back tire of the parked van and to hear many cars go by one after another on Sunday. Please go home, I say to myself. Go home peacefully to your dinners and wine and man and woman . . . Leave me to tell. I'm in the backyard.

So many sad stories, but then they become better. We admire the energy of the rotund storyteller who is willing to go on at length, even describing someone's mustache, and the audience smiles and goes along with him. One man and his wife and seven children lived in, let's say, Manchester, England. They practiced Kṛṣṇa consciousness at home with Gaura-Nitāi on an altar and a quiet *kīrtana* before the man went to work as a school teacher. But their next-door neighbor moved out and the man who moved in began to make life miserable for them. He played loud metal rock music late at night, and *very, very* loud. When the devotee family made even the "smallest" noise in their *kīrtana*, their new neighbor pounded the wall and played his music even louder on his powerful stereo. Sometimes he went out, locking his door, and deliberately left the music on loud at night just to torment them. They called the police, but they said, "We don't deal with noise abuse. Call the Environment Agency." The Environment Agency said, "We will take your address and consider a visit." When the next-door neighbor, who they

began to call the demon, saw any member of the devotee family, he abused them with obscene words and threats.

One night at 10 P.M., after a hard day's work, Vira dāsa, the devotee, was about to take his evening rest. Then the music started up intolerably loud right on the other side of the wall to their room. No question of sleeping through that. Vira went to the demon's door and knocked. He opened the door and growled. He was big and fat, half bald with long hair on the sides. He wore a T-shirt with a vest. He appeared drunk or drug-high.

"What the f\_\_\_ do *you* want?" he challenged.

Vira said, "I've had a hard day at work. I'm asking you to please turn down the music."

"You get the f\_\_\_ outta here!" said the demon, "or I'll butt you!" He threatened to butt with his big head. Vira persisted with words and the demon picked up a baseball bat and brandished it menacingly.

"I'll charge you with assault!" said Vira, but he backed up. The demon slammed the door in his face.

It went on like that for days and then weeks. When they made just the slightest noise, according to their own estimation, the demon retaliated full force. They thought of moving away, but you just can't move a big family so easily. And how did they know that where they would go next would be better? Yet they couldn't tolerate this. They wondered, "Why is this happening? Did we torment

this man in a previous life and now he's coming back to get me in revenge?"

On the day before Lord Nityānanda's appearance day, Vira's wife took up courage to knock on the demon's door. Her intention was to tell him, "We are having a little birthday party tomorrow, so you can expect a bit of singing and music, but please don't retaliate." To her surprise, the demon met her in a different mood.

"Hey, I'm really sorry," he said, "for my anger. After I threatened your husband with the bat, it occurred to me that I could really go too far with my anger. I'm sorry."

She was amazed. She thought, "Either he's the world's best actor or he's actually undergone some change of heart (or at least a change of policy)." They continued talking it out. They were both friendly. They commiserated on the difficulties of their lives. She expressed her great relief that he would not torment them and she would also quiet down the *kīrtanas*. They parted as friends. He said, "There's no use in us being enemies."

She said, "I'll bring you some cake from our birthday party tomorrow."

Sometimes you just have to stick it out and sooner or later there's some relief. Take the ordeal as a test of our Kṛṣṇa consciousness and as a time when we can come closer to Him. But also, there is no final peace in this world. It can again get so bad, in a minute. A neighbor can start up his music once again, or a rock can come through the window, or your friendly kidneys suddenly become



your enemies, a gall stone appears and you fall to the floor in pain. Lord Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna, "Therefore having come to this miserable and temporary world, engage yourself in acts of devotional service."

When you tell a story, you get lifted out of your environment. Śrīla Prabhupāda's *kīrtanas* did that. We joined him in the spiritual world. Then a half hour later he'd stop and we'd be back, surrounded by the inimical sounds of Second Avenue on Friday night. In the eternal spiritual world there is no anxiety and the true story never ends, it's never boring, has always the perfect, lively variety and center of interest in Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His devotees. One who goes there never returns to this material world of repeated birth and death. While we are here, we want to hear a story to get relief from the material tedium. We shouldn't indulge in a time-waster fantasy which takes us up into orbit only to splash us back down onto the material ocean. Stories should inspire and strengthen us to face our daily struggles, like Lord Rāma's triumphs over adversity, Prahlāda's peaceful endurance in *kṛṣṇa-smaraṇam*, and so many other edifying and entertaining tales. Other tales do no good, no matter how enchanting.

## Sighing

Why am I sighing as if I have a heavy task? Distracted by the voices in the house. The message, the message . . . of Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the world. Even Śrīla Prabhupāda was frustrated that they wouldn't take it. They are so puffed up, blind . . . But he never desisted in trying. People don't cooperate with us, he said. If we flatter them, they would come. But because we tell the truth that they are the eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa, no one cooperates.

Me . . . the story in me. Why am I reluctant to find it or let it go? Someone says I am lazy to make the full endeavor. That's a fact. Besides, when I read interviews with those fanatic, workaholic dreamers called writers, they seem perfectly dedicated, but to what—to *creating characters*. One who is supposed to be the best said he's been writing twenty years and "As I'm sitting here, I seem to be alone, but in fact I'm trailing about sixty people. They are people that I have created . . . What you need to be to create a character is terribly hard-headed and sensible. . . . It's an astonishing thing to have created a person alone in your room. It's an enormous privilege."

Why should I want to *create* anyone? Anyway, I can't.

Resign yourself. You're just a little tract writer, diarist . . . Śrīla Prabhupāda told you to take from

*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam's* purports and write them into articles, like "Prayers by Akrūra."

I can find plenty stories in the letters people write to me. A pretty young woman joined the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. She and her boyfriend. They both joined the movement in, say, Seattle. Pure and sweet and young, and they want to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness to people their age. Wonderful. They got initiated. But the temple is struggling. No one wants to be temple president, no one is fit for it. Severe shortage.

They asked her to become head cook. It's too hard. She has a very small room that she has to share with other women, which is next to the room of a man and his wife. She says you can hear everything from this room, even a sigh. The young wife—she married her boyfriend, call her Pṛthādevī—can't live with her husband in the temple. He lives with the *brahmacārīs*. It's not satisfactory

...

I wrote her a letter saying, "It doesn't sound good. I had to put up with things like that too. You are facing the realism of the movement. I hope you don't get disillusioned . . . I know you like to go out and preach, but now with all the kitchen work you can't, and when you do manage to get out and schedule a *bhakti-yoga* club at the college, no one comes to the first meeting because it's midterms. So if you want to get an apartment outside the temple with your husband, I have no objection. They can't expect you to do something intolerable."

I picture the temple authorities telling her that now she's head cook, this young girl who joined so high-spirited and willing to speak to college kids and high school kids about Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I picture the details, how men come up to the women's floor and don't keep the privacy . . . how the temple president and his wife have a new baby, their first, "and if the mother is not saying goo-goo, she's saying gaa-gaa . . ."

Then I got to write the next letter—to a wife abandoned by her husband. Encourage. But you can't steal stories from confidential mail.

How come *you're* not in the kitchen or preaching at the university? Who asked you to ponder and wonder about fiction for devotees?

"I didn't say these were fiction, they are stories."

Sighing for Killarney. Did I tell you the time when a big man sighed?

Sighing is just breath exhaling. You give yourself credit for some achievement. Or you accept that you couldn't do what you wanted, but you have to move on. Success or failure, you have to move on and that's a cause for sighing. You wish to go to some place, like an Irish immigrant who is living in a New York City apartment, and it's not going so well, so he thinks of the old country.

Wrap it up and don't be guilty. You are breathing. The back door of the van is open. At least you

are following the principles of your spiritual master. This is a story for people who sigh like you. They will understand. People who don't sigh will not understand, and the atheist, no matter how much you tell him about Kṛṣṇa, will never accept it. but the devotees are happy, and generous . . . I'm moving on.

