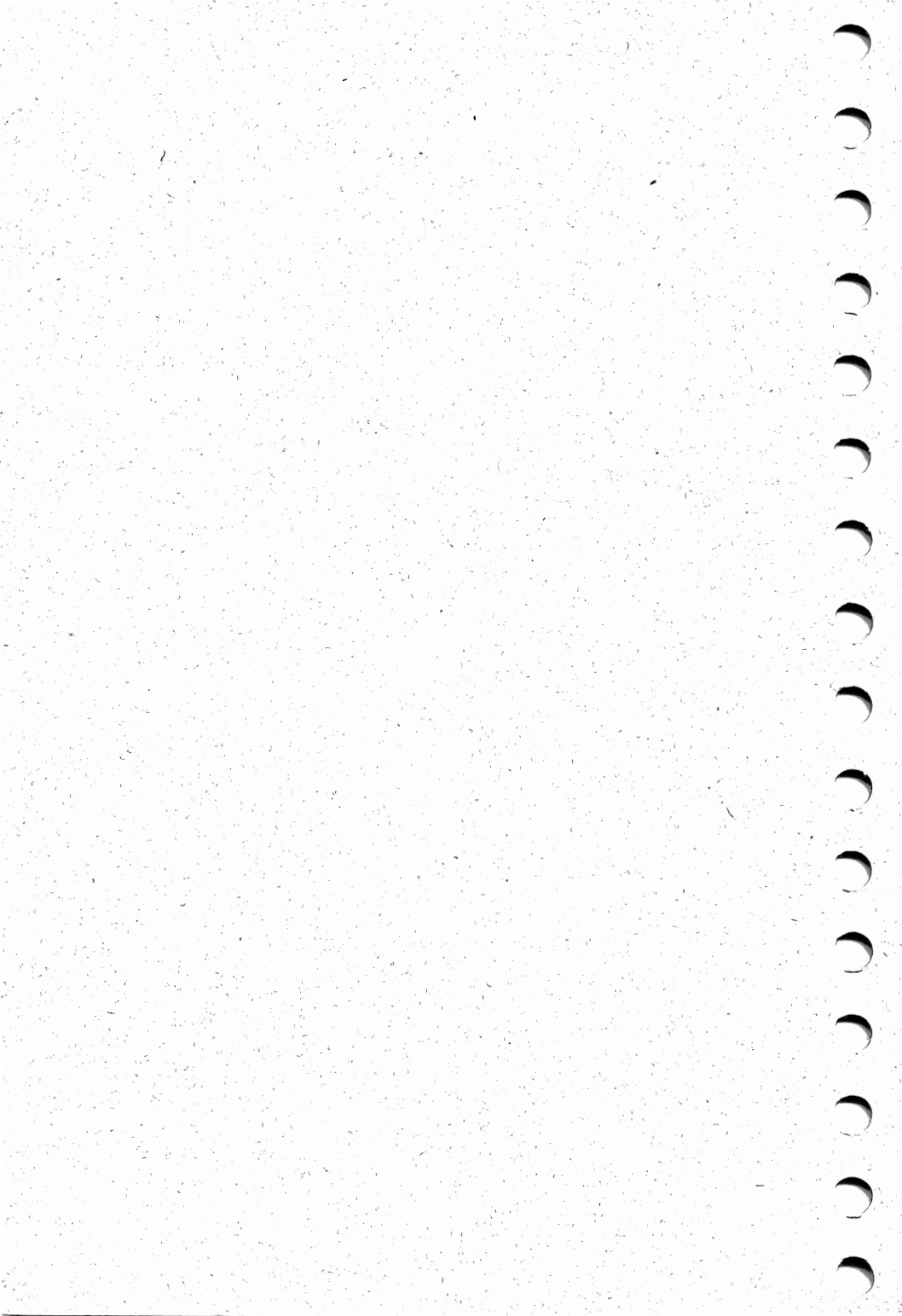



The Story of a Retreat

Revised: January 1995

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami





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Part I

Chapter One

Day One (September 8, 1994)

The main thing about my stories is that they are improvised and that they aim for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I'm not sure about the audience orientation except it's for myself. I intend them as some kind of service to my spiritual master and to devotees of Kṛṣṇa. That's about it.

