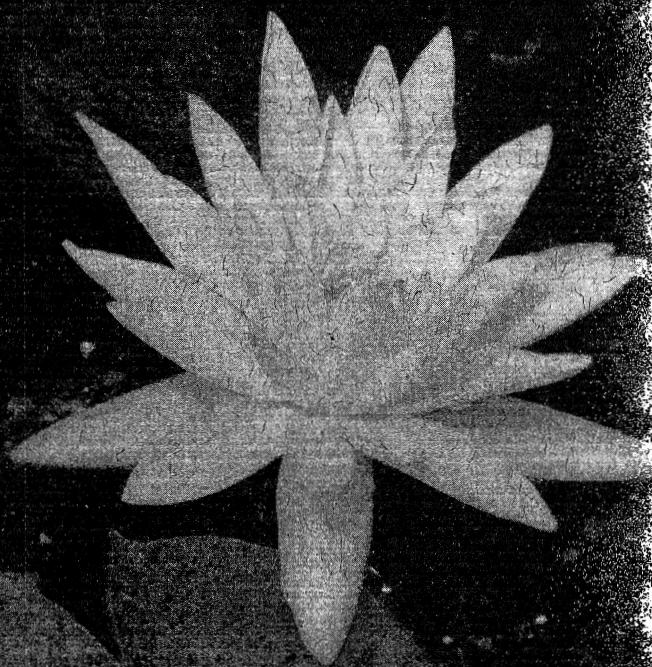


# From Imperfection PURITY <sup>will</sup> <sub>come</sub> about.



Satsvakūpa dāsa Goswami

Writing

Sessions

while

Reading

Bhaktivinoda

Thakura's

Saranagati



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We would like to thank Bala Books for their kind permission  
to use the verses of Śaraṇāgati in this work.

*" . . . Lord Chaitanya's prophetic words will in a few days come true, I am sure. Why not? Nothing is absolutely pure in the beginning. From imperfection, purity will come about."*

*—Bhaktivinoda Thakura*

## *How This Book Came To Be*

A few years ago, I thought of writing on the themes in Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Śaraṇāgati*. I was attracted to them because in *Śaraṇāgati*, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura confesses and laments his fallen nature. He takes the position of an eternally conditioned soul, and through his songs, leads us to perfection. I photocopied *Śaraṇāgati* (which is part of a longer volume, *The Songs of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura*) and bound it for easy carrying in my travels, but I never wrote on it.

Now two years later, a devotee to whom I have given *harināma* initiation, has asked me to do "directed free-writing" on Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's songs. I was surprised that she was aware of the term "directed free-writing" and that she suggested the same project I had previously considered. A writer often waits for inspiration before taking on a serious task, so I asked her to say something further to inspire me. She wrote back that she didn't know what more to say, but she enclosed a copy of the songs.

Free-writing means to write whatever comes to mind in a given writing session. There are rules: keep the hand moving, lose control, don't think discursively, go for the thoughts that have the most energy, don't be afraid of what might come up. It is a particular writing practice. Free-writing has the potential to free a writer from conventional

expression or merely social writing. Free-writing may not always be polished enough to share with the Vaiṣṇavas, but with editing, it can often produce strong, honest writing.

Some of my friends want me to write according to my heart's desire. They believe that this free-writing can produce the best writing of which I am capable. One of my editors wrote me about free-writing: "It is meant to disencumber you from your audience, which can hang like a lead weight around your expression. I really believe that the deeper you go in your writing, the deeper people will read you. Those who are looking for entertainment or pat philosophical essays will go elsewhere. Let them. You do have a sincere following of readers who are willing to go to the depths with you."

Therefore I plan to read Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Śaraṇāgati* and then use free-writing to bring myself to a deeper, more honest—more responsive—place. I want to develop a relationship with Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura as I write. I am asking him to carry me through this project. I want this writing to be a service to him and the cause for which he wrote—to free the bound *jīvas* and bring them to surrender at the lotus feet of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is my great-grandfather. He is a close relative of the followers of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. He is affectionate toward us and we also love and revere him. I pray that he not be offended by my attempts. He knew that in the future, Westerners would take

to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and that their approach would not always appear conventional. Certainly Śrīla Prabhupāda knew this:

Sometimes our Indian friends, puffed up with concocted notions, criticize, "This has not been done. That has not been done." But they forget this instruction of Nārada Muni to one of the greatest Vaiṣṇavas, Dhruva Mahārāja. One has to consider the particular time, country and convenience. . . . If someone does go and preach, taking all risks and allowing all consideration for time and place, it might be that there are changes in the manner of worship, but that is not at all faulty according to *śāstra*.

—*Bhāg.* 4.8.54, purport

I take the dust of the devotees' feet on my head and I ask for their encouragement. I pray to go deep. Please bear with me as nothing is absolutely pure in the beginning. This is where I am: at the beginning of *Śaraṇāgati*.

May 1993

## Introduction

Recently after a Sunday lecture, a guest asked me, "How do you surrender to God?" I told him that there are six symptoms of surrender and that Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions them in the preface to his translation of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Lord Kṛṣṇa promises in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that He will take charge of anyone who surrenders to Him. The Supreme Lord is already maintaining the universe and all the souls within it, but this maintenance is being carried out by Kṣīrodakaśāyī Viṣṇu, His expansion. It is not directly being carried out by Kṛṣṇa. When Kṛṣṇa says He takes charge of His pure devotee, He takes direct charge.

A pure devotee is a soul who is forever surrendered to the Lord, just as a child is surrendered to his parents or an animal to its master. In the surrendering process, one should: (1) accept things favorable for discharging devotional service, (2) reject things unfavorable, (3) believe in the Lord's protection, (4) feel exclusively dependent on the mercy of the Lord, (5) have no interest separate from the Lord, and (6) always feel oneself meek and humble.

—C.c., Preface, p. ix

These six symptoms are the subject matter of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Śaraṇāgati*. It is crucial that we learn these symptoms and take them up.

Unfortunately, few people will advise us to follow the path of *śaraṇāgati*. They are mistaken. Lord Kṛṣṇa says, "Those who are not faithful in this devotional service cannot attain Me, O conqueror of enemies. Therefore they return to the path of birth and death in this material world" (Bg. 9.3).



There is a thin line between admitting inability to surrender and indulging in that misfortune. Gautama Muni was pleased with the young boy who admitted he was so low-born that he didn't even know who his father was. Gautama Muni accepted him because he was honest. A devotee's obedience and good behavior is important.

Each of us has to go alone and remember our spiritual master's instructions. We try to follow them, knowing that our shortcomings will be exposed. Śrīla Prabhupāda allows us to think of him when we are chanting; he is watching us. We do not behave improperly because we know that he is present.

There are other ways to think of the guru's presence when we chant, but despite our aspirations, we fail. We cannot pay attention. We remember incidents that arouse our lust, anger, or envy. We identify with the material body. A long-standing skepticism paralyzes our attempts to feel *bhāva*. It's true. You can't just tell the conditioned soul, "Now be a good boy and don't think anything bad. Just think of Kṛṣṇa twenty-four hours a day and don't

indulge in karma or *jñāna*." We fail. Then we think of our guru when we try to perform our *bhajana* and call out, "Please help me!" This is a real way to remember the spiritual master.

Think of him during your *sādhana*. We are permitted to be ourselves with all our faults—and to improve. Unless we give it this meaning, how can the guru be with us during *bhajana*? We need him to help us through the difficult passages, through attachment and illusion. He will not reject us, although he reserves the right to correct us. Maybe we won't always be successful in following his direction on the first or second attempt. Neither can we guarantee that we will never commit that same mistake again. He doesn't reject us for this. Without his mercy, we are helpless.

I appeal to the leniency of my spiritual master when I place my flawed offerings on the altar. Please find it sincere and acceptable. Please offer it to Kṛṣṇa. Only you can do that.

Why am I writing this? I am begging for mercy.

*From Imperfection,  
Purity Will Come About*

*Writing Sessions While Reading  
Bhaktivinoda Thakura's Saranagati*

Years ago, I used to sing the Introductory Song to *Śaraṇāgati* every morning in the cabin at Gītā-nāgarī. About fifty devotees would gather with me after a morning walk. I remember straining to reach the high notes in the second line of each stanza. Then I would read the translation. The theme of surrender is dear to all devotees. Managers and gurus sometimes used surrender to convince subordinates to perform. "Your duty is hard? Do it anyway! *Surrender!*" I sang this song to remind us.

The devotees who sang these songs with me are scattered now. They no longer collect money for the farm or teach in the *gurukula*. The children are no longer obeying their teachers. Some of them no longer surrender to the four rules or chant sixteen rounds. I've stopped singing *Śaraṇāgati* every day and I've stopped demanding that everyone surrender. Now I am working on myself.

"Out of compassion for the fallen souls, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya came to this world with His personal associates and divine abode to teach *śaraṇāgati*, surrender to the almighty Godhead, and to freely distribute ecstatic love of God, which is ordinarily very difficult to obtain. This *śaraṇāgati* is the very life of the true devotee" (Introductory Song, text 1). The Lord taught this surrender in the form of *harināma-saṅkīrtana*. Prabhupāda called it "an easy and pleasant method of surrender: chant Hare

Kṛṣṇa and dance, and whenever you get tired, take *prasādam*."

Lord Caitanya taught more difficult things too, as in His teachings to Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī: don't eat palatable food, dress like a mendicant, and avoid the company of women. When He dealt with Choṭa Haridāsa, He spoke against hypocrisy. Lord Caitanya Himself surrendered to the *sannyāsa-dharma* and traveled and preached throughout South India.

He taught surrender to Kṛṣṇa, and He showed the ecstasy that comes to the loving *bhakta*. He gave that ecstasy out freely along with *kṛṣṇa-nāma*. "The youthful son of Nanda Mahārāja, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, hears the prayers of anyone who takes refuge in Him by this six-fold practice. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura concludes the opening song by declaring himself the lowest among men. "But please make me the best of men by teaching me the ways of *śaraṇāgati*."



The ways of *śaraṇāgati* are humility, dedication of the self, acceptance of the Lord as one's only maintainer, faith that Kṛṣṇa will surely protect, execution of only those acts favorable to pure devotion, and renunciation of conduct averse to pure devotion.

At first, the six symptoms of surrender may seem vague. Yet they are clear and demanding: do whatever is favorable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and avoid what is unfavorable. The Lord is our protector. We

don't need any other protection. He is our maintainer. We don't need to worry about anything. Nothing happens except by the will of Kṛṣṇa—when we know this and depend on His mercy in all ways, we are surrendering. We think of ourselves as lowly and fallen and in need of His direction. The basic symptoms include a devotee's whole state of being. "This *śaraṇāgati* is the very life of a true devotee."

A pure devotee is surrendered at every second. He manifests these symptoms. Those who are in the imperfect stage are not always successful at seeing Kṛṣṇa as the maintainer and in being dependent on Him. They examine themselves, "Why don't I do what is favorable for my Kṛṣṇa consciousness? What *is* favorable?" They are not always sure. Is remaining a *brahmacārī* surrender? Is becoming a *gṛhastha* surrender? Is surrendering to the temple commander surrender? Is preaching surrender? O Kṛṣṇa, please teach us the science of surrender.



There are two definitions of "surrender" in my Webster's paperback: "(1) to give up control or possession of to another on demand or under compulsion. (2) to give (oneself) over, as to an emotion: yield." (Surrender can act as a verb or as a noun. In the song title, *Śaraṇāgati*, it acts as a noun: the act or way of surrender.)

According to Webster's first meaning, we can understand that the compulsion is coming from

Kṛṣṇa. He is demanding, "Surrender to Me." We don't like to surrender to another person, so most people reply, "Who are You? Why should we do as *You* say?" That is their misfortune. The Supreme Personality of Godhead has a right to demand surrender. He is interested in our own good. Only when He takes charge of us can He take away our sinful reactions. "Surrender, you rascal, and don't be afraid."

The particular words used here, *mā śucaḥ*, "Don't fear, don't hesitate, don't worry," are very significant. One may be perplexed as to how one can give up all kinds of religious forms and simply surrender unto Kṛṣṇa, but such worry is useless.

—Bg. 18.66, purport

Kṛṣṇa doesn't take away our tiny free will. We actually have the power to refuse His offer of protection. But surrender we must. If we don't surrender to Kṛṣṇa, then we have to surrender to the material energy, to repeated birth and death. Therefore Kṛṣṇa's representatives move among the conditioned souls imploring them, "Just surrender unto Kṛṣṇa. Don't worry what will happen to your body and soul. Kṛṣṇa will take care of that."

The second dictionary meaning is to give in to an emotion. This may have the opposite significance of what we mean by surrender to Kṛṣṇa. It can mean yielding to the lower nature. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* we read how Diti induced her husband, Kaśyapa, to have sexual intercourse with her at an inauspicious time. "Understanding his wife's pur-

pose, he was obliged to perform the forbidden act, and thus after offering his obeisances unto worshipable fate, he laid down with her in a secluded place" (*Bhāg.* 3.14.31). They both knew better, but they gave in to sex desire. This is a destructive form of surrender whereby even one who is learned and enlightened, who knows the rules and regulations, fails to protect himself from material desire. The conditioned soul routinely surrenders to the dictates of the mind, speech, anger, the tongue, and belly. He jokes, "All right, I surrender," and does what he should not do, consigning himself to fate in the form of sinful reactions.

The Vaiṣṇavas are not interested in that kind of surrender. Facing *māyā* and her agents, the devotee is like a warrior who refuses to surrender even against such formidable foes. When the British asked John Paul Jones to surrender, he replied, "I have not yet begun to fight." When Satan tempted Christ to bow down to him "and I'll give you everything," Christ replied, "Get thee hence, Satan!" He did not surrender.

My stony heart is devoid of devotion and grows despondent upon hearing the arduous process of self-realization and the devotional discipline undertaken by great souls like Śukadeva Gosvāmī and Mahārāja Ambarīṣa. I feel hopeless and incapable. But looking around me once more I see the waves of mercy that You showered upon Lord Brahmā and upon even the most fallen reprobate. This gives me great hope and soothes my troubled heart.

—Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī

Our work is to discriminate between the elevated and the degrading forms of surrender and choose the favorable one. I especially try to do that in writing. Sometimes my offering is not the deepest act of voluntary love, but Śrīla Prabhupāda says we have to act like soldiers under a military command. Lord Kṛṣṇa says, "If you do not act according to My direction and do not fight, then you will be falsely directed. By your nature, you will have to engage in warfare" (Bg. 18.59).

The Supreme Personality gives directions as to what is good and what is bad, and one simply has to act in Kṛṣṇa consciousness to attain the perfection of life. No one can ascertain his destiny as the Supreme Lord can; therefore the best course is take direction from the Supreme Lord and act. No one should neglect the order of the Supreme Personality of Godhead or the order of the spiritual master, who is the representative of God. One should act unhesitatingly to execute the order of the Supreme Personality of Godhead—that will keep one safe under all circumstances.

—Bg. 18. 59, purport

Bite the bullet. Surrender to Kṛṣṇa can sometimes be like that. Get in line, stop speculating, stop your sense gratification fantasies. Follow the orders of your spiritual master no matter what the cost. Get off the mental plane and surrender.

There are limits to surrender when it is offered only out of fear or duty. Are we afraid of Kṛṣṇa's punishment? Why do we withhold a part of ourselves—that part that is not fully convinced? Don't

we trust Kṛṣṇa? Don't we trust ourselves? This is *vaidhī-bhakti*—mechanical surrender to the rules and regulations. It will eventually lead to a higher stage, but we shouldn't misidentify obedience to the rules and regulations as surrender.

Surrender doesn't mean losing yourself. You don't have to renounce your true ego. The liberated devotees of the Lord who please Him most have a full sense of their own desires and self-hood—but they are completely in love with Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa isn't looking for slaves or indentured servants. He doesn't want conscripted soldiers in His army. He is giving us the choice: "What do you want to do? Do you want to come to Me, or do you want to stay in the material world?" When we choose sin, He may order His foolish devotees, "No! Surrender!"

There is a class of devotees, *rāgātmikās*, who render all their service voluntarily because they love Kṛṣṇa. These devotees are experiencing real freedom, and in that freedom, sometimes they order Kṛṣṇa to carry out their desires. Kṛṣṇa loves these exchanges because the orders are coming from His surrendered servants. As Kṛṣṇa tells the *gopīs*, "Your connection with Me is beyond reproach" (*Bhāg.* 10.32.22).



The first section in *Śaraṇāgati* is titled "*Dainya*, Humility." This section closely follows a section in the Third Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* where the human embryo prays to God:

He is unlimited, but He is perceived in the repentant heart. . . . I am separated from the Supreme Lord because of my being in this material body . . . although I am essentially spiritual. . . . My dear Lord, by Your causeless mercy I am awakened to consciousness, although I am only ten months old. . . . there is no way to express my gratitude but to pray with folded hands. . . . Therefore, without being agitated anymore, I shall deliver myself from the darkness of nescience with the help of my friend, clear consciousness. Simply by keeping the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu in my mind, I shall be saved from entering the womb of many mothers for repeated birth and death.

—*Bhāg.* 3.31.13–14, 18, 21

The unborn child sees the Lord in his heart and promises to always remember Him. He suffers terribly and doesn't want to experience another birth. But as soon as he is born, he is in the hands of people who know neither his physical nor his spiritual needs.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes an entire life in the first song, stanzas 4–7:

"As a fondled son in the laps of my relatives, I passed my time smiling and laughing. My parents' affection helped me to forget the pangs of birth, and I thought the world was very nice.

"Day by day I grew and soon began playing with other boys. Shortly my power of understanding emerged. I read and studied my lessons incessantly.

"Traveling from place to place, proud of my education, I grew wealthy and maintained my family

with undivided attention. O Lord Hari, I forgot You!

"Now in old age, Bhaktivinoda is sad. He weeps. I failed to worship You, O Lord, and instead, passed my life in vain. What will be my fate now?"

Under the spell of *māyā*, most people don't think of these activities as a waste of time but as the goal of life. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's life appears successful—he has affectionate parents, a nice world view, a taste for his studies and the competitive edge, wealth, the ability to travel, devotion to his family. "Why is he complaining?" the materialist wants to know.

"O Lord Hari, I forgot You!"

He is speaking through the eyes of scripture. A human life is wasted without God consciousness. It becomes no better than the life of an animal (*śrama eva hi kevalam*). Even a half-intelligent person can taste the bitterness of his or her own experiences. And when old age approaches, what is left? "What will be my fate now?"