## The Earnest Mind

The earnest mind was able to keep sticking its head out. I mean, while chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, the earnest mind noticed, "I'm off the track, not paying attention," and brought itself back where it wanted to be, *hearing* the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.

He is earnest because a pile driver frightened folks, *Boom! Boom!*

I'm not going to write what someone told me and asked me to keep confidential. Don't worry, you who write to me, I'm not going to tell your stories. I'll tell mine because I don't object. I've got an earnest mind.

Oh, boo hoo, and whine whine, I ain't got a story. And hooray! Aren't I grand? I do have a story! Either one of those views is extreme. I'll take the middle ground and go ahead swimming.

But do you have a special technique? I heard you did. I heard you had a ten point logical proof of the existence of God and a fool-proof method to write.

Yes, I do, but it's a secret. I bal-finch the hypotheses and then see if I smell anything nasty. If not, I go ahead.

There are many weeds in the heart. "Only a rare person who has adopted complete, unalloyed devotional service to Kṛṣṇa can uproot the weeds of sinful desires with no possibility that they will revive.

He can do this simply by discharging devotional service, just as the sun can immediately dissipate fog by its rays" (*Bhāg.* 6.1.15).

I will find the way. I have no doubt of it. A story will appear.

So said the bear and he ambled back into his lair.

Meanwhile, gnarled pieces of wood were gathered by devotees of Kṛṣṇa from the debris of the olive orchard. The young man threw some branches (they looked like curly spaghetti noodles) onto the red ashes, and gradually the wood heated and burst into flames. *Sādhus* warmed themselves early in the morning and then again at night by this kindling fire, just as Lord Caitanya did when traveling in Daṇḍakarāṇya forest.

Who is the wise guy who knows everything, who tells everything? Not me.

The franchise dealer belched and closed the metal file drawer, catching his necktie in it. Ha ha, he didn't know it, but the truth just passed him by. A devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa wanted to save him, being compassionate.

Give me back my articles, he said.

This is getting silly and desperate, but I'm not worried. I trust in God, Kṛṣṇa. I'll reach a point where I know it's time to praise God. I'll go and do this anywhere in the world. Set up a madras, a few books and start chanting. It will work if the devotee is sincere. Prabhupāda will please him.

Devotees want a purport.

I went to see an important man in Durban. But he was in London. I gave up. Thinking at *guru-pūjā* and I forgot what happened. I proceeded to read my daydreams.

This is the ultimate poor (materially exhausted) story—the story of what I did and thought while writing this. I hemmed and hawed. I was tired (as in the yawning story).

What happened anyway? Someone beat you by whipping you with your clothes? You fell asleep but were determined to bring Kṛṣṇa into your writing.

*Kirata-pulinda, abhira . . .* all these can be better. You better move somewhere else.

There's a closed-eyed formula, and it's no good. Go outside, mate, and greet the foggy dawn.

Yeah, this is better. In this neighborhood, even when you stay indoors, the dogs bark at you from outside. The verse *kirata-hunindra* means that devotional service is so powerful, it can cleanse you no matter what tribe you belong to. Do you care about this? Then repeat it. Little birds are chirping like little roses. They cheer you up and make you think good is here and things are possible.

Then these flowers will open when more light comes in the morning.

Dear friends, this may be a cross roads. I'm not only tired from being up all night, but a little tired of telling this story. I prefer to come home for awhile to the all-accepting arms of free-write. If you'll call that a story for your *My Stories* collection,



fine. If not, I'm not inclined to shape it and weld it. I don't want to do that now. Maybe another time.

Really? You quittin' on us, bro?

It's something like that, cutting loose.

The geraniums are in here.

We are studying his letters thoroughly and reading what he wrote. Who needs your story?

## Part II

The above is okay if it's earnest. That's the whole trick. In modern art, they are putting you on, throwing paint wildly on a canvas and saying it's profound. You have to agree to it. But we want to paint Kṛṣṇa in a readily understandable way according to the *śāstra*.

I am reading now in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* about the *jīva* when he is in the womb. After ten months of utter misery (he can bear it only because his consciousness is so limited), he makes a beautiful prayer. He is grateful that he has consciousness to know God and to be able to pray. Of course, it's God's grace, but He reveals Himself. The atheist will say how could God be so cruel to put someone in the embryo? But it's the law of nature. God wants us to get out. He comes to rescue the soul. The soul prays, "I am grateful. I want to go back to Godhead as soon as possible. I don't want to be born at all. Once I'm born, I'll just forget everything of my present, praying mood. This womb is miserable, but at least I am aware here that I am an eternal soul who keeps changing bodies. If I come out and take another mother and father, they will just impress

their trip on me and I'll identify myself with body and family—for another round of birth, death, disease, and old age. Please, Lord, let me stay here, or if I come out, let me not forget You."

Śrīla Prabhupāda says when Śukadeva Gosvāmī appeared, he first stayed for sixteen years in the womb of his mother before coming out. When he was finally born, he left home at once for concentrated chanting and hearing in the renounced order.

The skeptics challenge, "Why do we have to suffer?" They demand an explanation from God. Well, you caused so much suffering to others. You killed innocent animals, but you don't expect some reaction? You are implicated in the killing of thousands and millions of cows for the meat you eat. And as for illicit sex . . . You didn't know better? Ignorance is no excuse.

You can get out of all reaction and punishment and become liberated from birth and death. Just develop Kṛṣṇa consciousness and don't speculate on or doubt Śrī Kṛṣṇa's teachings.

### *Finale*

O boats and oboes, play a little melody while we end this. If I am frivolous, I'll have to learn by the hard way, with a rap on the wrist. But I do desire to be earnest and write an earnest story. It's not about two Russians at a summer sea resort discussing why one should remain in marriage even after passionate romance has faded. It's a simple way of discussing *kṛṣṇa-upadeśa*. I hope those guys who left

Kṛṣṇa consciousness, like some of the ex-marines and the 1960s flower girls, will find their way back. They came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness with various motives and Māyā-devī tested them. They proved to have selfish motives other than serving Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Maybe it's just a temporary sojourn in *māyā* and they will be back. I don't consider myself better, just lucky. I need to preserve my lucky connection to His Divine Grace by nourishing it with service. I am reading and trying to preach, you know? But I do hope the whole spiritual family can be restored. Surely those devotees rendered sincere service and Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa can never forget it. That will be a most blessed day if we can get together, and with that youthful enthusiasm, again spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness or do whatever it is Prabhupāda wants us to do next time.

I'm doing okay today.

"Satsvarūpa, I hope you don't mind if I sit in this cabin for awhile."

Yes, I do mind. It's not my house, so don't abuse the privileges. Let's see you prove your earnestness by right behavior and regular reading and chanting.

## **The Mosquito, Relaxing**

An afternoon with ink sifting onto the page. The words fail me, mates. The cars go by, but we're inside our house, in a small yard with compound walls and high hedge. Nothing out there I care to see. They were cutting down trees with a power saw for most of the day.

I was busy with my routine.

This is a story for me to look at later. That sounds strange.

You free-write at ease and in your writing sessions you told yourself, "I want to write Kṛṣṇa conscious themes. Tell of Lord Caitanya."

A landlord or Lord Russell is not the Supreme Lord. Those British lords come and go; the House of Lords is a farce in time compared to the Lord from whom everything comes, in whom everything is maintained, and who remains after everything is destroyed by Lord Śiva.

You are swimming in the lake and on the shore you see people. People are also swimming in this lake.

You can keep this for yourself as a story at home exercise, a spinning wheel cloth-making session.

I feel how writing can be passionate creative activity and that's fine. You hack to hew out some shape. But to let be is also something. That dog who crossed the street barks his way through life

and his "owners" may feel protected by his obnoxious presence.

