

Lessons from the Road
Volume Nine

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

Lessons from the Road

I'm getting to really like this idea of "finding the good" in America. Bad news travels fast. Good news needs a preacher. I've really heard enough bad news—I'm ready to hear some good stuff, even if small. Write on!

—Letter from Jayādvaita Swami, November 1987

Also, criticism by itself, even true criticism, does not do much good in a monastery. We stand much more in need of encouragement, of positive and clear direction. We know well enough what is wrong with us ... but we cannot seem to do anything about it. What we need above all is words that will make us love one another and advice that will strengthen us to overcome evil with good.

—Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Dallas

In going to different temples and seeing the Deities, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, there is no need of education, there is no need of philosophy, there is no need of science—simply if you visit temples of Viṣṇu, then your life is successful. This is the Kṛṣṇa conscious process, simply if you move to the temples and see with your eyes ... it's a very simple process.

—Lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda in Los Angeles,
June 19, 1972 on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.3.22

As you drive from Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, you see them—castles of shimmering glass, marble, and cement. They stand around like Gandharva-Purī, dreams on the barren plain.

And very often when I visit Dallas I see a car accident on Route 35. Today also we had to slow down when we saw sparkling flares on the road. Two police cars were blocking the road, and there was an ambulance. The first disabled car was not so badly smashed, but beyond it the other car was four feet off the ground, wrapped around a cement pole. The car was astride the safety barrier, the front hanging over the side, the rear on the freeway. The driver's side was mangled and ripped, the steering wheel embedded in the driver's seat.

So the temple is to teach us that the Gandharva-Purī will vanish along with all the people—it's just a play of mirrors, a manipulation of matter to make us think that false is real. And it ends in a crack-up, not just for one out of ten thousand, but for everyone who rides.

The Kṛṣṇa temple teaches us that there is a real Purī, Vaikuṇṭha, where there are no bone-smashing accidents and no anxiety of death. In Vaikuṇṭha everyone loves and serves Kṛṣṇa. In the material world, the temple bravely declares war against the surrounding *māyā*, but in Vaikuṇṭha, *everyone and every place* is in accord with the worship of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

Rādhā-Kālachandjī is
 the roundness,
 calmness,
 and influence
 of the moon.
 He is God,
 the black moon.

He arrived in Dallas,
 just before Prabhupāda,
 who installed the Lord
 and sprinkled water on our heads.

He is the Lord of my life,
 although I was not able
 to worship Him well.
 Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Goswami
 was fit for that—
 he built the Dallas Palace.
 “Why spend so much money
 for Deities in Texas?
 It doesn’t make sense.”
 But the Black Jewel emerged
 in the palatial setting—
 inspiration for devotees
 and for Kālachandjī’s restaurant.

Govardhana-pūjā

Navīna Kṛṣṇa dāsa made announcements at the microphone. He said that as we go on chanting, love of God will gradually be revealed in our hearts. Yes, I thought, but when will it be more blazing? We are such meager devotees, at least I am. Others showed their true devotion today by working long hours in the kitchen or at Deity service. Some have gone out for the weekend trying to raise money. These are all signs of love for God.

At the Sunday Feast, I spoke on the *līlā* of Govardhana: Just worship Kṛṣṇa, you don't have to worship the demigods. After my talk, they asked me to announce, "The hill will come out in five minutes." But after chanting for twenty minutes, the hill still didn't appear. I became anxious and called for Saṅkarṣaṇa dāsa.

"Don't worry," he said. "They're Indians, they won't leave. They're glued to the Deities."

As I looked to Rādhā-Kālachandjī in Their new blue outfits and then to the crowd of five-hundred strong, I felt reassured. They sat peacefully on the floor, chanting along or just watching and waiting. It occurred to me that just by birth in India these people have gained enormous pious credit; they can sit and watch Kṛṣṇa for a long time. And even if some are beginning to leave because the so-called Govardhana Hill has not arrived, why should I worry? My service is to lead the chanting, and that means that the high point of the whole evening is happening right now: so go on chanting, even if they leave.

After a half hour of *kīrtana*, they brought the hill in. It was made of rice, so hot you could hardly touch it. As we scooped some from around the base of the hill, red and blue dyes came off onto our hands. The people

milled forward. We had asked them to circumambulate, but they just pressed in and held out their hands for the hot rice. A few ladies started circumambulating, looking fondly at the little Deity of Kṛṣṇa atop the hill. Gradually the temple room began to thin out, as most of the guests headed for the queue to receive full *prasādam*—*purīs*, *halavā*, rice, *pakorā*, two *sabjīs*. and sweet-rice. And they went outside with their plates to sit in the mild, autumn evening.

October 26, Disappearance Day of Śrīla Prabhupāda

Last night I spoke with Navīna Kṛṣṇa about how we would observe Prabhupāda's disappearance day. He said most devotees he had spoken with were not so much interested in a formal philosophical lecture but wanted to share reminiscences of Prabhupāda. I am not averse to straight anecdotes of Prabhupāda nectar, but I think that on his disappearance day we should face up to at least some of the pain we feel in separation from him. When we openly admit our loss, we need consolation from the Vaiṣṇava *siddhānta*. And for that we turn to Prabhupāda's purports.

Prabhupāda expertly describes the disappearance of the spiritual master in a series of verses and purports in the Fourth Canto, Chapter 28. Vaidarbhī, the wife of a king, had just experienced the passing away of her beloved husband. Prabhupāda describes her grief and compares it to the situation of a disciple when his spiritual master departs from the world. The loss is not merely a personal one, but it is a loss for the whole world. As Prabhupāda writes, "The *ācārya*, the authorized representative of the Supreme Lord, establishes these principles, but when he disappears, things again become disordered. The perfect disciples of the *ācārya* try to relieve the situation by sincerely following the instructions of the spiritual master." Śrīla Prabhupāda



was single-handedly holding off the worst effects of Kali-yuga, just like Mahārāja Parīkṣit. Now we have felt the disorder within our own ranks, and many have been dispersed or shaken.

Prabhupāda states that the sincere disciple should rather die than give up the orders of the *guru*. "To execute the will of the spiritual master, the disciple should be prepared to lay down his life and abandon all personal considerations." Relief comes by the appearance of "an old friend," the Supersoul. In the story of Queen Vaidarbhī, a *brāhmaṇa* friend actually appears before her and pacifies her. Similarly, Prabhupāda advises us that if we seriously follow the spiritual master, even after his disappearance, then "this resolution is tantamount to seeing the Supreme Personality of Godhead ... this means meeting the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the instruction of the spiritual master."

The demise of the trailer

Bhakta Kent and Goloka arrived safely in Dallas. They said the Kāmadhuk and the van made it all right, but Kent broke the news to me, by note, that we had lost our little Coachmen trailer:

After driving seven hours straight, I was only two hours outside of Dallas, Texas, at about 4:00 A.M. I decided to stop for a few hours so as to be fresh and cleaned up in order to represent you for the morning program in Dallas temple. Fighting off sleep, I suddenly felt the Dhuk shrugging and jolting. Looking out the rear-view mirror, I saw sparks flying up like a "rooster-tail" from a ski boat speeding along a lake surface. Pulling over slowly, I tried to keep the trailer from skidding on its side. It was bouncing back and forth, almost ready to go over. By Kṛṣṇa's mercy it didn't happen. Finally, it came to a stop off the roadway. I turned off the lights and fell asleep. Three hours later I woke up and was ready to deal with the temporary reality. I thought it was just a flat, so I got the necessary tools and walked around to the back to unbolt the spare tire. But then I realized that the entire axle had snapped off, causing a two-hundred foot gouge-signature in the roadway. The "kitchen" was beyond repair.

We had been thinking it was too luxurious for me to keep a separate trailer for *brahmacārīs* and a traveling kitchen, and now it's gone. Is the Kāmadhuk next? And one night like that, will I suddenly turn into a trail of sparklers?

Rādhā-Kālachandjī

The pillars, peacocks, lions,
and all intervening space
emanate from Him.

We worship Him
 as Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa,
 yet He's Kṛṣṇa,
 who holds a flute.
 His body curves three times,
 and that strong, arched foot.

In Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Goswami's room, there is an original painting of Sura dāsa singing for Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is listening, sitting beside him. Kṛṣṇa is always with us, but we're blind—and Bilvamāṅgala is not blind. In TKG's room there is also a large painting of Nṛsiṃhadeva over the bed. While pacing and chanting *japa* last night, I glanced and noticed the toughness of His lion's muzzle—it's a toughness protecting me. And I keep seeing the demon's blood all over the palace floor.

Dallas backyard notes

The crinkling leaves are carpeting the flat earth. A blue jay with white breast is raucously calling from overhead, and another jay is answering back from a far corner of the lot. A U.S. postman is slowly making his rounds. *Gurukula* boys and girls run out from the classrooms, boys wrestling, kicking a ball, girls riding the swings. This lot is filled with many good pecan trees. They're canopy trees, especially valuable for shade during the long, hot summers.

I can hear the steady hum of tires and engines from the highway, and from here you can also see cars and trucks rolling along Highway 35. I remember in the early 1970's I thought that Dallas was my *prabhu-datta deśa*. I recall walking out from the temple one day when the meetings and problems became too much. I walked down the block toward the highway and stopped a few minutes in a deserted lot with a few trees. I became

peaceful and pledged myself to surrender a lifetime to Dallas ISKCON. Although I couldn't know the future, I weighed it somehow and agreed to put my life in the care of Rādhā-Kālachandjī Mandira. But since then Śrīla Prabhupāda moved me elsewhere, and my own desires have kept me moving.... But to live in a surrendered way gives strength and peace of mind. You are ready for whatever comes. The Alamo heroes must have felt peace when they decided not to run away, but fight and die.

He who agrees to serve Rādhā-Kālachandjī under all circumstances conquers the powerful Ajita. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that Kṛṣṇa is in our hearts, and when we're happy to hear His name and fame and activities, then He reveals Himself, "Here I am." That's what it means to *conquer* Kṛṣṇa.

When ISKCON guruship first began, I again came to reside in Dallas in 1978. The *gurukula* had recently closed. It was like beginning all over again, except without the initial enthusiasm. There were a few early warning signs that I wasn't a *paramahansa* and that Godbrothers were doubtful, but most of us missed the first signals. Śeṣa came to join me, and we entered the *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*. Mahākrama came and observed Cāturmāsya by chanting sixty-four rounds daily, until he became too weak to preach. Sitting in this yard, I wrote a letter to Pradyumna.... But why go back to all that? The present is a bright October day. "God is in that building over there."

Kālachandjī-kathā

I requested the assembled devotees to write their realizations about Rādhā-Kālachandjī, so that I could broadcast Their glories. Rādhā-vinoda dāsa writes,

"Sometimes in the morning He looks like a cowherd boy, but after 7:00 A.M., when He reappears with His fancy dress, I cannot see Him in any other way but the "King of Dvārakā" in full opulence." That is what I was thinking also. But I was thinking that I prefer Him at *maṅgala-ārati*. You can better see His mighty head and strong right shoulder without the "interference" of big crowns, garlands, and necklaces. When you attend the main *darsana*, you anticipate how magnificently He will be dressed. But in the early morning you anticipate how He will be unencumbered, just His mighty form in simple dress. But Rādhā-vinoda thinks, "There may be some Deities that go well with simple outfits, but I think that Kālachandjī likes very opulent dresses and jewelry."

"He looks majestic and sober," writes Rādhā-vinoda, "and always very satisfied, undisturbed by all the problems. He is observing our attempt at devotional service. By personal experience I understand that He is not depending on our services, but He is the one who is arranging for the needful. Very often we see that a devotee in an important department suddenly decides to leave, but somehow a person comes to fill in that position. I think He is trying to teach us dependence on Him. Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī looks like a very merciful queen to me. Their setting is more like a magnificent palace, rarely a forest."

Dr̥ṣṭa Prabhu writes, "I'd like to wish myself back to that day when we opened the curtains and saw Kālachandjī in His new altar. It was so ecstatic."

From Gopīnātha-devī dāśī:

When you sew for the Deities you have as much realization of Kṛṣṇa being present as you do when you see Him on the altar. Once someone asked me how I knew Kṛṣṇa was

present in His Deity form. I said, "Because He gains and loses weight." Since I have been here in Dallas, the Rādhā-Kālachandjī Deities have gained, and we have had to make a two-inch adjustment from the measurements that used to fit two years ago.

From Indranīlamanī-devī dāsī:

Sometimes at night my husband and I test each other to see how well we worshiped Their Lordships with our vision, otherwise what's the use of having two eyes, if it's not to drink with them the nectar of Rādhā-Kālachandjī's beauty? If we need to ask what color turban Kālachandjī had on when in actuality He had a crown, or if we don't know how many rings He wore, or if we forget that *tulasī* leaves were decorating His lotus feet, then our eyes are no better than the peacock's feathers. So we go to rest meditating on Their Lordships, waiting until the next day to taste more nectar.

Dallas pecans

The neighborhood Mexicans are walking on the border of the ISKCON property picking up pecans for selling. They're eating a few also. They are not going about their pecan-picking in a passionate way, just kicking the dead leaves, and whenever they see a pecan, they bend down and put it in a little bag. But a few of their friends are doing the same down the block. Eventually they may collect enough to turn them into cash. The squirrels are also after the pecans. I'm in their midst, chanting my rounds and gathering "pecans" of devotional life in Dallas:

(1) Wherever you enter the building you see the name *Kālachandjī*. "Dallas" or "ISKCON" do not appear as much. It is all *His*, Kālachandjī the Kartāmi-śāyī.

(2) In the front hall of the *mandira*, there is a plastic-covered tray containing *mahā-prasādam*. A sign invites

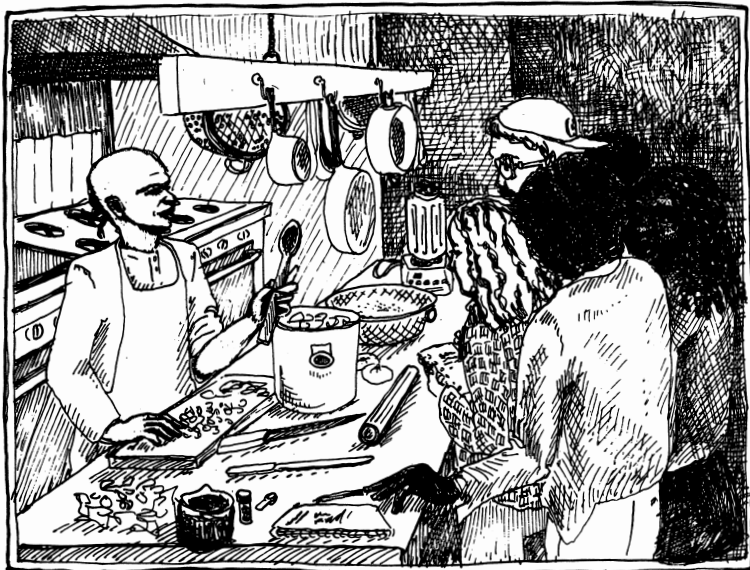
the guest, "Please take *mahā-prasādam*, remnants of food offered to Rādhā-Kālachandjī." Beside the tray is a stack of paper cups. A guest is supposed to take a cup, open the lid, and scoop up some *mahā*. It's available any time of the day.