If, therefore, the living entity again associates with the path of unrighteousness, influenced by sensually minded people engaged in the pursuit of sexual enjoyment and the gratification of the palate, he again goes to hell as before.

—*Bhāg.* 3.31.32



In youth, the life of scholarship increases our hopes. We didn't know anything as children, but then we discovered books, writers, philosophers,

poets, psychologists, political scientists, the physicists, art, culture . . . "Confidently, I spent my time in the pleasures of mundane learning and never worshiped Your lotus feet, O Lord . . . Reading on and on, my hopes grew, for I considered material knowledge to be life's true path" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 1.2.1–2). Knowledge-acquiring becomes a passion when the student tries to glean all he can from books and teachers. The rewards may not be as intense as those gained by other pursuits, but learning produces prestige, power, and pride. It also produces intellectual snobbery.

Eventually, the scholar (*jñānī*) finds that material knowledge cannot answer the crucial questions: "Who am I? What is the cause of creation? Why is there so much suffering and how can it be overcome?" And what can knowledge do to stop death? The scholar meets contradictions and differing opinions wherever he turns.

As stated in the *Mahābhārata*, "Dry arguments cannot give us the truth, and neither can the philosophers, because they always differ." This differing nature of the world's teachers is an illusion created by *māyā* for the purpose of further bewildering the Godless thinkers. This is described in the "*Haṁsa-guhya*" prayers of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*:

Let me offer my respectful obeisances unto the all-pervading Supreme Personality of Godhead, who possesses unlimited transcendental qualities. Acting from within the cores of hearts of all philosophers, who propagate various views, He causes them to forget their own souls while

sometimes agreeing and sometimes disagreeing among themselves. Thus He creates within this material world a situation in which they are unable to come to a conclusion. I offer my obeisances unto Him.

—*Bhāg.* 6.4.31

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura concludes that material knowledge makes a man an ass. His future is bleaker than that of an ordinary man; he is more entangled and confused. The *Īśopaniṣad* declares, "Those who engage in the culture of nescient activities shall enter into the darkest region of ignorance. Worse still are those engaged in the culture of so-called culture of knowledge" (Mantra Nine).

In his purport to this mantra, Śrīla Prabhupāda states: "Advancement of learning by a godless people is as dangerous as a valuable jewel on the hood of a cobra. The cobra decorated with such a valuable jewel is more dangerous as one which is not decorated. . . . In *Hari-bhakti-sudhodaya*, the advancement of education by a godless people is compared to decorations on a dead body."



I was thinking about this writing this morning. I made a resolution to keep writing, but I realized that at any moment, my peace and ease could be violently torn away. I felt this in a small way today while walking and listening to tapes. I made a gesture with my hand and it caught the wire that leads to the Walkman. Suddenly the earplugs were

jerked out of my ears. It didn't hurt, but it was sudden, accidental—the sound was gone. It produced a mental shock as I humbly returned the earplugs to my ears.

That was just a small inconvenience—not even serious—but with the same suddenness, I could lose my life. I try to write with that in mind. Every moment is special, and when you pass the fifty-year mark, every moment becomes more precious. I still haven't been able to write a profound epic, but at least I am able to stop and breathe prayers and to remind myself that I am writing as one who is about to die, for those who are also about to die. Don't waste time. We are all looking for earnestness. We are all looking for that feeling that will connect us to Kṛṣṇa.



Bhaktivinoda Tṭhākura talks of the pleasures of mundane learning. His learning taught him that sense gratification was of utmost importance, but in old age, he is not able to enjoy:

"Here is one such ass who for so long has carried on his back the burden of material existence. Now in my old age, for want of the power to enjoy, nothing pleases me."

Each of us will have to experience this. Are we still expecting the body to prove that we made the best choices throughout our lives? The old man's material knowledge leaves him bankrupt. Even a *great* old man like Mahatma Gandhi was betrayed by his followers, and the projects he worked so hard

for all his life became nothing. The old man becomes bitter. He no longer wants to live. " . . . my knowledge has proven itself worthless, and ignorance has penetrated my heart with the intolerable, burning pain of a pointed shaft."

When you can surrender, a song begins to infiltrate your mind. Is it a marching song? I'm not sure. But it does not come as a result of surrendering to lower emotions. It comes when you surrender to Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda said Vyāsa and other sages of his rank did not write fairy tales. And saints and their learned disciples are not so foolish as to worship stone and wooden idols. I also follow Prabhupāda's example and steal from my sleep at night to write. Why? Am I foolish enough to do it without a serious return? No, I am getting a return. But it is taking a lot of work to dig on the eastern side.

Surrender is austerity when we do it in faith before reaching the spontaneous stage. We are like Lord Brahmā who heard Lord Viṣṇu's sound vibration "*tapa*" and began to meditate, not sure of what he expected. We want to surrender to beautiful, playful Kṛṣṇa. Surrender means to want to please Him even before we know Him.

Like Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's song, we will also have to sing songs before we are spiritually redeemed. "I am wrong, I am unhappy, I am ignorant . . . " We regret our pre-Kṛṣṇa conscious impressions; they haunt us as we grow older. We regret not having taken full advantage of our spiritual master's association. We regret not having fully studied the words of the *mahā-bhāgavatas* to whom

our spiritual master introduced us. We aspire to reach the stage Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings of in his last stanza of this self-deprecating lament. He says he has been misled by the so-called jewel of education, but now "I seek no other treasure in this world than Your lotus feet."

Material knowledge makes an ass out of a man. It makes him forget his soul. He pursues "brilliant thoughts" and material "improvements" which in actuality are mirages and blind alleys. By the time he discovers how lost he is, it's too late. At the end he is broken. An intelligent man at that point accepts humiliation as the only valuable lesson he has learned, but by then he is alone. His friends have deserted him and the pursuits which once seemed important now seem ludicrous.

This is when he decides to dedicate himself to devotional service. With his body embarrassed by dwindling and weakness, he tries to renounce material life.

Kṛṣṇa is the ever-youthful hero of Vṛndāvana. When the old man discovers Kṛṣṇa and tries to surrender to Him, he is liberated from the bonds of his body. People laugh at him, but he says, "I am not obliged to follow those asses and their institutions and slavish duties. I will worship Govinda by chanting and hearing His glories and I won't care for anyone else."

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says the ass-like man carries the burden of material existence on his back all his life. All kinds of materialists, from the educated to the illiterate, agree that spiritual life should not

be pursued. "Here is one such ass" who has followed them and seeks meaning in this world while totally neglecting the call of the soul and the Supreme. It has all been in vain.

This is not an idle song. Try to feel the loss he feels. See yourself in that position. See the whole world like that—the people growing old in quiet desperation, one by one realizing their lives have been wasted. The worst fools, of course, never admit it.



I don't feel as if I am writing from the heart. Although I am speaking the śāstric truths in an empathetic way, I don't identify with this story. I was spared the worst delusions before I grew too old. At least externally, I have been released from material existence for over twenty-seven years. My story is different. I am approaching old age with aspirations to continue serving my *gurudeva*.

But that does not mean I am not free of regrets. Although I have had such a rare opportunity, I was not able to embrace Kṛṣṇa consciousness with all my heart. My previous material attachments have hampered me. I have become bogged down by the disappointments that come in the institutional religious life, in personal failure to surrender, and in my lack of boldness to preach. The later it gets, the harder it is for me to summon up youthful idealism.

But it's not too late. We have to accompany Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura through all his despair. He promises to deliver us to perfection. To go with

him in truth, we have to honestly admit the extent of our own failures. We have to be prepared to search our hearts. We have only glimpsed the truth of our condition and only glimpsed the superlative position of Kṛṣṇa. Therefore we haven't lived fully. We have been given Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which produces amazing results. But we haven't tasted them. Therefore, to waste life in petty material pursuits is one kind of regret, but to have been given the chance to worship Govinda from youth, to have the trust of His pure devotee placed upon us, and then to have not taken it fully . . . to have slipped down to mediocrity in an unfulfilled spiritual life . . .

We should cry. These songs are for us. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's unhappiness *is* our unhappiness.



In Song Three of *Dainya*, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes more details of his life. "When I was young, I greatly desired to earn money. At that time, bearing in mind the codes of religion, I took a wife. Together we set up a household, wasted much time, had many sons and daughters . . . my heart grew heavy. . . . The burden increased day by day. I felt my life at a standstill."

How do we take this song? Is it autobiography? Fiction? Who is the "I" he speaks of who wastes time in household life? What do we mean when we say Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is saying this for our benefit?

I think many of us know the answers to these questions. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is a liberated soul; he is a sage like Vyāsadeva or Śukadeva. They too had human-like lives. Vyāsa suffered dissatisfaction even after compiling the *Vedas*. Śukadeva appeared to be a monist at first. But they are not ordinary conditioned souls. They are liberated *śaktyāveśa-avatāras*. Yes, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is speaking for our benefit when he says he is in constant material anxiety. He is our worshipable guru.

We can examine the depth of his Kṛṣṇa consciousness simply by studying his writings. Here he describes himself as a harassed householder in need of Kṛṣṇa's mercy. Later he will give us the entire science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in books like *Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta* and *Jaiva Dharma*. In those books, he discusses everything from "I am not this body" to the identity of the soul as a *mañjarī* in Rādhā's service in eternal Vraja. He could not write such things in such an authoritative, convincing, and appealing manner unless he was an empowered *ācārya*. We also accept him because he is worshiped by great spiritual masters like Gaura-kīśora dāsa Bābājī, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, and our Śrīla Prabhupāda. (As the son of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura personally observed his father's activities. In his preface to his father's *Bhajana-rahasya*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī writes, "A few years before, this *akiñcana* carefully observed him reciting the *ślokas* mentioned in this book and at the same time he

was relishing overwhelming ecstatic love of Godhead.”)

We have no doubt about Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura’s position, yet we shouldn’t think he is writing these songs from a great distance, that he is not feeling the things he is writing. Śrīla Prabhupāda told us that when great Vaiṣṇavas write that they are most fallen and sinful, they actually *feel* most fallen and sinful. We don’t take them literally and conclude that because Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja claims he is lower than a worm in stool, it must be true. If we think like that, our spiritual life will be destroyed by Vaiṣṇava *aparādha*. We should, however, try to enter their mood.

The *mahā-bhāgavata* thinks everyone is serving Kṛṣṇa except himself. Entering their mood is not so easy. I can’t do it. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is close to these emotions. He *regrets* having wasted his life; I am the one who is distant from it. At least theoretically I am able to accept his writing as deep and personal. When he says he feels pain and is afraid, he is writing how he feels. He is writing for himself and also as the universal teacher (*jagat-guru*). Hear him with faith. He is the most competent guide to teach us to face our own desperation and then surrender to Kṛṣṇa.



Why *don’t* I feel regret? I’m not even sure why. Maybe I don’t want to be uncomfortable—whether it’s caused by restless joy or mental pain—and I don’t want to be kept up all night. I want regula-

tion, not ecstasies or a remorse that burns my heart. I have tasted the pain that an illness can bring. Am I frightened by that experience? Am I trying to avoid suffering?

Some psychologists suggest that it is better to stay on the surface, although they may also agree that some regret is therapeutic. We read of catharsis. The Greek tragedies play this catharsis out. The characters go through intense emotional grief and become cleansed. If we fully partake of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's songs, we can experience transcendental catharsis. Why don't we let them cut our hearts?

The metaphors these poets use can be startling: "Ignorance has penetrated my heart with the intolerable burning pain of a pointed shaft." Who needs *that*? I keep it comfortably at a distance—as "poetry." But until I feel regret at my offenses and past and present misconduct, how can I make spiritual advancement? Why and how have I managed to cover up all these emotions? Is it really necessary that I go through them? Perhaps Kṛṣṇa is making it easy for me because He knows my faith is delicate and I can't take too much. But that means I won't go back to Godhead. We have to go through so much austerity in spiritual life. The *vrajavāsīs* are always being carried on waves of often contradictory emotions. Sometimes they laugh, sometimes they cry, sometimes they feel intense pride followed by crushing humility.

I don't have the answer to these questions I am asking myself, but I am convinced that we have to

feel regret. I advocate it in my lectures and writings, although I don't personally feel it. I never even shed a tear in my solitary *bhajana*. My confessions are filled with descriptions of the deserts I cross while riding the chariot of the mind.

It is good at least to be writing this. I don't want to skim over these songs without trying to understand them. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Not only should one give up his past bad habits, but he must always regret his past sinful acts. This is the standard of pure devotion" (*Bhāg.* 6.2.27, purport). And in discussing Mahārāja Parīkṣit's repentance, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "... all sins unwillingly committed by a devotee are burnt in the fire of repentance" (*Bhāg.* 1.19.1, purport).

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura has written on this subject elsewhere also. In his essay entitled "*Pañca Saṁskāra*," he criticizes unqualified teachers who do not evoke repentance in their followers. "Without *tapa* or inner repentance, the soul cannot live as a Vaiṣṇava. . . . Therefore, good friends, seek atonement without delay!"

Repentance is usually considered an early stage of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It comes when we are still troubled by sins, when we are unredeemed. I tend to think I am beyond this. By Śrīla Prabhupāda's mercy, I am avoiding illicit sex, intoxication, meat-eating, and gambling. I have no apparent sins. I don't say, "I would worship You, O Lord, but it is a useless hope" because I worship Kṛṣṇa every day in the temple. Obviously, I am complacent. I have to go deeper.

I do commit mistakes. I do make offenses. I do have *anarthas*. I may not be grossly sinful, but perhaps my deeply embedded complacency is just as bad. Therefore, remorse is one of the first stages of recognizing and trying to get out of complacency. When we try again and again to chant, but again and again we don't feel anything, that is cause for regret. Sometimes neophyte devotees ask, "How should we think when we chant? Should we pay attention to the sound, or should we think of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the groves of Vṛndāvana?" But what if we can do neither due to *nāma-aparādhā*? We should be sorry. We should beg the holy names for forgiveness. Repentance is a treasure, a rare gift. "If perchance a devotee commits *nāma-aparādhā*, then with an anguished heart full of contrition, he should become eager to chant continuously, for this alone will uproot his previous offenses and also protect him from committing further offenses" (*Śikṣāṣṭaka*, *Śloka* 2, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's purport).

Until we admit our faults, there is no room for improvement. And as long as we want to avoid "feeling bad," we will not be able to enter the mood of repentance.



Dear Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura,

Please accept my humble obeisances at your lotus feet.

I am a disciple of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and I am writing to

request permission to write while I read your *Śaraṇāgati*.

In Song 3 of the "*Dainya*" series, you write "I" as if you mean yourself. You tell us you "took a wife . . . together we set up a household, wasted much time, had many sons and daughters . . . my heart grew heavy." This "I" corresponds to your biographical data. You *did* have many children and you were a learned scholar. But you were always a pure devotee. I don't have any doubt about that. I accept everything you say. My spiritual master reveres you as a great sage whose writings are as good as the *Vedas*. My only problem is whether you will accept me and my attempt to read your songs and then to write. My spiritual master told us you are "eighty percent lenient" (which implies you are only twenty percent strict). Śrīla Prabhupāda said this on your appearance day in 1968. He asked me to get married, and he chose your appearance day as an auspicious date. On that morning we asked if we should fast in honor of your appearance day. Śrīla Prabhupāda replied, "There is no question of fasting. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura was lenient. All the *ācāryas* are lenient."

Dear Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, great-grandfather spiritual master, you were a great preacher to the Indians as well as to the Westerners. You particularly addressed the Western mind in your "*Bhāgavata*" lecture, in *Caitanya-śikṣāṣṭaka*, and in the *Life and Precepts of Lord Caitanya* which you sent to McGill University in Canada in 1896. I have heard you even corresponded with Ralph Waldo Emer-

son. You reached out because you wanted Kṛṣṇa consciousness to be taken up by Americans and Europeans. You longed for the day when all the people would come together in Navadvīpa and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and *Jaya Śacīnandana*.

I hope you will see my attempts to write as sincere.



Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *dainya* songs are intense. The word *dainya* means "wretched, miserable, afflicted, poverty-stricken, low-spirited, feeble." He has infused every stanza with that mood in his depiction of an old man who sees all his plans frustrated. Too old to enjoy the senses now, troubled by diseases and anxieties—and it's obvious that nothing will improve. There's nothing to look forward to but death. "I would worship You, O Lord, but it is a useless hope."

I want to empathize with his mood, but I will have to depart from it also. It's not my normal state. My state is peace-seeking, counting blessings, looking for deeper entrance into Kṛṣṇa consciousness, an awareness that I'm not advanced and not pure. I'm thankful for what I have. I haven't awakened to deep remorse over what I lack.

I don't feel complacent or ingenuous as we sit in our Renault van atop a mountain near a sanctuary built into the rock. I am a little worried thieves and murderers could come during the night, but I also entrust my life to Kṛṣṇa and try to overlook that possibility.

Tomorrow we will go down to this town and begin a five-day Āyurvedic treatment. After that, I'll be free to write in peace. This is where I'm at externally. Internally? The quality I am seeking may take many, many births. It's not cheap. But this is all I have for now. Anyway, let me write even now. I am not writing because I feel forced, but because I want to. Prabhupāda said of his own writing, "Why I get up at night, one o'clock and do this job? Because I cannot do without it. How will one do it artificially? This is quality. Therefore they like my purports" (*Conversations With Śrīla Prabhupāda*, November 2, 1975).



I wish I could read these songs in Bengali. He writes so personally, as I also try to do. He has not filled these songs with śāstric quotes, but he is writing for us. It is painful. His songs are disturbed laments. They make us uneasy. Maybe that's why we tend to become preoccupied with asking whether he is really talking about himself in these songs. It diverts our attention rather than focusing it where it belongs, on ourselves. That would be too hard to take.

Yesterday at lunch, the topic of Yugoslavia came up briefly. Our host said different people have been placed together, Serbs and Croats, by falsely designated political borders. Now they are cruelly destroying each other. I thought, "You don't have to repeat the details. Stop there. Don't say 'rape' and 'roasting' and 'butchering bodies.' Don't disturb our

lunch." I thought of asking, "Yugoslavia is not so far from Italy, is it? It's just across the Adriatic Sea." I imagined the Italian planes guarding their coast.

Don't disturb us. Don't bring up negative topics. Leave us to continue hoping bad things won't happen to us. We are going for a five-day health treatment—we are trying to stay alive. "The current of this worldly river is strong and relentless. A frightening, gloomy death approaches. How I wish I could give up my worldly attachments. I would worship You, O Lord . . ."