Dogs don't enter houses in Vedic society. They are given *prasādam* at the door and then they go away.

Another reason I am less passionately inclined to create is that my head feels a pressure. I prefer to breathe and watch it go in and out with a healthy, deep inhalation-hold and exhalation. Then normal unconscious breathing, in and out, like the ocean waves at Purī. In and out, in and out . . . I will always remember those days and what happened to me there. I may romanticize on the external events, but I can't forget the basic internal events, leaving the surrendered discipleship of Mahārāja and urging myself to return to the simple basics and that real connection with Śrīla Prabhupāda which he has allowed me to keep over so many years. Purī is now an ISKCON socializing place, not good for going to be alone . . . But one day I may return to hear the sea go in and out and remember what happened.

But this lifetime will come to an end. You can't project forever savoring and creating and dodging your enemies and their projectiles . . .

This is a story of relaxing in the afternoon. The day's work is done and we have just a few more quotas to fulfill before night rest. Dinanātha has cooked, eaten, cleaned all pots and floors, and gone to his room. M. gave me the van for my use. You can relax and at the same time, make a story.

One time the flowers, each day in fact, the flowers open to sunlight and then close by the cool of afternoon.

This morning a mosquito appeared in my room as I sat writing at midnight. The first one I have seen since the winter. Saw his delicate machinery, fuselage and wings transparent as he landed on my sweatshirt sleeve. I didn't have any flesh exposed except my busy right hand writing, and he didn't dare alight there. Left hand wore a glove. He hovered around my face, which was also hooded. So Mr. Mosquito, I thought, your presence means something. You are trying to tell me. Are you the harbinger of spring and then mosquito pestered nights?

At 4:30 A.M., Madhu came in for our daily talking session as we reviewed Śrīla Prabhupāda's letters to me. He was barefoot, and when he saw the mosquito, he became alert and alarmed. I said, "There is only one mosquito here." The whole hour, M. kept fidgeting and glancing at his bare feet. He doesn't like being bitten at all. I made a note, "Mosquito," thinking that there may be a story here. But now in the afternoon I can't think of one. I expect he will be there tomorrow when I wake and put on the light.

Relax and you don't have to achieve, but you can write. Waves of pre-Kṛṣṇa conscious memories come over me and I decide to let them pass. Don't have to write them down. If I'm not going to pen passages of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, why should I feel obliged to tell something of Fiorelli's drugstore in

Great Kills, just because it's passing by in memory form? You are not an addict. Sometimes it's good to just be (a Taoist expression) and show that you're not a compulsive creator-writer.

Leaves fall down from the trellis. I can't figure them out. They are dry like you might expect at the end of summer. Are they going to fall off and then new ones come with spring? I see something like very tight buds at the end of some branches. We won't be here to see them develop.

Yes, this is enough. You can stop if you want. There is your climax and poem and plot and character. It's the mosquito. It's the claim, "I want to relax." It's telling you I am a writer, I don't have to be, but I want to be. I'm stopping short of explicit *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, I'm not exactly sure why.

He doesn't want to be overbearing. He figures you hear enough *śāstra*. But we never hear enough. Of course. But he wants you to receive it like a lover, at the right time. We should never be tired of *śāstra*, or inattentive. All this is a rest in between readings of *śāstra*.

## Daydreams

They flicker into your waking consciousness. The dictionary gives this image of them: "A pleasant, dream-like thinking, or wishing; reverie. 2. A pleasing but visionary notion or scheme." I am thinking of the flickering ones, sometimes they stay longer, sometimes they flash and are gone, like fish coming up to surface.

In a sustained daydream, you may see yourself as a much improved devotee. Does one enter daydreams to escape reality? It's conscious thinking rather than the dream that comes in sleep.

It would be nice, he daydreamed.

Now, that's not all I want to say. The heater is on in the van. You waited all morning for this, grinding your teeth, stifling your drowsiness that comes at this time of day. Weird practice. Someone deprived himself of air or sleep in experimenting to reach altered states. Don't be like that. Give us straight, plain Kṛṣṇa consciousness, what you've learned in your spiritual master's books. The spiritual world is no visionary reverie, not in the unreal sense. Vaikuṇṭha and Goloka are described in authorized Vedic literature. To go there, you have to seriously practice *bhakti-yoga* for a long time, not by dreaming of it in your armchair. "It's not my manufacture," Prabhupāda said. This information we have got from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. There is a



world beyond the manifest temporary worlds. When all in this world is destroyed, that part remains as it is. Lord Kṛṣṇa says, "That is My Supreme abode."

Memory fades . . . you have to keep chanting and hearing. In this age especially, memory gets weak, and it gets weaker as you grow older. Ronald Reagan was notorious when as U.S. President, he said he forgot whether he gave orders that led to the Contra-AB scam. A recent cartoon shows the retired Mr. Reagan listening to his wife read from the newspapers. He stares blankly and thinks, "Bush? Bush? Why does that name seem so familiar?" He can't even remember his vice-president of eight years in the White House. We can't even remember who we are or who is the Supreme. Am I this body or something else? Who is God? Where *am* I? And Tolstoy's dying words, "What am I supposed to do now?"

Give us plain, simple reading of transcendental texts with purports. Take it on face value and go deeper.

No need to go now . . . Hitler, something about him. I don't call these daydreams, but falling asleep suddenly while sitting and writing and reading or even talking and you are in some imaginative or real world which flickers and then is gone. You think to pull something out of the lake and take a look at its strangeness and whether it is useful to anyone.

Don't wait for reveries or pipe dreams, those hallucinations, not from opium, but from waking consciousness suddenly you go under the water of sea life and they are also known as "fantastic idea, vain hope or plan." We want realists who can do plain, substantial work for Kṛṣṇa in this world. Work with your day-planner. Make a few notes and then get on the phone. Get off the mental plane, go out and work and preach.

They do, but they have a new weapon in my epiphanies. I am dreaming for the race of like-minded devotees. Pig, hog, is a daydream who banded together to stop animal slaughter. You can't get the daydream whole. It flips loose and goes back into the ocean.

Day-tripper.

Marble halls with palace windows and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class in session. You look in the window. Someone is climbing.

All bleary-eyed, Danish pastry, olives, O Sancho Panzo, O itinerant house, a good hunter bowels a good scent . . .

I have to have all pieces intact.

Begin this again? I thought I could collect some daydreams or fragments as they occur and say that this happens, but it sounds too strange. If a whole one came, it could tell a story for you, but that's not my view.

You're saying I don't know the language. I can't read your handwriting.

I don't want to be incoherent.

But did you think something would come, one of those star spangled banner decorations?

Little by little, it was a rumor only that the *Kṛṣṇa* book was missing. Śrīla Prabhupāda warned me, listen . . .

Strawberries. Often I daydream I am bringing some delicious food into my mouth, like a rolled waffle with strawberries, but it never quite gets there.

And so there is no use telling them. Let's get back to work. My work is to tell a story, then go inside. I have transcendental duties and so do you.

Save money and spend in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Rūpa Gosvāmī showed fifty percent for Kṛṣṇa conscious persons. The balance is divided.

Just write the line, don't care about the larger meaning. Trust that He guides you at all times and be the scribe.

Okay, keep going. When we have clear consciousness and there's no daydream or fog, you should speak. You are going to get interrupted by static, so speak uncrooked while you can. It's just a matter of reciting what you read or taking a book down right now and quoting from it. Or if you are

experienced, you can share some of it. To help people. They should chant Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra on beads. If drowsy dreams come, push them aside like turds in the Ganges and go for the flashing neon of Hare Kṛṣṇa mantras in the dark to guide you.