(3) The managers of Kālachandjī's Restaurant discourage devotees from walking around the restaurant in saffron *dhotīs*. This is so that the customers can feel relaxed. But as soon as a customer walks out the restaurant door, he immediately faces the temple store, and a row of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatams*. There is also a free literature rack in the hall. And at each restaurant table is a leaflet.

(4) Navīna Kṛṣṇa has been reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's 1972 letters. Sometimes in his morning announcements after *maṅgala-ārati* and in his *Bhāgavatam* class and even on a little sign above his desk, he has quoted Prabhupāda's message from those 1972 letters:

Make certain that your routine work is going on nicely—chanting sixteen rounds, rising early, cleansing, street *saṅkīrtana*, etc. then all other programs will be successful. If routine work becomes slack or neglected, then all other attempts will fail.

I went to Rādhā-vinoda's house and watched his informal cooking class. He had gathered a group of interested vegetarians in his small kitchen. They like him. They joke about "the Rādhā system of measurement," because when he measures an ingredient, it is a spontaneous pinch or feeling for how much is to be added. They seem to be old friends. As an outsider, I stood back and watched. But they also welcomed me. He was making rice, *pakorās* ... but after a while, I had



Rādhā-vinoda's cooking class

too many other things on my mind, such as letters from Śrīdhara Mahārāja followers, thoughts about an *iṣṭa-goṣṭhī* I want to hold with Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Goswami's disciples, and a need to go and read Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. I left Rādhā-vinoda's class early, and of course it went on without me, as it goes on every Wednesday night.

I walked over to Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Goswami's office and read a few of Śrīla Prabhupāda's letters from 1970. In one letter Prabhupāda was writing about an Indian man who had given Sanskrit and philosophy classes from the *vyāsāsana* in the London temple. Prabhupāda wrote, "Regarding the Sanskrit class, I think it was only a plea, but he wanted to teach us something in philosophy." Then Śrīla Prabhupāda said—and this really hit me—"It is definitely concluded that we have not got to learn anything from any outsider beyond the jurisdiction of Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava philosophy" (Letter of May 27, 1970).

Gurudeva

Last night we held a meeting for the disciples of TKG. I suggested that they hold occasional meetings among themselves. "Advertise that *prasādam* will be served," I said, "to increase the attendance." Hold it like an *iṣṭa-goṣṭhī*. Have a business part of the meeting where you discuss arrangements for Vyāsa-pūjā celebration and things like that. Then a philosophy section with topics like "Service in Separation," "Gurudeva's Writings," and read from his books, and so on. Mathurānātha said he thought Gurudeva would like the idea of the meetings and the fact that I had suggested it.

I spoke to them about my own friendship with TKG. Now, a day later, writing in the pecan lot, I'm thinking, which is the higher truth, the relative or the absolute? Godbrothers have a relative view of TKG or SDG or any *guru-bhāi*, and the *śiṣyas* have their absolute view. So it's possible that a devotee may be relative to some and absolute to others. Even Kṛṣṇa is worshiped as the relative by Yaśodā and Nanda. We have to accommodate both absolute and relative in our ISKCON house. Kṛṣṇa consciousness must be big-hearted, or it will split into more and more pieces.

As I write, one of TKG's disciples is picking up litter from the lot covered with pecan leaves. His Gurudeva is my friend.

Travel day, Dallas—San Antonio

Travel seems anticlimactic. Maybe that's because it's autumn, and the end of our U.S. travels is in sight. So why not end "traveling" right now and instead simply serve and preach, wherever you may be, without thinking of yourself as a world-traveler? Just share Kṛṣṇa consciousness without pretention.

When I went before Rādhā-Kālachandjī one last time, I felt encouraged and thought, *This is your reward, devotional service: God is Kṛṣṇa.*

While on the road, do you remember how Rādhā-Kālachandjī were dressed this morning? Just above His lotus feet, I saw white cuffs, then black silk pants, a white silk shirt with puffy sleeves, a gold *jārī* crown. Rādhārāṇī was also in black and white, with gold and black embroidery on Her blouse. Her face was slightly tinged with red.

The road is as dark as night, although it's 6:00 A.M.—just a long white highway ribbon ahead. I'm thinking of my friends in the Dallas temple and my last words with Navīna Kṛṣṇa.

Someone had criticized the temple for not preaching. I defended, "Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī wasn't against big temples or why did he build them? When he said, 'Better to take the marble out of the temple and print books,' he meant that they were quarreling over proprietorship of the rooms. He wanted both book distribution and temples."

"Yes," said Navīna Kṛṣṇa, "and Śrīla Prabhupāda built so many big temples in India."

"Also this temple," I said, "was built personally for the worship of Rādhā-Kālachandjī."

"There is so much preaching going on from this temple and the restaurant," said Navīna. We acknowledged that there is a lack of preaching. But why criticize the good they're doing?

CHAPTER NINETEEN

San Antonio / Austin

San Antonio, Camp Alamo, Halloween, grackles, and fallen leaves

I need to read Prabhupāda's books. It's not enough to note down the birds I see or to read newspapers and say that this is also Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I need direct contact. Śrīla Prabhupāda has given it. And I've come to San Antonio to give it to whoever will take it. I haven't come here as a saint to give my own *śakti*, but as a deliverer of the king of knowledge. And if they ask, "Well what do *you* experience of love of God?" I'll say, "I'm just a deliverer of the message." If I believe it, maybe Kṛṣṇa will inspire me to be actually humble. The main thing is not personal disclosures, but sharing the science of *bhakti-yoga*. As stated by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, "In this age of Kali, there are no genuine religious principles. There are only the Vaiṣṇava devotees and the Vaiṣṇava devotional scriptures" (Cc. *Madhya* 9.362).

Tonight at John Goudge's house I'm going to say:

"I assume that most of you want to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and it's mostly a matter of finding space and time in your lives to do it. We have to be convinced that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is as important as paying the rent or getting extra sleep and exercise or as reading a favorite book.

"Then how do we become more convinced and

inspired? By hearing from the *sāstra* and associating with devotees."

About ten people gathered at John's apartment. He told me that they all had some previous acquaintance with Kṛṣṇa consciousness. A few wore neck beads and were initiated. One was the mother of a thirty-year-old man, Neil, who wanted to come but was ill, so he sent his mom to get some *prasādam* for him. She sat on a chair and listened attentively. Later she asked me, "What is it that attracts people to the East? I'm studying Shiatsu, and it seems like so many things are connected to the East, nowadays."

I said, "The East has wisdom."

"Oh yes," she said, "they are much older cultures."

"And especially India," I said. "Kṛṣṇa and His incarnations appeared there." She nodded enthusiastically.

It was unpretentious, with all of us except mom sitting on the bare floor, singing and talking about Kṛṣṇa. John and Goloka had cooked the feast, and although the yellow rice was a bit dry and cakey, the vegetables half-cooked in the style of Nature Cure, there was no bread on the menu—it was all delicious and no one complained.

"What is the history of the *mahā-mantra*?" asked a man named Ross. He was a well-dressed person, whom no outsider would suspect of being interested in the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*. I replied with caution, almost academically, that the *mahā-mantra* is beyond history. Later, talking with him more intimately in a corner of the room, he referred to his own reading of the *Japa Reform Notebook*.

"Is quantitative chanting more important than qualitative?" he asked.

"You should establish some quota, even if it's only four rounds," I said.

"Well I do one round," he said. "But sometimes it's very difficult to find time."

Another man with a black beard and an intellectual appearance said, "You mentioned ecstasy. Is it true that Prabhupāda showed that stage?"

"Oh yes. But he didn't like to manifest it. He wrote in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* how one time Lord Caitanya met a pure devotee, Rāmānanda Rāya. When they met they felt ecstasy and symptoms of love of God. But Rāmānanda Rāya was a king, so he was accompanied by ritualistic priests and government men, and they were all amazed when they saw the two pure devotees manifesting ecstatic symptoms. When Lord Caitanya saw them all looking on, He checked His ecstasy. Ecstasy shouldn't be displayed. Prabhupāda wanted everyone to become Kṛṣṇa conscious, but he didn't try to make followers by displays of ecstasy."

"But sometimes?"

"Yes, sometimes he couldn't check it. Yes. We all want ecstasy. But we have to chant sincerely and it comes on its own time."

A man who seemed the least interested asked John if he could play the guitar while we were all having *prasādam*. John agreed, but a string was missing, and so he couldn't play.

It was easy to move from person to person. I spoke to Kṛṣṇa Caitanya dāsa, who was with his wife; both are initiated disciples of Tamāla Kṛṣṇa Goswami. They have served in Hong Kong and in the Philippines.

"We're practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness privately now," said Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. He said he had conducted a *yoga* class in Hong Kong, and he thought of doing it

again someday in San Antonio. A Mexican man said he had been initiated by Rāmeśvara Mahārāja. He remembered me because we were both present in 1973 at the installation of the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Deities in Mexico City.

The mom who was there on behalf of her son said, "I didn't know there were so many people in San Antonio who were interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness." She didn't mean it sarcastically that a mere ten people comprised the followers of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but she seemed appreciative that so many had gathered. We talked about the history of Kṛṣṇa consciousness preaching in San Antonio—Viṣṇujana's days here and the various *saṅkīrtana* parties, including my own group, who used to go out daily on *hari-nāma* and distribute *Back to Godheads* at the Alamo.

"Maybe someday we'll have a Ratha-yātrā here," said John.

"The first thing," I said, "is to practice your own *sādhana*."

The home program at John's was a lesson for me on the importance of contact *saṅkīrtana*. People who have lived for a month or two in a temple turn out to be lifetime followers of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They remember their intense period of service as the most important spiritual experience of their lives. We shouldn't think of people as blooming just because they leave the temple. In one sense, we have all bloomed into the material ocean, and we remain unsaved until we reach the stage of unalloyed devotional service.

Those who want to preach should know that there are hundreds and thousands of opportunities such as we found in San Antonio. As Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote in a letter, "Actually, in every town and city there are many, many devotees of Kṛṣṇa; now it is our business

to go around the world wherever people are congregating and pick up these sincere souls. The world is suffering for want of this knowledge of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and we experience practically that many people will take to this spiritual line simply if we make this information available to them." Some of the guests last night had been discovered by lists of names at the Dallas temple.

"The other day," said Ross, "a small plane flew very close over my car and I suddenly shouted 'Kṛṣṇa!' I realized the end can come like that. Is the goal of chanting to remember Kṛṣṇa at the end of life?"

"Yes," I said, "and the more we practice, we'll be more able to do it at the end."

Who is to say that these sincere people, even if they appear merged into the common scene, will not remember Kṛṣṇa when it counts the most? How important, then, to visit and remind them!

At St. Edwards College, Houston, Texas

A Catholic Seminarian, Mike Santos, invited us to meet with him and two of his professors on campus at St. Edwards. Mike wears neck beads, chants *japa*, and reads Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. We waited in the students' lounge while Mike went to get his professors, Ed and Bob. As we waited, a student walked in and sat down. "I'm Scott," he said. Madhu and I introduced ourselves. Scott then picked up a remote control panel, pushed a button, and a TV soap opera came on loud and clear.

"You look—incredible," said the actor on TV. He confessed that he was still in love with the blonde beauty, even though she had decided to marry someone else.

"I just want to know if we can still be friends," said the actor.

"Why not?" said the blonde.

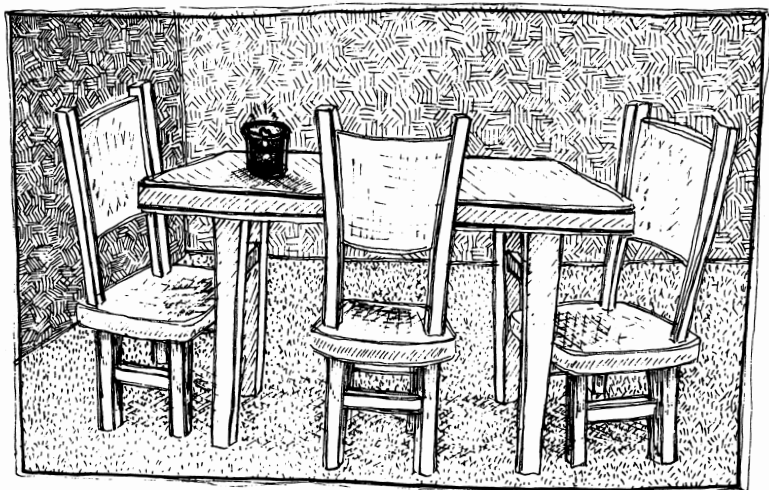
I was thinking, *Hey Scott, how come you're watching this garbage? Why don't you read Saint John of the Cross or one of those other interesting books on the "prayer" bookshelf?*

Bob and Ed soon arrived and we went to another room where there was a table with a candle burning in a glass.

"A devotee in San Antonio," I began, "told me that one of you said there are two kinds of religionists, lumpers and choppers. Lumpers find the common elements in different religions and bring them together, and choppers look for the difference. And I heard that one of you said 'I am a lumper.' "

"I said that," laughed Ed, who was bearded. "But I got it from Huston Smith."

I said that the common denominator among devotees of different religions is their *bhakti*. Within Vedic tradition there are *karmīs*, *jñānīs*, *yogīs*, and *bhaktas*. So



we devotees of Kṛṣṇa identify with the pure *bhakti* movement, even as we find it in other religious paths, more than we identify with the path of impersonal speculation, wherever it appears. I said that I had been reading the autobiography of Saint Teresa of Avila and found agreeable similarities between her realizations and those of Lord Caitanya. I just happened to have her book with me, and so I read aloud how Saint Teresa was in favor of "Deity worship":

This was the reason I like images so much. Unfortunate are those who through their own fault lose this great good. It indeed appears that they do not love the Lord, for if they loved Him, they would rejoice to see a portrait of Him, just as here on earth it really gives joy to see the one whom you deeply love.