Did I hear a dog barking? That's the last thing I need. This house gained some points by the fact that there's hot water. Yeah, it's a dog I hear out there, nearby. Down ten points. How can I go on a walk before dawn if some cur is yapping at me? One of the main deterrents to our taking this place for a second retreat is that there's no central heating. You can get by without it in September, but not in the winter. There is one of those small kitchen stoves you put turf into and that's all—no radiators upstairs, no fireplaces, and certainly no oil burner. I do have a small electric heater, but it only warms up your feet.

Improvised, and when I say Kṛṣṇa conscious, the emphasis should be on desiring Kṛṣṇa consciousness or even say, on the absence of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Working to put Kṛṣṇa into it. Not being able to live without it. In life, I just open the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and start reading Citraketu's prayer to Lord Śiva and Parvatī. Or I sit before an improvised altar made from the deep window shelf and I start

chanting *japa* on beads. But in a story you are supposed to narrate, blend in, and not just read from a book or write out the mantra again and again: Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

An anthology of short stories states in the Introduction by Richard Bausch, "The most important thing in the story as a form is the story itself . . . Readers want . . . what people have always wanted from the earliest speech: to be told a story."



We (you and I) are waiting for dawn. The window is wetted over and there's a reflection from my desk lamp so we cannot see clearly outside. But it's dark.

Beasts and vipers, there I go off into woods.
 "That story, one has only language, languaging . . .
 " Yeah? Well, what about poems and words like

"fruit" and Bhāgavata Purāṇa asks me if I want pieces of ginger for breakfast. I told you he's going to Vṛndāvana to join the twenty-four hour *kīrtana*. But I didn't mention the gadgets he's bringing with him: two silver-run flashlights (I told him they'll get stolen when he leaves them out in the sunshine), a tent, a supersonic gadget that chases away rodents by a high-pitched sound, a battery-run fan for 112° summers. He's got a five-year visa. I admire him. Tell you more about him in our story of this retreat.

Dreams are boring except for your own. I can hardly remember the one I had last night, but it was intriguing. Let me play it back from the tape recorder:

Kṛṣṇa is giving me the power to be truthful, but not reveal my mind to my Godbrothers who were all trying to become Number One. I was clearly admitting my own weakness but they couldn't pry out of me my allegiance to Lord Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda. I was able to keep part of me sacredly secret. One time they gave me a truth serum, but I took it and still they could not get at my secrets, by Kṛṣṇa's grace. I thank Kṛṣṇa for allowing me to do that.

After that dream: It seemed like they were all trying to become Number One. Is that a fact? Is it a fact that I am free of this and that I think everyone else is playing that game? Is that why I try to be alone, because I want to be free of it? Am I free of it?

You see, I have already given you two micro-stories and if I open a letter, I'm sure there's a third one in there. I'm not going to answer mail for over three weeks. But Bhāgavata Purāṇa brought a few letters with him for me from Boston.

Citraketu Mahārāja was exemplary in his tolerance. Mother Parvatī cursed him and he accepted it without protest. It was a serious curse—to have to be born as a demon.

And as I say, poems are as good as stories. And as good as poems are notebook lines that come—pop out due to frustration maybe

or joy
lease

Free door slam the
sound of little heater
obscures others
dogs I tell
stop. M. clears his throat
in a house. Stop. In a house
a hundred years old or more,
more
with blue light bulb under picture
of Sacred Heart
and we worship Kṛṣṇa. A "form"
is what they call a low bench a bunch of
kids sat on
at the dinner table in
the old days . . .
Irish tales,

an open fire
 nowadays it's different, last
 of black Kerry cows. M. says
 when Irish lose their piety
 they are merely stupid.

And to Frank

Francis, don't mind me. I am Eloise Poise and will be free when you write with gloves on. Don't complain. But it's cold. Stay awake. I am hoping only if I could become a lover of Kṛṣṇa consciousness—of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, of holy name, of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

I assured Bhāgavata Purāṇa the twenty-four hour *kīrtana* is preaching and so is this.

Chapter Two

Plans for a Mystic Seminar

So I told in my first story how the main thing is to improvise and to be Kṛṣṇa conscious. I think another main point is to take in influences and then shake them off, and to really try to be honest. The story is the main thing, they say. But when I look at their stories, of course, the lack of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the main thing, so there's really nothing there. Everything's like a shell. Or as Prabhupāda put it, "decoration of a dead body." But my frustration is that I know Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but I may not be a good storyteller, right?

All I can tell is a story of my retreat, what I'm doing now, or things I did in the past. It just seems to make no sense to try and make up characters and

all that stuff, but the influences are there from others.

Okay, then surrender to it.