Remember walking back from the Ganges after bathing, and the Māyāpur Chandrodayā Mandir standing on the plain? Certainly it was the eighth wonder of the world, or more than that . . . But reality was bogged down by institutional in-fighting and your poor distresses of body, mind, and words. Despite it, your spiritual master carried you all like he was Hercules. But it wasn't physical, it was spiritual, but he carried you all with great strength. Now it's up to you to represent him and lecture in many places. In 1967, January, he wrote back to New York temple president with two points: 1. Don't wait for some utopian scheme to happen such as a gift of a temple building from Mr. Payne. But work honestly on your own. 2. Hold *kīrtanas* in halls and public places as I am doing in San Francisco and popularize the movement—in this way, money and buildings will come as Lord Kṛṣṇa will reciprocate.

No need to look at the "lunatic" fringe of your consciousness to see who is there, what old, startled face or elfin or literary character like Scrooge McDuck. No, I was thinking of Rip Van Winkle and someone said Charles Dickens. We will put it aside and at least don't make it a stage center. Keep the center at Lord Kṛṣṇa and devotional acts.

Daydreams as vain ideas are to be banished in favor of practical work, but if you can envision a utopian—I mean a grand, never-before-seen act for spreading and attaining Kṛṣṇa consciousness—then do it. Śrīla Prabhupāda liked Śyāmasundara's helium balloon over Bombay advertising the Hare Kṛṣṇa festival and Śyāmasundara's receiving George Harrison's donation of Bhaktivedanta Manor and his building of Jagannātha carts. Someone said to Śrīla Prabhupāda about Śyāmasundara, "He's all right, as long as he's not utopian." Śrīla Prabhupāda, "You can be utopian for Kṛṣṇa." Kṛṣṇa can make anything happen, so it's okay to daydream something fantastic for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa—but not at the expense of basic daily *sādhana* and simple life and kind relations with everyone.

## Answering a Message

A person came to see me today. Fortunately, my secretary prevented him from entering my room. I feel some pressure in my head today and couldn't bear a personal meeting. The messenger, who said he was representing "the Vaiṣṇavas," anticipated that I would not see him. Therefore he carried a written message and said that he would wait in an outer room for my written reply. Of course, I prefer this kind of epistolary exchange, but still, it's intimidating. I wanted to go out and sit on the veranda, but the messenger is waiting there. I can even hear him chanting *japa* on his beads. So let me attend to his message without delay.

It reads as follows:

"Why don't you direct every sentence to Lord Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* and name and qualities and teachings? Why aren't you a pure devotee writer?"

Dear Sirs, I write like I write because that's how I write. If you don't like it, don't read it. If I could be a pure devotee, I'd be one! But if I'm not a hundred percent pure, what do you want me to do, fake it? You guys are too much.

As for not writing about Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* in every line, well, even Vyāsadeva didn't do that in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. He leads up to it, but because he's always thinking of how to bring

us to pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness, whatever he says is pure devotional service and nothing less. Even Lord Kṛṣṇa in *Bhagavad-gītā* leads us up to the conclusion of *prema-bhakti*. And what to speak of the *Mahābhārata*? Of course, I cannot compare myself to the Lord and Vyāsadeva, but you see my point in mentioning them.

I'm sorry for being feisty about this, but I prefer to answer you directly without beating around the bush. Forgive me for addressing you as "you guys." And please excuse me for not seeing your messenger. Besides all this, although I do not know who you are, you have introduced yourselves as "the Vaiṣṇavas," I hope this note satisfies you. I have defended myself, but I will also think over what you have said and pray that I may one day satisfy you and fulfill my own aspirations as well, to write of *kṛṣṇa-kathā* in every line, and be as you have stated, a pure-devotee writer.

By the time I finished this note, a half hour had passed. I gave it to my secretary who gave it to the messenger, who rode off on his bicycle. Now I'm free to use the veranda.

## If You Please Kṛṣṇa

You can write a relaxing story and your headache will go away? Not likely. But it's not so bad. There are things popping to be said, like "peppermint." But I want to calm it down. Leg crossed to support the legal pad cover book. Writing. Dear stalwart friends, dear muses . . . there you go again, bubbling Dr. Bronner's peppermint. You had better calm down.

Dear cold hands, why don't you put on your gloves which are in your coat pocket? At least the left hand. Did you read that story by Franz Kafka where his two hands start a fight? The author said he would be the referee. The right hand easily over-powered the left and was about to break his wrist when the author intervened and concluded that he was unfair in stopping the fight, but what else could he do? He didn't want to witness that self-mayhem.

Flower pots under the hedges. Do you think you could forget a headache by observing what's around? No, but calm is good. Feel it like expanding energy in your head. Get too calm, though, and your pen will drop.

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa. The poor mantras I call upon at times like this. Call them nonetheless, they are absolute. The ink enters the page like a friend visiting a sick man. Metaphors. Doctors and nurses

...



Why am I writing like this?  
Because it's true.

This is not a meditation relaxation exercise, but it's trying to come up to a story. We have only two days left in this place where we are visiting. I am grateful and happy (in a quiet but very positive way) about the stories. I promise them a home in *My Stories*. From there, some of them may go on to debut in "Among Friends"—and that's as far as they'll get. I'm grateful. To whom? To Lord Kṛṣṇa who arranges for the fulfillment of all our desires. I hope to increase the reciprocation with Him by practicing more stories and I pray that they may be pleasing to Him. I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda say today that a devotee simply wants to please Lord Kṛṣṇa and that's what he works for. The preacher may try hard all day, yet sell very few books. Or the lecturer may draw only two or three people at the program, but he should not be disappointed. Śrīla Bhakti-siddhānta Sarasvatī told his disciples, "If no one comes, you can still speak to the four walls." If Lord Kṛṣṇa sees the devotee is making a sincere effort and He is pleased, then the devotee's desires are fulfilled. So let me write like that, trying. That means being honest and in a crude, hopeless way, telling some Kṛṣṇa conscious tale.

It doesn't have to be fiction. Just somehow get in Kṛṣṇa and Lord Caitanya. This is being written two weeks before Gaura-Pūrṇimā. Lord Caitanya is even more merciful than when He appeared as Lord Kṛṣṇa five thousand years ago. As Lord Kṛṣṇa

He demanded, "Surrender to Me and then I will rescue you." But Lord Caitanya gave *kṛṣṇa-prema* freely to one and all by the easy process of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. May I speak of His liberal glories on Gaura-Pūrṇimā.

Sun is going down, blazing a hole through the high hedge. He is with you. He is everywhere. Finish this story and then start bringing things into the van. This story is one of the slightest. But it will pass if you just don't feel guilty and realize there's nothing you have to do. I guess I can't concentrate. But I am not unhappy. Passionate creation isn't everything. I want to leave this important message: a writer can write even if he's not in a passionate-to-create mindset. Life. Little pebbles inset in the cement. The care someone took to do that. Yeah, he got paid for it, but still, he did it nicely. The hedges are nice too. Someone made these gloves. This is a good coat, bought in Boston. God's material energy made these bodies. The pure soul is beyond all this. He wants to be in Kṛṣṇa-loka, but is detained here by his petty desires and distractions. Write your way to *that* goal.

Scribe, can you hear the voices that tell you that story—how to surmount all obstacles and get on the free road and see the Supreme and serve Him heart and soul and body?

I'll try, says the Scribe, sincere as he can. "I'll try real hard to listen to that divine voice and write it down. I'd like to."

Yes, Scribe, do. And be at your post as often as possible. "*Nitya*" means every day, regularly, and constantly. Writing too is *bhajana*. It never replaces reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* or chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, but it is in there, swinging with the others, for sure, at least for me, at least in this conditioned state where I must purify myself by my occupation. I'm dovetailing. I'm serving the Supreme. I forgot my headache; I think it went away.