Ed and Bob enthusiastically elaborated on the Catholic belief in the worship of *mūrtis* and pictures. One of them mentioned how much he felt at home when he saw the beautiful decorated Deities at Dallas.

Seeing these professors as well-wishers, I raised a delicate "chopper" question. SDG: "May I ask a question about our understanding of Jesus Christ as we learned from our spiritual master? He, more than any other Vedic spiritual master, was asked questions about Christianity, since he was preaching in the West. And he always said very devotional things about Christ—offering him all obeisances and commenting that he's considered an incarnation of God because he always talked about love of God. But he didn't say that God has only one son and there is no other manifestation. Now that's the kind of thing that we hear from some Christians. Not only do they recognize that we're different from them, but they go to the scriptural statements 'I am the way and the light, and there's no way but through me

to the father.' And that's it. And if you're worshipping something else.... "

Edward Shirley: "The cosmic Jesus is in a sense more important than the historical Jesus. When we believe in his crucifixion and resurrection, then we accept, basically, that he permeates all of realities."

Bob Fastiggi: "Cosmic, the cosmic Christ, the cosmic logos."

Ed: "The cosmic Christ ... Even those who do not have explicit faith in Jesus, in that historical manifestation. You know, we believe in the Light that enlightens all men. All people participate in him without realizing it, so it's similar to the way you would look upon that statement in the *Gītā* that says that basically all worship comes to Me.... "

SDG: "As they approach Me, I reciprocate."

Ed: "As Catholics we cannot get rid of the identification of the historical Jesus as the topmost revelation of God. But, also because we have that metaphysical sense, we recognize that it's not simply a historical personality we're talking about, but that historical personality is, you know, the all-permeating reality of God. And so we would say that, for example, the people in other traditions, even without knowing the name of Jesus—the scripture says that you cannot be saved by any other name—but even without knowing the name, or if you follow in a different name.... "

SDG: "Just by following His will."

Ed: "Yeah, by following His will, and it says in the statement of Vatican II that, even an atheist who follows the dictates of his conscience, even if he hasn't gotten the full light, he can be guided, you know, into salvation."

Bob: "The statement is, 'Those also can be saved who due to no fault of their own do not know the gospel yet

strive by their deeds, by God's grace, to do His will, as it is known to them, according to the dictates of their conscience.' So the idea here is that salvation is the universal reality and can't be made exclusive only to Christians. It clearly would be to deny the mercy of God or the universality of God's compassion. The statement I often refer to is the first letter of John, which says God is love and those who live in love, live in God, and God lives in them. So are we to say that love is exclusively the domain of Christians? This would be to deny the universality of God! So I think the key is understanding the Trinity and understanding the idea of the divine logos as an all-pervasive, universal wisdom of God or the all-pervasive self-expression of God."

Ed: "Which we believe is God Himself. And so the basic question here, you know, between our traditions, would be, whereas you would feel the ultimate revelation of God is in perhaps the *Bhagavad-gītā*, or with Lord Caitanya, we would say that we would have no problem in the sense of identifying Him as a very..."

Bob: "I asked one Catholic teacher in New York, 'Do you believe in the *Bhagavad-gītā* as divine word of God?' And he said 'Yes.' He said, 'It reads so true!'"

Bob then asked me to talk about the kingdom of God. I said that the Vedic literature gives us more detail. There are different planets, and according to the form of Lord Viṣṇu that one worships, one goes to the planet where that form of the Lord is residing. But on all the Vaikuṇṭha planets, there is eternity, bliss, and knowledge.

"So you would say the followers of Jesus go to be with him?" asked Bob.

"Yes."

They admitted that the New Testament teachers are

reticent about the kingdom of God, and Jesus Christ said, "There are many rooms in my father's mansions." We also compared the concept of purgatory with *samsāra*.

In conclusion, they wished well for the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement and said that it offered a kind of healthy competition for Christians. Not a malicious competition, but one which brings out the best in each.

While leaving the campus, Mike told us about his own practice. He said the people in his dorm don't mind that he practices Kṛṣṇa consciousness, except for the militant "Army of Mary" group on the first floor. His counselor said the only pressure he would get from his teachers and fellow students would be the pressure he placed on himself. They don't mind him chanting or reading. (Another student there is interested in Yoga-nanda). But they advised Mike not to try to convert others to Kṛṣṇa consciousness but to actually manifest symptoms of spiritual advancement, and then his fellow students may be attracted. They said they won't be attracted if he tries to force them while not actually showing signs of advancement.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Houston

Travel Day—to Houston

Billboards hurt the eyes and sicken the human spirit. The poor eyeballs frantically search out the colorful forms and slogans, like fish jumping for bait. We have to drive through it, and there's never escape. Although the highway sign declares "Don't Mess with Texas, \$400 for littering," the state encourages advertisers to mess with our minds.

When we traveled in the Northwest, there was more relief in the natural scenery. But recently, from Dallas to San Antonio and now on to Houston, I've not been enlivened. The only relief is to keep our destination in mind, the Kṛṣṇa temple. Otherwise, the advertisers weigh us down. Only the *saṅkīrtana* spirit, which is like a soldier's cause, keeps the devotees enlivened to fight against *māyā*. And so we laugh at the billboards, and sometimes ignore them. And we feel pity for the *jīvas* entrapped by these messages. As stated by Prahllāda Mahārāja, "I am simply concerned for the fools and rascals, who are making elaborate plans for material happiness.... I am concerned with love for them" (*Bhāg.* 7.9.43).

We left the campground under a night sky, Big and Little Dippers, etc. Before 7:00 A.M., the sky began to turn a faint blue, almost purple as it does on Juhu Beach. Now on the Texas horizon, all around, a faint red layer.

The uninterrupted countryside gives way to La-

grange, Texas, and another deluge of signs. "Major Muffler." "American Air-Conditioning." "All You Can Eat." "Catfish Special." "Country-Style Fried Chicken." "Radio Shack." The eyes rarely get a rest. "Lone Star Beer." Lord Kṛṣṇa protects His devotees, or else we would all be drowned in this ocean of names. "Cajun Sausage." "Deer Processing." Except for the chanting of the holy names, we would be covered all over with signs.

Leaving Lagrange, the sky is a white-yellow layer above the pale red. We can escape the billboards and the stream of our inner thoughts, which are provoked by chains of reminiscences—by chanting.

Just yesterday, I read in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*: "In this age, hearing is more important than thinking, because one's thinking may be disturbed by mental agitation, but ... by hearing ... he'll be forced to associate with the sound vibration" (*Bhāg.* 3.24.36).

Chanting is better than thinking; it frees the mind. Those reminiscent thoughts—what are my mother and father doing now?—become subheadings within the context of the *mahā-mantra's* compassion and within the context of devotional service to Kṛṣṇa and to all living beings. And the demands of the road, the visions before us of smashed racoons, a long stripe of tire skids, all these conglomerations are made clear and realized by chanting God's names. Because He is everything, and He is present in His name. Kṛṣṇa's name is like the Ganges, and the cars and ad signs and odd thoughts are like stool and corpses that pass by. They don't hinder the bather in the Ganges.

"Quail Farm." "Live and Frozen Birds For Sale." "Children's Clothing Outlet." "Eagle Lake." ... Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Picnic area off Route I-10

Thinking of yesterday's meeting with the Catholic lay brothers, I now feel disappointed with my replies, especially when they asked me about Śrīla Prabhupāda.

"You associated with Prabhupāda? What impressed you most about him?"

I said that Prabhupāda was very convinced and knowledgeable in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and very influential. I said he was a great preacher. That's true. But now as I turn on a tape of his lecturing, I suddenly realize how pale were my estimations of Prabhupāda. I should have said, "*He knows Kṛṣṇa.*" That's what is so impressive about Prabhupāda. Anyone can talk of Christ or Kṛṣṇa, and some have actually become well-behaved and sanctified by practicing God consciousness. But Śrīla Prabhupāda knew Kṛṣṇa as everyone's friend. He knows that the Lord is Supreme. Kṛṣṇa is the person who orders the ocean not to go beyond the shore. He orders the sun not to go out of orbit, even a bit. Prabhupāda knew Kṛṣṇa, but he did not speak on his own concoctions. He spoke on the basis of *sāstra*. And Prabhupāda could rightly denounce the atheists as "lunatic men."

We needed to hear from Prabhupāda, we atheists; we hedonists and cynics had to meet him. He gave us the process of devotional service. He said, "Every one of us is sinful, but simply by hearing this transcendental vibration we can become benefited."

ISKCON Houston

The exterior of the temple building is a plain, white, shingle-covered hall. As we arrived in the yard, an Indian man greeted us with folded palms. "I'm Mādhavānanda dāsa," he said, and brought us into the

temple room. It is a large (sixty feet by fifty feet) hall with adequate daylight coming through half a dozen windows, brightening the white-painted room. The outstanding architectural feature is twelve octagonal holes that have been cut and boxed into a ceiling, into which reinforced plastic molds have been inserted like inverted bowls. These ceiling indentures are elaborately designed, painted white and highlighted in dull gold. A sparkling brass chandelier hangs from the center of each dome, illuminating the interior of the dome and the room below. The domes are so large that they take up most of the ceiling, and their traditional Vedic curves and designs give the impression of an ancient massive temple building.

The construction of the octagonal domes was the subject of a color photo and caption in the *Houston Post*:

The high-tech molding process that produced this dome in three days is more commonly used for manufacturing helicopter rotors and missile nose-cones. Measuring a hundred feet in diameter, the octagonal dome weighs less than 200 pounds, but is a reproduction of a teakwood dome made in India that weighs 1,800 pounds and required one year to carve. This dome is one of 12 that will become part of a church being built in the Heights.

The Deities, Rādhā-Nīla-Mādhava, are over six feet tall. My first impression was that He was an "old" Deity. I don't mean that Kṛṣṇa looked more than sixteen years old (although He doesn't look much younger), but He appeared in old Vedic style. Rādhārāṇī's hand is not stiff and flat-palmed but curving in a more human benediction. We can receive that blessing from Her hand by feeling our own fallen nature and begging Her for love of Kṛṣṇa. My first impression of Kṛṣṇa was "Wow! I want to get to know Him." He is really big; and He is

ancient like an old Viṣṇu Deity. And yet He is certainly the original Kṛṣṇa. After all, Kṛṣṇa contains all the Deities and all wisdom is in His face.

Mādhavānanda explained that the altar thrones, which are teakwood and covered in white antiquing paint as well as other altar paraphernalia, cost sixty-five thousand dollars, and the domes in the hall and the remodeling cost another eighty-five thousand, and all of this has been raised by public money.

"Our position with the Indians in Houston is very strong," he said. "There are twenty-five thousand Indians in Houston."

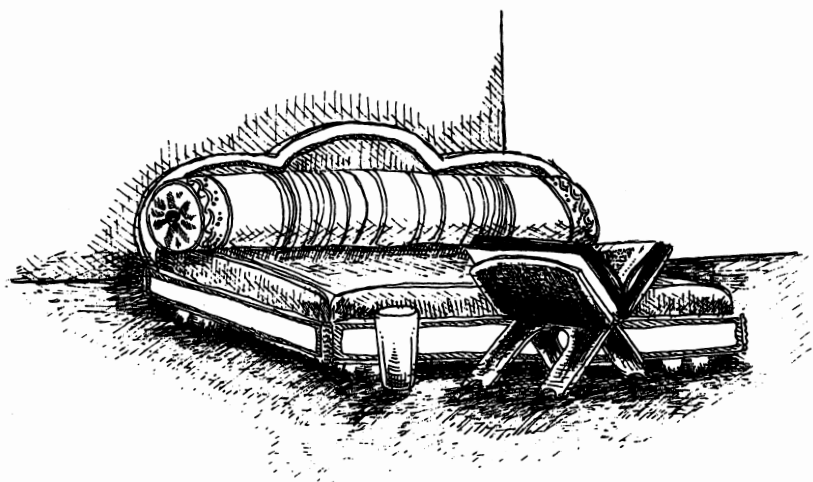
"That many?"

"Yes, there used to be even more. And they are mostly Gujaratis. They are the best because they don't give up their religion as much as others who tend to become westernized."

But Mādhavānanda said only a few devotees live in the temple. So they're short-staffed, but the programs are well-attended.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam class

It's a treat to give the *Bhāgavatam* class while the Deities give *darśana*. Here in Houston, Rādhā-Nīla-Mādhava are very imposing and glorious. When you speak of Kṛṣṇa, you can gesture to Him, "Here He is." This morning's verse described the time factor. I was able to draw the attention of the audience to Nīla-Mādhava and say, "And ultimately time comes from Kṛṣṇa." Or when we speak of the Supreme in His original form as the source of all power or as completely transcendental, we can point to Nīla-Mādhava, and He smiles back assuringly as if to say, "Go on speaking in *paramparā*."



To give class means to ride in ecstasy. You speak full of confidence and vanquish the doubts of others. All opposers are subdued. Any bona fide speaker is empowered with such confidence. He shouldn't be arrogant or think that it is *his* own power, and yet he must represent the king of knowledge; he must be the representative of Vyāsadeva. He who gives the class is "king for an hour." As Viśvambhara Gosvāmī said to me, "When I'm on the *āsana* speaking, I represent Vyāsa as *guru*, but when I get off, I'm just an ordinary man, Viśvambhara." No wonder we get that heady feeling just after giving a class. It's as if we descend once again to the world of mortals. Just be careful you don't pontificate on relative or political matters from the *vyāsāsana*, or think that you are now absolute in everything you do.

I went to an engagement at Dvārkānātha's house. He is a Gujarati disciple of TKG and a long-time Houston resident. I remembered him from 1976. The room was simple. The guests all sat on the floor; one easy chair

covered with a sheet, waited for the *guru*-speaker to come and sit. No hesitancy here about worshiping the *guru*. They were enthusiastic, ready to make a joke and ready to hear serious philosophy. A poster of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa was on the altar as well as Śrīla Prabhupāda and photos of Philadelphia's Śarad-vihārī.

I had planned to speak on *paramparā*, from *Bhagavad-gītā* 4.3, but the gathering inspired me to speak directly on 4.34, about inquiry and service to the spiritual master. Their saintly *saṅga* also inspired a good twenty-five minute *kīrtana*, with Indians manning *mṛdaṅga* and *karatālas* and Madhu on harmonium. When I began to speak and remarked about Hindus who glibly claim, "We know all about Kṛṣṇa," they laughed heartily.

After the lecture, one lady asked why did one have to accept a *guru*, if one could follow all the rules and regulations and practices? I asked her, "Then, why not?" She said that some *gurus* had too many disciples, but she wanted more attention.