Let us take shelter while we can in the patch of peace we live in, with whatever health we possess. We all have to leave here eventually—yes, that means everyone who gathered with me as we worshiped Tulasī-devī and everyone in this Italian town. Whether or not someone comes up this hill to disturb us, we will all have to die. The blonde woman who drove up in the small gray car and spent half an hour in the *sanctuario*, the old man who came up on his motor scooter and left at once, the dog barking at 2:30 a.m., and my dear Madhu (unthinkable), and me, precious me, the writer . . . We all have to die. But Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura lives on in this stanza. "Without Your mercy, everything is lost. Please give me the shelter of Your lotus feet."

*Padāśraya*: I take shelter at Your feet. Feel and believe and enter. This is the time and place for prayer. I need to hear you, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura. We all do. "Now please hear me, O Lord, for I am utterly helpless."

In Song Four, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura confesses, "I am a sinner. I caused others pain." He doesn't commit sins anymore, but his karma weighs heavily on him. (My karma weighs on me too. During *japa* this morning, I roamed back to 1964 when I was confused, helpless, and sinful—a welfare worker, marijuana-smoker . . . Are these the thoughts fit to accompany *japa*? It's bad enough that I *lived* those things, but do I have to remember them while I am chanting the holy name? Prabhupāda saved me just in time.) Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura does not describe the details, but he lays it on the line—a sense-gratifier hurts others, but he doesn't care. Therefore he hurts and ruins himself.

Most of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's statements seem so extreme that we don't quite know what to do with them. It's almost hard to believe him when he says, "I am remorseful seeing others happy." But I experience this all the time. "I'm a perpetual liar." That's not true of me. I am honest. But wait a minute, you can't *face* the truth. You don't even know what the truth *is*. Isn't that a form of lying?

"The misery of others is a source of great pleasure for me." Now *that's* an exaggeration as far as I'm concerned. That sounds like a sadist. Do I think like that? But isn't a holier-than-thou attitude the same thing? Seeing the nondevotees unhappy is proof of my own righteousness. I tell you, I haven't faced the truth; I have no idea what it is. I know neither the evil in me nor the good. I know neither the love nor the pain. I don't know separation from

Kṛṣṇa at all. I am a *vaidhī-bhakta*, fingering my beads by candlelight and reminiscing about 1964.

I am easily disturbed. I don't feel deep emotion. I can't confess. I remember going to confession as a child. The nun told us to prepare ourselves to tell the priest our sins, but all I could think of was that I talked back to my mother and told a lie. We were looking for the cracks in the sidewalk instead of the chasms in our souls. Why? Because the main thing was to stay as calm as possible. It was the middle of the war.

Don't look at the chasms. Don't wake up the sleeping beasts. "The material desires within the core of my heart are unlimited." Again I wonder if he is calling up the worst possible condition to describe an Everyman. But any one of us can fall to the lowest depths of depravity. "There but for the grace of God go I." We generously ascribe all possible weaknesses to ourselves, even though we don't believe we have them, but Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says that *kāma*, material lust, is in the core of his heart. He speaks the truth even for you. Admit it.

No, I'm not such a bad guy. I used to be bad, but I'm okay now. I'm a *sādhū* traveling in a Renault van.

Ah, but in the core, the secret core of your heart . . .

Dhruva Mahārāja disowned all his desires when he saw the Lord, but Lord Viṣṇu said, "That's very nice, Dhruva, that you say *svāmīn kṛtārtho 'smi varam na yache*. But I know you still harbor one desire. Therefore, I am going to give you the Pole

Star and a fabulously long duration as king. After that, you can come back to Me in the spiritual world."

It's in the heart. You dream of surrendering yourself to . . . you dream . . .

My Kṛṣṇa consciousness is only a covering. At the ultimate core, I am spirit soul. Then there are lumps of filth around that, then an outer layer of devotional service in ISKCON, and finally, most recently added, a thin powdery covering of real hope.

Hey man, where are you at? Do you even know?



Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is eventually going to introduce songs of a higher nature. A pure devotee will come into his life and save him. Then he will aspire for Kṛṣṇa consciousness in surrender. He is starting out at the bottom with the story of a sinful man. Maybe it's like this: the man is not Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, but once he decides to tell of a man at the bottom, he finds within himself the feeling that he wasted his life. It makes me think of how Dostoevsky wrote of people who contained both depravity and moral strength. People praised Dostoevsky for feeling and living such a wide range of human possibilities. People are like that—some are bad, some are good, most are mixed. Why should we deny Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura the ability to feel the emotions of a soul who is depraved and broken by material misery?

Vyāsadeva saw the sufferings of the *jīvas* in his vision of the Absolute Truth with *māyā* standing behind. Prahlāda Mahārāja said he wouldn't go back to Godhead alone, leaving aside the poor fools who were bewildered by material civilization. Śrīla Prabhupāda felt compassion for the hippies and other materialists in the West.

To feel it in yourself is different though. I don't need to know whether Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is speaking for himself in order to hear his message. I appreciate the story of a fallen soul near death, calling out to God. I think of some of my readers who say about me, "I refuse to believe the bad things you say about yourself." Similarly, I can't believe Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura was a vile, wicked man rejected by godly people. Instead, I can try to feel what he wants me to feel. When he ascends to the liberated stage and speaks of his direct service to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, again I won't be able to directly feel his emotions. It's beyond my experience. His eternal happiness gives me the hope I need to follow him to the depths of spiritual despair.

Actually, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura wrote fearlessly. Superficial people can take his words literally and condemn him as a sinner. His writing is deep, but it is possible to read it as shallow. How to penetrate it? The spiritual texts are themselves conscious and can reveal their own meanings to a sincere reader. I also know that when I understand better what Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura feels, I'll better be able to

open my own floodgates of sorrow and remorse. Right now I am numb to remorse. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is open. I am closed.



“Now in old age, deprived of all means of success, humbled and poor, Bhaktivinoda submits his tale of grief at the feet of the Supreme Lord.” The word “humbled” in this verse is significant. He is forced to his knees. It’s not a humility that he has arrived at by natural thought. He hasn’t voluntarily decided that humility is useful and should be cultivated. Old age has taken away the illusion which fostered pride in false ego and possessions. This kind of humility can be as genuine as any other. We also know from the *Bhāgavatam* verse, *yasyāham anugṛhṇāmi*, that it is Lord Kṛṣṇa who humbles the devotee by crushing his material life. The humbled man is humble. He grieves not simply because he has lost his money, beauty, and sexual power, but because he has been pursuing an illusion of material happiness. He weeps because he has wasted his life and not worshiped the all-attractive Supreme Lord.

This is true of me to some degree, but I can’t see it. Externally I wear saffron, carry my *daṇḍa*, follow the four rules, and worship Govinda by the top-most religious process, *harināma-saṅkīrtana*. But internally I am not a Vaiṣṇava. I lead a subtle version of a life of illusion. I appear to be religiously successful. When I confess my wrongs, I don’t feel bad.

I don't even see what damage I did to myself in this lifetime before I met Śrīla Prabhupāda. He saved me, but I'm still unredeemed in the core of my heart. I'm satisfied by the relief I've gained through Śrīla Prabhupāda's association and pleased with the respect I've received among devotees, that I don't feel myself a sinner. I have a tiny intimation that things may not really be as I see them, but how can I change my vision?

I try to skip over remorse and go straight to the nectar of remembering Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Who wants to dwell in the cesspool of bad thoughts and self-recrimination? Rise up!

But you can't rise. You still chant with inattention. The jaundice, the *avidyā*, is still on your tongue. You have to first feel remorse. "I am destroyed by my own greed and I am always lustful." If we don't admit that this applies to us, then it will hold us back. If we don't admit it, we will be stuck with our lack of humility and our dishonesty. Are we not poor? Have we even exhausted (*akiñcana*) our material desires? Submit your tale of grief at the feet of the Supreme Lord.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is knocking at the door of our self-esteem, so we prefer to admire his songs from a distance. We don't want to get too involved. We're positive thinkers. We only want to hear nectar. If requested, we are willing to go through a few songs of theoretical grief, but don't expect us, full-grown men and women, to get down on our knees and cry. No sir, we don't grovel, never.

I'm not a sinner, so why should I pretend I am? Thus Satsvarūpa dāsa admits his tale of unsunder and unfeeling. He never cried and saw no wrong in himself. Thus he could not understand why Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sang these songs about himself.

Spare us the details. Our way is easy. It's Kṛṣṇa's grace on us. Lord Caitanya assured us that *harināma* would be the easiest method of God realization in this age and we have already been saved from the worst.

Our sense of ease may be a testimony of Prabhu-pāda's compassion on us—this honest telling about ourselves, that we feel good, that we're okay, that we have been saved from the worst effects of karma. We recognize our little miseries as token karma. We have given up gross sin. *Jaya!* Victory over material hell. Aren't we wearing Vaiṣṇava *tilaka*? We are righteous, up early receiving the Lord's *darśana*.

This is all true, but it doesn't negate the other. Why don't we cry for service? Why don't we cry that we can't chant *śuddha-nāma*? Why aren't we even sorry? Why are we so complacent?



Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's song is being sung before God. It is a summation of his ruined life. He did not write these songs with any other audience in mind, although he has allowed us to hear him.

Confession has to take place first within ourselves. That was why I was defeated in my childhood confessions in the Catholic Church. We were naive, the nuns and us parish children. We assumed we could search our conscience and quickly find our wrongs, and we were confident that by relating them to the priest in the darkness of the confessional we would be forgiven. We believed he heard our sins just as God would hear them, and the penance he meted out would be in accord with God's justice.

"Recite ten 'Hail Marys' and two 'Our Fathers' and then make a good 'Act of Contrition.'" The Act of Contrition is a prayer that makes you say you are sorry. It is effective provided you recite it sincerely and promise, with God's help, not to commit the sin again.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's song is the end-of-life summary confession of a wicked man. Are such men rare or are we all like that? You can decide for yourself, but as Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura continues to sing, we begin to suspect that maybe he is referring to us. It's almost too late to reform—we are just too worn out and wasted by material life. When will we pour out our own tale of grief before the Supreme Lord?



"Hear, O Lord, my story of sadness." Now Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is directly requesting the Lord's audience. His is not a purposeless lament. We need to fall before Kṛṣṇa with our troubles, our self-

inflicted woes, and admit to Him how we have failed to become devotees.

A man who gets this far into *śaraṇāgati* is pious enough to believe in God. Atheists don't feel regret, at least not for failing to have served God. If they do feel regret, they either accuse God or blame other people for the corruption in their own souls. A pious man is confident that Kṛṣṇa hears him.

Admitting our wretchedness is not quite in the spiritual dimension—it's not above the modes of nature—but it is an essential prerequisite, a sub-religious principle. If we think we are at a more transcendental stage, yet we haven't experienced remorse for our failings, then we may be wrong. How can a *sannyāsī* with disciples of his own turn back and confess his sins? It's too embarrassing. It's incongruous. We'd like to do it, but for various reasons we hesitate.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja tells us that he is so sinful that if we remember his name, we will lose all our pious credits. Then he goes on to describe Lord Caitanya's pastimes. Do we have such a humble estimation of ourselves? Are we aware of our own lack of devotion? Don't be numb or invulnerable to sorrow. At the same time, discharge your duties in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's songs are our guide.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura repeats his theme:

"I spent my childhood in play, my youth in academic pursuit, and in me there arose no sense of right or wrong. In young manhood I set up a household and settled down to the spell of material

enjoyment. . . . Soon old age arrived and all happiness departed. . . . all my senses are feeble now, my body wracked and exhausted, and my spirits downcast in the absence of youthful pleasures. Devoid of even a particle of devotion, lacking any enlightenment—what help is there for me now?"

At the end of life, you tend to summarize everything you have done. Thus you come to regret all the years you spent in illusion. You are finally free of illusion, but it is too late to suddenly turn a misspent life into a useful one. This life is already recorded not only in your memory, but in the account books of Yamarāja's servant, Citragupta.

The sun is setting on the horizon of my life and it's not a pretty picture—yet I can see it all, and there's nothing I can do to change it. I am singing this song of sadness and asking the Lord to hear it. He already knows my story, but He hears the fresh emotions of a grieving "old" *jīva*. The grief is purifying.

We should be so fortunate as to attain this grief before death. We are persistent in thinking that we are not sinners who wasted our lives, so we cannot sing these grief-stricken songs. Our own song, we think, should sound different. We would sing it with a stately measure and just a touch of sadness ("into each life a little rain must fall"). We would carefully avoid including our many misdemeanors and felonies or the overall wretchedness of our condition. We don't sing our true song because we don't even know what it is. We can at least admit, however, that the song of contrition is more

purifying and pleasing to God than a song that leaves these elements out.

What is this life that moves into old age with no deep sense of spiritual assessment? Why do we only measure success or failure by worldly calculation? "I'm fifty-three years old. Maybe I'll live to be seventy. I better keep active and fit. I should try to repair my health, change my diet, and get regular exercise. I could still learn a new language and there's time for picking up some computer skills. Maybe I would like to go back to college and get an extra degree? Or learn to play the harmonium? It's not too late . . ." So we calculate.



*Dainya* is also related to disease and pain. When you can no longer enjoy with your body, you stop strutting. How glad you are to be free of pain. But old age brings more pain. You find yourself taking up dietary regimens and developing confidence in doctors who promise relief, although your disease is incurable. You find yourself trying to think positively, whatever that means. You try again and again to wring a little more enjoyment out of the body.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura speaks of old age and disease. These two work together against the world of pleasure you tried to live in as a youth. It seemed to work. "In young manhood I . . . settled down to the spell of material enjoyment. Children and friends multiplied quickly."

Often we don't even notice health, we take it for granted. It will always be with us, and youth too, and wife and friends, all young and good-looking and vital. But it's not true.

I'm only a young old man, fifty-three. People say my face is youthful. But someone else tells me I look terrible. And I can't walk long, can't join *pada-yātrās* or *parikramas*. Can't chant in long ecstatic *kīrtanas* in Navadvīpa. Can't chew hard foods. Can't work long hours or even a few short, stressful ones. Can't attend committee meetings because they bring on headaches. It's all right. I live with it as long as I can read and write and sit in my chair without pain. But pain comes. Then everything stops—no books, no writing . . . I don't even want to see anyone at that time. I lie in bed in a darkened room, knowing that the pain usually lasts for twenty-four hours and then I'll be all right again—until the next time. I look on my body as a loving friend. Maybe I didn't treat it right, didn't eat the best foods for its health, broke sleep by getting up at midnight to write, didn't heed those who said not to travel so much . . . I am traveling too much before it's too late. I am rising early and writing before it's too late. No matter how gently I treat my body, time is running out.

"Soon old age arrived, and all happiness departed." The breakdown of the body is a message to the self. The signals increase with old age. They become a continuous flashing light. Pain is the alarm ringing.

Young people shouldn't think this has nothing to do with them. Every old man's story will be their story in due course. They should learn to use their physical strength in Kṛṣṇa consciousness before they are embarrassed by their bodies dwindling. Pain is our teacher.



Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura then says that he had no sense of right or wrong. It just did not arise in him. That's what happens when you pursue sense gratification as the goal of life. Besides, who is there to teach you ultimate morality? For that you need the *Bhagavad-gītā* and an expert guru.

The fourth stanza of this song is wonderful: "Devoid of even a particle of devotion, lacking any enlightenment—what help is there for me now? Only You, O Lord, friend of the fallen. I am certainly fallen, the lowest of men. Please, therefore, lift me to Your lotus feet."

Unless a person arrives at such a desperate condition, he cannot pray like this. But again, it doesn't have to be a desperation brought by external miseries. And he doesn't have to be a big criminal. He just has to feel this in his heart: *I have forgotten my Lord, Kṛṣṇa. Therefore I have wasted my life.* If this prayer occurs to you, then it becomes contrition.

Therefore Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is writing for all of us. Whether or not these verses are literal, autobiographical truth for any of us, the essence applies to all of us: the wasted life in forgetfulness

of God, degeneration, grief, and finally turning to Him.

*Patita-bandhu, patita-dhāma, dīna-bandhu, dīna-nātha.* The Lord is the friend of the fallen. He picks us up. Again, it's the essence. Someone can be a fallen Bowery bum or a highly respected *brāhmaṇa*, but if in his heart he feels exhausted of material desires, he can be picked up by the Lord. Such a person no longer looks for relief in this life or the next. He doesn't care whether his body is beautiful and strong. He doesn't care if he has money or no money. He doesn't care if he is from aristocracy or whether he is low-born. He has learned by experience that these things don't bring happiness. Now he wants only Kṛṣṇa.

These realizations can only really appear by the merciful association of pure devotees. If we renounce material hopes and cry out to Kṛṣṇa, He will send the rarely-attained company of His *bhaktas*.



Prabhupāda has written that *jarā*, old age, doesn't come to a fully engaged devotee. Such a devotee doesn't become depressed or lose his enthusiasm. He doesn't need to retire. Death itself is an impetus to his devotional service. He becomes more enlivened as old age approaches. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is singing the song of a reprobate. He is singing as someone who is finally coming to his senses after being beaten down by *māyā*. He is acknowledging defeat.

The pure devotees end life differently. Prabhu-pāda assured us that the Yamadūtas wouldn't come for us because we were chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. We can hope for a better next life, or perhaps we will be successful in this life and go back to Godhead. Death and old age are not traumatic for a devotee.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura asks the Lord not to judge him, but to give him mercy. "Were You to judge me now, You would find no good qualities. Have mercy and judge me not. Cause me to drink the honey of Your lotus feet and thereby deliver this Bhaktivinoda."

We sometimes hear how God has both the judging quality and the forgiving quality. The fallen soul asks for mercy. He is earnest because he is contrite. He has learned his lesson. He wants no more of the material enjoyment that brings only suffering. He is not planning another chapter of sin, he's an *akiñcana*. He has become as qualified as a long-practiced *vairāgi*.

Somehow turn to Kṛṣṇa and seek spiritual fortune. Stay at His lotus feet by hook or by crook. Become greedy for the company of His dearest devotees. Hear the scriptures from them and roll in the dust of the best of *dhāmas*, Vṛndāvana—if you are lucky enough to go there. Preach.



"At Your feet, soft as new-grown leaves, I offer this humble prayer. Those feet shelter the fallen souls who burn from the heat of material existence.

But I gave up their shelter, and now my mind, scorched by the fire of worldliness, has dried up like a desert" (*Saraṇāgati*, 1.6.1).