## Down To Earth

It's presumptuous to call them "my stories." They belong to God. Everything belongs to Him. Tell a story of yourself as His eternal servant. I'm telling them all, the memories of my past service to Śrīla Prabhupāda, in memoir books, meditations. Then here?

Here I'll tell . . . the shape of the *mūrti* draped with a full blanket *cādar*. Overnight he sits with a knit hat on his head. He is comfy, and I look over at him. Yes, if I could feel more, that would be nice . . . but I do feel . . . In the early *japa* hours, all lights off and a votive candle on the altar beside Śrīla Prabhupāda. His eyes are illuminated by candlelight, but he's looking down. He allows me to be with him. We also eat together. Will I be able to continue this life with him? For how long? Oh, it will have to end after a few years.

But now I have him here. Even the *gopīs* couldn't keep Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana. But now we have Him here, they thought. One can't always feel for how the future will separate us.

This place where I write stories, be down to earth. Your feet in Wellington boots. One on the floor. You sit on a sharp edge of the bunk and write this. Be down to earth. Rejoice in a new traveling lamp. It's a good one, bought for a hundred dollars as a gift from Rāma-vigrahā, who lives in these parts. His son lent me his. His son is a student of

the classics. So I marveled at what a good lamp it was and now he has bought me one. M. attached it to the desk in the van and now it's shining down, non-glare, but full illumination of the white page.

Down to earth. The bathroom drain is stuck, so we shower outdoors. It's cold. A bucket of warm water first, then the cold shower shock, rubbing off quickly with an Indian *gamchā*. Then you run inside the house where there's a fire in the fireplace, a blaze of noodly old wood, twigs, not a long-lasting fire. Then we talk for an hour about Prabhupāda's letters to me.

Down to earth. One wants to write a story with some fictive magic, just a touch of it is sufficient. But you can't always have that. So many reasons why not, so many objections. Afraid the "characters" in the story will be too wooden, just stick men. Afraid the reader will object, "It's not Kṛṣṇa conscious enough." Or if you plunge right into Kṛṣṇa consciousness, how do you fictionalize the scriptures? That historic fiction you did and fantasy. So many objections.

There was a little man who went to town. He received a book on Kṛṣṇa and went home and read it and said this is the best thing I've ever found. He was able to take his attention off his swollen ankles, his piles, his broken heart, no good supper, wife dead, kids grown up and gone and don't care for him . . . He saw the truth as described by Śrīla Prabhupāda. I thought this Kṛṣṇa consciousness

was for young people, he said, but it's for everyone. So he began chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa . . .

Okay, that's something.

Now your own teeth are almost gone, Vidura said to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and your liver is a problem for you, and mucus. Why don't you leave this house?

Yeah, me too. I wiggle a loose lower denture. Why all this worry about how you look? In India, if a *sādhū* has no teeth, he often just admits it and doesn't get—can't afford—a denture. Why this deception. When I suggested that one time, the dentist said, "No, you are an ambassador of Kṛṣṇa consciousness." Got to look good. Stories, too, shouldn't be by gap-toothed, smiling stick men who never existed.

And the lack of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Hear this: in the Indian villages, people go to different wells for different purposes. One well is for drinking water and others are for washing clothes and so on. But if you go to the clean-flowing river, it can supply all your water needs. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa consciousness supplies all spiritual and material needs. The highest conclusions of each world religion are within Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Buddhism's *nirvāṇa*, Christianity's love of God, Islam's service to God—all of these are in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I thrill to hear my master speak in this way.

A woman collected eggs. Then her daughter, Mary, and her daughter's friend came to visit. They lived together in a flat in the city. They had taken to the practices of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They told

the mother, "You shouldn't eat or sell eggs because they represent the embryo. In Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we honor all life and don't kill. Kṛṣṇa is all-pervading. All these creatures have a right to live." The mother couldn't agree. "Why tell me that stuff?" she said.

Her daughter, Mary, was having some problems getting along with the devotees in the city temple. One of them told her that he didn't think she was cut out to be a temple devotee. She took this as a hurtful insult. But then some of her other friends said that the insulter was just a dogmatic *brahmacārī* and she shouldn't be so affected by what he said. She certainly was "cut out" to be a devotee, they told her. She seemed to be a devotee even from her past life. So this encouraged her. She tried reading Prabhupāda's books, although they were a little heavily philosophical for her. On the sly, she read a local Irish poet. But basically she was serious to become a devotee and very much liked offering her food to the Lord and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. And maybe she could marry a devotee and have some children like some other devotee families she knew who seemed happy. It is nice to think of young girls and young men coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, rare souls somehow picked out of the thousands and millions in any city or country, and they come forward with innocence and determination . . .

I'm sorry, this is a failure, and no permissiveness is going to change that. You can sit with a pain in your ass from the sharp bunk edge, but if you don't

know how or won't give time to a story, it just won't be worth the reader's time. And that's my problem right now. I'm not writing for myself.

Look, if I am satisfied to tell a fragment, then let it go at that. Robert Bly's *What Have I Ever Lost By Dying*, sits with cover curling on the desk on top of a dictionary. I don't care for Kowit's approval. Let him be disturbed by what I write. I'm going to serve my spiritual master and write some stories to please myself. That's part of the bargain.

What do you mean by that?

I mean if I serve him, I become happy in the process. My life *is* gone entirely into Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Everything else that I ever did or know is getting dragged into Kṛṣṇa consciousness and purified, or I will throw it out. So in return for being a Kṛṣṇa conscious attempter, when I write, I can do it my way.

End it, man, it's not getting any better.

Hola! *Haribol*. Hare Kṛṣṇa. Your man here, you see me and I see you. Let us chant down to earth where people die, but our souls don't die. I pray next life, Lord, I pray to be with Your devotees. Finish what I can before I leave.



## Dear Friends

Once there was an egg and it was known as Hiranyagarbha. The Supreme Lord manifested that egg-shaped universe and it grew. It entered it as Garbhodakṣāyī Viṣṇu and from His navel came a stem that contained all the universes. The first *jīva*, Lord Brahmā, was born of Lord Viṣṇu and he sat atop a lotus blossom which appeared at the top of the stem. From that solitary seat, Lord Brahmā contemplated, but didn't know what to do. He was also disturbed by the rocking caused by the waves from the ocean of devastation.

Śrīla Prabhupāda says that in former times, only liberated persons wrote books and no one would be interested in a book unless it was compiled by a liberated sage. Now the bookstores are crammed with fiction and other rubbish. So how is my writing not of the rubbish category? Because it's Kṛṣṇa conscious.

I'm a corporal in the Army, a petty officer in the Navy, a person in this Kṛṣṇa conscious group. We are all working together.

Dear friend, you kindly accept whatever I give, or at least that is how I think of you. Is it so permissive? If I worry about this too much—that what I write may not be good enough—then I cut back my trusting nature and say, "Just write for yourself."

I repeat that the bookshelf is nice, people, and I don't want to harm anyone.

Tomorrow is our last day in this camp, and then we go to serve.

This is the story of a dog and a cat and Gary Larson, cartoonist of "The Far Side." Shot a pigeon.

The guy was so drowsy that a cotton-like utterance came out of his mouth. Then he slumped forward. Hey, before you die, give us a tune. He played on a small piano on top of the bar. People requested tunes. He was just a pop bar pianist with no accompanying musicians. He got requests along with unpleasant remarks from the drunks.

Brahmā heard the sound of *tapa* from the sky, and he obeyed by performing meditation. At the end of many, many years, he attained the *darśana* of the Supreme Lord. Kṛṣṇa, some of us . . . The wall is walling. The Bosnians are . . .

Dear friends, this is a golden opportunity and I don't want to miss it due to sleep or cold or lack of stories.