"A *guru* doesn't have to take so many disciples," I said. "Jīva Gosvāmī says one shouldn't take so many. But if you want to accept a spiritual master who does have many disciples, you can still have an intimate relationship with him by virtue of your enthusiasm to follow his orders. And you can regularly inquire from him. But don't be fickle. You should be anxious to accept a spiritual master, rather than thinking of all the reasons why not to take one."

Some also expressed doubts whether service to mankind—even if not connected to Kṛṣṇa—could be called *bhakti*. The group was heavily pro-Kṛṣṇa. There were many real inquiries. Mādhavānanda dāsa was present and urged them, "Go ahead, ask your doubts. This is the time."

When I left, six or eight people came out to the car.

"Why are you all leaving the house?" I asked.

Dvārkanātha said, "It is Vedic culture. We must. Actually one should go with a *sādhu* the whole length of the village before parting from him."

Nṛsiṁha dāsa, who wrote the novel *The Way of Vaiṣṇava Sages* visited the Houston temple today just before Greeting of the Deities. Out of shyness or false ego, I did not introduce myself, and neither did he introduce himself to me. But later in the morning he passed me a copy of his essay, "Every Man Should Own Some Land—Economic Development in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness." After I read it, I wrote him a note, "If what you say is true, this could revive the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement."

His plan is simple and backed up with quotes from Prabhupāda. "The whole world situation is degrading because people are not producing their own food. This is the problem, the real problem." Nṛsiṁha dāsa suggests that every devotee householder can solve his economic problem by owning as little as one or two acres, and growing enough food for his family and for income. He outlined the dilemma of becoming involved in ordinary business: "Although a handful of household devotees have grown rich by cooperating in the sinful secular society and catering to the useless demands of materialists, apparently little of that wealth swiped out of the hands of materialists has made it to the preaching front. And ironically, in spite of the increased emphasis on economic development, devotees everywhere are expressing feelings of insecurity due to a lack of finances."

Nṛsiṁha dāsa has been gardening and researching

the subject. He claims that in the northern United States a family needs only two or three acres for a self-sustaining farm. And because food is so expensive (ten times more expensive than in India) devotees can sell their surplus, with the aid of those devotees who are especially talented at sales. He writes, "In a Kṛṣṇa conscious village, with a self-sufficient agrarian economy, most devotees could stay home, on their own land, living simply and selling their crops to a few devotees who could market the pure farm products in nearby towns or cities. Should we doubt that Kṛṣṇa will provide enough wealth, in the form of food and clothing and money, if we follow the life-style He personally encourages?"

He claims that researchers such as the Ecology Action Group in Palo Alto, California, have already proved Prabhupāda's statements that a family can be self-sufficient on just one acre, by working only six months a year. "Therefore, I suggest," Nṛsiṁha dāsa writes, "that all *gr̥hasthas* try to become prosperous in the Vedic way and depend more upon Kṛṣṇa's mercy and the beauty of nature than upon a falling dollar and the crumbling Western economies. I also urge ISKCON leaders to carefully research the concept of subdividing and selling the major fertile portion of our farm projects for the purpose of setting up two-to-five acre family farms that would employ intensive farming techniques...."

But I wrote in reply to Nṛsiṁha dāsa, "I'm skeptical whether those devotees who have become allured by material success would ever be willing to go back to such a simple way of life." I have visited householders who have been establishing their careers in the capitalistic societies, and in most cases Nṛsiṁha dāsa's statements about them seem accurate. The householder has

every right, and it is even his *dharma*, to live outside the ascetic community or *āśrama* and earn a livelihood. But unfortunately, the available job markets are for selling useless commodities. As Nṛsiṁha dāsa writes, "Many have become contaminated, to some extent, by close and regular contact with meat-eating sense enjoyers." Often, when one goes to visit the "successful" householder, he finds that he's keeping only a slight connection to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They give up two, three, or even four of the regulative principles, and often there is no chanting of *japa*. They say there is no way they could come back to ISKCON. They have outgrown it, and it has disappointed them. And so, while gaining "national recognition" in their field of occupation, many are losing sight of spiritual goals. Nṛsiṁha dāsa's idea is pure and simple, but it will require persons to develop a taste for a simple way.

My own role is to go wherever I am invited, whether they are successful or unsuccessful, agrarian or yuppie, and try to share *kīrtana* with them. I find that no one wants to hear too much criticism of what they're doing. But they're usually open to Prabhupāda's simple preaching, "Just add Kṛṣṇa to what you're doing."

Darśana of Rādhā-Nīla-Mādhava, maṅgala-ārati:

At *maṅgala-ārati* we see three lines in Nīla-Mādhava's neck, like the lines of a conchshell. His hair is in a large, natural top-knot. He also wears golden earrings in natural forms, like flowers, and natural ankle bracelets. His head is slightly tilted, with arching, golden eyebrows.

Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī sometimes wears kimono-like *saris* white silk with flower and butterfly patterns. She has golden-tinted eyelids and black arched eyebrows. If

you look up to Her just as you are bowing down, She looks pleased, like a mother pleased with the bad son who at least shows a spark of submission. Her looks remind me of some statues of Buddhadeva, with a sublime smile and the curving hand of benediction. Whatever sweetness and peace come from the gaze of Lord Buddha is certainly within the peacefulness of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, who is under direct protection of Kṛṣṇa. She is also full of cheer and mercy.

When it's time for Greeting the Deities, Kṛṣṇa's face provides a field for gold stars and dots.

Devotees here joke in a competitive way about Rādhā-Kālachandjī of Dallas and Rādhā-Nīla-Mādhava of Houston. Who is stronger? Who is better looking? Someone said that Nīla-Mādhava was a better cowherd wrestler than Kālachandjī—although He is not as broad in the shoulders by proportion, He is taller and has longer arm range. And He can be seen from anywhere in the temple hall. The ladies are very grateful for that.

While eating gulābjāmunas on the way back from a home program with Indian friends

A program like tonight's makes you aware that Indians are the most special people in the world. They are born close to Kṛṣṇa. Tonight, the guests kept me talking for over an hour and then insisted that I take *prasādam* from the *āsana* while they sat on the floor waiting for *prasādam* to be served. If in humility I had refused their honorable treatment, they would have been disappointed.

Our host asked, "How can the *grhasthas* remain like a lily in the water? How to avoid contamination and entanglement in the material world?"

"You have traveled and seen many Deities. What do you think of Nīla-Mādhava?"

It's euphoric being with them and answering their insistent questions, trying to refuse their nectarean food. Their women know how to cook, the men know how to honor a devotee, and a ten-year-old boy played expert *tabla*.

Mādhavānanda announced, "Tomorrow night please come to the Sunday program at 5:00 P.M. The domes are up for the first time. It's fabulous! There is a four-way lighting system. With one switch you get twenty-five percent of lighting, then with another switch fifty percent, then seventy-five, and then one hundred percent lighting!"

As we rode home from the program there was a full moon for the end of Cāturmāsya. I noticed that the Ramada Hotel sign includes the word Rāma. And in the liquor billboard "Here's to Rare Character," the word *Rare*, looks like *Hare*.



After the *Bhāgavatam* lecture in the temple an Indian man said, "Mahārājī, we know that you have been suffering with headaches so please tell us what you think of your relationship with the Lord when in that condition."

I fell for his trap and began answering the question in a personal way, as if I were the only person in the universe who knew pain. "I feel the same, in my relationship with Kṛṣṇa," I said, "but maybe it's even better when there is pain." Then I woke up from solipsism. "Everyone knows pain!" *Tat te nukampām* ... pain or not, we have to remember Kṛṣṇa. But if one wants to be active and free to help others, to travel and preach throughout the day, and to read, etc., naturally he wants to be healthy.

Leaving Houston

Pulling out at 4:00 A.M. in light rainfall, we saw an illuminated sign on a church: "A Soft Answer Turneth Away Wrath" (Proverbs). Then—"Gabby's Genuine Beefsteak." "Drink Responsibly. Budweiser Cares." After ten minutes on Highway 10, Madhu called out, "Only in America! So gross!" The sign:

TRUCK STOP
WASH TRUCK \$17.50
BY GIRLS

We entered Louisiana in a rainstorm. Silhouetted trees of the bayou surrounded the highway.

Goloka, our driver, looked sleepy, while Madhu was napping in the back.

I asked Goloka, "What did you think of the book *The*

Way of Vaiṣṇava Sages? I noticed you read the entire book while we were in Houston."

"I liked it very much," he said. "That review in *ISKCON World Review* didn't do it justice." And so Goloka spoke a brief synopsis of the novel.

Oil refineries and a city skyline heralded Lake Charles. Rain in cajun country. Morning clouds bunched on the eastern horizon. Baton Rouge forty miles ahead.

Madhu handed me a packet of last minute letters from devotees in Houston. Some were in answer to my request for descriptions of Rādhā-Nīla-Mādhava, like this one from the head *pūjārī*, Kṛṣṇa-kṛpā dāsa:

His feet are very large with red soles and pinkish toenails. His right foot rests on a golden pedestal.

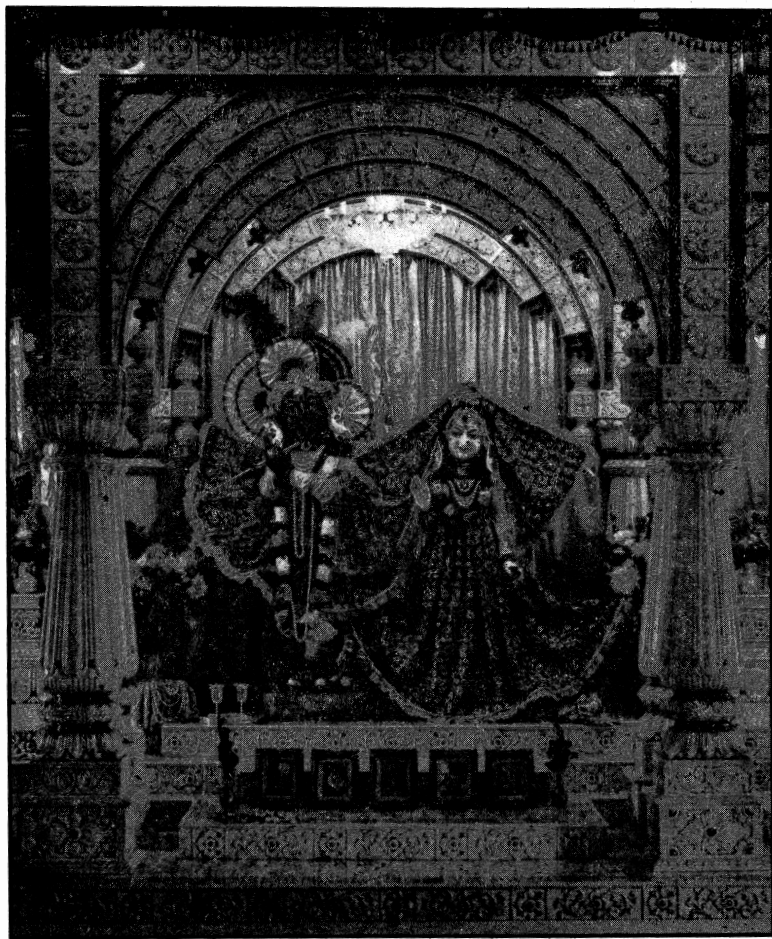
Nīla-Mādhava's calves are long and slender, and His thighs are short and thick. His waist is slender compared to His broad chest. His transcendental body leans to the right.

His chest is decorated with a silver *brāhmaṇa's* thread, which gently hangs down from His left shoulder. At the base of His neck is a natural necklace.

Śrīla Nīla-Mādhava's arms are very long and appear very strong so as to protect His devotees from *māyā*. In His hands He holds a flute to His lips and His palms are reddish. His neck is marked with three slightly pinkish lines and acts as a slender stem of a lotus to hold up His full lotus face. Taking a full view of Śrīla Nīla-Mādhava we see a greatly powerful yet entirely merciful form of Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is very delicate and shy and kind. Her moonlike face is cream colored with slightly reddish cheeks, and Her entire face is held a little down so that She does not look directly at you. However, Her gentle expression lets you know that She cares greatly for all of Kṛṣṇa's devotees. Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī's hair is dark with a braid and it is almost four feet long.

Dictating letters while we fill up the gas tank. Miles of elevated highway through the swamps, Lake Pontchartrain, the Gulf of Mexico, New Orleans temple.



Śrī-Śrī Rādhā-Nīla-Mādhava

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

New Orleans

ISKCON New Orleans

ISKCON New Orleans has been located at Esplanade Avenue for fifteen years. The buildings have been much improved, and yet the original features, such as the huge oak tree, which spreads its branches across the front yard, and the long stairway leading up to the temple building are still intact. It's southern charm.

We were greeted at the temple door by a devotee named Jvarajit who took us to a house next door.

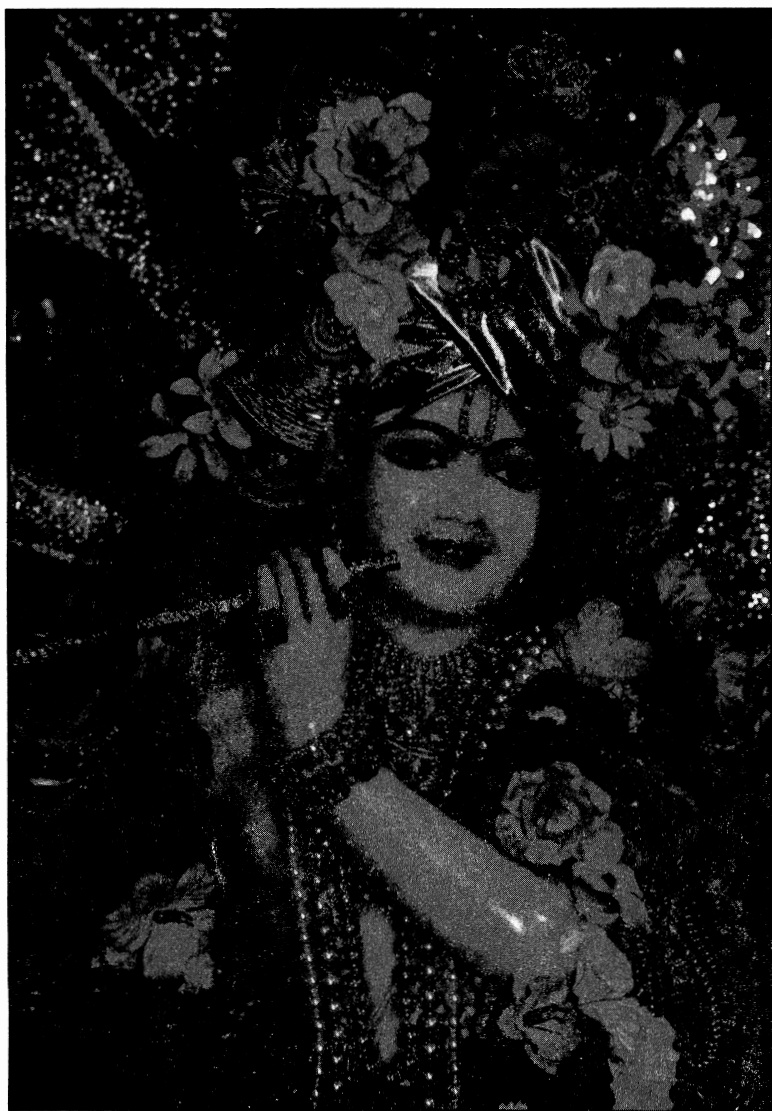
"*Sannyāsīs* and GBC stay here," he said. And he opened for our use a front "*darśana-and-prasādam* room." At the end of the room was an *āsana* so imposing that you felt like bowing down before it even though it was empty. The next room was an office with desk and drawers filled with remnants from Jayapatāka Swami, such as old Air India tickets, computer magazines, and photos of Lord Jagannātha and Ratha-yātrā in Calcutta. The next room was a bedroom and then a full kitchen.