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has not addressed God as Kṛṣṇa, but as Master, "*Prabhu he!*" We sense that he is seeing Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet, those same feet the *gopīs* wanted to place on their breasts to protect them from the sharp pebbles on the forest paths. How can this most forlorn of sinners know so much about Kṛṣṇa's feet?

Perhaps he has heard of them from others, as we have. The goddess of fortune holds those feet on her lap and massages them. Kāliya's pride was crushed by those feet. Sin is vanquished by the touch of those feet. They are sought after by the demigods and great sages. Govinda dāsa sings, "O mind, just worship the lotus feet of the son of Nanda, which make one fearless." We can learn a lot by hearing.

*He Prabhu*, whose feet are as soft as new-grown leaves, please hear my prayer. *He Prabhu*, please cause me to remember You. You are the goal of all works. If we do our duty in forgetfulness of You, then our lives are useless. If we sin because we have forgotten You, then how will we again find the shelter of Your lotus feet?

If material ruin brings on remembrance of You, then that is Your mercy. Remembrance of You comes from so far away; it is born from the *śraddhā* our spiritual master cultured in us. He is Your confidential servant.

In another song, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura prays, "O Gopīnātha, You know everything. Now, having punished Your servant, please give him a place at Your lotus feet." Lord Caitanya also prays to the son of Nanda Mahārāja, "Please place Me as an atom at Your lotus feet."

It is sometimes said that prayers to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa indicate *dāsyā-rasa*. But the gopīs also pray for the touch of His feet on their heads and breasts. They want Kṛṣṇa's love. Cowherd boys want to massage Kṛṣṇa's feet and give Him pleasure. All devotees hanker to serve His feet. I do too. O Mukunda, please allow me to come to Your feet with my mind and pen, seeking a small space and complete shelter.



Dear Lord, dear energy of the Lord, please engage me in Your service. We think proper thoughts sometimes—they float across our complacent attention. The sinner has more strength. He wholeheartedly prays for forgiveness. Though he claims he has no strength to continue his miserable life, he's still able to fix his contrite and painful mind upon the Lord and seek His shelter. He does not doubt or hesitate. He has arrived at this point by a torturous route. We should all be so fortunate.

We cannot judge whose life is successful. Everything is judged by the final outcome—*ante nārāyaṇa smṛti*. The goal of all endeavors is to think of Nārāyaṇa at the time of death. Our worth is tested in that way. Now, dear brothers, accumulate that wealth of remembrance and practice it. Mahārāja

Parikṣit perfected his life by hearing about Kṛṣṇa without cessation during the last seven days of his life.

Our pulse beats at every moment, and at every moment, we can either think of Kṛṣṇa or forget Him. To remember Kṛṣṇa is the greatest gain; to forget Him for a moment is the greatest loss. How is such constant remembrance possible? How is it *not* possible as long as we are aware that Kṛṣṇa is everything? "Know that all opulent, beautiful and glorious creations spring from but a spark of My splendor. But what need is there, Arjuna, for all this detailed knowledge? With a single fragment of Myself I pervade and support this entire universe" (Bg. 10. 41-2).

I wish to dedicate everything I am and everything I do to Kṛṣṇa. I want to remember Him constantly. This is why we worship our guru: he inspires us to remember and serve Kṛṣṇa at every moment. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings "O venerable Vaiṣṇava . . . Give me the shade of your lotus feet and purify me. . . . Please bless me by giving me one drop of faith by which to obtain the great treasure of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa" (*Vaiṣṇava Ṭhākura*, verses 1-3).



I fear this world and seek Kṛṣṇa's shelter. Last night we moved into this house where we will stay for three weeks. As our van pulled into the driveway, a car came behind us on the road, beeping its horn. I thought at first that he might be beeping because he saw we were Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees.

Perhaps it indicated trouble. But then I learned that many cars beep as they pass this house because it's a mountain road with a sharp turn. They want to warn possible oncoming cars. But in those moments of worry, why didn't I turn and call, "*Prabhu He?*"

The room where I am staying is simple. The wood beams on the ceiling are rough, and the tile on the floor is made of stone. It is a good place to cry for Kṛṣṇa. Remember Him when you climb up to your high bed. Remember Him on your morning walk in the grassy fields and secluded roads, while soaking delicious Ekādaśī biscuits in your hot milk, while looking upon the faces of your friends, while setting up the altar and spreading your work out before you. "Start today" you wrote after Maggio 18 on the calendar. Days and hours and moments of thinking of Kṛṣṇa and not forgetting Him. O Gurudeva, please allow me to always think and serve in a way that is pleasing to Kṛṣṇa. If I'm busy, earnest, even desperate, but it's not pleasing to Kṛṣṇa, then it's all wasted. All temporary efforts have this goal and this is their success: to please Kṛṣṇa and His devotees.

There is an old drawing of Christ hanging on the cross in this room, and a poem to Mother Maria. I found a nail to hang the picture of Gītā-nāgarī's Rādhā-Dāmodara. I am gauging how cool it is and what clothes I should wear, what I should say . . . I threw drops of water on the desk and wiped it with a tissue. It is twilight. The lights are on but the front

door is still open, and I can smell the fresh mowed grass. I love this life.

Sometimes I think I am seeking what could be called a heaven on earth. When we drove up here, I saw quite a few roadside altars, prayer spots, shelves with a relief or statue of Mary, and it occurred to me that some people are honestly pious. They want a life with God present in it, and they want people to honor the saints and behave respectably. They don't want crime, but gentleness. But how is it possible? And what am I doing to contribute to their vision? If I am shallow, sensitive only to my own pains, then I cannot be of any help.

So I write here, "Let me always think of Govinda." Remember to remember. Remember and live now.

In ink, in blood, in spirit, in *amma* (undigested food), in *vāta* and *pitta* and *kapha*, in the bag of three kinds of elements, in the hot and cold bathing, in the music that runs through my head . . . Don't make fun of those who try to remember Kṛṣṇa in pop songs, but welcome remembrance wherever it comes. There are millions of seconds in our lives, a constant flow and change. We have to be flexible. This is not just an official attempt, but a cry from the heart. I resort to saying, "And this too, and also this, and this . . ." I pray, "Kṛṣṇa, please let it happen. Incline me to You."

It's not like holding your breath under water. Not like in the summer of 1966 when I would propose to myself to go on chanting for the entire walk between First Street and Fourteenth. No, it's more

natural than that. The *gopīs* meditate on Kṛṣṇa while doing everything. "Persons who are constantly engaged in the transcendental meditation of seeing Kṛṣṇa, internally and externally, by thinking of Him playing the flute, entering the Vṛndāvana forest, and tending the cows with the cowherd boys have really attained the perfection of *samādhi* . . . the *gopīs* indicate that the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa are the perfection of all meditation and *samādhi*" (*Kṛṣṇa*, Chapter 21, p. 188).



Let's look again at Song Six. Sometimes I think the English translation isn't giving enough. We lose a lot when we translate from Bengali to English. We end up with only an approximation, or a remnant, of the actual song that issued from Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's heart. But it's all we have. He wrote so powerfully, so purely. His songs are like the sun's rays (*tīvra*), so his potency survives the translation.

"At Your feet, soft as new-grown leaves, I offer this humble prayer." I remember one naturopathic doctor I was seeing years ago discouraging me from listening to the laments of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura. He thought they were pessimistic and that reading them would work against my recovery. I tried to explain to him about the ecstasy of the pure devotees, and of their humility and feelings of separation from Kṛṣṇa, but he pushed it away. He was horrified that anyone

would induce such a state in themselves.

Of course, it's not pessimism. I am trying to get beyond official reverence for these songs. I feel so distant from them. I want other things—I don't have the spiritual fixedness to understand them properly. I want peace, productivity, good digestion . . . I want a better desk lamp, beautiful things to see, fresh strawberries, good writing paper, creamy and thick. I want to adjust the angle of the sun so it doesn't shine straight into my eyes. I want to be thoughtful, but are these my thoughts?

I am in process as a writer and a *vaidhī-bhakta*. I cling to Prabhupāda's instructions. But as for feelings . . . Śrīla Prabhupāda was once asked how we could find quality in our chanting. He replied that first we have to have quantity before we can experience quality. It may take many lifetimes. It comes automatically, not by force. For now, we chant out of duty. I also write out of duty. I consider Bhakti-vinoda Ṭhākura's songs and hope a few crumbs will fall to me.

"I find no strength to go on, and thus I spend my days lamenting. My only desire now is for Your lotus feet, O Lord of the meek and humble (*dīna-jana-nātha*).” The verses are progressing, growing more religious. This is a new mood, more hopeful than his previous lament.

He asks the Lord to show him mercy by giving him the association of devotees, “For by tasting the pleasure of hearing Your pastimes, I shall give up all evils.” The same truth is found in the scriptures.

*Nasta prāyeṣu*, by hearing the *Bhāgavatam* from the *bhāgavatas*, almost all the dirty things within the heart are removed and devotional service to Uttamaḥ-śloka is awakened. *Śṛṇvatām sva-kathāḥ kṛṣṇaḥ*, *punya-śravaṇa kīrtanaḥ*, hearing about Kṛṣṇa is pious activity. When we do it, Kṛṣṇa personally cleans our hearts.

One hope in an otherwise lamentable life: “to spend day and night in Your divine abode, singing Your holy name. Your tiny servant, Bhaktivinoda, begs a place in the delightfully cooling shade of Your feet.”

How could a sinner be so presumptuous? One minute he says he has no good qualities and is sunk in the defeat of worldly existence, and the next he’s praying to attain the blissful *param-dhāma*. Doesn’t he know only a rare soul attains Goloka? Even good devotees have to return to the material world to continue the path of perfection.

Yes, he knows, but he cannot help but hope. His soul is moved by spiritual desire. We could say that such a hope is beyond him, that he is not entitled to it, but what is the harm if a blind man prays to see? If he calls to Kṛṣṇa and guru to be lifted to their feet, what is the harm? Dīnanātha can do anything.

This is the *āśā-bandha* described in *The Nectar of Devotion*. It is hope against hope, a symptom of *bhāva*. Who is so cruel as to deny a dying man this hope? Neither can we take it away from him if we try.

The objects of this world seem friendly enough, but they are a wall against the spiritual world. They catch your attention and sometimes deceive you—you think they are satisfying in and of themselves.

Our movements in this world are hindered in so many ways. A breeze turns the pages of *Śaraṇāgati* and you lose your place. This writing table slants downward. Cars beep their horns as they pass your sacred spot. You can't think of anything to say.

I wish I were like an angel, a singer, who could recite Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in a beautiful voice. I don't really know what I want. But I have faith. I think I want to be myself and express that self in writing. At the same time, I want to be a protected devotee, protected by my masters.

When I look up, all I see is two wilted irises and the VW on the front of Śrīdāmā's car.



But it is spring! The air is filled with the noise of fighter jets practicing overhead, probably worried about defending the Adriatic border. My mind is bound in this material world. My only hope is to keep turning the pages of *Śaraṇāgati*. Bhaktivinoda Thākura can carry me to the spiritual world.

This restless body-mind-soul tries to calm itself and make peace with the wild flowers. It wants to stay in this place, not in the circus of life in the town we passed through last night. I saw a poster advertising Salvador Dali, his crazy waxed mustache sticking out straight like a cat's electrified

whiskers. I also saw a poster for a Russian rock group called "Soviet," with a godlike, long-haired, blond lead singer. The voluptuous Italians were out, enjoying the spring evening. There were hotels, restaurants, boys on motor bikes jerking the handle bars back so they could ride only on their rear wheels. It is a circus. Just to get through it without touching anyone's fenders—just to get through the traffic congestion, past the park with the fountain, up the side of the mountain, turning and winding to this place, where a small spider crawls across the white slats of a table and I race ahead, riding only on my rear wheel.

Whenever I close my eyes, rich combinations go to work like a constant shifting kaleidoscope, ninety-five percent mundane. Often I'm a devotee in my dreams, but struggling in the material world. I am not seeing Kṛṣṇa or partaking in His pastimes in the spiritual world. We could say the dreams are of no account. Just like the van or the town, they are just illusion. After all, what is real beyond the Vai-kunṭha planets? But they are the sign that I am bound. The dreams are a sign of my tastes and perceptions; my pains and struggles are not so easily forgotten. My *kāma*, my doubts, I am humiliated by them.

Please be merciful. Allow me to perceive Your eternal pastimes. Allow me to please You. Let me sing Your glories day and night. I don't want to be another Salvador Dali or a Soviet rock star. I want to be like a small maroon-pink flower, growing in Your garden of devotees.

In Song Seven the tone changes. A pure devotee enters the scene and rescues the poor sinner. "A wicked mind brought me into this world, O Lord, but one of Your pure and elevated devotees has come to bring me out." This is not make-believe; it actually happens whenever the Lord's confidential servants contact the *jīvas*. It is preaching. The pure devotees come to rescue the *jīvas* from illusion and deliver them to Kṛṣṇa. I know because it happened to me. All glories to the pure devotees who carry Kṛṣṇa's message.

A wicked mind brought me into this world and a wayward and fickle mind will keep me in it. The pure devotee comes to save me. My spiritual master is a specific person, and I serve him specifically to please him. He's a preacher and a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa, my Prabhupāda. He wants me to surrender and practice *bhakti* in my own life, and he wants me to do something to help others.



I can hardly believe the opportunity before me. Also the fact that I have so much freedom. Kṛṣṇa, there's so much to read, so much to absorb, and my capacities are limited. And there are threats I can't perceive, just as I can't perceive weather fronts that move in from the sea or the influence of the demigods and demons, stars and planets, and me just one tiny dot. I'm spirit soul, shining, although infinitesimal in size. I am not yet aware of or experiencing *prema*. I'm still here within the seven walls

of this universe. I want to become free so I can join my guru in his *nitya-līlā praviṣṭa*, but I don't have enough credit to pay the price. Not yet.

Neither can I figure it all out by writing, but writing helps.

"After judging my sins, You should punish me, for I deserve to suffer the pangs of rebirth in this world" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 2.2.3). I think, "This doesn't apply to me." Am I a sinner in need of punishment? I don't know. But I do know that I am ineligible at present to go back to Godhead. Why? Because I don't think of that place. I don't think of the Yugala-kiśora and Their pastimes in Goloka Vṛndāvana. Neither do I sacrifice everything in this world to serve my guru's mission. You could call me a sinner, but I think of it more as incompleteness. That is also a kind of sin. "I only pray that, as I wander through repeated births and deaths, my mind may ever dwell at Your lotus feet in the company of the Vaiṣṇavas."

I want to be with Kṛṣṇa. I want to be a servant of the Divine Couple. I want to hear from the *ācāryas* and get the *samvit* and *hlādinī-śakti* from their hearts to mine.

This is the spirit I want to enter in my writing. I should go back to bed, but what's the use? *Mānasa, deho, geha, jo kichu mor arpiluṅ tuwā pade, nanda-kiśor!* Whatever may be mine I have surrendered at Your lotus feet, O youthful son of Nanda! This is one of the best songs of all. It stands out among the others.

"If it is Your will that I be born again, then may it be in the home of Your devotee. . . . I yearn for the company of that devotee who is completely devoid of all desire for worldly enjoyment and liberation . . . . Father, mother, lover, son, Lord, preceptor, and husband—You are everything to me! O Lord of Rādhā, You are my life and soul!"

I think by writing it will come. By reading and hearing and serving—but how long will it take? *Mānasa, deho, geha, jo kichu mor.*

I wish I could claim these words for myself. I wish I could say that I have surrendered my *ātmā*, my very self and all that I have to Kṛṣṇa, my friend, my lover, my guru. Now He may do with me as He likes. Instead, what do I say? Taking precautions, I try to preserve my health. Anyway, Śrīdāmā dāsa is kind to me. He rented this place for three weeks and today he got an excellent desk lamp for me and framed my altar picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Tonight I asked him, "Is everything all right?" He said, "I cannot understand." Even that little bit of English he can't understand, and neither do I speak any Italian. Then he said, "My only problem is the *capātīs*." He's cooking for us and he has never made *capātīs* before. I didn't eat the ones he made today, so he's worried. A sweet thing to worry about. Madhu is working on his asthma. He couldn't sleep last night because of it. Tonight is my turn to not be able to sleep.

If *māyā* looks my way I'm afraid. Better death, I

think, than falldown. Don't let yourself stray even a little. Kṛṣṇa, Kāna. "I have no desire to be born as Brahmā averse to You."



I slept from 1:30 to 2:30 a.m. Dreamt I went to see Śrīla Prabhupāda with some people who weren't even devotees. I was only officially received, without the affection I hanker for. Later as a result, I wandered alone in a desert and forest singing to myself, "Be your own man. Go alone. That's the best way." As a result of being alone, I was almost attacked by robbers.

I take this dream as an anxiety dream. I shouldn't fear that Prabhupāda won't show me affection, even if he doesn't always openly express it.

We have such strong drives within us in the form of fear. They warn us against certain actions, but often those actions lead to opening the heart. They are good for us to take up. Therefore we shouldn't allow our anxiety to stop us.

Dreams often warn that we may fail in some endeavor. I choose to take this particular one as a sign of how strong my resistance is to opening up. Better to go forward intelligently and bravely, although there is always apparent danger.



Śrīdāmā showed me a new walk  
inside the woods, not much climbing and  
I listened to tapes for half an hour.

A devotee was confessing his  
*aparādhās* toward Vaiṣṇavas.  
My guru said we should never think that way.  
Reconcile everything.  
Prabhupāda asked forgiveness of his  
Godbrothers. We should not criticize  
ISKCON devotees and ISKCON's *ācārya*.  
Raghunātha Gosvāmī bowed down even to  
Ariṣṭāsura because his death led to  
the building of Rādhā-kuṇḍa.  
Reconcile.

Anyone who criticized me,  
anything that hurt me  
had some purpose.  
"Little by little," he said, "you  
have to give up these superficial things  
and enter into *bhakti*."  
Leave behind everything else.

Back in the house.  
On the walk I spoke with Śrīdāmā  
about translating *Nimāi* stories  
into Italian. Cool air,  
boots,  
short walk goes by.