I imagine myself putting a classroom of sixty devotees into a trance by repeatedly reading select verses of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. I've got this selection of ones where Kṛṣṇa speaks to us directly, and so I do a kind of *lectio divina* with them. We'd pray together—wouldn't that be wonderful? I'd have to have real courage and relaxation, and what if someone like a senior Godbrother walked in the middle of the class, I wouldn't be able to do it, would I? But I could try if I had real courage, I could be brazen if I had the real conviction to do it.

The thing is, it would be a performance. How can you perform a prayer in public? But you can if you practice it enough yourself in earnest, alone, like Jesus says, "in your closet." You talk about prayer, and then it could be possible to pray with devotees. I mean, devotees are so nice. They want to pray, they want to hear about it, so why not do it, even though it's a little simulated? And admit to them in the beginning, "Look, this is a simulated thing. It's not prayer, I can't pray anyway, but it's Kṛṣṇa's words, and let's just hear it."

So then we do it. We read a verse like Kṛṣṇa saying, "Many, many lives both you and I have passed. I can remember them but you cannot." And then you repeat some of the things that Prabhupāda says in the purport about it. And the intonation of your voice and the repeating of it, there's "something" there beyond just the text. It's

like getting past the barriers to the receptive stage. Where you could actually start thinking, "Yeah, Kṛṣṇa is speaking to us." And even if you don't—I mean, some people will get it more than others, and I don't pretend that I'm there in the center, hearing Kṛṣṇa. But I know Kṛṣṇa is there, and Prabhupāda says Kṛṣṇa is there, so I go ahead. I'm like the guide, a guide who can, the people who are following me, they go further than I do. So it's not wrong, it's not phony.

This is a good story, isn't it? It's a story of a seminar that I might never do, but I'm thinking about doing it. It's called "The Guided Tour Into the Select Verses of *Bhāgavata-gītā* Where Kṛṣṇa is Speaking Directly To Us." Prabhupāda says that it's nonsense to think that Kṛṣṇa spoke *Bhagavad-gītā* 5,000 years ago and now it's null and void. Kṛṣṇa's present in His words, Kṛṣṇa's present in His words.

You could do a lot of things like this, just sit down with the devotees and go over that Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, but you have to use your "trance voice" and say Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. Some of the devotees, they might not be able to get into it. Those especially who operate from the head mostly say, "What's this anyway?" So be it.

Chapter Three Home Base

I don't think we'll ever get a home base in Ireland. M. and I don't want to be entangled in

ownership or maintenance. For example, this old house we are renting. The toilet doesn't flush down the turds. The washing machine doesn't work. The kitchen stove does not heat the house. So who would repair these things? To do it justice we'd have to live here most of the time and M. would work at it. Anyway, I'm supposed to travel around and preach. So it's not likely. But maybe there's a man in a retired stage of life who would be owner and caretaker and who would like to live in a place, a small house with maybe a smaller house attached to it and he would be chanting sixty-four rounds a day and have a garden and he would own the place, see? And one of his services, which he would love to do, is keep the house for me to come there. That's a fantasy because there is no one like that.

It is cold in this house. This is the second day of our official one-month hidden retreat. It's so secret I can't even tell myself and can't write about it. As soon as I start to write like this it means my story is doomed to be kept secret until maybe after ten years when the world changes, ISKCON changes and I change sufficiently so that this information can become Declassified.

I write top secrets nowadays that are too hot to be handled by the world of ISKCON, peers and subordinates. One secret is how delightful it is to start out on a walk by yourself just before dawn. I can't tell that. Devotees usually don't do such a thing, so I keep it to myself. But it leaks out in little essays where I mention I'm on a walk. I try to hide it, but

people are getting the idea I sometimes go to isolated places in between my big preaching engagements. Mainly I am protected by people's indifference to whatever I do. This, plus the fact that I'm on good behavior anyway and am a senior fellow in ISKCON. Also, I actually do get headaches about once a week that put me out of commission for the day, even when in a retreat, and if I tried to move in regular society, the headaches would come every day. So I'm lucky in that way.



The sheer pleasure of an early morning walk is a secret. Besides, what can I say? You walk downhill with a flashlight. You turn right, you chant and get ready for your project, whatever it is—currently it is learning to pray with Lord Kṛṣṇa in the verses where He speaks directly to us in *Bhagavad-gītā*.

I'm talking about freedom. This is what I live for. The little life. Sometimes I pretend I'm not even

doing this, not taking so many retreats. It has been creeping up on me. I've brought my 1980s diaries with me to this house and I'll start reading them, especially from 1988 when I thought I might get a home base and lead a life of prayer. Would you like to hear about that? When I start to read it, I'll tell you about it.