Within a few minutes the vice-president, Raghunātha Prabhu, came.

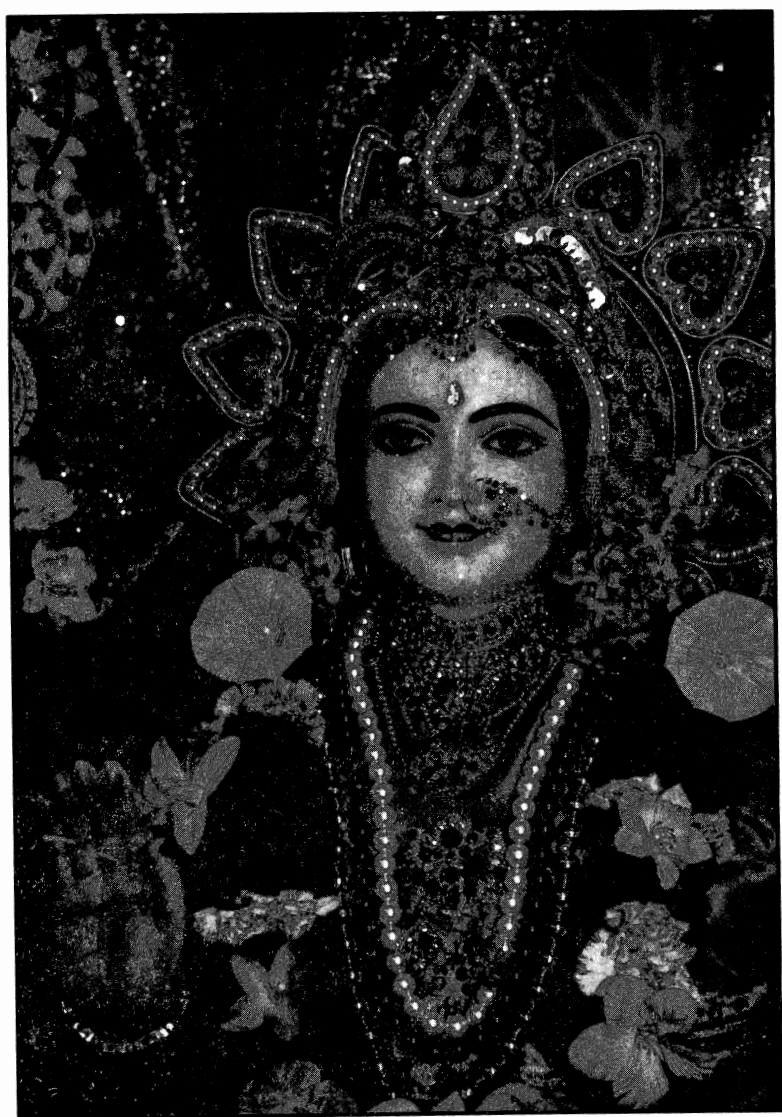
"Remember me? When I was a little boy?"

"I remember you not as a little boy," I said. "But as a book distributor." He still looks very youthful and enthusiastic, wearing a sports jacket over his white *kurtā* and *dhōtī*.

"Most devotees are at the farm," he said. "There are seventy devotees and about seventy children there.



Śrī-Śrī Rādhā-Rādhākānta of New Orleans



New Orleans has about twenty devotees. But now the Christmas marathon is on, and many are out selling."

Despite the problems in ISKCON, I sensed the abiding good in this movement, represented by Raghunātha dāsa.

R.R.K.

The initials "R.R.K." on the Deities' donation box reminded me when Śrīla Prabhupāda gave Them Their names. It was in 1974 in Vṛndāvana. Nityānanda dāsa, who was New Orleans' temple president, came to the door of Śrīla Prabhupāda's residence and asked me (I was Śrīla Prabhupāda's servant) to ask Prabhupāda for a name for the New Orleans Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Deities. It was a bit of a special favor he was asking, but I went in and asked Prabhupāda. He was sitting at his desk in the room.

I asked, "Could you name the Deities of New Orleans?"

He said, "Rādhākānta?" It was as simple as that.

Madhu-maṅgala dāsa is attracted to Rādhā-Rādhākānta. He sings Their names as he works in the kitchen. A devotee here gave Madhu pictures of Their Lordships. "They're very young," said Madhu. "And very beautiful!" I think, *But what about Rādhā-Nīla-Mādhava in Houston?* The Deities are certainly different in each temple—Nīla-Mādhava was massive with the aura of ancient India, whereas Rādhā-Rādhākānta are very white and sweet, more delicate. But now when I go for the *darśana* of R.R.K. I feel uplifted to know that a devotee loves the Deities of New Orleans.

Madhu said, "Last night I met a man in the street and he came into the temple with me. He was talking about

wanting to make an offering to the Deity. So I said here's one offering you could make right away, and I pointed to the *mantra*. He said, "You sing that sometimes?" I said, "Yes, we can do it right now if you want. He was delighted to try, so I got the harmonium and we sang. He said he might come tonight to your class!"

Vṛkodara came in from the Mississippi farm to see his *saṅkīrtana* men at the airport, and he stopped by to see me. He brought me a gift, a sweater, from the devotees at the farm.

"The thing that most concerns myself," said Vṛkodara, "is whether the devotees in this movement can keep up the spiritual practices—*sādhana*, and morning and evening classes, and talking about Kṛṣṇa." He said that the most important priority was loving exchanges among devotees, whether in the temple in the morning or on *saṅkīrtana*, but somehow somewhere, spiritual exchanges. If we can do that, he said, then financial and other problems will be solved. He also praised Jayapatāka Swami, co-GBC for New Orleans, who he said is always ready to preach, day or night, and who is always developing Vaiṣṇava relationships with his Godbrothers, and who creates enthusiastic Indian festivals.

Vṛkodara said, "I enjoy working at both the farm and the New Orleans temple and seeing them develop. The farm devotees are united by the *gurukula*. It's very hard work, but I'm hopeful."

"You know," I said, "some devotees are ready to conclude that *gurukula* is a failure. They say Śrīla Prabhupāda gave his instructions, and we tried, but it doesn't work, at least not in America."

"No!" Vṛkodara said. "I don't believe that.

Prabhupāda said if we give the children love and education they'll never leave. What love is and what education is, that we have to understand, but if we can give them those things they'll never leave." He also spoke of recognizing the social dimension to devotional life, especially for those who have children. He mentioned that the girls at *gurukula* are learning Indian dances, and all day they're absorbed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness in that way, striking poses of Lord Nṛsiṃha and of Kṛṣṇa playing the flute.

We've heard optimistic reports before. And we've also heard the doomsday proclamations. Vṛkodara is a yea-sayer. But he's ready to fight for it. He loves the farm community but says, "Of course we haven't been tested yet. But when that comes that will also bring us together."

I mentioned that some ISKCON farms were splitting up their properties for private ownership by *grhasthas*, whereas his New Talavan was in the old-fashioned commune model.

"I don't know," said Vṛkodara, "whether I'm behind the times or ahead. I'm ready to do whatever will promote the priorities of Kṛṣṇa consciousness—spiritual practices and personal association. If at a certain point that can be achieved by subdividing land, we could do that, or if by staying together we can do it, then we'll do that."

Vṛkodara said he read an interview where Larry Shinn said he didn't think ISKCON would blossom as Śrīla Prabhupāda expected.

"With all respects to Doctor Larry Shinn," said Vṛkodara, "who is doing wonderful work, I don't agree with this point. Lord Caitanya's movement will flourish, even if we don't do it ourselves."

"Yes," I said, "the only question is whether we go down in history as the rascals who failed. Otherwise a new set of devotees will come. Prabhupāda even said once, that even if everyone left, new devotees would come from his books."

Last night I spoke to the disciples of Jayapatāka Swami and Hṛdayānanda Goswami. It was transcendently sweet and vital reading "Lord Caitanya Returns to Jagannātha Purī" and discussing Vaiṣṇava relationships. It was something different for all of us. Speaking to these nieces and nephews is just as important as to speaking to one's own disciples.

Vṛkodara brought the older boys and older girls *gurukula āśramas* from Mississippi to attend *Bhāgavatam* class in New Orleans today. They were all wearing dark blue sweatshirts with "New Talavan Gurukula" and a silhouette of Prabhupāda on the front. On the back of each shirt was the student's name, "Jāmbhavatī," etc.

Vṛkodara asked me to sing *guru-pūjā* for Śrīla Prabhupāda, and we built up into a strong *kīrtana*. The walls of the temple are light sky blue with fluffy clouds painted over them. As we jumped and sang before Prabhupāda's green and gold *vyāsāsana*, it was like ascending into the sky with His Divine Grace. I felt a strong impression that I was *with Prabhupāda's group*, and I was grateful.

Now on two consecutive mornings, Vṛkodara has driven from the farm to the temple (one hour) with groups of *gurukula* children, just to attend my



Kāmadhuk for sale

Bhāgavatam class. Today he will go back to the farm, and then come back again at noon to New Orleans to catch a flight to Los Angeles for a North American GBC meeting. It occurs to me, of course, that I'm not really giving him that much in reciprocation. He can give *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class as well as I can, and the *gurukula* kids aren't that much interested in seeing me. But Vṛkodara wants to do it.

November 14, travel day

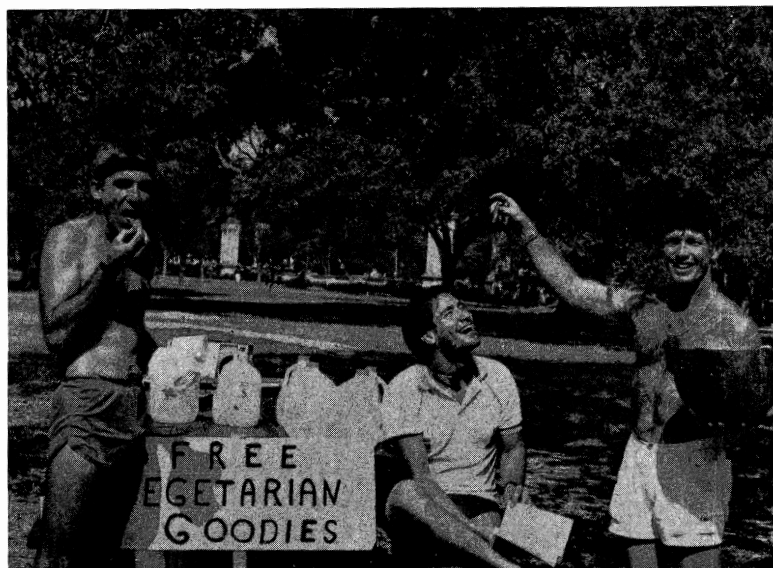
Goloka dāsa and Bhakta Kent left today, driving the motorhome and Ram van from New Orleans to Gītā-nāgarī. We plan to catch up with them by U.S. Air. Weeks ago, when we decided to reduce the size of our traveling party, we naturally thought that I should give up the “*bhajana-kuṭir* on wheels.” Now we have found a buyer. So from here on just three of us will travel in the Ram van.

I feel excitement in traveling to my old ISKCON home in the Northeast, like a student coming home from college to Thanksgiving with the family. Or like a Navy man home on leave, looking up his old friends, staying in his old room. Gītā-nāgarī was the heart of what was called “the mid-Atlantic zone” of ISKCON, and it was the center where I was “zonal ācārya.” These designations are gone with the wind.

By this afternoon, we should arrive at Gītā-nāgarī. I usually notice whether the sign is up at the entrance to the farm. It gets torn down by country boys “having fun” and then the devotees erect a new version. So will the sign be up? And is it true what I’ve heard, that fewer devotees attend *maṅgala-ārati* at Gītā-nāgarī nowadays? Am I supposed to speak against it? And what about the economic changes? I’ve already heard which devotees are disappointed with one another. I’ll be asked to take sides. If I ask *everyone* to be peaceful, will they listen?

Last morning

We had time to attend the *tulasī ārati* before leaving for the airport, but my mind was screaming. I didn’t want to stay for the *ārati*. But I surrendered. There were only four of us in the temple room. I played *karatālas*



Jvarajit dāsa (right) and two park joggers

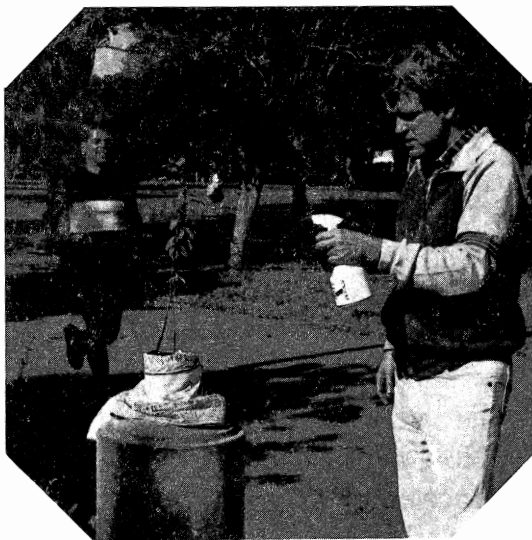
and surrendered more. I looked at the somewhat spindly plant, and thought of her as a maidservant of *bhakti*. We sang and circumambulated. This is Kṛṣṇa consciousness—staying together in the early morning in the temple room, believing in the truth of Tulasī, walking around and around her.