No mosquitoes yet in this cool morning. The  
twittering of the many birds adds to the free pattern  
of nature. It's a foolish song actually, because birds

are fools, aren't they? Śrīla Prabhupāda says they don't know anything about self-realization, and if a human being doesn't care for self-realization either, he's no better than a bird or a beast. Lord Caitanya asked Rāmānanda Rāya, "What is the best kind of self-realization process?" Rāmānanda Rāya replied, "Devotional service, Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

Drink in the sight of blooming flowers. There are some trees that bloom only in the spring—not just lilacs or cherry trees—but less well-known trees. They burst into showers of white blossoms for only a few weeks and I'm always surprised. I never remember they can do it. Some of them have big globs of blossoms on each branch, yet I hesitate to bring them indoors and put them in vases because they crumble at my touch. Others I have to practically rip off their branches. Besides, they're so wild that I can't help wanting to respect their outdoor nature and leave them to glorify their trees.

A spring like this makes me want to celebrate something. It would be nice if these trees led me to thoughts of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Vṛndā-devī arranges that there are always trees blooming like this in a perpetual festival of festivals. The trees in Vraja are not only fragrant but conscious. They inspire *mādhurya-rasa*.



In *Ātma-nivedana*, song 4, the devotee expresses a high realization. From the negative, the hopeless depression, has sprung a most positive stage of spiritual love. "I no longer belong to myself. Now I

am exclusively Yours." The prior step was poverty and now complete surrender of self to Kṛṣṇa.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura expresses the ideal *yukta-vairāgya* where the householder gives up everything he has, including his wife, family, house, and belongings—even his own body—yet remains alive in order to actively engage all of these as a servant in the Lord's house. "You are the Lord of my house, and I am Your most obedient servant. Your happiness is my only endeavor now."

Previously I was almost complaining that Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura was not really a sinner although he was expressing the feelings of reprobate. But now I appreciate better how he is teaching us. His compassion for less advanced devotees is deep and real. He wants to deliver us and he feels our plight. Therefore he tells it as we know it—the life of crushed hopes and frustrated ego, the defeat of old age and death. He is extending his hand to help us out of the well.

By this act of surrender, the prisoner is freed: "Whatever piety or sins were done by me, by mind or deed, are no longer mine, for I am redeemed!"

"From this day," he says. Surrender can be as dramatic as that. One day you just surrender. Most of us surrender a little at a time, constantly, every day. Why are we holding back?

We are afraid. We are afraid of running into danger and of going wrong. A celibate monk with disciples has to watch his step. Śrīla Prabhupāda says a little inattention (as in shaving one's face) can cause bloodshed. Kṛṣṇa gives us signals: "Beware!"

He is trying to protect us. But some of the signals aren't coming from Kṛṣṇa; they come from our materially conditioned minds and senses. They are stifling to our spirit of full surrender. We have to take risks to love Kṛṣṇa fully, but how do we know when to see the signals as Kṛṣṇa's protection of our spiritual lives and when to see the mind's bluff? Our minds don't love us. They don't want us to reach our full potential. They are themselves afraid of losing the opportunity for sense enjoyment. We have to examine our feelings more and find the surrender of which Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings.

Can a deer step forward out of the forest without getting shot by a hunter? Do you hear that barking dog? Should we run away and hide? But spring is Kṛṣṇa's favorite season.

It's hard work distinguishing.

In the material world, distinguished honors go to the man with the beard, the *New York Times* journalist who wrote at great risk in what was Yugoslavia. He won the Pulitzer prize. His stories were sent out from the war zone where he was often the only eye witness reporting in writing. He wrote what he saw and tried to tell the world the truth in the honorable tradition of newspaper journalism.

I'm not camped in a war zone. My place is more behind the scenes. It is conducive to finding freedom and surrender. It's a good place to get work done without being disturbed. A few friends are waiting for my written report.

Who am I? That is my question. What is this experience of being a devotee? I am trying to be receptive here.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura prays that the urgency of his self-surrender not be a temporary mood. He doesn't want it to be like the "momentary cleanliness of an elephant after his bath" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 2.6.7).

"Of whom will I take shelter except for You? O son of the King of Vraja, You are the Lord of all lords. . . . You alone are the shelter of those who have gone astray. Apart from You, what else exists, O merciful Lord? Those like me who have offended You will know no peace until achieving Your shelter" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 2.7.4, 6, 7).

That's me, the straying soul, the one seeking Kṛṣṇa's shelter, seeking substance for constant *bhajaṇa*, looking for where I can enter. Quality means we cannot stop.

I am the straying soul, but I am sitting under this tree, contending with my body, trying to keep it clean, running, maintained. My Shaeffer pen can't invent new concerns. My brain also goes in its loops. It's time to admit I am exhausted and penniless. I don't want to sin or waste time. I want to worship Kṛṣṇa.

So I look to the Pañca-tattva, led by Lord Caitanya with His hands free and blissful above His head. Dance! Chant!

Do You see me? Dear Lord, I did not know You before I met Śrīla Prabhupāda. Sad and foolish as I may look now, I'm peaceful, safe, and grateful. I am trying to dance for You out of my own desire.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said you have to be serious and then you can see God. If you want to see what's wrong with your car engine, you have to take it to a mechanic. Why do you think you can see God with no qualification? He told a story about a thief who attended a *Bhāgavatam* lecture and heard that Kṛṣṇa has beautiful jewels and ornaments and tends the cows in Vṛndāvana. The thief decided to go to Vṛndāvana to plunder child Kṛṣṇa. He thought he would become a millionaire overnight. He so seriously contemplated seeing Kṛṣṇa that Kṛṣṇa appeared to him. By the Lord's *darśana*, he became purified. The Lord said to him, "No! You can't steal My jewels! My mother will complain!" (Prabhupāda's audience laughed along with him as he told the story.)

Maybe I am like that thief. Now all I have to do is become serious to attain the Lord's *darśana*. Am I looking for that blackish boy as I write?

In this room there's a Modigliani print of a woman with a swan neck, pupil-less eyes, a coiffure—I think I kept the same print on my wall when I was in college. People used to ask, "What girl are you thinking of? Why a picture instead of the real thing?" Now I want neither.

Well then, what do you want? What are you serious enough to attain?

I hereby surrender to my spiritual master. I can't claim that my entire former identity is gone, but at least the vanity of I and mine has left me for now. I hope it never again finds a place within my heart. But I pray, "O Lord, please give me this strength,

that I may be able to keep the false conceptions of 'I' and 'mine' far away" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 2.6.6).

We don't live to create a niche and reside there like civil servants. We want to rise higher and higher, from *śraddhā* to *prema*. We suffer sorrow and fear as long as we identify with our bodies, so we beg to be rid of the false conception of ourselves.

I am writing in a blind, groping way, rolling on and on. I mouth the words, "I surrender my works to Prabhupāda." If it's good literature, I dedicate it to him; if there's something wrong, I take the blame. I am one of his devotees.

I want Kṛṣṇa conscious substance. I want something genuine. But that also can become a sense of false pride. So I push ahead imperfectly. "I submit at Your lotus feet, O Lord, that I am fallen and wretched, a fact known to the three worlds" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 2.7.1). Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura declares himself redeemed in an earlier verse, but now he again claims that he is fallen. "By attempting to clear myself of all these sins and offenses I am put to shame and beg Your forgiveness" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 2.7.3).

He is serious. I am too. Why else would I be up at this desk at midnight writing? "Is it difficult?" asked a technician at the Āyurvedic clinic. "No," I said, "because I want to do it. I have a serious purpose." It doesn't matter that I don't exactly know what my purpose means. I am uncovering it a little bit at a time. I am not just filling up space; I am begging for mercy.

The same words we hear referring to sinfulness in the material world, *kāma* and *lobha*, are the

topmost expressions of spiritual love. These are the things I am trying to understand and distinguish. Material greed or lust has nothing to do with the spiritual world. I am trying to puncture whatever remaining enthusiasm I have for worldly achievement—flatten it out. Who am I trying to impress in this world? Enthusiasm is for *bhakti-yoga*.

Enthusiasm means action. Always act for Kṛṣṇa—*kṛṣṇārthākila-ceṣṭā* (NOI, text 3, purport). But at the same time, be patient. Non-*paramparā* enthusiasm is a disturbance. Follow the *ācāryas*. They have provided detailed maps of the way. “. . . in devotional service, surrender means that one has to become confident. The devotee thinks *avaśya rakṣibe kṛṣṇa*: ‘Kṛṣṇa will surely protect me and give me help for the successful execution of devotional service’” (NOI, text 3, purport).

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is joyful. Be confident of his direction. Seek the shelter of Lord Nityānanda. But I’m here in this body, in Italy, and I don’t know where to find Him. I can’t buzz my intercom and call for Him. Can’t wake Madhu up and say, “Bring me Lord Nityānanda.” Can’t even plan to go to Māyāpur and find Him there. Unless I am serious.



Doubts are like rocks in an agricultural field. Some are easy to lift out and pile in a corner. Others break your tractor. If you can’t remove them all, plow around them and plant where you can.



Writing is like *japa*: it's important what you do before you start. What have you been eating, speaking, thinking, dreaming? A dream: a fire occurred in our house. Then Madhu got in an accident while operating a huge tractor. I ran to the scene crying, "My baby!" Didn't want to record such a dream. There are reasons for that . . .

There are always some things I don't want to admit. It turned out in the dream that the fire wasn't so bad and neither was the accident. I took yogurt for breakfast, although three out of four Āyurvedic doctors tell me not to. Now I have indigestion. Why offer watermelon on too cool a day? Which way do the beads go, left or right when you chant? I forget, but I am happy to have such a life where there is always another chance to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

"I have become supremely joyful by surrendering myself at Your holy feet . . . there are no more anxieties. I see joy in all directions" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 2.8.1). Is this the same person who saw only grief? How has such a great change come about? He has met a pure devotee. He cried with contrition and Kṛṣṇa sent a Vaiṣṇava. From that Vaiṣṇava, he has learned to surrender.

"Unhappiness has gone away. I shall strive for whatever pleases You, fully devoted to Your lotus feet." I admitted that I was the sinner in the early songs of *Śaraṇāgati*, but why do I exclude myself from these songs? I'm also serving the Lord. I'm also fixed at my guru's feet. I still have some *aparādhas* and *anarthas*, and I don't see how I will find relief. But I have found peace at Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet

and I have given up the fear of worldly existence. Or maybe it's more accurate to say I fear the *kāla-cakra*. I fear this world where you meet up with what you don't want and are torn away from what you love. I fear it. I want shelter. I want devotional service for Kṛṣṇa's pleasure, but I'm also scurrying to His lotus feet out of fear of the material conflagration. Kṛṣṇa, please save me. I'm not pure, but I want to be.

"Troubles encountered in Your service shall be the cause of great happiness, for in Your devotional service joy and sorrow are equally great riches" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 2.8.4). This is a great verse. I have often quoted it in books and lectures. It's useful for motivating subordinates who feel weak-hearted in their service. I also remind them of the glories of Mādhavendra Puri. He carried over eighty pounds of sandalwood—undisturbed by toll guards or thieves' threats—and walked thousands of miles for his Gopīnātha's service.

The question is, do I realize the truth of Bhakti-vinoda Ṭhākura's statement? Do I live it? Taste it? It's a little too much for me right now, but I definitely accept it as true, just as I accept that I am not this body and that material comforts are detestable to a pure devotee and that I should not be afraid of death.

What have I realized? I know that the practice gives you a good reputation among pious people, and they are willing to give you money and service. Am I being cynical? Yes, a little. My cynicism is like a leftover cloud raining dirt.

I'm conditioned to speak as perfectly as possible and never let on that I have any doubt. Can you imagine? You raise your hand and express a doubt and the devotee giving the class from the *vyāsāsana* says, "Yes, I have that doubt too. I don't know the answer. Maybe we can't do what the *śāstras* say. I dunno." Although he may give a humble preamble like that, we still expect him to come up with the goods. Otherwise, how can we let him speak?

When I meet troubles in the course of Your service do they make me happy? "Thanks," he says to trouble-makers, "You've made my day." Sounds like a pure devotee, completely staunch and not out for self-aggrandizement. So what if I get arrested or hit on the head and harassed in some way? The main thing is to serve Kṛṣṇa. That taste is always sublime.

At least I know I am rightly situated. Kṛṣṇa is giving me a little mercy in the form of pain (purification). He knows the misery of ignorance is being destroyed by the so-called misery of troubles encountered while serving Kṛṣṇa. *Svargāpavarga-narakeṣv api tulyārtha-darśinaḥ*: heaven and hell are the same for the fearless *nārāyaṇa parāyaṇa*. I believe it, but I'm not there yet.

"I have completely forgotten all past history by feeling great joy in my mind. I am most certainly Yours, and You are indeed mine. What need is there of any other treasure?" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 2.8.5). When a statement is beyond your realization, does that mean you're not interested to hear it? No. I visualize the great devotees who measured up—

Arjuna, Bhīṣma, the *gopīs*, all the *mahājanas*. They all passed severe tests. Maybe I'm embarrassed by the topic and feel excluded. In honesty, I can't yet tell my success story. It's like being in school during exams. You are given a choice of essays to write. Some are interesting topics but too hard. You skip those and look for something easier you can still relate to. You have to be careful of that too, though. Sometimes you are still unqualified to answer the easy questions.

Tell us what you know of "troubles encountered in Kṛṣṇa's service are a cause of great happiness. Joy and sorrow are all one, all treasures for me in blissful Kṛṣṇa consciousness." Hmmm.

"I have completely forgotten all past history." I'd love to be able to do that. It reminds me of that Steig cartoon *Tattva-vit dāsa* sent me after reading in *Shack Notes* how I visited my old Great Kills streets. The picture shows a bemused gentlemen floating in the sky with angel wings, looking down on dilapidated tenements. It's captioned, "The Old Neighborhood." We're like that: we don't mind a quick floating tour over the past, but if we have to get down into the streets and the actual ignorance, then it's hell. Want to go? No thanks.

"Bhaktivinoda, diving into the ocean of bliss, devotes all his efforts for Your service and dwells in Your house according to Your wishes" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 2.8.6). We *are* doing this. We are fully surrendered to Prabhupāda. Often our statements to the contrary are humility. We grasp at our identities as Prabhupāda's followers. We don't really harbor doubts.

We're not deeply unfaithful. If the guru isn't completely dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, he's not actually a guru, and if the disciple isn't fully dedicated to the guru, he's not a real disciple. Some of us are just completely free, that's all.



The third set of songs in *Śaraṇāgati* are to Kṛṣṇa as the maintainer of the devotees. A devotee should have a firm sense that the Lord will take care of him and therefore he needn't seek shelter anywhere else. *Eko bahūnām yo vidadhāti kāmān*. Lord Kṛṣṇa maintains all creatures in the universe as well as maintaining the universe itself. Why should we doubt that He will maintain His surrendered servants? A devotee's realization on this point is always tested in practical ways. They strive to collect funds for the temple, they fall into debts, litigation, etc., but Kṛṣṇa maintains and protects.

"I have given up everything and come to Your lotus feet. I am Your eternal servant, and You are my protector and maintainer, O Lord of the universe!" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 3.1.4).



Please don't be heavy-hearted. Are you sorrowful because you cannot love Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and write directly of Them? *That* sorrow is all right. We read of sorrowful *gopīs*, sorrowful Rādhā shedding tears in Nava-Vṛndāvana (the replica of Vṛndāvana

in Dvārakā). Such sorrow is the fruit of intense *prema*.

What is it when I feel despondent and think, "How can I go on writing? Why? When? I'm so far away and approaching Them seems so slow." Inch by inch, I study the scriptures and try to concentrate on Them for as many hours a day as possible. I pray to be overwhelmed. But I keep up the discipline in the meantime, waiting for love to descend from *viśuddha-sattva*.

Please maintain me. I forget what I wrote five minutes ago. I forget what I was doing twenty-four hours ago. I am not God. Kṛṣṇa, please maintain me. I want to be open-hearted. Please maintain me. I know You do. You nourish my *bhakti*. You provide food.

Anyway, it has been a day of regulated practice. The readings were good, *prasādam* was okay, although Śrīdāmā is sorry again because the sweet cake he made didn't come out well and the *capātis* were so-so. I'm happy with *prasādam* and with him and Madhu and this house and the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. I wish I could do something more wonderful with my pen, but it's the process, not the substance, that counts.

Keep trying to write. Don't be distracted by the voices coming this way, those Italian, full-of-life voices. And don't be satisfied with a good front. (The voices are even nearer, and I hear a dull bell ringing 5 P.M. *Say it!* It sounds like the bell in Vṛndāvana.)

The foolish birds never stop their symphony for a moment. They don't wonder whether their songs are expendable. They simply sing.

O lonely singer-writer, you *are* surrendering to Kṛṣṇa. He sees your surrender. Do you wish you were better? Wish you were closer to the Lord's Vṛndāvana pastimes? Of course. But I am grateful too.



We memorized the five kinds of *anarthas* from *Mādhurya-kādambinī*, the different kinds of unsteady devotional service, and now we are going over the verses I memorized over twenty years ago. The endings are always rough.

Communication with Śrīdāmā is limited. I came down into the kitchen and he was sitting at the table sipping tea.

"So now you know what a writing retreat is like."

He doesn't understand. I ask Madhu to translate, but his Italian doesn't quite get it across.

"Tell him it's quiet," I say. But even that we cannot say. Then "*tranquilo*."

"Oh, yes," Śrīdāmā says. Then he says he will think of me later just as he sees me now in this writing retreat.

The rest of what I wanted to say will have to go unsaid. I wanted to tell him not to mind the quietness. I wanted to encourage him to stay busy with his own studying. I didn't just want to say it was tranquil, because the quietness is only on the surface. Internally, things are burgeoning and

contending with each other and moving along.  
Things are getting said.

The dull bell is ringing seven.



Don't be anxious about your maintenance. Kṛṣṇa will provide. He takes care of His servants. This attitude can be taken up to different degrees. One may go on working hard and continue to be anxious about money-making and paying bills, yet have a certain satisfaction that the final outcome is up to Kṛṣṇa. Thus to some extent the worldly anxiety is reduced. After all, we're not the doers. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's proposal seems more radical, that he will no longer make money or provide for his relatives, but instead he will engage full-time in chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. Remember Mṛgāri the hunter who was saved by Nārada? He was also worried about how he would survive when Nārada told him to break his bow. But Nārada assured him that he would arrange for his meals. So Mṛgāri spent his full time chanting in his little hut. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings, "I will serve You free from all anxiety, and at home, if any good or evil should occur, it will not be my responsibility" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 3.2.7).