Let's say that pianist in the bar, say the bar was called the Swiss Chalet, and maybe his name was Charles Lloyd. He played the piano and a couple of young guys who attended the community college nearby came and joked with him. They were just starting to hear about modern jazz, and of course they knew rhythm and blues, so they talked with him and asked him if he knew different tunes. He

said he did and that he could improvise, but for this job, he had to just play the popular tunes that people requested. They would request tunes like "My Gal Sal," and even the more sentimental things like "Sweet Adeline." He had to just be a cheerful black man as they expected and tickle the ivories. He wasn't even supposed to sing, although sometimes he did if people themselves were singing.

One of those young college kids later met Śrīla Prabhupāda. Then he never went back to the Swiss Chalet, or hardly ever thought about it, or the pianist. Those people really can't be given Kṛṣṇa consciousness. You could go in and try to sell them candles in the days that we were doing that. Maybe they'd buy a few. But they all have this lumped-in version of what Hare Kṛṣṇa is, some kind of cult madness. They're so covered up. Prabhupāda makes it clear throughout his writings that people in ignorance cannot receive Kṛṣṇa consciousness. People who are too sinful cannot receive it. The Lord even tells the devotees don't bother to approach them. Just stick to your own Kṛṣṇa consciousness and leave them alone to go to hell.

But the devotees are more kind than Kṛṣṇa and they go and take the risk. But I have been less inclined to do it, at least in some really alien situation like a bar. You can have a big festival, a Ratha-yātrā that starts somewhere downtown, and when it starts out there aren't so many people around the cart, but the devotees are enthusiastic.

One devotee says he has proof that loud *kīrtanas* cause permanent hearing loss. I don't know what his proposal is for how to reduce it. It will be hard to avoid the fact that Lord Caitanya liked lots of drums and *karatālas* and that it's described in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* that when they had *kīrtana*, it would shake the whole universe and you couldn't hear anything but "Hari! Hari!" But still, something should be done about not crashing many, many pairs of *karatālas* right near your ears, especially in these small quarters like many of our temples are. Devotees think that if there are ten devotees gathered, then nine people have to have *karatālas* and they all play them as loudly as possible. The fact is, that some of our Godbrothers, starting even with infants, are suffering from permanent hearing loss. I guess that's also in favor of a milder kind of *kīrtana*, the way Prabhupāda used to have it. It was always lively and certainly soulful, but not that high volume of crash-crash-crash.

It's almost like being near industrial sounds when you think about it.

So as I was saying, we can have a big *kīrtana* around the Ratha-yātrā cart and then start off, go downtown, and wind up in a park, like Stanley Park in Vancouver. There you have different booths and some kind of music which is a concession to the popular tastes of the people, dancers, and so on. In that atmosphere of a sunny day and distributing *prasādam*, you might meet some of the same drunks and young kids who go to the Swiss Chalet and places like that. Then you can fulfill

that obligation. You can fulfill the compassion of the devotee, at least assist the devotee who is compassionate.

I have been thinking about monologues. One definition of a monologue is a skit or play or a recitation for one character only. *Krapps' Last Tape* would qualify, written by Samuel Beckett. In that play, there's a guy on stage and he has a tape recorder. He's sort of talking aloud or thinking aloud. He tells us (the audience) that he has recorded his memoirs. It's a typical Beckett thing, very internal, and maddeningly so, and also fatalistic, dry, agnostic. This man who has no wife or no friends or anything—he's alone in his apartment just recording his own voice—I don't remember it all because I saw it way back in 1960 before I even met Prabhupāda. But near the end of the play, he's making his last recording. Then he's going to die and his life and death has no sense, and neither does the recording of it. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not like that. Even if you speak alone, if you speak about Kṛṣṇa, it will be good for others and for yourself.

Śrīla Prabhupāda got that order from his spiritual master. Prabhupāda remembered it keenly all his life. He said it was around December 9th or 10th in 1936 that he wrote to his spiritual master, who at that time was feeling a little indisposed and was living by the seashore in Jagannātha Purī. Prabhupāda wrote him and said that you have so many *sannyāsī* and *brahmacārī* disciples who are living with you and rendering you personal

service. But I'm a householder. I can't live with you and I can't serve you so nicely. So *how can I serve you?* Prabhupāda said he just had some idea, I guess it was also some kind of yearning that had just manifested in terms of this specific sentence to his Guru Mahārāja, and with inspiration he wrote it just at the right time. Then he got a reply which turned out to be only a fortnight before the disappearance of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

His spiritual master wrote him and said that you should develop yourself to become a preacher in the Western countries. If you do that, it will be good for you and it will be good for others.

Whatever you do in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, it's good for you, and somehow or other it will be good for others. We should have that trust that any act in Kṛṣṇa consciousness will reverberate. Just as when you throw a pebble into a pond, more and more circles will go out. It will be preaching. Of course, we should deliberately try to be effective so that people will receive the preaching, but really it all starts with that pebble into the pond. If it's well-placed, and if it's intense and sincere, then it will go out.

## Nonwhimsical Behavior

"Pleasing the Lord should be the sole purpose of commerce and trade, and also of research, science, charity, austerity, and all other activities. . . . In Vedic times, all human activities were strongly affiliated with devotional service to the Supreme Lord. Today the same eternal principle applies: everything must be utilized in the Lord's service" (*Renunciation Through Wisdom*, p. 113).

Pleasing Lord Kṛṣṇa is also the sole purpose of telling a story. I may say I do it "to entertain the devotees, to please them, to inspire them." That is also a way to please the Lord of the devotees. Serve Him by serving them. But how are they pleased? Not by appealing to a frivolity in them or in yourself. You'll wind up being the laughing stock and scorned.

"We must pay careful, however, never to allow the desire for self-aggrandizement or sense gratification to surreptitiously slip into our consciousness while we are performing devotional service" (p. 113).

Cars go by. It's Friday afternoon and growing chilly in our backyard. Tomorrow we leave this place, and most likely we'll never return here. Fix your mind on your purpose of serving the Lord. Dear Lord, I can only ask You to forgive me for not being single-minded in my devotion to You. My

excuse is that it's Kali-yuga and I'm a product of Kali and his consort, Sin. But I am spirit soul, pure, I just have to know it.

May-be, say the scholars. May-be God is a person, or He could be an imperson. Śrīla Prabhupāda says, why "may be"? You scholars should say more honestly, "I don't know."

Lord Kṛṣṇa is clearly the Supreme Personality of Godhead, as enunciated in *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and affirmed by great *ācāryas*. Therefore the "search" for God, after so much evidence that Kṛṣṇa is God, is a rascaldom. I remember Śrīla Prabhupāda saying that to us in a walk through the German forest. He said that if by chance Śrīla Prabhupāda got separated from us and we were searching for him in the woods, and if he called out to us, "I'm over here!" and if we ignored his voice, but kept searching in other places, saying, "Where's Prabhupāda?" Then our very "search" was rascaldom.

I pray to not be a tomfoolery fooling around person.

This is a good-bye-and-busy-but-still-I-wanted-to-write-you-story.

"What happened to Nimāi?" a friend asked. He was waiting for the Italian translation of the *Nimāi* series, book four. Someone told him that Nimāi does appear in the end of that book, but it's mostly about Choṭa. I'll tell you. Nimāi takes a big duffel bag on his shoulder and goes out of our sight, down the block, leaving the Brooklyn temple on



his way to India to see his spiritual master. It's the eternal place of the *śiṣya* to go and serve his guru wherever he may be.

Choṭa goes back to his *prabhu-datta-deśa*, unafraid but determined that he shall balance preaching and *sādhana*.

I'm going to keep my mind on You, dear Lord.

I asked Madhu if he would have hot tea in the morning for us when we stop after three hours driving. He said, "No, just bread and a cold drink." I'm afraid I may have trouble chewing the bread. But why think and plan about this and insert it into your "story"? It's on my mind, and I'm relieving my mind by exposing it. I can easily overcome that "bread problem." Be glad you can eat at all.