Jvarajit and the joggers

I enjoyed the association of Jvarajit Prabhu who drove us to the New Orleans airport.

Jvarajit operates a painting business on Bourbon Street. "Sweetest spot in the world," he said. "I just open the door and I close it at night. Real soft. I like to do a little preaching too." He said he goes jogging in Audubon Park near Tulane and Loyola Universities.

"I run with them and then I cook for them. If I wore a *dhoti*, they'd never talk to me, so I wear shorts. But I don't talk nonsense. That park is the best spot I've ever



Jvarajit also places a tulasī plant in such a way that all the joggers “circumambulate” tulasī, and he invites them to water her as this man is doing

seen in the country.”

Jvarajit is soft-spoken but intense, speaking rapidly.

“The other day one eighty-year-old man, in great shape from running, asked me, ‘What can I do with my mind while I’m running? I count, do you think that’s the best thing?’ ” Jvarajit laughed. “What an opportunity! I told him the *mantra*.”

“Where do you cook?” I asked, “on a barbecue?”

“No. I have everything I need right here in the van,” he pointed to a small Coleman gas stove.

He said, “When I cook all the park attendants line up.”

He told me some of the questions people have asked him in the park. “One New Age jogger asked what was the relation of yin and yang to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. And another was asking about ‘getting into the flow of

things,' and how that related to Kṛṣṇa. And I tell the Catholics that we worship Jesus and Mary too." Jvarajit turned to me, "Is that all right to say?"

"Yes!" I said. "It sounds great what you're doing. Sometimes we hear a devotee say he wants to preach but has no facility, but you're proving that all you need is a desire."

"I keep thinking what Prabhupāda said, 'that if we can make Americans Kṛṣṇa conscious, the whole world will follow.'"

When he said that, I felt a credibility gap—my own disbelief. How can the unpopular Hare Kṛṣṇa movement convince a significant number of Americans? But then, who would think that you could preach successfully to the joggers in Audubon Park, New Orleans?

At the airport, Jvarajit helped us carry our bags to the counter. On parting he said, "a little mercy?" and we embraced.

APPENDIXES

Excerpts from Recent Letters

New York is a great opportunity

You are fortunate to be able to distribute books from a table on Fourteenth Street in Manhattan. Kṛṣṇa is kind to you to give you this direct service. And you are right to say that New York City is the best place for preaching. This was Prabhupāda's example; with great compassion, he went to that city. Although, materially speaking, New York City is hellish, from the viewpoint of a Vaiṣṇava, because there are so many conditioned souls there, and some of them are willing to hear, New York is a great opportunity for serving Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, in order to appreciate New York City as a devotee, you have to be compassionate. I know you are in this mood, and therefore you are satisfied with that service.

Realistic situations in ISKCON

Now you are learning some of the realistic situations in ISKCON, such as the fact that devotees sometimes make mistakes and engage in gossiping and are not at the perfect standard. It would be nice if we were all just like Vaiṣṇava persons. But the fact is that we are in this material world with so many attachments, although we are in the process of becoming purified. Sometimes a new devotee expects everything to be ideal and suffers a severe disappointment when he or she sees inebrieties in the devotees. But that is a trick of *māyā*. We have to accept realistically that the devotees are not perfect, but the process is perfect. Kṛṣṇa will never fail you, nor will the process of *bhakti-yoga*. So don't become over-affected when you learn these realities. And make good friends with devotees whom you can trust.

On friendship

When corrective advice is given without an inner sweetness, then it becomes unpleasant, even if well-intended. I notice an increase in this spirit of criticism among some Godbrothers, even to the point of missing the essence of friendship. For example, one person has recently sent out his "manifesto" to ISKCON and he strikes the familiar theme with the usual quotes: "My manner of words sometimes seem a little harsh and abrasive but I simply say it like I feel it. If anyone is offended by my words, I apologize, but request them to try and understand the urgency of the message. It is said, 'He who praises you—he is your enemy; he who criticizes you—he is your friend.' "

Perhaps the kind of friendship I am talking of is rarer. But when I have found it in a few instances among my Godbrothers, it is what I am really hankering for. I appreciate if someone notices a spiritual discrepancy or financial mismanagement or literary inappropriateness and so many other things that I may do wrong. But what I look for among friends is the constant and dominant factor of mutual encouragement. Now how does this mutual encouragement escape the superficiality of flattery and self-indulgence? It does so by actual trust and understanding between the two parties. This is not easily gained. There has to be strong like-mindedness and good experience to bring two together through thick and thin. In such a friendship, when one is offering corrective advice to the other, it is done in a loving way and one doesn't have to apologize for the rough edges or quote the saying, "The critic is the real friend, not the one who praises."

I know that Prabhupāda says when dealing with boils we can't just blow on them, but we have to do some violence. But I am here stating the other side of it,

at least in regards to friendships. Friends can't be regularly blasting away at each other. Rather, they are regularly exchanging the Vaiṣṇava loving reciprocations, and this gives them a basis for sometimes gentle reprimands.

Preaching to devotees

You mention a purport in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* where "Śrīla Prabhupāda explains and stresses the importance of spiritual upkeep as superior to spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness." You also mention a letter that Prabhupāda wrote to me in 1972. Yes, I remember that. I had just recently taken *sannyāsa* and Prabhupāda wrote to me that preaching to the devotees was more important for the time being than preaching to nondevotees. I think he gave the example of boiling the milk. When you boil the milk then it gets richer. So we should train up our men, especially by reading the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and teaching them how to be Kṛṣṇa conscious.

But that story has a sequel. A few months later I personally met Śrīla Prabhupāda. I had been following his advice and traveling exclusively from temple to temple, giving attention to classes in the morning. When Prabhupāda asked me what I was doing, I told him that I was preaching to devotees. He, however, immediately encouraged me to get a bus like Viṣṇujana Swami and go from place to place, not only to the temples. I became a bit confused and said to Prabhupāda that I thought he had told me to go preach in the temples. Prabhupāda then became annoyed by my narrow-minded understanding and said, "Kṛṣṇa's head is important and His tail is important." In other words, *both* preaching to the devotees and preaching to

the nondevotees are important. I then took a bus and traveled outside the temples, but I also went to the temples. So it's not an either/or proposal. It's not that a certain point has been reached in ISKCON where we are no longer interested in other preaching. However, I think at the present moment there is a very crucial need to strengthen devotees, because there has been so much confusion, with *gurus* leaving and all kinds of weakness. So I think it is time definitely to help the devotees.

Any movement of the soul toward God

You have asked me for my purport to Chapter Eighteen, verse 6 of *Bhagavad-gītā*. Of course, it is clear in the context. Kṛṣṇa has been discussing that, according to a different opinion, some say that charity, sacrifice, and penance should be abandoned, but Kṛṣṇa says they should not be given up. And in the purport to verse 5, Prabhupāda gives the example of marriage which may be helpful to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and therefore a *sannyāsī* does not give up his performance of marriage ceremonies. The purport to verse 6 is quite interesting; Prabhupāda says, "Everything that leads to Kṛṣṇa consciousness must be encouraged." We find liberal statements like this in the writings of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura also. Any movement of the soul toward God is to be encouraged. Of course, we want to see complete surrender to Kṛṣṇa, but you may not be able to see that right away. Therefore, under the guidance of the spiritual master, the neophyte should be encouraged. We are also neophytes, and so we have to allow ourselves a certain freedom to express our individuality as we approach Kṛṣṇa. Especially when we guide others we should not be too strict to think that there is only "one way," such as book distribution only or *brahmacārī* life only or anything too strict like that. We should fan the

spark of any Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Better to guide people in these matters rather than to let them go on their own to exercise their propensities.

Don't give up the routine

Some of Prabhupāda's big disciples fell away because they were unable to do simple, routine service. If there was a super Ratha-yātrā or big Bombay *paṇḍāl*, then they were happy, but in the absence of that they could not simply live the routine. But we have to find pleasure in routine activities. Even though there are immediate urgent needs, we have to do our regular service. In fact, we will find that if we try to abandon sane, balanced spiritual life, we will not achieve even the thing that we want.

Developing faith

You mention in a rather negative way, "I do not have firm faith in my authorities here." But I think you do have faith. However, you do not "accept them as absolute, especially because of what I have gone through." So don't expect the impossible from yourself. You may not accept them as absolute, but you should accept them as sufficient guides. They may make mistakes, but they are bona fide leaders trying to follow Prabhupāda and spread the Absolute Truth of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. So if that is all the faith that you can muster at present, don't deny it, but go forward on that much faith. Prabhupāda says that even a tiny bit of faith is worth tons of faithlessness. Your absolute faith is there in Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda, and this you have maintained even through so many personal, spiritual disasters with your *gurus*. Similarly, if you have some faith in my instructions, let it develop in a natural way, and don't feel something is wrong if it is not at a certain

stage. I think if such a relationship develops naturally, then I would not deny it.

Making devotees

Your attitude of sorrow when you see people come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and then leave shows that you are a true devotee. At least when the girls come you can try to give them your association and show them how nice Kṛṣṇa consciousness is. Of course, our rules and regulations are a little hard for most people, but eventually we try to teach them surrender. Just because someone doesn't live in a temple doesn't mean that they cannot become Kṛṣṇa conscious. Some of the people who come and go may practice it later in their homes. So we shouldn't think that all is lost.

Study Notes

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam

From Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Canto One, Chapter One, verses 4–8: the qualities of a representative of Vyāsa (spiritual master)

(1) He doesn't speak Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam lectures capriciously.

(2) He performs services very carefully, following the previous ācāryas.

(3) He restrains all his senses and sticks to the path of the ācāryas (one should approach him with respect and not in a challenging mood).

(4) He must be free from all kinds of vices before he can dare sit on the *vyāsāsana*. Spotless in character.

(5) He is well-versed in all the *Vedas* ("to hear and explain them is more important than to read them").

(6) He should know Vyāsa's Vedānta philosophy, which is presented in elaborate form in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. Moreover, he should know the nontheistic philosophies, which in Indian philosophy are six: Gautama, Kaṇāda, Kapila, Patañjali, Jaimini, and Aṣṭāvakra.

(7) To be qualified as a representative of Vyāsa he must please his spiritual masters by being obedient and submissive.

(To be continued.)

Caitanya-caritāmṛta

From Ādi-līlā Chapter One, verses 45–46, The Supreme Lord as guru

“To those who are constantly devoted and worship Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 10.10).

Enlightenment in transcendental knowledge means attachment to Kṛṣṇa, and this is granted to the devotee by Kṛṣṇa Himself. Prabhupāda writes, “This awakening of divine consciousness enralls a devotee, who thus relishes his eternal transcendental mellow.” If someone claims that he is learned or enlightened in transcendental knowledge but hasn’t gained attachment to the Supreme Lord, he is actually ignorant. And it can only come by the Lord’s blessing. It comes to those who are “convinced by devotional service about the transcendental nature of the Personality of Godhead.”

There are many śāstric examples of how the Supreme Lord acted as the supreme spiritual master. For example, He did this in teaching the *cātur-śloka*s to Lord Brahmā. The Lord speaks within the heart of a sincere devotee. He also speaks *śāstra*. By His teachings in *Bhagavad-gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa is directly everyone’s *guru*.

Ādi-līlā Chapter One, verses 57–64, more descriptions of the spiritual master and the Vaiṣṇavas.

“All glories to Cintāmaṇi and my initiating spiritual master, Somagiri. All glories to my instructing spiritual master, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.... ”

In this verse Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja offers his obeisances to his different *gurus*, “and it is to be noted that he adored them all equally.” It is not a shame for someone to identify his *śikṣa* and *dīkṣa-gurus*.

One might question why there is any need for further *gurus*, if we have the best *guru* in our heart, as *caitya-guru*. Prabhupāda writes, "Lord Kṛṣṇa sends an instructing spiritual master ... the preceptor appears before the external senses ... and at the same time the devotee is guided from within by *caitya-guru*." Even when we may not be always aware of it, the *caitya-guru* is guiding us. Yet we require to actually see and hear from a living, liberated devotee.

This section of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* impresses us with the absolute necessity of accepting a *guru*, and we learn more of the *guru's* duties toward his disciple.

When there are differences of opinion about the meaning of the spiritual master, everyone will want to find support in the scriptures. But to be learned in the scriptures, we must study them without exploiting them for our personal interests. If we have a personal cause to champion, and yet we find arguments against some of the views that we want to champion, we should submit to what is in the *sāstras* and be tempered in this way.

(To be continued.)

Comparative Study of *Bhagavad-gītā* As It Is and Other Commentaries

Bhagavad-gītā 2.12

"Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings, nor in the future shall any of us cease to be."

In his commentary Śaṅkara declares, "As the Self, the Ātmā, we are eternal in all the three periods of time (past, present, and future). The plural 'us' is used with reference to the bodies that are different. It does not mean that there is more than one Self."

Śrīla Prabhupāda was aware of this misinterpretation and directly challenged it in his purport to 2.12. He quoted from the *Kaṭha* as well as the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads* that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is the maintainer of innumerable living entities, and by His plenary portion He also lives in the heart of every living entity.

Prabhupāda quoted *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.2.13, *nityo nityānām cetanaś cetānām eko bāhunām yo vidadhāti kaman* ... This verse describes the Supreme Lord, the Parabrahman as an individual and as eternal. In a similar way, the living entities, such as Arjuna and all the kings who were assembled in the battlefield, are also eternal, individual beings. The difference between them is that the Lord is eternally maintaining the individual living beings both in their conditioned and in their liberated states. So this *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* verse is a support for what Kṛṣṇa is saying in *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.12. The Lord and all the *jīvas* are eternal, individual persons. "Their individuality existed in the past, and their individuality

will continue in the future without interruption. Therefore, there is no cause for lamentation for anyone."

The knowledge that will free Arjuna and others from lamentation is knowledge of the individuality of the Supreme Lord and His co-eternals, the living entities. *Simply to know that we are eternal is not enough.*

Śrīla Prabhupāda's own purport is in direct response to the note made by Śaṅkara in his *Gīta-bhāṣya*. Śaṅkara says that the plural "us" in this verse is a bodily plurality, whereas the spiritual essence is only one Self. In answer to this Prabhupāda makes several points:

(1) Even if the argument that the individuality is material is accepted, how can one distinguish Kṛṣṇa's individuality? Kṛṣṇa affirms His own individuality, past, present, and future. If Kṛṣṇa is accepted as an ordinary, conditioned soul with individual consciousness, then His *Bhagavad-gītā* has no value as authoritative scripture.