The pure devotee is ready to do whatever the Lord wants and is not afraid of the outcome. He may continue earning money, or he may stop. Often he continues earning money just to set an example for others. "So as not to disrupt the minds of ignorant men attached to the fruitive results of

prescribed duties, a learned person should not induce them to stop work. Rather, by working in the spirit of devotion, he should engage them in all sorts of activities (for the gradual development of Kṛṣṇa consciousness)" (Bg. 3.26).

We desire to be full-time servants of Kṛṣṇa. We want no other occupation. Many of us have been full-time devotees for most of our adult lives. Externally, this means we haven't had jobs, we have served in ISKCON. But ISKCON has its own anxieties about raising money and it has evolving attitudes as to what is the best way to go about it.

What is my duty as a *sannyāsī*? I don't need a job, that's clear. I should live as a *bikṣu tridaṇḍi* and accept alms. I should live according to what comes. I drive around in our Renault Master van and then fly to India once a year. Kṛṣṇa is providing. I try not to misuse this facility, because abusing it would be an *anartha* in *bhakti*. But at least I should be grateful enough to acknowledge that Kṛṣṇa is maintaining me.

We always wonder if we are doing the best thing. We want to be able to have a deep conviction in the direction our lives are taking. Kṛṣṇa is maintaining us, and up to a point, we also have to help ourselves. We trust Kṛṣṇa and we have to learn to trust our own intentions in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The *Mādhurya-kādambinī* lists a symptom of unsteadiness as "indecision." You go back and forth, back and forth, trying to decide what course to take even in spiritual life. It's better just to plunge in and trust that Kṛṣṇa will take care of the results.

Do you want to be Kṛṣṇa conscious? The intelligence consults the self, "How do you feel about your surrender to Kṛṣṇa consciousness?" We consult even the senses and the body and the subpersons. "Are you all right? Do you want to quit Kṛṣṇa consciousness or lessen it? Any other desires needing to be fulfilled? Are you convinced?" If you're actually a devotee, all your selves will express their loyalty to this path. They may all have their own opinion as to how Kṛṣṇa consciousness will best be accomplished, though. The intelligence has to have control. It's not as simple as it sounds.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes himself as a dog in the Lord's household. "Chain me nearby and maintain me as You will. I shall remain at the doorstep and allow no enemies to enter Your house" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 3.3.2). He'll eat whatever *prasādam* remnants are left by the devotees and he'll feast on them with ecstasy. "Whenever You call, I will immediately run to You and dance in rapture."

Kṛṣṇa, please engage me in Your service. Vanquish my reluctance and uncertainty of whether I can serve You, whether I can trust those who claim to represent You, whether the tasks are suitable for me. You gave me so much freedom because I asked for it. You gave me a "license" for sense gratification. It's good to know my service is voluntary, but am I not Your servant, Your household dog? I pray to be able to sing honestly like Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura (and Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī), "I am Yours! I am Yours! I am Yours!"

"I will never think of my own maintenance, but rather remain transported by a multitude of ecstasies. Bhaktivinoda accepts You as his only support."

Kṛṣṇa wants us to be free of false support systems. This is an important consideration. How we make our money, how we spend it, what standard of living we maintain—unless these are done properly, they will hamper our ability to please Kṛṣṇa. Lord Caitanya wanted Sanātana Gosvāmī to give away his valuable blanket before He would fully instruct him. The Lord was also happy when Raghunātha dāsa stopped receiving his father's income. Be free of false support and then inquire on the path that leads to deep Kṛṣṇa consciousness.



Everything in the universe happens by God's will (including time passing and the cock crowing). The demigods act in obedience to that will. By the will of God, *jīvas* are born and live out their karma in prosperity or ruin, joy or sorrow. Without His sanction, the tiny *jīva* is unable to do anything. A follower of *śaraṇāgati* surrenders to this will. It doesn't take perfection in devotional service to attain surrender; it's the first step. Only the stubborn fools continue to resist or think that there is no divine will.

Still, it's a big first step. If we totally resign to surrender, then that surrender can deliver us to the further stages of devotion. "You are my protector and maintainer. Without Your lotus feet there is

no hope for me. No longer confident of my own strength and endeavor, I depend solely on Your will" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 3.4.6-7).

Who is in touch with the great God? Who knows for sure how He operates in all things great and small? He who has faith and experience. Direct realization is rare. He who knows *vāsudeva sarvaṁ iti* is a *mahātmā*. What am I compared to such a realized saint? I am someone who has sinned recently, but who repents it and realizes that the true taste of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is better than playing it safe within religious codes. I am someone who has received the mercy of perfect Vaiṣṇavas and yet hasn't gone far with it. "Bhaktivinoda is most poor, and his pride has been leveled. Now he lives or dies, as You wish" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 3.4.8).

(The day is closed in with fog. No valley or mountains or blossoming trees, only white air in a wall. The birds' melody goes on. And someone with a power saw. This is my 10-11 A.M. time. I'm not afraid of it. I dot my periods at the end of a sentence. Drink hot ginger tea.

Some bird, I'll call it a wood cuckoo, is punctuating his three notes and another sounds like a woodpecker rapping, or maybe it's a telephone ringing. I'm listening from my hooded sweatshirt. I'm crouched in my mind, ready to spring. Don't want to speak beyond what is actually happening with me. But then . . . You've got to make a run for it.)

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is claiming a lot. He has held the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord to his head. Those same lotus feet were attained by Lakṣmī-devī

only after severe austerities. Only when he attained a place at the Lord's feet, did Lord Śiva attain auspiciousness. And Brahmā and Nārada. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says he too has surrendered at the soles of those feet and thus become free of misery.

What can I say? He who was singing the opening songs has already attained the *param-gati* which even great souls do not attain before many lifetimes of *bhajana*. He wants us to follow him, but I don't know if I can. The most I seem to be able to do is honor him.

How are these songs going to affect me? That is also Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's concern. He is writing them for us. He wants the songs to deliver us the joy of *śaraṇāgati*. He is an *ācārya*.

My dear Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, I cannot attain so quickly what you have attained. I know it's not so easily gained. We can read *Bhagavad-gītā* in an hour and see Arjuna go from doubt to *śaraṇāgati*. We can read *Bṛhad-Bhāgavatāmṛta* and instantly traverse many lifetimes of Brahmā with Gopakumāra until he finally returns to Goloka Vṛndāvana. We can read *Jaiva Dharma* and observe the guru ask his disciples what *rasa* they prefer. None of these things take long to read, but it took lifetimes for these devotees to reach their goal.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's complete surrender takes place within a relatively few stanzas. He is teaching us the way, how it will happen, what to expect when we faithfully practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness with determination. But it's not going to happen today.

God's command is all powerful. In fear of Him the wind blows, and the sun, moon and all others perform their allotted duties. He's Supreme above all and lives in the heart of His loving devotees. Whomever He protects, no one can kill. "O Lord, Your eternal servant Bhaktivinoda has bowed down at Your lotus feet. O master, he cherishes the faith that You will surely protect him from all dangers" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 4.2.5).



Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura next sings of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in Gokula. He is the protector of the residents of Vṛndāvana. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura identifies himself as a *vrajavāsī* and glorifies his protector. "You will kill Agha and Baka. I will drink the water of the Yamunā and Kāliya's poison will not act because You will purify the water and Your heroic deeds will enhance our faith. You will protect me and the others by swallowing the forest fire. You will counteract Indra's malice and rainstorms and protect us by lifting Govardhana Hill. You will protect me when four-headed Brahmā steals Your boys and calves." "Bhaktivinoda is now the property of Gokula, Your holy abode. O Keśava, kindly protect him with care" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 4.3.10).

Where did the once-fallen soul learn all this nectar of Kṛṣṇa's protection in Gokula? He must have heard it from his guru and from Kṛṣṇa Himself through the scriptures. May Kṛṣṇa protect our attempt to follow our initiation vows and honor our

allegiance to Prabhupāda. May He protect us from demons of doubts and from the fear and influence of *asuras*. May He protect our newly sprouted desire to serve Him. Please protect our wish to live even now in the spiritual world, with no need of tidings from the three material worlds. Kindly protect us.

Yes, He will protect you, but you have to protect yourself by following as purely as possible. Kṛṣṇa will reciprocate when He sees you are trying to protect what you have already been given. Don't throw it away, don't neglect it—the treasure of pure feelings and obedience to guru, *śāstra*, and *sādhū*.



(As I write, a man in a jacket and fedora stands at the end of our driveway. He is holding a cane and looking in our direction. Perhaps he lives around here and is surprised to see people living in this house. His curiosity is open, like the Indians. I keep writing, aware that the rose bush is still holding on to its tight blossoms swaying in the breeze. When I look up again, the old man is gone.

The old man is back. He is walking slowly, using his cane. Śrīdāmā dāsa goes to meet him and explain who we are. We are only here for a few weeks. I am outside at the table, writing. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmipāda, please keep us in the shower of your nectarean verses and let us never leave this magic circle of friends. Give me the heart to read and hear and always relish. We are *rūpānugas*.)



"Gone is the vanity of male egoism, O Kāna. Now I am Your faithful maidservant" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 4.4.1) Can you believe he has come this far? From an old man lamenting his life of frustrated sense gratification, he has come not only to full surrender, but to his awareness of his eternal spiritual form. He says he has no more male egoism, but that he is now a *sakhī* or *kiṅkarī*.

"O Lord of Rādhā, in the groves of Vraja I will perform devotional service as a follower of one of the *sakhīs*." This is what Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura most wants to tell us. He is telling us of the most beautiful desire, the best song. "Please accept me as a *sakhī-maṇjarī*. I will make a garland of forest flowers and *tulasī* buds. I will place that garland in the hands of the confidential *sakhī* who is my group leader. She will place the garland on the necks of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I will watch from afar." "The confidante will then say to me, 'Listen, O beautiful one, you should remain in this grove as my attendant'" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 4.4.6). He has forgotten Bhaktivinoda. Now she is a *sakhī* in Vraja.

Again and again that perfection is held up for us to see and aspire for. I sit in my chair in the yard, listening to the slow hum of a faraway tractor. The cough in my chest doesn't go away, or does it? The breeze can remind me. The old man in the driveway can remind me. I have wasted my time and I still have so far to go.

I am eager to see what Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura will give us next, now that we have gone with him to the summit.

There is a verse that states that *vaidhī-bhakti* leads to *rāgānugā*. Another verse states that *vaidhī* cannot produce *bhāva*. You need the *rasika* Vaiṣṇava to guide you.



Bhaktivinoda Thākura next gives more songs of “*bhakti-pratikūla-bhāva varjanāṅgikāra*,” renunciation of conduct averse to pure devotion. He has given us a full glimpse of the ultimate liberation as a *sakhī* in Gokula, and now he returns to instruct all *jīvas* how to avoid obstacles on the path. We’ll hear more from him about yearning for the perfect state, but if we want to progress there, we still have a lot of ground to cover. Also, he wants to equip us as preachers so that we can help others.

“This material creation of Yours, O Keśava, is most strange. I have roamed throughout the forest of this universe in consequence of my selfish acts, and I have beheld many strange and curious sights” (*Śaraṇāgati*, 5.1.1). Ghettos, torturings. I dreamt I was protected by a powerful and excellently trained dog. I kept him on a leash and he did my bidding. I could go anywhere unafraid. But then the dog became as intelligent as a human and quit my service. He said he preferred to be unemployed. Without him, I was open to attacks. I had to cross streets where everyone saw me as the enemy to be attacked. O Keśava, this material creation is most strange, and it’s due to my past karma that I have to suffer now. I caused others to suffer in the past and now I have to go into the streets at night where everyone sees me as worth killing.

In this dangerous world, cheating philosophers come forward to deliver me. They offer me material pleasures and liberation. But it is forgetfulness of Lord Keśava's feet that has brought on my anguish and grief—and these philosophers are averse to His devotional service. They are fatally dangerous. "Bhaktivinoda, considering refuge at the feet of the Vaiṣṇava as essential, pays his respects to these cheating philosophers from afar" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 5.1.4).

Don't play with fire. Having come to devotional service, don't look back to see if there was anything you missed enjoying in the world or would like to take with you. You can't bring your old rocks across the river: they will make you sink. You renounced everything and you felt such relief. Kṛṣṇa gave you the strength and courage then. He took away all your old friends. Don't rummage through the heap of discarded memories and desires. You have already been given the best. Don't become a crow again.

"I shall never reside at a place unfavorable for devotional practices, and may I never take pleasure in nondevotional works. I will read no book opposed to pure devotion, nor listen to any explanation which disagrees with pure devotional principles" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 5.2.3–4).

"I vow to completely shun whatever I know to contradict pure devotion. This I strongly promise. Bhaktivinoda, falling at the feet of the Lord, begs for the strength to give up all obstacles to pure devotion" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 5.2.8–9).

Don't complain that he's not being broad-minded. Cut off all ties with nondevotees. You can't be interested in pure *bhakti* and at the same time, averse to its principles. There is no such thing as being favorable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and maintaining relationships with those who are averse. How could you live with them or talk with them? No, we have to get out of all unfavorable situations. We are only interested in our ultimate benefit. Therefore, have a healthy fear of any attachments which are averse to pure devotional service.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is not discussing *yukta-vairāgya*. If you need to study something or use something for your service, ask your guru's permission and then carefully proceed. But don't fool yourself. Non-devotional music and writing and work is often empowered by the grace of Māyā-devī. She bewildered you before and she can do it again if you leave the shelter of the Vaiṣṇavas.

O most powerful, insurmountable Lord, who are kind to the fallen souls, I have been put into the association of demons as a result of my activities, and therefore I am very much afraid of my condition of life within this material world. When will that moment come when You will call me to the shelter of Your lotus feet, which are the ultimate goal for liberation from conditional life?

—*Bhāg.* 7.9.16

My dear Lord, You are always transcendently situated on the other side of the river of death, but because of the reactions of our own activities, we are suffering on this side. Indeed, we are fallen into this river and are repeatedly suffering

the pains of birth and death and eating horrible things. Now kindly look upon us—not only upon me but also upon all others who are suffering—and by Your causeless mercy and compassion, deliver us and maintain us.

—*Bhāg.* 7.9.41



It is serious business getting out of the material world. We have to be careful as we nurture our spiritual lives, and it takes patience to mature. How many seasons must a fruit tree grow before it starts to produce? Yet it can be cut down at any moment. Don't flirt with the material world, I tell myself. Be careful of self-administered drops of poison and your foolish self-assurance. Don't ever think you are safe. Give up everything unfavorable.

But some say, I grew up in *gurukula* with the devotees. I was forced to participate in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I didn't choose it. Now I want to check out the material scene. I can't repress it, it's breaking out of me—a desire to tour the town and to see what the materialists enjoy. I want to go to night clubs and dance. I want to find out who I am and I think the nondevotees can help me. They have so many teachings and ways. Perhaps I'll go to college. It's not that only Hare Kṛṣṇa people are good. In fact, I'm beginning to think they're shallow. I don't want their company, at least not exclusively. I want to be with people who can think for themselves.

It sounds feasible in some respects. I know you have good reason to feel this way and you've convinced yourself. You won't listen to me why you

should be patient and find all that you need within the wide bounds of devotional service. I will pray for you, but I won't go with you. I am satisfied with *bhakti*.



O Keśava, it's a weird world where souls eat abominable things and appear in multifarious forms as fish and birds and beasts and plants and insects and humans and demigods. There seems to be no end to the possibilities in material life, and once you're caught up in changing one body for another, you can't get out. Bound by ropes hand and feet, among cruel monsters, I pray to be delivered. Your feet are the only safety.



I am not a zombie. I really did go through all that and I don't want to go back for more. Please spare me the company of sense enjoyers and monists. Actually, the sense enjoyer is better than the Māyāvādī. Māyāvādīs harden the heart against devotees and devotional service. Giving up sins is easier than giving up non-devotional meditation. I will not listen to those Āyurvedic doctors who say, "Why don't you add nondevotional meditation to your life? You have Kṛṣṇa, but you should go beyond Him. Transcend." "Bhaktivinoda drives away the philosophy of illusionism and sits safely in the society of Vaiṣṇavas under the shelter of the holy name" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 5.3.9).

No place seems to mean much to me. You could say I love mountains like this, and the spring season (although I've renounced yogurt mixed with big spoons of honey), but they're all just places to pass through. I am a traveler. I can't feel the spring the way you can if you always live in a little house in the country near Gītā-nāgarī.

I never see a bluebird's rusty breast, but I see sparrows everywhere I go. I am growing familiar with more and more places around the globe—Italy, France—the big tree there, the door knob on the bathroom in the Paris temple, the passenger cabin on the ferry to Ireland, the gorse in Wicklow, the skylight in Uddhava's house . . . I pass through them with no sense of belonging.

What about sacred places? Śrīla Prabhupāda's *samādhi*, and his rooms in Vṛndāvana. I haven't been living in the guesthouse at the Krishna-Balaram Mandir now for two years, but I haven't forgotten it and I am willing to go back.

The point is that it's not the place, but who you are—chanting anywhere quietly before pictures of special Vaiṣṇavas, especially the one of Prabhupāda to whom I offer my food.

I say I'm just passing through because I wish I had more feeling, although I am afraid of that too.



At the end of the section, "Aversion to things unfavorable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness," Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura inserts another song of perfection in

*sakhī-bhāva*: "I am a resident of Svānanda-sukhadakuñj and a maidservant of the lotus feet of Rādhikā and Mādhava. At the union of the Divine Couple I rejoice, and in Their separation, I die in anguish" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 5.4.1–2). The pure devotee judges as "unfavorable" things which hinder Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's union. His happiness is not based on selfishness, but is dependent on the happiness of Śrīmatī Rādhikā.

He says he never looks at *sakhī-sṭhālī*, Candrāvalī's place. (Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī became angry when a friend brought him yogurt obtained at *sakhī-sṭhālī* and he threw the leaf cup away.) Why? Because Candrāvalī and Her group are transcendental rivals to Rādhā. "Candrāvalī wants to take away Rādhā's Lord Hari, thus covering the grove of Rādhikā with the darkness of gloom" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 5.4.5).

(I'm writing this in a blaze of sunshine over my shoulder. It's Saturday and the motorcyclists are zooming up and down this road. When they gun their engines the sound is alive, insistent, and forces me to pay attention. But Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is holding me here, reading *Śaraṇāgati* and writing something about it.)

I won't say more about *sakhī-sṭhālī* appearing under "Aversion to things unfavorable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness." There are rules in Kṛṣṇa consciousness for the *vaidhī-bhakta*, and some different rules for those practicing *rāgānugā*. The *rāgānugā-bhakta* is fixed only in his own mood. What is favorable or unfavorable is determined according to that mood.