A devotee in Northern Ireland wrote me and said she's hearing more about major disasters of the world which will occur in a few years. She's afraid and says *she* particularly can't stand pain and trouble. I know what she means. I told her the world is meant for troubles, but Kṛṣṇa protects His devotees. Go on seeing life in a positive way, as long as we can, as long as the sun comes up peacefully and the earth holds together with sea in the ocean and land on the land . . . If everything goes crazy . . . we will still, more than ever, have to depend on Him. I tried to cheer her up and quote *śāstra*. The same person said she wants to be a counselor for devotees with problems. I said, "Counsel yourself first." And I say it to myself. Tell

your own story before you become a *raconteur* entertainer.

Live, live a life.

This is a busy afternoon. M. and I look at each other and talk of the smallest possible items, such as where the candles go in the van and whether to pack the gray or the saffron sweat pants for storage. I think it over and go back and forth in my mind, and finally say, "I'll keep the saffron and store away the gray." M. favors me wearing the gray and storing the saffron. I see his point and agree. Multiply that a hundred times and you know what we're doing today—packing the van. But we don't think it's foolish. It's quite serious as far as we are concerned. It's all paraphernalia for devotional service. That is a story too, and it is within the theme and jurisdiction of that quote at the beginning—all endeavors are to please the Lord.

Flower pots. One chair broke, a light burnt out, both happened today. The landlord can deal with it. We paid and we're leaving. I have all of Śrīla Prabhupāda's lecture tapes and I intend to hear them one after another and read what he's written and what they have transcribed of his speeches. The secret of life is therein. He wanted us all to surrender to Kṛṣṇa, and his desire was so strong and intent. To get close to that intent of Prabhupāda, to thrill to it, to pick it up and become infected by it, to become like him as the son is like the father . . . is my desire.

This is my story: I want to be myself, I *have to* be myself, but I want to be one in intent with the Lord and His pure devotee, Śrīla Prabhupāda. The way to do that is to dovetail, I know. And even more, give up all separate desires. You can't become desireless. Can I write stories for the Lord and the cause of my spiritual master? Yes, but not whimsically. Get this: "It does not mean that the Lord is impersonal and that he will bless any whimsical act, even unruly behavior" (*Renunciation Through Wisdom*, p. 114).

You are somewhere within the Lord's camp, but you don't want to remain on the outer fringe. Kṛṣṇa loves all souls, and especially all devotees, but some are dearer to Him than others. The most dear have given up all plans for sense gratification and they take pleasure in serving Kṛṣṇa, whom they love with all attention and free devotion. "Thus the Lord's equal disposition is not without varieties of personalism. In other words, the Lord reciprocates with us according to our intensity of love for Him" (p. 114). In the *Gītā* (4.11) He says, *ye yatam mām prapadyānte, tamś tataiva bhajam yaham*: "As all surrender unto Me, I reward them accordingly."

That's the crunch. How dear can you become? Kṛṣṇa doesn't even accept an offering unless it's made with devotion. As a man without hunger won't eat the food you offer to him, not matter how fancy you prepared for it, so Kṛṣṇa won't accept an offering of food or writing if it has no devotion. If you "offer" your service, but you are

after self-aggrandizement, Kṛṣṇa knows it and He doesn't take your so-called offering. He may even give you the material benefits you seek by writing, but you won't please Him. Then what good is your effort?

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/  
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.  
On this day before a journey, I appeal to all readers,  
please don't misbehave in the name of devotional  
service. I wish to please you and to please myself  
with writing—we all seek pleasure and informal  
ease, intimacy, but let's do it right. *Paramparā*. May  
our efforts be blessed in that way.

## Bouncing Along

I'm bouncing along in the back of the van, and it's hard to go deep in your mind like this. The main objectives seem to be not to get a headache and not to let the mind go way into all those recesses, past *māyā*, and so on. I look up and see that everything is rather firmly attached. The tapes are strapped in, the bins are locked, the pictures are pasted to the wall, the books are in their shelves, and so on. So I also am within myself, my physical organs bumping along, but not so bad, and then there is the mind. But you can't expect me to go deep.

What good is a passenger? He's like a parcel you hold in your lap. But then there is Śrīla Prabhupāda *mūrti*. He's packed away and riding safely, and my thoughts . . .

The passenger hopes that his subconscious or his unspoken self is somehow perking underneath the surface. I mean, he wants to pray, but he feels too much rocked about. How can you pray when you can't write on a firm surface with a pen, and when you just feel too rickety to go deep? I wonder, though, that the older I get, and when you get sick and finally when you die, how are you going to go deep then?

It really would be good if you could develop some talent on these rides. The best thing would be if you could learn to chant beyond sixteen rounds. I

have been doing that today, but it's the same thing, bouncing along. Your mind goes its own way. I don't want to run on here in a negative way. I came to this monologue because it was beckoning me.

Hour after hour goes by as we go upward on the *autostrade*, approaching Bologna northward. Some kind of trees, maybe olive trees, are all blooming a beautiful blushing pink. It's almost a violet pink. The farmers are cultivating these trees in long rows. Then separating the two-way highway is a yellow kind of weedy flower. That's what I see when I ride up front with Madhu. He seems to be content enough singing Hare Kṛṣṇa tunes, sometimes without earphones and sometimes with them. He sings and I chant *japa*. I was up there and the sun was glancing in. I thought I had better come back before I get a headache. I was thinking about this dictaphone in the coat pocket. If I could only get at it and say something . . . But what?

I answered letters while driving this morning for the first three hours before breakfast and then three hours before lunch. Now that's done, although my replies and the letters to me are still rattling around inside my head. My main impression is that each devotee is very sincere and surrendered. There are so few of them around the world. It's not a huge movement, but still, the devotees are precious.

One devotee who is pioneering in a place, told me that he's formed a "support group" of people who really care about preaching in that area. He'll be asking them for money. But that seems to be secondary. He said that he knows he should distri-

bute lots of books in this pioneering place, but over the years he has lost his faith about the efficacy of preaching. So the support group is formed just so that people would get together with him and encourage him to go ahead and do it, to preach. He expresses his fears and doubts to them and they encourage him. I thought, "What a nice idea!" Be honest enough to admit that you are weak-hearted, although you know you have a very good assignment. Get together some friends and ask them, "Please preach to me. Please encourage me to go ahead with my austerities in spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

Maybe I should do that too. In one sense, I do it within myself, asking my different "sub-parts" not to sabotage me, go ahead and write your little stories and do your writing sessions. People are waiting to get books from you. It doesn't have to be a lot of people. You don't have to be four weeks on *The New York Times* best-seller list. Just a book here and there, in East Europe, in Australia, in America, somebody who cares.

That much I can do while rattling around in the back of the van, pray for resolve to go on with my service. I have also been reading Prabhupāda for two hours a day for a few weeks, but now while traveling, nothing. I look up wistfully at the row of the books and wait for this van to stop. But I know when it stops, I'll probably be too tired to read. Oh well, the time will come again. The passenger will unpack himself and become a real person again, capable of reading and writing. At least for now he

can chant his mechanical chant, Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare as we bounce along. And this travel travail also has a purpose. We are moving in Kṛṣṇa's service. We're traveling preachers. We're going to Kṛṣṇa's temple, Prabhupāda-deśa, Vicenza, Italy.



## Story Improvised in Vicenza (#1)

The herb announced that His Excellency was about to lose all his teeth.

"Is this a bad thing, a calamity?"

No, said Herb, it is a relief as far as we heard he said.

"Why is that? Doesn't he like his teeth? What happened to them anyway?" asked Oyster, the second in charge.