(2) It is not logical to say that the plurality mentioned in this verse is conventional and refers to the body. Because "previous to this verse such a bodily conception is already condemned. After condemning the bodily conception of the living entities, how is it possible for Kṛṣṇa to place a conventional proposition on the body again" (Lord Kṛṣṇa said that the wise do not lament for the living or the dead; they do not see persons in terms of their bodies).

Prabhupāda concludes: "The plurality of the individual soul and of the Lord is an eternal fact, and that is confirmed by the *Vedas* as above mentioned."

(To be continued.)

Jaiva-dharma

Synopsis

We have previously described how a certain impersonalist *sannyāsī* had the good fortune to become attracted to the Vaiṣṇavas, and he submitted himself to one Prema dāsa Bābājī of Godruma in Navadvīpa. Before the *bābājī* commenced to instruct the *sannyāsī*, he first brought him to another village where they met the spiritual master of Prema dāsa Bābājī. Thus we get an unusual picture of a spiritual master introducing his disciple to the disciple's grand spiritual master. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes the scene as follows:

From a reasonable distance Paramahansa Bābājī (another name for Prema dāsa Bābājī), made his prostrated obeisances to his divine master who came out of the temple, and, being too full of the milk of divine kindness and affection for his disciple, held and hugged him (Bābājī Mahārāja) in his loving embrace and asked him how he fared in his worship. After a long good discourse, the *sannyāsī* was introduced by Paramahansa Bābājī to his divine master who expressed his delight for his (the *sannyāsī's*) receiving such a genuine master and asked him to learn *Prema-vivarta* from him (Bābājī Mahārāja) saying, "He who is well-versed in the transcendental knowledge of Kṛṣṇa is a *guru*, be he a *brāhmaṇa*, or a *sannyāsī* or a *śūdra*."

The *sannyāsī* then offered his obeisances to his grand spiritual master. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura notes that the *sannyāsī* was ignorant in some particulars about "the good rule of life that exists between a *guru* and a *parama-guru*, and later he acted accordingly."

What is interesting to me about this amazing scene is the fact that the preceptor brings his disciple, who receives the blessings from the *parama-guru*. This cer-

tainly will be the discharge of my duty as spiritual master for those whom I have initiated if I can, in a real sense, bring them to Prabhupāda. Certainly Prabhupāda will also bless them and encourage them to study his message from their spiritual master in disciplic succession.

Chapter Three, Causal Dharma is Imperfect, Unwholesome, Adulterated and Ephemeral

It is obvious that Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is more interested in the philosophy than in weaving a plot or developing characters in the way of modern novels. Therefore, it is sometimes hard to actually extricate a consistent story. Gradually, a number of saintly personalities are introduced to the reader, and they mostly live in Godruma, along with Prema dāsa Bābājī, who is the first Vaiṣṇava we have met in the book.

Chapter Three opens with strong Vaiṣṇava preaching, and yet we are not aware for several pages who is the speaker. After the conclusion of part of the speech, the narrator informs us, "At the conclusion of his speech, Vaiṣṇava dāsa, after making his obeisances to the assembly of the Vaiṣṇavas, assumed his seat at the further end of the gathering, and all those devotees were greatly moved and tears rolled down their eyes. All of them thanked him with one accord. The groves of Śrī Godruma also responded by the offering of their gratitude." We soon learn that this Vaiṣṇava dāsa is none other than the *sannyāsī* who was formerly an impersonalist, and who had become a student of Prema dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja. He is now a full-fledged Vaiṣṇava and is preaching on his own, in the company of Prema dāsa Bābājī and others.

Vaiṣṇava dāsa's speech impresses another new-

comer, one Kalidāsa Lahiri. On hearing from Vaiṣṇava dāsa, Śrī Lahiri mentally accepts him as his spiritual preceptor or *guru*. It is interesting that when Śrī Lahiri first asked to be instructed by the sages, Prema dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja spoke up and “made the gracious answer” of advising the newcomer to associate with Śrīman Vaiṣṇava dāsa. If we now consider Vaiṣṇava dāsa to be a worthy spiritual master, that would mean that four “generations” of preachers were all capable of instructing disciples. Prema dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja had his own spiritual master, whom he introduced to the *sannyāsī*. And now the *sannyāsī* has become Vaiṣṇava dāsa and has accepted the duty of instructing souls in disciplic succession.

After hearing Vaiṣṇava dāsa’s speech, Lahiri went back to his home. We are told that he lives in a place where he rents a room from a landlord named Mādhava dāsa. Lahiri goes to sleep but awakes at midnight, still pondering over the speeches of Vaiṣṇava dāsa. Lahiri comes out of his room and finds his landlord Mādhava dāsa talking with a woman in the yard of the grove. This Mādhava dāsa is supposedly a renounced *bābājī*, so it is a shock for Lahiri to see this. The woman sees that Lahiri has spotted them and she disappears. Mādhava dāsa is very ashamed of himself in the presence of Lahiri who advises him to “give up the evil course.” After this incident Lahiri decides that he should not stay any more in these rooms, because it will give him an evil reputation. So the next morning he goes to Pradyumna-kuñja, the place in Godruma where the *bābājīs* are staying. He greets Śrī Vaiṣṇava dāsa and begs him for a little room in the *kuñja* where he may stay. Vaiṣṇava dāsa asks Prema dāsa Bābājī about this

request and is given permission to give Lahiri a cottage on one side of the *kuñja*. "Since then Lahiri Mahashaya lived in that cottage and arranged for obtaining food that had been offered to Viṣṇu at the house of a *brāhmaṇa*."

(To be continued.)

Reading Confession: Saint Teresa of Avila

Introduction

Śrīla Prabhupāda authorized his devotees to study other philosophies and religions for the purpose of preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness to wider audiences. But he warned even his advanced Ph.D. followers, “Be careful.” Keeping in mind Prabhupāda’s authorization as well as his warning, I am hereby submitting a reading confession—a report on my reading in the works of Saint Teresa of Avila.

Teresa of Avila can hardly be described as a *karmī* or a *jñānī*. Her path is the way of *bhakti*, devotion to God. One way to look at certain saints of other religions is to regard them as nonalien and within the domain of the *Vedas*. When Prabhupāda was asked if Saint Joan of Arc was in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, he replied that she was not within the twelve cantos of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. But he said, “Anything in relation with God, that is *Bhāgavatam*. So if Joan of Arc—she was in relationship with God—so she’s also *Bhāgavatam*. You should expand *Bhāgavatam* in that way.”

I will discuss the writings of Teresa of Avila not to indulge in them but to use them as a basis for related Kṛṣṇa conscious reflections. I hope that by appreciating a saintly person I will go on to a deeper appreciation of the Kṛṣṇa conscious tradition, which is my own path, and which is, objectively, the supreme path.

I came to read Teresa of Avila by an interesting connection of events. Jayādvaita Swami told me that he was planning to write a Kṛṣṇa conscious commentary on the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes. He intended to introduce his essay with a narration of his own Jewish boyhood. While receiving religious training from a Rabbi, Jayādvaita (then Jay Israel) was introduced to Ecclesiastes, and he was very moved by it. He had read some books by the atheistic existentialists denouncing material life, but he had rejected them as "sour guys." But when he heard "vanity of vanities, all is vanity," it changed his whole outlook. This was the beginning of his spiritual and philosophical quest for the truth. When I heard Jayādvaita Swami discuss this, it made me think of my own upbringing within the tradition of Roman Catholicism.

My mother told me something about heaven and hell and Jesus, and I thought it over on my own. I remember my first reading—baby books with soft illustrations. A mother and her child were talking. The children were asking questions like, "Who made everything?" and the mother answered, "God is the creator of all life." I read this with a thrill, appreciating God as the creator. Even if I committed some sins, I thought, most probably I could expect Jesus to forgive me. I imagined someone having a choice whether to run a hot pressing iron over my back. If He were merciful—which I thought God must be (at least as merciful as I was, if not more so)—He would spare me.

I grew up in a family that did not stress the essence of spiritual life. As middle-class, second-generation American Catholics, living in Queens, New York City, we enjoyed God's grace as the order-supplier—He who wouldn't put a hot iron to your back, and He who

brought daddy back from the war, and allowed us to get a mortgage on a new home. If there was pure devotion to God in our family, I can't recall. Mostly it was just going to church on Sunday.

Later, we children started going to Confession. The nuns asked us to prepare beforehand by examining our consciences. We had to remember what sins we had committed since the last confession. I remember looking down at the scars on my wooden desk. The nuns maintained a period of silence while we examined our thoughts and got ready to tell the priest. Finally, you had to settle on what you would say: "I told lies ten times. I was disobedient to my mother and father maybe five times," etc.

As a college freshman my Catholic faith was knocked over like a weak-rooted weed by the intellectualism of several professors. The teachers smiled and laughed when they mentioned religious faith. One professor said, "Theology cannot answer the question why there's evil in the world if God is good." And why were there so many religions, and so many philosophers? A history professor said there was no real historical record of Jesus, except for a little in Josephus. If he was so important why wasn't Jesus in the historical accounts? And I heard second-hand that the philosopher Wittgenstein said that some questions were absurd to ask and should be ruled out as illegitimate inquiries, such as the question whether God existed. In French class we read Camus' *The Stranger* where the dying hero refused to talk with a priest.

Our local parish priests were superficial. They held raffles in the vestibule where parishioners gambled for prizes of liquor labeled "Baskets of Joy." My father's example was *not* to go to Sunday mass; he claimed that

he communed with God in the backyard garden, and he complained that the priests always asked for money. My mother was stalwart in her faith but too simple for my budding intellectualism. So I rose into the intoxicating ether of atheism boosted by Thomas Paine, Bertrand Russell, and my friendly professors who gave me A's for iconoclastic thoughts.

Atheism led me nowhere, and the world blew me from place to place, like a straw in the wind. Then in 1966, by some undeserved, inconceivable fortune, I met His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, a pure devotee of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Kṛṣṇa. Since then, I have been serving him, convinced the path of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the topmost eternal *dharma*.

But even as a Catholic, I had not read much of the literature. So one day, in the spring of 1986, I went with my assistant Baladeva to a Newman bookstore near Catholic University in Washington. We were probably an unusual sight, two saffron-dressed Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees entering the Christian bookstore. But no one seemed to mind. We were directed to different areas of the store, and after about forty minutes, I had gathered a pile of books, such as an edition of *The Gospels*, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, *My Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, several journals of Thomas Merton, and the works of Saint Teresa of Avila.

The Catholic bookstore was impressive with its wide variety of literatures divided into sections like spirituality, liturgy, Bible studies, and philosophy. When I asked if they had a catalog he said, "No, our books change so often we can't keep up with them." Vedic writings are even more voluminous than Catho-

lic texts, although not yet translated and newly published to stock a big, fancy Kṛṣṇa conscious bookstore. Not yet. Let us look forward to that day!

After a few days, I put aside most of the books we had gathered, although I continued to peruse the diaries of Merton. But I became especially attracted to Saint Teresa. Previously, I had never read anything by her, but I had heard her referred to as "a mystic."

Right away I liked her unsophisticated writing style, a weaving of experience with doctrine. I also liked the fact that she wrote as a teacher, with loving concern for impressing the teachings on her students. And from the first page, it was obvious that she stressed devotion to God by vocal as well as mental prayer as the supreme way. I could see that her practice of writing was also a prayer.

As I began to read I didn't find anything contradictory to the Kṛṣṇa conscious teachings regarding prayer. I had talked with Catholic priests in Dublin who considered vocal prayer inferior. But Teresa wrote favorably of saying one's prayers. During the time of Teresa, a form of Christian silent meditation had already become popular, and though she praised it, she said that her teachings are for those "with souls and minds so scattered that they are like wild horses no one can stop." Certainly Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu taught vocal prayer—the loud chanting of the holy name in *kīrtana* and the audible but quiet prayers of *japa*. When Arjuna was taught silent *yoga* meditation, he said that it was too difficult because "to subdue it [the mind], I think is more difficult than controlling the wind."

But Teresa emphasizes that the vocal prayer must be attentive:

Insofar as I can understand, the gate of entry to this castle is prayer and reflection. I don't mean to refer to mental more than vocal prayer, for since vocal prayer is prayer, it must be accompanied by reflection. A prayer in which a person is not aware of Whom he's speaking to, and what he is asking and of Whom, I do not call prayer, however much the lips may move.

After reading two chapters of *Interior Castle*, I concluded that I liked it. Her concept of God is personal, not impersonal. Her example is of the soul entering further and further toward God within the heart. It reminded me of allegories such as Lord Caitanya's creeper of devotional service, which must be watered by chanting and hearing, and which must be guarded against the mad elephant offense. A similar allegory is Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's comparison of the cleansing of the Guṇḍicā temple to the cleansing of the heart. Just as Lord Caitanya and his associates thoroughly cleansed the temple before bringing Lord Jagannātha there, so we must clean our hearts of different dirts and weeds, such as fault-finding, duplicity, and desire for worship by others. The use of an extended metaphor created by the preacher often helps us to easily remember a complex set of instructions.

But after reading about a third of Saint Teresa's book, I put it aside. I reasoned that if her style was colloquial and charming, wasn't Prabhupāda's also? As she spoke from direct realization, didn't he? As she wrote with a personal concern for her disciples, didn't he? And as her writing was a form of prayer, aren't Prabhupāda's purports his ecstasies? And didn't he give much more even than she, drawing as he did from the larger storehouse of the science of love of God, directly from Lord Caitanya and the six Gosvāmīs? So why be

interested in other than his works? Why not apply one's best hours each day to the worship and exclusive study of his books? And so I turned to a rereading of the prayers of Queen Kuntī.

A year went by, and again I thought favorably of Saint Teresa's life of prayer. I thought reading about her life might help my *japa*. This time I began reading *The Way of Perfection*.

Teresa of Avila was born in 1515 in Spain. She lived most of her life as a cloistered nun of the Catholic Church. She founded many convent houses of the Carmelite order and wrote books on prayer, which have gained a wide audience through the centuries. As one of her editors notes, "Essentially, her popularity has been due to divine grace, which first inspired her to lay aside every aim but the quest for God, and then enabled her to attain a degree of purity in her love for Him which sustained and impelled her. Before everything else, it is the intense fervor of this love which speaks to lovers everywhere, just as it is the determination and courage of her virile soul which inspires those who long to be more determined and courageous than they are."