Ordinary devotees don't even know that Candrāvalī's success brings darkness to Rādhā's grove.

But how many acts do we ignorantly (or not so ignorantly) commit that are unfavorable to our Kṛṣṇa consciousness? It's like when you follow a health regimen. Sometimes we speak of compromise as a way to make peace with the mind. Premature renunciation can harden the heart, so we want to keep balanced. Many health books advise that a sweet after a meal does not promote digestion, but we may like it. Our tongue may crave sweets. So we compromise. If we try to completely deny the tongue, he'll get us in another way. He'll force us to binge at the Sunday feast or something.

We don't even want to admit to ourselves what compromises we may be making in terms of our practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and our lower selves. Do we say, "Go ahead, do what you like to do, although it's temporary and will hinder you from obtaining pure devotion. What's a few more births rotting in the material world?" Where is our greed to attain the goal? Why are we so interested in this one, short life that we won't offer obeisances just because we feel tired? We tell ourselves that our spiritual master will understand, that Lord Caitanya was extremely merciful, and that we would bow down except we just don't *feel* like it right now. This is not the mood of a follower of Raghunātha Gosvāmī.

Therefore *vaidhī-bhakti* is necessary to keep us chanting and reading. We need the discipline imposed on us because we have no taste. Get up! It's

time for *maṅgala-ārati*. Bow down! You are so lazy! The etiquette is that you must offer *daṇḍavats* when you see the Deity or a *sannyāsī* in the morning.

Instead we strike a deal. Compromise is not always unfavorable. Imitation of the advanced stage is just as dangerous as spiritual laziness. So the *vaidhī* rules force us to obey long enough until our hearts become blessed by spontaneous love.

(The blazing sun makes ink look pale blue as it flows out of this pen and quickly dries. I see trees on mountain terraces. I have stopped my little preaching about favorable and unfavorable because I lost my train of thought. Now I am looking at the perfectly blue sky—no clouds at all overhead. I will take this opportunity to take off my sweatshirt and my hat.)

The next group of four songs is "Acceptance of activities favorable to pure devotion." (It's really getting warm. I am also learning to feel more favorable toward the sun. Sūrya-deva called Rādhā to come to the sun planet when he saw Her grief after Kṛṣṇa's departure. He arranged this through the Yamunā, his daughter. He gave Rādhā shelter and assured Her that if She went to Nava-Vṛndāvana in Dvārakā, She would attain Kṛṣṇa there. Re-counting, Rādhā said, "The *devas* don't lie." Of course, too much sun will kill us. But some is very good.)



This *brāhmaṇa* thread is too long. Too hot, too cold, too long, too short—happiness is only the temporary cessation of pain. We say, "I slept well, I

don't remember anything." Sanātana Gosvāmī saw such negative happiness in "good" sleep as the happiness of impersonal liberation. Good eating means we didn't starve. Counteracting the natural miseries. Spiritual life is beyond just counteracting the material miseries. In this world nothing is *śubha* or *aśubha*, auspicious or inauspicious.

Now the positive (according to Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura): I will be fond of those things in the world conducive to pure devotion. Ah, let my mind and memory dwell here. Let me recall going to *maṅgala-ārati* in the temples, the Deities and the songs, the *mṛdaṅgas* and *karatālas* well played. I will listen carefully to *hari-kathā*. I will nourish my body with *prasādam*, and smell the sweet scent of *tulasī* leaves. I will use my desires to pray for Your service. Let my service be *bhakti*, not *rajo-guṇa*. Let it draw me out of sleep and lethargy and doubt to the circle of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. Service to Your devotee, anger toward those who are envious of You, "My propensities and emotions [will] attain dignity and glory by being favorable to You . . ." Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura prays that all his activities be *bhakti-anukūla*.



In his next song, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes the favorable land (*dhāma*) for worship of the Lord. He chooses Godruma, which is nondifferent from Nandagrām. I'm in Cozille, Italy, right now, seeking a favorable atmosphere for solitary writing and being. I find it more favorable than the social in-

teraction in busier places. We have to do what is *anukūla* for us. Some things are generally favorable, others may be individual. I want to go to the best *dhāma*, Vṛndāvana in India, but it's not always favorable for me there after the months go by and I can't find time or peace to think and write. Therefore I look for favorable places.

Some devotees of Lord Caitanya lived in caves because it was favorable for their *bhajana*. Someone once told me that he preferred to go to Jagannātha Puri when he wanted to write, even though it was an *aiśvarya* place and not *mādhurya*. Wherever you can best do your *bhajana* is favorable. If you are most peaceful somewhere odd—in a van, a cave, on a hill in Italy, a bolt hole somewhere, a back room, a hall packed with thousands of people chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, in a class at Harvard, on the Brooklyn streets distributing books—go there without delay.

But don't cheat yourself. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura wishes to live in Godruma. He'll dress in Vaiṣṇava garb and mark his body with twelve Vaiṣṇava *tilakas* and wear *tulasī* beads around his neck. He will plant flowering trees—*campaka*, *bakula*, *kadamba*, and *tamāla*—and thus cultivate an extensive grove. He will add *mādhavī* and *malati* creepers to create a shady bower. (It's not that a devotee has to run to the desert to find peaceful contemplation.) Then he will plant *yuthī*, *jati*, and *malli* and install the empress, *Tulasī*, on an elevated throne. On the terrace, he will place *kīrtana* instruments. Don't cheat yourself of the best *bhāvas*.

Sometimes Rādhā experiences separation and sometimes She is with Kṛṣṇa. In any case, She is always intensely Kṛṣṇa conscious. No one satisfies Kṛṣṇa as much as Rādhikā.



The next song is everyone's favorite, "*Śuddha-bhakata-caraṇa-reṇu*." I remember reading it in a small collection of unpublished translations passed among the devotees. It struck me more than the other passages. It opened a window for me to understand bliss. It is such an open acknowledgment of the joy he feels in devotional service. It can be true for us too.

"My mind always begs for the opportunity to hear the music of the *mṛdaṅga*." (Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "When I hear a *mṛdaṅga* played in Germany, I become ecstatic"—the joy of the world preacher.) "Upon hearing the *kīrtana* ordained by Lord Caitanya, my heart dances in ecstasy" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 6.3.4).

I feel the greatest joy when I see the Deity forms of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. When I honor the Lord's *prasādam* I conquer over worldly illusions. Miracles take place by the simple execution of *bhakti* practices in the heart of the pure devotee. Especially this one—"Goloka Vṛndāvana appears in my home whenever I see the worship and service of Lord Hari taking place there." On reading these lines, we want to tell each other, "Look what can happen!"

When I first read the next line, it was translated like this: "When I take the *carṇāmṛta* which flows

from the Deities, I see it as the Ganges coming directly from the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa."

It depends on your purity, but all these things are possible and potent within the *sevā*. Everyone can meditate like this. We simply have to look at our everyday occurrences with faith. Have faith in the activities that are favorable to pure devotional service. They are designed to provoke ecstasy. Tulasī-devī pleases Kṛṣṇa, so if you serve her, why will you not see how she pleases Him? When you honor *śāk*, one of Lord Caitanya's favorite vegetable preparations, you can consider your life worthwhile.

Do that which is favorable.



Vines growing up the trunks, bees finding the flowers, clouds in the blue sky—all these mean Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are coming together. I can see it too, just as I can see that the taste of water is Kṛṣṇa and the sun is His eye. Can I see Rādhā in the yellow buttercup? Can I think more of Vṛndāvana?

The routine here is peaceful. Sometimes I picture myself as a small, staggering, feeble person climbing stairs. I don't know how I look to others. Anyone's face is a simple mask that doesn't have the ability to reveal all emotions. There's a voice out in the valley. My thoughts pass through my mind in this sunlight. They move in a certain direction. This is not *śuddha bhakata*.

Spring is a festival for lovers. In this world it is cheapened and perverted by lusty couples. Better to be a celibate monk and think of the springtime love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Shiny grass bending your back, do you have a message for me? I can record it. If any daisy or humble weed has something to say about Kṛṣṇa consciousness, I can record it. I have come here for that purpose.

But please speak up. I don't think I can bend too far down to hear you speak. You shamrocks with the red spot in the middle of each leaf, I've never seen your species before. How did you get that blood spot? If you were growing in India, I'm sure there would be a story in the *Purāṇas* about you. If you can't talk, then at least listen to me chant—Hare Kṛṣṇa! Hear the holy names of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I write in your midst. Even if you don't like the way I pronounce the *mahā-mantra* with my crackling, harsh voice, please feel it coming from my heart.

The grasses are praised by Lord Caitanya as lowly and fit to chant. The trees are the example of tolerance. You deserve more. Be patient for now and take the opportunity when it comes. If I can yearn from here to go to Vṛndāvana, why can't you?



The last songs in the series of "*Bhakti-anukūla*" are a list of *uddīpana*, things that stimulate ecstasy in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The *kuṭir* on the bank of

Rādhā-kuṇḍa, Govardhana Hill, the Yamunā's banks, the flute, the cows' hoofprints, the dust of Vraja, rows of blackish clouds, springtime, the moon . . . Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura knows all these are conducive to the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. He refuses to go where these things are absent, "For to abandon them is to abandon life itself."

I am looking for those things here.



We sat ready to memorize. I was tired and just watched from inside my sweatshirt hood as Madhu went over the definitions of *āsakti*: it is like a polished mirror in which the Lord is sometimes seen. A person at the stage of *āsakti* is absorbed in the Lord without even trying. Neighbors think he is a "born idiot." And in *bhāva*, more symptoms: the buds appear that will in turn become flowers and fruits . . . I can remember so little.

"Do you want to memorize these?" he asks.

"I'd like to, but I don't know if I can."

"Well, you'll have to say. Unless I underline them, we won't do them any more."

"Okay, go ahead."

He underlines. The devotee loses attachment for other things. He loves Kṛṣṇa, that's the point. It develops. I watch and allow myself to relax and feel tired because it's the end of the day. I feel satisfied with this day.

"There are two kinds of *bhāva*. One arises from *vaidhī* and one from *rāgānugā*."

He says, "The *bhāva* of *vaidhī* emphasizes Kṛṣṇa's power and majesty."

Hmmm, like the Christians.

"It tends to be less in strength and in natural feeling. Do you want to memorize this?"

"Yes. But I don't have much time now."

He served milk late.

"Let me just read about the stages of *bhāva*. Do you want to hear it? We can try to memorize them tomorrow."

"Yes, go ahead."

He reads, sometimes stopping to blow his nose (we both have hayfever). First is *sneha*. *Śānta-rasa* cannot reach there. How does it go? *Sneha*, *māna*, *prañāya*, *rāga*, *anurāga*, *bhāva*, *mahā-bhāva*, which has two types. The queens have *viruddha* and the *gopīs* have the highest, *aviruddha*.

(Memorization work is serious. Remember Thomas à Kempis's remark, "I would rather experience compunction than know the meaning of the word." A critic responded, "Why not experience compunction *and* know the meaning?")

I'm into learning all these terms. It's just that I'm a little feeble—we *vātas* get like that, especially as we grow older—and I'm tired tonight. But I am also happy—happy with this day and happy to be hearing these sublime terms and their definitions.



Life is limited. Everyone should be a devotee. I think of the terminally ill devotees living in the Krishna-Balaram Mandir. There is one woman in a

wheelchair, or more than one. She said she'd write her life story, but she didn't feel well enough to do it. She gave me some money for my expenses in Vṛndāvana. She laughs ironically, freely, at this mortal condition. She appreciates that she's been saved from a big material career and has been given Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But then Kṛṣṇa took her health away and has shortened her life. She feels happy, she says. I hope she is.

Next Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes thirteen songs called "*Bhajana-lālasā*," hankering for divine service. The first nine are based on Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Upadeśāmṛta*.

Again he is writing as a fallen soul. He says he doesn't deserve deliverance from *saṁsāra*, but he appeals to the Supreme Lord's compassion. "Therefore, although I am certainly destitute, I solicit your causeless mercy" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 7.1.2).

The powerful "*vegas*," the pushing agents, cast him adrift on the sea of the world. Rūpa Gosvāmī's verse states that one who can control these urges is a *gosvāmī* and is capable of accepting disciples all over the world. But Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura doesn't claim he is such a *gosvāmī*. "After great endeavor to subdue these material demands, I have completely given up all hope. O Lord of the destitute, I call upon Your holy name, for now You are my only shelter" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 7.1.4). He has turned the verse into a personal prayer. Let us remember the *Upadeśāmṛta* text in this way.

We sometimes quote it as evidence of who is qualified to be a spiritual master Or we assert, "I

am following the rules. I control these urges. So consider me as a *gosvāmī*." But we cannot ultimately control ourselves; we can only endeavor and pray, because our minds, tongues, bellies, and genitals are banded together against us. Our tongue speaks nonsense. Please, Lord of the poor, give us Your shelter.

Similarly, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura takes the statement of items which are unfavorable for devotional service and he turns it into his personal prayer. "I have not been able to give up any of these attachments. Thus my own faults have been my downfall." It is nice to study these faults from an objective distance, "One should avoid these." But it is also powerful to come close to them and openly admit, *I have these and they are spoiling my life*. I want release from them. The list of entanglements comes alive and we confess. We have been giving a lecture on unfavorable items to one's execution of service. Now we admit our own wrongs.

"O Lord Hari, what am I to do now? I am indeed fallen; but Your holy name is the savior of the fallen. Clinging to that holy name, I have taken shelter at Your lotus feet" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 7.2.3-4).

Wait a minute, why so freely say that you are guilty? Who has proved you wrong? Do you actually commit *atyāhāraḥ prayāśaś ca, prajalpo niyamā-grahaḥ? Jana-saṅgaś ca laulyaṁ ca*? Yes, sometimes greedy, sometimes eating more than necessary and collecting more funds than necessary. I definitely practice the rules only for the sake of following them. These items are not only a list of what the

ools and nondevotees do. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Every intelligent man should purify his consciousness and rid himself of the above mentioned six hindrances to devotional service by taking whole-hearted shelter of this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement" (NOI, text 2, purport). ISKCON can free us. So you, I mean I—are we taking shelter?

As for the six principles favorable to the execution of devotional service beginning with *utsāha*, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says, "I have never possessed these six devotional qualities." *Śaraṇāgati* means making the confession. You look in your heart and find yourself wanting. *Śaraṇāgati* means to drop the pose. With honest scrutiny, we can see that we are still dancing with *māyā*. We can check the bad qualities off as in a private questionnaire, "Yes. Sometimes. Yes. All the time. Yes, I *think* of doing it." When good qualities are mentioned—and sometimes the interviewers remind us to be honest—his pencils checks off, "No. Rarely. Not so often."

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes, "Absorbed in abominable activities, I never kept company with *sādhus*. Now I adopt the garb of the *sādhus* and instruct others. This is *māyā*'s big joke" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 7.3.3). Who has that power to look within and admit the truth? Who is so liberated that he can accept criticism from others, "You don't have patience. You don't seem confident in the process of devotional service." And who has the power to see himself as a hypocrite for instructing others even though he is not himself free? "O Lord Hari, in

such a helpless condition surely I will obtain Your causeless mercy. O when, under the shelter of my spiritual master, will I call out to You with humble prayers?" (*Śaranāgati*, 7.3.4).

You mean we should go around admitting we are hypocrites and can't follow the basic instructions of *The Nectar of Instruction*? We should be honest. We don't have to "go around" announcing anything. Know it within yourself and act accordingly. Engage confidently in the process of anarthanivṛtti and develop good qualities. Live *The Nectar of Instruction*.

"The International Society for Krishna Consciousness is giving such a chance to humanity at large." You read this aloud and tell your audience to come up to the mark: follow ISKCON, give money, support us. But it's for you too, Prabhu. "One should accept this opportunity to return home, back to Godhead, very enthusiastically" (*NOI*, text 3, purport). "The successful execution of Kṛṣṇa consciousness activities requires both patience and confidence."



Okay, ink spiller, one pen has leaked all over your finger and your right palm. Another has run out, and since you have no refills on the desk, it lies discarded like a dead soldier. More ink is easy to find, but stop and think. Writing can also be an excuse not to act: "Isn't it marvelous the way Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura puts all of us on the spot?" Yeah, and he writes, "Me too, me too," and leans back sat-

isfied that he has done a morning's work. O when, under the shelter of my spiritual master, will I call out to You with humility?



Regarding the six exchanges of love between devotees, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says he has practiced these with the nondevotees, "Either knowingly or unknowingly [and] I have lost all devotion." He longs to gain the taste for intimate company with the devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

If we make nondevotees our confidantes, it is detrimental to *bhakti*. We may do this unknowingly—by reading their books or enjoying the facilities they provide—or by enjoying the same things they enjoy. We become one at heart with all the world's materialists when we engage in sense gratification. When that happens, Lord Kṛṣṇa remains far away.

Mentally honor that person who chants the holy names, even if he is not initiated. Bow down to the devotee who is fixed in pure devotion to the Lord. Consider yourself fortunate to even see the *uttamā-bhakta* who looks upon all jīvas equally. "When will my mind become simple and inoffensive toward the Vaiṣṇavas, and when will I cross over the ocean of worldly existence to reach Your abode of Vraja?" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 7.5.4).

We should never find fault with the pure devotee, considering his body to be defective or displeasing or diseased. Such apparent defects in the body of a pure devotee are just like Ganges water which appears foamy and muddy during the rainy season.

The Ganges is never polluted. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura prays never to fall into such deadly irreligion, which will certainly destroy him. "The Vaiṣṇava is Yours, and he is Your glory. May he be merciful to me. Then my life's journey will lead to You and I will obtain shelter in the shade of Your lotus feet."

When fault-finding toward the pure devotee arises in our minds, we should know that we are the ones at fault. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "What should be taken into account is the spiritual master's main business, which is devotional service, pure service to the Supreme Lord" (NOI, text 6, purport). No one should be proud of their body or be prejudiced about the bodies of others. If it comes, regret it.

For the neophyte especially, considering a pure devotee from a material point of view is very injurious. One should therefore avoid observing a pure devotee externally, but should try to see the internal features and understand how he is engaged in the transcendental loving service of the Lord. In this way one can avoid seeing the pure devotee from a material point of view, and thus one can gradually become a purified devotee himself.

. . . When one thus criticizes a pure devotee, he commits an offense (*vaiṣṇava-aparādhā*) that is very obstructive and dangerous for those who desire to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. A person cannot derive any spiritual benefit when he offends the lotus feet of a Vaiṣṇava.