Herb explained, "His teeth are fine. No cavities. But it's the gums that hold them."

So they described the nature of pyorrhea while they stood on the ramparts of the fort.

*(Opening Scene)*

Alas, who goes there? Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

The restless Senate could hardly keep their eyes and minds on the subject at hand. They were all bustling men and a few women with plans to eat and stimulate their genitals after working hours, and even shamelessly during working hours. But the American public foolishly demanded that they be chaste and celibate as befits officers, legislators of the highest posts. So the Senate, unfit as it was, was constantly making proposals and laws for tremendous tasks of energy and group intelligence and a long tradition of how these things get done.

For my purpose, it is too bewildering to the mind to try to understand it. And what profit anyway? They are all *mūḍhas* and we shall not dawdle here, but switch our attention to some sages.

(Next scene)

There is a big meadow in Naimiṣaraṇya, India, near Lucknow. Satsvarūpa is there talking to himself and others.

Satsvarūpa: I've come to Naimiṣaraṇya near the train station Naimis or something because Śrīla Prabhupāda said we could visit all these places of holy India. I used to think only Vṛndāvana counted. Then my Godbrother in a lecture told of some preaching they were doing here. He said there was a clarity of thought that awaits a devotee who comes here. In his lectures on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.2.6, Śrīla Prabhupāda mentioned that sages come here. My purpose is to do a writing retreat. (Satsvarūpa then busies himself writing indoors on note pads he's brought from the West. His writing is confidential, and when people ask him what it actually contains, he says it is for the Centennial.)

(Next scene)

This should contain some conflict or flow of action or maybe not. It's up to you. Why are you writing this and what do you want to give your readers? What can you give them now, considering all this?

Parrot: I am a parrot of Naimiṣaraṇya. I speak whatever is in the *śāstra*. If you like you can believe

it, but I overheard the sages speak *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and I can repeat it and also add something sweet with my beak.

Dog: I am a dog in India. I can't pronounce the big words. I live in Naimi and piss here, and clean up after myself with movements of my rear feet. I am sorry I am a dog.

Satsvarūpa, writing: (The camera zooms in and we see what he has etched on the page, these words:)

"Cartoon character Popeye observes fast on Ekādaśī. My angular neck holds up one head a little longer. The arrow of Kṛṣṇa contains His five charming abilities to stun the *gopīs* by His form, enchanting odor (as smelled by Lord Caitanya in the garden at Purī), the touch of His feet, the sound of His flute, and so on."

Okay, now this story or play is going to take a break (very short one) and figure out why the heck we are here and what we're going to do.

Man 1: Why aren't there other characters in this story?

Man 2: I have one. How about a different story of dogs who live in an abandoned human's shack in Italy on the Adriatic? We can tell of their domestic troubles. It'll be humorous.

Man 1: That's all right, but that's a different one. Now that we've opened our mouths, as if complaining about the self-centered author, now we are implicated in the deficiency of this story and ought

to contribute something. I think a little control is in order, and some management.

(The two men take up *karatālas* and *mṛdaṅga* and begin to sing Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. This way, at least the holy name appears and the reader needn't feel gypped.)

Narrator: What finally happens is that the Senate and the two watchmen on the parapet and Satsvarūpa and his teeth and all other persons and properties as may appear in this story, not forgetting the fact that the spirit soul is eternal—all aforementioned conditioned souls as apart from liberated, do die, do pass away. Any story, when continued, comes to this conclusion, and this story, being a long-time one, does also come to that point. Whatever each person thought of at the time of death determines his next life. Those descriptions that were clearly imaginary, never existed in reality anyway. And those thoughts that were too big for our present intelligence (I mean for the intelligence of this puny author), I hereby admit I cannot handle. Go to a philosopher for them.

In Brooklyn, then, this story was not hatched, as you might think. It comes from the mind of man. And all comes from Bhagavān. He knows I tried a little. I shall try more and try getting them together. But precious as it sounds, this is the story I wanted to write for now. Or more accurately, this is the best I could dash off and all I was willing to do. Per-

versely, this I want to be published or printed or at least typed for me and my friends to look at later—as a *specimen* like that human body shrunk up by the Native Indians of America and preserved in a museum case in Brooklyn where we students were shocked to see it and didn't know whether to laugh or feel something profound like horror at the human predicament.

## Stone Cold Dead in the Market

I don't like danger, don't like to venture out, so I may not be the best one to tell this story. Bad things are always happening. You try to be on your own and tell your own story, what wants to come out.

Here is a small plastic bag containing dust from Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *bhajana-kuṭīr* in Godruma, Māyāpura. He built the house himself, they say. He lived there and chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa and wrote beautiful poems and essays. In some, he revealed that his eternal *rasa* was that of *gopī-maṇjarī*. Go ahead, I tell myself, open the envelope and look at the dust.

I flake a few drops onto my pink palm. It's like from an old warehouse in Brooklyn. Or these could be small chips of cement from the sidewalk my father made outside our house in 1950, Great Kills, Staten Island. Then I look at my palm where the dust is resting. My palm is smooth, pinkish, with many criss-crossed lines. Are palm lines supposed to be filled with so many scratchings? I could get someone to read it and listen to him become my guru and guide as he said how I was extraordinary or ordinary. Back to the dust. There's one piece that won't crumble. It's a tiny chip of stone. Other pieces scatter and crumble onto the page. I pick them up by pressing my finger against them, place them onto my tongue, and drink them down with a sip of water. There, it's done.

What do you think? I think people who go out and do many things in the world don't really act . . .

I think this room is chilly no matter how high up I turn the electric radiator. Time is going by . . .

I . . . still have that one little piece of cement. Now I put it back in the bag.

Oh, if you were venturesome, at least in your mind, you could go to Godruma and see a grove of trees, and look in the *kuṭir* window and see the large form of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura chanting *japa* or writing with a pen. Or he's eating flat rice and mango or yogurt.

No, I don't see it. I don't desire to see it.

Or you could read in your spiritual master's book. You left off where he was criticizing Śrī Aurobindo. It was interesting. You could discover who you are. Then you say, "I'm crippled by inattention." It's not a very successful day. I am feeling sorry for myself that I am not able to write something better or at least read . . . Why are you so sure you'll fall asleep? And even if you do, you might get a little bit done and that will be worth it.

They leave me alone.

This is no fiction. More like a writing session confession.

Or a very low-flying-little-self-essay.

I hear a boy's voice in this building. That's all for now. Take a break.

A toy broke on its way to the market. Five fences collapsed. A lone man worked in the field, tying the branches of his olive trees onto cement posts. A

car zimmered by, wailing its toy-like Japanese motor wail. You enter silence, you enter the pain of stiffness in the back of your neck.

I can't submit this as my story of the day. You don't have to. Just let it sit here.

It's not nothing. It's just a little response. You are unsettled, having moved out of a four-week retreat where you were managing your time well, and now you're unsettled.

Oh, tomorrow, the twelve people will sit down and look at me in a meeting for my disciples. What can I say? It's like being cornered. The basis for the meeting is that I am special. But I don't want to feel that way. Do I boast, explain, apologize?

You can put that aside and talk of *japa*. That's the idea. But who am I to talk of that? Shall I confess? No, mostly you just talk of it as something we are all interested to do. You don't have to bare your chest or thump it, *mea culpa, mea culpa*, my profound guilt. Just talk about it and then do a demonstration of *japa*. Say, "Isn't it nice?"

That's what's on my mind and maybe it's hampering my writing. I have already given two lectures here. Each day I will have to give two from now on, so don't berate yourself that you are not doing much writing. You will have some time, you will adjust, you always do, and find a way to "make money" in this particular climate. Either writing sessions or stories. It won't be like South Italy or like Śaraṇāgati. Something new. You can do it. Get into a process-oriented form of telling a story.