There are many interesting parallels that could be drawn between Saint Teresa's devotion and the life of a Kṛṣṇa conscious devotee, but I would like to concentrate on a particular section of her teachings on prayer, contained in her book *The Way of Perfection*. Saint Teresa writes for her own disciples (nuns) and guides them from the most rudimentary stages to advanced realizations. Yet at every stage she stresses the importance of humility, determination, and devotion, especially in achieving God's grace through prayer. Her

method is similar to that of Kṛṣṇa consciousness wherein one should persevere and hanker for the advanced stage of love of Kṛṣṇa, while always patiently practicing the rudiments of chanting and hearing.

Saint Teresa is especially concerned with "those whose souls and minds are so scattered that they are like wild horses no one can stop." She calls for the necessity of what we in Kṛṣṇa consciousness would call "attentive chanting."

During Saint Teresa's time, there were other writers and mystics who advocated a form of mental or contemplative prayer, and Teresa of Avila also advises this form of prayer. But she joins it to vocal prayer. By vocal prayer she means the recitation of standard prayers as handed down in the religious tradition and in the scriptures. For we followers of Lord Caitanya and Śrīla Prabhupāda, the chanting out loud of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa is superior to silent meditation. But neither do we ever say that the chanting may be done mechanically or inattentively to receive the full benefit. We will get only a semblance of the holy name, *nāmābhāsa*, if we chant without attention. In his *Hari-nāma Cintāmaṇi*, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has described inattentive chanting by the word *pramāda*, and he says that all the other offenses in the list of ten offenses against the holy name are contained in the offense of inattention. Let us see how Saint Teresa emphasizes the joining of vocal and mental prayer.

Saint Teresa is aware that some of her own readers may be suspicious about so-called mental prayer, or meditation, and may want to stick to their vocal prayers. She also mentions that well-intentioned but uninformed advisors may tell us not to be concerned about the meditative part of our prayers.

If someone should raise these fears to you, humbly explain the path to him. Tell him you have a rule that commands you to pray unceasingly. And then you have to keep it. If they tell you that the prayers should be vocal, ask, for the sake of more precision, if in vocal prayer, the mind and heart must be attentive to what you say. If they answer "Yes"—for they cannot answer otherwise—you will see how they admit how you are forced to practice mental prayer and even experience contemplation if God should give it to you by such a means.

By this explanation, we can understand that "mental prayer" doesn't mean simply that the mouth is closed. The real point is awareness of the words one is saying and thinking. Saint Teresa's simple but profound advice for attentive chanting is that we always remember to whom we are speaking in our prayer. As we increase our awareness of the greatness of God and our own insignificance, as well as our desire to be His devotee, we should be able to at least cease the worst stages of inattention which amount to no more than an impudence before God. As Teresa remarks, "For we must not approach a conversation with a prince as negligently as we do one with a farm worker, or with some poor thing like ourselves, for whom any manner of address is all right." In other words, it is plain rudeness to speak to the Supreme Person by chanting His holy names without bothering to pay great attention to how you address Him, and to keeping your consciousness of time and place.

This is mental prayer, my daughters: to understand these truths. If you should want to grow in understanding these things then pray vocally. Well and good. But you should not be thinking of other things while speaking with God, for doing so amounts to not knowing what mental prayer is.

The person whose names we are calling deserves our greatest attention and devotion. And similarly, the time in which we call upon Him should be devoted to the act of chanting. Teresa writes, "This little bit of time that we resolve to give Him which we spend on ourselves and on someone who will not thank us for it, let us give to Him, since we desire to do so, with our thoughts free of other things and unoccupied by them. And let us be wholly determined never to take it back from Him, neither because of trials on this account, nor because of contradictions, nor because of dryness. I should consider the time of prayer as not belonging to me and think that He can ask it of me in justice even when I do not want to give it wholly to Him."

With this in mind, we think of the wisdom of the previous *ācāryas*, who advised that early morning hours should be devoted to chanting and hearing the glories of the name. As far as possible, one should chant "twenty-four hours a day," but since that is not possible, and we also have many other duties to do for the Lord, spending the best time, such as in *brāhma-muhūrta*, for calling upon Him in the holy name is advisable.

So for vocal prayer to be recited with perfection, it must be joined with mental prayer. We should refuse to be satisfied with merely pronouncing the words. When we say "Hare Kṛṣṇa," it should be an act of love to understand who is Hare and who is Kṛṣṇa. And we may also think of our beloved spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, who has taught us this prayer.

Some persons advise solitude to increase the perfection of calling God's names, and the *yogīs* pursue meditation in that way. But when we can chant in the company of devotees who are also reciting their *japa*, or who are melodiously sharing *kīrtana* vibrations, that is even better than physical solitude. The real point of

"being alone" is to be removed from thoughts of and association with the material world. As Teresa writes, "One cannot speak simultaneously to God and to the world; this would amount to nothing more than reciting the prayer while listening to what is being said elsewhere, or to letting the mind wander and making no effort to control it."

When we consider the possibilities of associating with Kṛṣṇa through His name, we become enthusiastic, and that is good. But when we actually attempt it and come into conflict with the disordered nature of our minds, we sometimes become disappointed. Therefore Rūpa Gosvāmī has advised *utsāhān niścayād dhairyat*. One should be enthusiastic, but when results don't come right away, one should be very determined. Saint Teresa gives encouraging advice for those who feel very discouraged in their attempts to advance in chanting and hearing. Using an image similar to Lord Caitanya's example, Saint Teresa compares the devotee to a gardener who is watering and maintaining the Supreme Lord's garden. As the gardener finds, after some days of attempting, that he has very little desire to draw water for the gardening, he should nevertheless persevere.

Since he [the devotee] knows that this pleases the Lord, and his intention must be not to please himself but to please the Lord, he gives the Lord much praise.... And so he is determined, even though this dryness may last for his whole life.... He doesn't fear that the labor is being wasted. He is serving a good master whose eyes are upon him.... It seems to me more courage is necessary for them than for many other labors in this world. But I have seen clearly that God does not leave one, even in this life, without a large reward; because it is certainly true that one of those hours in which the Lord afterward bestowed on me a taste of Himself repaid, it seems to me, all the anguish I suffered in persevering for a long time in prayer.

This sounds similar to the advice of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, "Don't try to see Kṛṣṇa, but act in such a way that Kṛṣṇa sees you." We should not approach the chanting of the holy names with the desire to get God's favors in the form of transcendental bliss. But we should chant just as Prabhupāda has told us when defining the meaning of Hare Kṛṣṇa: "Oh energy of the Lord, Oh, Supreme Lord, *please engage me in your service.*"

Saint Teresa advises that we not be crybabies about the fact that chanting is sometimes difficult or that we haven't reached the stage of bliss as soon as we desire.

But when I see servants of God, men of prominence, learning and high intelligence, make so much fuss because God doesn't give them devotion, it annoys me to hear them. I do not mean that they shouldn't accept it if God gives it, and esteem it, because then His Majesty sees that this is appropriate. But when they don't have devotion, they shouldn't weary themselves. They should understand that since His Majesty doesn't give it, it isn't necessary; and they should be masters of themselves. They should believe that their desire for consolation is a fault.

Even if our bodies are sick, or if we are afflicted by dryness or noisy and distracting thoughts, we should not admit hopelessness or defeat. We should not be afraid of *japa-tapa*.

In addition to the terms vocal prayer and mental prayer, Saint Teresa refers to "perfect contemplation." The vocal and mental prayer are somewhat within our control, but the stage of contemplation is awarded us as Kṛṣṇa's mercy. It cannot be achieved by one's own powers.

Saint Teresa is repetitive in her discussion of the joining of mental and vocal prayer, but since it's worth-

while, and since this is such a problem (at least for me), I would like to share a few more of her statements:

To recite the Our Father or the Hail Mary or whatever prayer you wish is vocal prayer. But behold, what poor music is produced when you do this without mental prayer. Even the words will be poorly pronounced at times. With these two kinds of prayer we can do something ourselves, with the help of God. In the contemplation I now mentioned, we can do nothing; His majesty is the one that does everything, for it is His work and above our nature.... For it is He who must bestow supernatural prayer, and He will grant it to you if you do not stop short on the road but try hard until you reach the end.

Some may think that too much talk about advanced stages of prayer sounds like the *prākṛta-sahajiyā*, he who is cheaply seeking ecstasy. But this is not at all the case. The *prākṛta-sahajiyā* tries to get things cheaply, tries to taste spiritual bliss before he is even rid of his material desires. He acts on the bodily platform and tries to pass it off as spiritual. But a sincere devotee always prosecutes the rules and regulations, while at the same time desiring to advance. Thus the Gosvāmīs pray, "When will the day come that by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, tears will fall from my eyes?" We should not be uninterested in making great improvements in our chanting. Saint Teresa addresses sarcastically the attitude of so-called pious people who think it is not proper to strive earnestly for spiritual advancement:

Leave aside any of that faint-heartedness that some persons have and think is humility. You see, humility doesn't consist in refusing a favor the King offers you, but in accepting such a favor and understanding how bountifully it comes to you and being delighted with it. What a nice kind of humility! I have the emperor of heaven and earth in my house (for He comes in order to favor me and be happy with me), and out of "humility" I do not want to answer Him or stay with Him or

take what He gives me, but I leave Him alone. Or, while He is telling me and begging me to ask Him for something, I do not do so but remain poor; and I even let Him go, for He sees that I never finish trying to make up my mind. Have nothing to do with this kind of humility, daughters, but speak to Him as with a father, or a brother, or a Lord, or as with a spouse.... He will teach you what you must do in order to please Him.

In a *Bhāgavatam* lecture, Śrīla Prabhupāda described the intensity of the genuine Kṛṣṇa conscious devotee, and how he strives to gain Kṛṣṇa's association. He gave the example first of the topmost devotees of the Lord, the *gopīs* of Vṛndāvana:

They loved so much Kṛṣṇa that they didn't care for family, reputation. They were going at dead of night. Kṛṣṇa's flute was playing.... We must be very very eager... This eagerness is wanted, then you can see God. Either you become lusty or a thief or a murderer; somehow or other you develop this eagerness that "I must see Kṛṣṇa;" then Kṛṣṇa will be seen.

So the first thing is how much eager you are to see Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa will respond. If you are actually eager to see... Then your business is successful.

... so this eagerness is very important thing. But it can happen by the association of devotee... We are giving chance to everyone to awaken that eagerness. Then you'll see God eye to eye. It is not difficult. Those who have developed that eagerness, faith—"I must see Kṛṣṇa in this lifetime." This life is meant for seeing Kṛṣṇa. It is not meant for being hogs and dogs.

—Lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda on August 5, 1972
on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.3.43

I have made my own very imperfect attempts to overcome inattentive chanting and have shared this in *Japa Reform Notebook*. In that collection, the repeated theme was "Chant with attention." Saint Teresa's teachings, especially for those in the beginning stages, also

repeatedly stress the theme that vocal and mental prayer should be joined.

And the main mental cultivation that she mentions is becoming aware of the greatness and nearness of God when we chant His names or pray to Him.

What I'm trying to point out is that we should see and be present to the One with whom we speak without turning our backs on Him, for I don't think speaking with God while thinking of a thousand other vanities would amount to anything else but turning our backs on Him. All the harm comes from not truly understanding that He is near, but in imagining Him as far away. Now, is Your face such, Lord, that we would not look at it when You are so close to us? If people aren't looking at us when we speak, it doesn't seem to us that they are listening to what we say.

... If you speak, strive to remember that the One with whom you are speaking is present within. If you listen, remember that you're going to hear One who is very close to you when He speaks. In some, bear in mind that you can, if you want, avoid ever withdrawing from such good company; and be sorry that for a long time you left your father alone, of whom you are so much in need. You can, practice this recollection often during the day.... Once this recollection is given by the Lord, you will not exchange it for any treasure.

... Those of you who are the enemies of contemplatives should not think that you are free from being a contemplative if you recite your vocal prayers as they should be recited, with a pure conscience.

Since this essay has been written for the followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda, I hope they will not misunderstand me. My intention has been to increase appreciation for attentive chanting. While all these things have already been taught fully in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and by other Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas*, it does not seem wrong to me to include these gems of advice on prayer from a saintly person of another religious culture. Cer-

tainly Śrīla Prabhupāda told us enough times that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is all-inclusive. Thus we accept genuine devotion to God wherever it occurs through His representatives, who teach differently according to time, persons, and places. We who have been fortunate enough to receive the sublime teachings of Lord Caitanya, and who have learned to utter the supreme prayer, the *mahā-mantra*, should do all we can to improve our chanting of these holy names. Whoever can help us to improve our chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* is a helpful guide, and we thank her.

Epilogue: Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra

We have been appreciating Saint Teresa's forceful exhortations for pure prayer, but we should finally pay attention to the special efficacy of the chantings of God's names as contained in the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*. Śrīla Prabhupāda regularly encouraged the chanting of the names of God according to one's religious scripture. But by chanting the name "Kṛṣṇa," we call upon the Supreme in His original form, in His all-attractive nature.

Lord Caitanya recommended, *kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ*: one should always chant the holy name of the Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa, because Kṛṣṇa is the most suitable name of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The name Kṛṣṇa and the Supreme Person Kṛṣṇa are nondifferent. Therefore, if one concentrates his mind on hearing and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, the same result is achieved.

—Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.28.9

The Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* is recommended throughout the Vedic scriptures such as the *Nārada Pañcarātra* and *Kali-santarāṇa Upaniṣad*. There is also a description of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* in the essay *Nāma Bhajana* by

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura:

Nāma has been accepted by all hands to be an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa on this earth. A word though He looks to be, still by His unimaginable powers, He is spiritual and is a special incarnation of Kṛṣṇa. As Kṛṣṇa and His name are identical, Kṛṣṇa has descended to the earth as *Nāma*; so Kṛṣṇa *Nāma* is the first introduction to Kṛṣṇa. With determination to reach Kṛṣṇa, *jīvas* must first accept the name of Kṛṣṇa. In going to determine the significance and origin of *Harināma*, Śrī Gopāla Guru Gosvāmī, the dearest disciple of Śrī Svarūpa Dāmodara Gosvāmī, writes "Blessed are they no doubt who utter Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare even indifferently" (from the *Agni Purāṇa*); those who chant are free from every spot of sin (from the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*); Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu simply collected these names together. These Hare Kṛṣṇa utterings coming out from the lips of Śrī Caitanya inundated the whole world with the thought of *prema*. Glory be to the *nāma* by His will! Hence, Śrīman Mahāprabhu, as mentioned in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and the *Caitanya-bhāgavata*, Himself sang and taught *jīvas* to count these sixteen names of thirty two letters in beads of *tulasī*.

For further references on the glories of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*, one may consult the *Śrī Nāmāmṛta*, by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, and *Hari-nāma Cintamaṇi* by Bhaktivīnoda Ṭhākura.

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