—NOI, text 6, purport

I have dreamt of Śrīla Prabhupāda for two days in a row. The dreams indicated to me that Śrīla Prabhupāda is ever willing to accept personal service from me and that I have direct access to him. Despite the changes I have gone through, he still sees me as his servant.

In one dream, Śrīla Prabhupāda was sitting in bed receiving some kind of medical treatment. One devotee was with him, but Prabhupāda called me in and indicated that we wanted me to put *tilaka* on his forehead. It was something I have never done, so I hoped I would be able to do it neatly. Should I stand behind him and do it from there while looking into a mirror? No, face him and apply it like that. The dream ended there, but I continued the meditation of seeing his forehead and coming close to apply the wet *candana*. I kept wondering whether or not it would come out nicely.

In the second dream, Prabhupāda was lecturing somewhere and I was also there. I was having trouble paying attention to his talk. Then I looked over to him and saw that his denture had come half out of his mouth while he was speaking. (Śrīla Prabhupāda never wore a denture, but this was a dream. Probably because I wear one, I was seeing according to *ātmavan manyate jagat*, seeing the universe from my own point of view.) I ran over to Śrīla Prabhupāda and he handed me the denture from his mouth. He said I could try to get some adhesive powder for it. I was aware that I was missing the valuable lecture, but glad that I had an urgent

searching for denture adhesive, but the stores were all closed. In my search, I had adventures with extraordinary people and events. I was earnestly crying, trying to get it done.



*Ohe! baiṣṇava ṭhākura, doyāra sāgara, e dāse koruṇā kori'*: this is perhaps the most beloved of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's songs from *Śaraṇāgati*. This song and a few others are sung daily as part of the temple program in many Gaudiya Maths. ISKCON loves it too. I remember Śrīla Prabhupāda asking a devotee to sing it when he arrived at the temple in Denver, Colorado. Then Daśaratha dāsa sang it accompanied by harmonium, and Śrīla Prabhupāda gave an explanation.

These songs need to be sung to feel their full effect. To sing with like-minded friends and then explain or comment on the song is a sublime way of associating in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Feast on Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's songs! Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has explained things carefully for us. Now he lets this song pour forth from his heart.

*Kṛṣṇa se tomāra, kṛṣṇa dite pāro, tomāra śakati āche*: "Kṛṣṇa is yours. You are able to give Him to me, for such is your power."

*Ami to' kāṅgāla, 'kṛṣṇa' 'kṛṣṇa' boli', dhāi taba pāche pāche*: "I am indeed wretched and simply run after you crying, "Kṛṣṇa! Kṛṣṇa!"

The best thing I can say here is that we should all make a date to sing this *bhajana* with someone who

The best thing I can say here is that we should all make a date to sing this *bhajana* with someone who knows how. The best singers come from Bengal, but we can all learn the art. (I wish it were that easy to learn how to weep.) O Vaiṣṇava Ṭhākura, ocean of mercy, please be merciful to me, your servant. Although I offend you, I want to be free of my offenses. Please relieve me with the shade of your lotus feet. Your feet I humbly embrace . . . *"I find I have no strength to chant the holy name of Hari. With a particle of śraddhā I beg you, therefore, please be merciful and give me the treasure of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa."*

*Harināma* comes from you, Śrīla Prabhupāda. Kindly give me the ability to chant and the courage to distribute the holy name. If nothing else, let me be inoffensive and stay in your company and the company of your followers.



Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura paraphrases Rūpa Gosvāmī's verse about jaundice, the disease of *avidyā*. "I cannot relish the nectar of Your holy name for I have become addicted to the taste of worldly pleasures." (Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura analyzes this more fully in his *Harināma Cintāmaṇi*.) He laments that this has happened due to committing offenses to the holy name. In the same positive spirit as Rūpa Gosvāmī, he concludes that the *aparādhas* and *avidyā* will be overcome if he simply persists in chanting.

If I sing Your holy name every day, by Your mercy the ten offenses will gradually disappear. A taste for Your holy name will grow within me, and then I will taste the intoxicating spirit of the name.

—*Śaraṇāgati*, 7.8.4

Rūpa Gosvāmī's verse has always been a crucial evidence for me. Armed with his verse and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's version of it, we can go on, not stopping our chanting and not feeling hopeless. Change will come about by the power of the holy name and by a drop of mercy from the Vaiṣṇava Ṭhākura.

We are meant to enter into the same spirit in which the song was composed. This is called becoming *tadātmya* with the mood. Prabhupāda defines *tadātmya* by giving the example of an iron rod in the fire. Simply by the rod's remaining in the fire, it will become fire. By our association with Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's mood, we will become *tadātmya* with it. Feel yourself wretched—go ahead—and weep. Confess that you have tried to improve your chanting but haven't been able to. Enter his mood and sing. Be cleansed by it. Sing and be conscious of the meaning of the words. This is your song. Enter it fully and receive the mercy.

Devotees are not interested in performance: we are looking for tears. Tears wash away the jaundice of *avidyā* and then Kṛṣṇa appears in His most merciful form. The Vaiṣṇavas shower their mercy. This is *bhajana*.

Next Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura gives us his version of Rūpa Gosvāmī's "essence of all advice," text eight of the *Upadeśāmṛta*. He declares that Rūpa Gosvāmī is giving us instructions as our *śikṣā-guru*. We should take them in that way, as personal teachings from our ever well-wisher.

Try to understand my words, O you who beg for the gift of the holy name, for by these instructions you will develop attraction for chanting the holy name.

Follow the scriptural rules and regulations and engage your tongue and mind in carefully chanting and remembering the holy names, divine forms, qualities, and wonderful pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Dwell in the holy land of Vraja, cultivate spontaneous loving devotion (*rāgānugā-bhakti*) and spend your every moment chanting and remembering the glories of Śrī Hari. Just accept these as the essence of all instructions.

—*Śaraṇāgati*, 7.9.1–3

How is it that we have come to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement? Surely our coming is due to some divine arrangement. We have become *rūpānugas* by Prabhupāda's grace. He has awakened our original seed for the *bhāva* of Rūpa Gosvāmī. (As I wrote this, a huge bee landed on my right elbow. I stopped writing for a moment to look at him, but he has already gone off, seeking nectar.)

We have a seed relationship with Kṛṣṇa. The Vaiṣṇava awakens that relationship. Naturally, we want to take the same path as our spiritual master. Therefore, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's advice to take

shelter in the Vaiṣṇava Ṭhākura is superexcellent—and to chant attentively with the tongue to capture the mind. Śrīla Prabhupāda insisted that this was possible for us. Then, we have to tune our ear to actually hear the names of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the holy name. From that hearing, Their pastimes will gradually unfold. We will see Their *rūpa*, *līlā*, and *guṇa*.

And we are looking for residence in the land of Vṛndāvana. Go there if possible. Stay there and chant. Serve according to the rules and regulations. If you can't go physically, then meditate on Vṛndāvana. Why not? Why say it's impossible? Listen to this song and *sing it*.

O Rūpa Gosvāmi, when, out of your causeless mercy, will you enable this poor wretched soul to reside in Vṛndāvana? You are a *rāgātmikā* devotee, an eternally liberated, intimate associate of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. This humble servant of yours desires to become a follower at your lotus feet.

—*Śaraṇāgati*, 7.9.4

Let us return to Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and bow down before him. He will ignite a flame within us.

In the next series, he begins each song with the word "Gurudeva!" Gurudeva, you gave me this place in Godruma in the forest of Gauḍa and instructed me to live here and sing *harināma*. But when will you give me the competence to actually do it? "When will my mind become tranquil and fixed? When will I endure all hardships and serve Lord Hari without distraction?" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 7.10.2).

He expresses himself as he did before, troubled by illness, old age, and anxiety. How to understand this?

One way to see it is that he is reminding us that until we are perfected, we will have ups and downs. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has described brilliant states of elevation and given glimpses into eternal Vraja, but he continues to set into his *Śaraṇāgati* reminders that the body still claims us, and our anxieties are not over until we leave this world behind once and for all. It is his method of instruction. He continues to cry as a fallen soul, begging at the feet of his *gurudeva*.

*Gurudeva! kṛpā-bindu diyā, koro' ei dāse tṛṇāpekḥā ati hīna:* we all love to sing this song, even if we are not expert singers. I sing it while riding in the van; others sing it to themselves while shopping or waiting for luggage at the airport. "Gurudeva! By a drop of your mercy make this servant of yours more humble than a blade of grass. Give me strength to bear all trials and troubles, and free me from all desires for personal honor" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 7.11.1).

We may doubt how the devotee accepts his guru as the medium to all Kṛṣṇa's instructions and blessings. How can a disciple pray to his guru for intelligence as if his guru were the Supersoul? This question is especially true when the guru has already left the planet.

But the liberated Vaiṣṇava spiritual master is *sākṣād-dharitvena*, the direct representative of Kṛṣṇa. He can do anything that Kṛṣṇa can do for the

sincere disciple. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is not concocting or exaggerating. This is our *siddhānta*. It is also in tune with the disciple's emotions. His guru has always been the bedrock of his spiritual life.

Kṛṣṇa consciousness begins and ends in *guru-sevā*. "When I examine myself, I find nothing of value. Your mercy is therefore essential to me." *Gurudeva! kabe mora sei dina ha'be*: "When, with a steady mind in a secluded place, will I sing the name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa? When will the pandemonium of worldly existence no longer echo in my ears and the diseases of the body remain far away?" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 7.12.1). Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura hankers for the *sāttvika* ecstasies, the tears of love that come when chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. When, even in this body, will he be able to constantly sing the holy name in this way?

Gurudeva! He awaits the day when, by Gurudeva's mercy, he will be able to know the eternal reality of Lord Gaurāṅga's *nitya-līlā*. The Pañca-tattva will flood the entire universe with the intoxicating nectar of the holy name. Devotees everywhere will perform *mahā-saṅkīrtana*. By singing his songs in solitude, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura envisions the spreading of the bliss of Lord Caitanya's *līlā*. Who could guess that it would take place? Now the devotees are gathering from all the countries of the world, including China and Russia, America and Africa, the Caribbean and France—all countries big and small, in Māyāpur, to chant the names of Śrī Śacīnandana and Gaurahari. This has taken place

O Gurudeva! Please let me be part of your mission. Let me serve the devotees. Let me speak your glories. Protect me from pride and vanity, from the madness of self-centered life. Let me not be daunted, even if "materialists will throw dirt at my body and proclaim me thoroughly mad." Let me weep to seek your mercy, and let me be assured that I am yours. Unless I can work for you, what good is anything to me?



Then comes "*Siddhi-lālasā*," three songs of hankering for spiritual perfection. He desires nothing less than to become a *rādhā-dāsī*. He will attain this goal by living as a mendicant in the land of Navadvīpa. He will become like one mad, forgetting all physical comforts and crying, "O Rādhā! O Kṛṣṇa!" He will roll along the banks of the sacred river, bow down to the *dhāma*'s inhabitants, and smear the dust of the Vaiṣṇavas' feet on his body. He will come to see no difference between the inhabitants of Vrajabhūmi and those of Navadvīpa and, "I will be transformed into a resident of Vraja." The true nature of the *dhāma* will become manifest to him, "And I will become a maidservant of Rādhārāṇī."

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sees into the next life. In a flash he will forget all bodily identity. He will not be born again into the world of illusion. He will take birth in the town of King Vṛṣabhānu, as the daughter of a *gopī*.

"When by the power of Rādhā's mercy, will I obtain my own eternal spiritual body, name, form,

and dress, and when, by Her mercy, will I obtain initiation into the divine love of Kṛṣṇa?" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 8.2.3).

She will go to draw water from the Yamunā, cherishing knowledge of the love that unites Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. She will sing Rādhā's glories like a madwoman enchanted by divine love. In the mood of an assistant *gopī*, she will serve a leader *sakhī*. "I will always strive to bring about the happiness of Śrī Rādhā. . . . I will never desire to abandon Her lotus feet for His solitary company. . . . I myself am always partial to Rādhikā and therefore never look at those who have abandoned Rādhā's entourage, whoever they may be and whatever their ways" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 8.3.1, 2, 4).



Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura now sings *Kabe Ha'be Bolo*. This is an expression of longing to attain a spiritual state. There are two means to attain Kṛṣṇa—by the ascending method of practicing *sādhana*, *anartha-nivṛtti*, etc., and by the descent of Kṛṣṇa's mercy. Kṛṣṇa's mercy is called "causeless" because it does not descend due to our efforts. Devotees both practice *sādhana* and wait for mercy.

These two ways to attain Kṛṣṇa are often exemplified by how the cat and monkey carry their young. The kittens are totally dependent on their mother's strength; the monkey baby has to hold on by its own strength. A young monkey who fails to hold on will be abandoned by its mother. She will

by its own strength. A young monkey who fails to hold on will be abandoned by its mother. She will consider it an unfit child. Devotees have to do both: pray and endeavor.

The pastime of Mother Yaśodā binding Kṛṣṇa reveals the necessity of both approaches. Every time Mother Yaśodā tried to bind Kṛṣṇa, the rope was two fingers too short. Finally, Kṛṣṇa decided that although His mother was trying something impossible—to bind the Absolute Truth—He would agree to be bound. Because she was trying so hard, and because she is a pure devotee, Kṛṣṇa wanted to serve her. But Prabhupāda points out that it's not that she actually overpowered Him. He first demonstrated that He couldn't be tied even by His mother, what to speak of mystic yogīs.

In a purport in this section of the *Bhāgavatam*, Prabhupāda says: "And now Kṛṣṇa exhibited another *vibhūti* or display of potency, to Mother Yaśodā. 'Unless I agree,' Kṛṣṇa wanted to show, 'you cannot bind Me.' Thus although Mother Yaśodā in her attempt to bind Kṛṣṇa added one rope after another, ultimately she was a failure. When Kṛṣṇa agreed, however, she was successful. In other words, one must be in transcendental love with Kṛṣṇa, but that does not mean that one can control Kṛṣṇa. When Kṛṣṇa is satisfied with one's devotional service, He does everything Himself. *Sevon-mukhe hi jihvādau, svayam eva sphuraty adaḥ*. He reveals more and more to the devotee as the devotee advances in service."

Therefore, we should behave as if everything depends on us, but we should know that it really depends on Kṛṣṇa. Then we can begin to long for His mercy. Longing means prayer. "When, oh when will that day be mine? When my offenses ceasing, taste for the name increasing, when in my heart will Your mercy shine? . . . When will I utter Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa with words choked up and shivering body? When will I be trembling all over, lose bodily color, tears pouring from my eyes? . . . When will Lord Nityānanda show mercy to me? When will I reject the world of *māyā*? Bestow upon me the shade of Your lotus feet. Let the right to preach the name be mine. When, oh when will that day be mine?"

There are different types of prayers. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is petitioning the Lord and begging for His mercy. Usually, petition-prayers are on a lower level of devotional service because the petitioner is asking for material boons—health, money, progeny. But Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura simply prays for service. His petition is on the highest stage of devotional service.

This is the actual life of prayer, to be desiring only Kṛṣṇa's mercy and eternal service at His feet. Rūpa Gosvāmī says that if you hear love of Godhead is available, you should immediately run to the marketplace to purchase it. The price is the desire to have it. But what is that desire? That desire is not available for *koṭi janma*, many, many lifetimes. We will have to want it so strongly that

nothing else will satisfy us. Then we can beg Kṛṣṇa in our own songs of longing, just as Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is doing in *Kabe Ha'be Bolo*.



The last song is called *Śrī Nāma-māhātmya*, the glories of the holy name. In this song, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura seems to answer the questions which he raised in "*Kabe ha'be bolo*." He wanted to somehow taste the pure holy name. He was prepared to buy or plunder to get the mellows of that name. When will the day come, he repeatedly asks, when he will be immersed in the sweet nectar of the holy name? And when will compassion awaken in him, so that he will forget his own happiness and "set out to propagate by humble entreaty the sacred order of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu?"

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura leaves us, at the end of his *Śaraṇāgati*, by assuring us of his full attainment of the nectar of the holy name. But how much can we understand of this, and how much can a great soul give to us little ones? He attempts to describe the power of the holy name, but words have their limit.

"The holy name speaks from within my heart, moves on the tip of my tongue, and constantly dances on it in the form of transcendental sound. My throat becomes choked up, my body violently trembles, and my feet move uncontrollably."

These are the symptoms of the *sāttvika* ecstasies, which are attained only by rare souls. It happens

when unparalleled nectar showers upon their heads.

Speaking of the holy name as nondifferent than Kṛṣṇa, he says, "He does not allow me to understand anything, for He has made me truly mad and has stolen away my heart and all my wealth."

It is remarkable that Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is even able to send back these messages from the absolute plane to our limited range of understanding based on comparison and poor-hearted perception. We can understand that Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is truly "gone" from this world, and yet he keeps in touch with us and wants the best for us. We listen in awe and full faith, although from a respectful distance, at his manifestation of ecstasies.

"Such is the behavior of Him who is now my only shelter. I am not capable of describing all this. The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is independent and thus acts at His own sweet will. In whatever way He becomes happy, that is also my way of happiness" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 10.5). Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says that when the holy name manifests even a slight degree of His power, He steals our heart and takes it to Kṛṣṇa. When the holy name is fully manifest, "The holy name takes me to Vraja and reveals to me His own love dalliance. He gives to me my own divine eternal body, keeps me near Kṛṣṇa, and completely destroys this mortal frame of mine."

Do we want to go? Can we pay the price? I doubt we will do it in this lifetime, although it is always possible. But I beg to have my name added to the list of souls hankering to taste the name's nectar. I

don't aspire for anything else. Please let me go on hearing of those who actually appreciate *Śaraṇāgati*. Let me hear them sing and speak on these sacred topics. And let it never stop. Please allow the rest of the world to simply fade away.

Let the day come when we will be *forced* to hear *Śaraṇāgati*. What then will we remember of our struggles to chant sixteen rounds with attention and our feeling overwhelmed in our services? We will be compassionate. We will simultaneously chant and desire to spread the chanting throughout the world.

All this is possible only by the mercy of the spiritual master. Beg to receive from him the nectar of the holy name.

"The name of Kṛṣṇa is touchstone, a mine of all devotional mellows, eternally liberated and the embodiment of pure rasa. When all impediments to the pure chanting of the holy name are taken away and destroyed, then my happiness will know its true awakening" (*Śaraṇāgati*, 10. 8).



Thus ends the *Śaraṇāgati* of Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda and a poor soul's writing sessions while reading it.

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