As I say, we would not want to own a house. But wouldn't it be nice? This place for example. It has some extraneous buildings next to this one. The owner uses them for storage or something, and they are junk-yardy. We would have to clean the place up, do major work. But just see that the other houses didn't exist. Then this place would be great. You could fix it up. M. knows what has to be done and how to do it. We could take money from my travel fund. But then how would it be a travel fund? Would the patrons be willing to give money for me to live in one place in Ireland? Is it justifiable? We would paint the outside, then fix the inside. First thing is a heater up here. Bookshelves, furniture. We are not going to do it. I'm just fantasizing. We've got a better thing going, with the traveling . . . but one of these days, the elaborate network of lies may be exposed and I'll say what the heck and just come out of the closet and say "I want to be alone to write and read. That's my main service. Leave me alone."

Chapter Four

The Weather Will Be Changing

The rain rains hard and it goes away. Next hour bright sunshine for awhile, then it goes away. That's what the weather is like here in September. There's an Irish way to express this and Madhu knows it. It's something like, "The weather will be changing . . ." He said this to the landlord, Dennis, and his friend, the day we arrived and they immediately assented, "Yep, yep." He knows the words for these parts and his name is Foley, a Kerry name. Anyway, this is supposed to be the story of the retreat, but unfortunately I have brought so many storybooks here by nondevotees. I thought it might be helpful to look at before doing this one this afternoon.

I looked through a chapter in Jean Shepherd's musings over his mythical Midwest American childhood. It left me dissatisfied mostly because the chapter was about fishing. Then I had only ten minutes left before 4 P.M. and I must follow my self-imposed schedule. I looked at Spalding Gray's monologue and it seemed so corrupt and clever, him just going for the laughs about being a Christian Scientist when he was a kid. You could almost hear the audience laughing at his lines. By now I was becoming aware that all of this was going to have a negative effect on whatever I attempted in the name of a story.

I turned to my own collection called *Stories in April*. I thought they were my friends. But the first one, "In the Flow," seemed as artificial as anything

by Shepherd, Gray, and the rest. As Prabhupāda says, some people touch their nose by putting their arm around the back of their neck instead of touching it directly. Is it because of the genre itself, the Story? My Writing Sessions are more friendly and directly accessible at every minute. But they are not so presentable. They are like your underwear.

With two minutes left before 4 P.M. I opened a page in the *Henry Miller Collection*, the story called "Astrological Fricassee" and he seemed to call everyone in his world a phony, corrupt, at a party that he is attending. Nothing simple or pure . . .

I then turned to Saroyan's *Obituaries* for one minute. He tells about driving cross-country and putting American lyrics to Armenian folk songs in order to pass the time and that's how he and his friend invented the pop song "Come on a my house" that was made famous by Rosemary Clooney. This is Saroyan's response to the name Betty Clooney in a list of the dead for 1976. But that is not a world that I can relate to, the show-biz friends and enemies of Saroyan and his shoot-from-the-hip prose which I recall twice alluded to Hare Kṛṣṇas in unkind cuts and based on no direct knowledge of what Kṛṣṇa consciousness is.

So here I am on time and skitting along, knowing only that I would like to be truthful, would like to be Kṛṣṇa conscious, and maybe I'm in the wrong genre at the wrong time and am the wrong kind of person to do this. Why did I read so many stories in the first place?

Being kind seems important, but it costs a lot. You have to go out of your way to help people. Or at least you have to restrain yourself from barking up trees and allowing the mind to put people down. That's the start of it. My mind works overtime whenever I see an ISKCON publication with devotees' names and works in it. I could be kinder. I wish I were. Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. The Buddhists follow that, *ahimsa parama-dharma* even without God consciousness. We in Kṛṣṇa consciousness have far more reason to do it—because Kṛṣṇa wants us to be kind. *Trṇād api sunīcena* . . . a devotee thinks himself lower than a blade of grass, he really does. Corrupt, corrupt, dirty lines from Spalding Gray float into the inner chambers of my working mind. Shepherd mostly leaves out the raunchy details . . . I sit now, half-paralyzed (exaggeration à la Shepherd), looking at the peaked hill which is half in sunshine and half covered with evanescent rain.

This is only the second day, so there isn't much to say. At this rate, I may give up with these *karmī* books entirely. On the prayer front, I tell myself my feet are on the ground and this is good. Story-writing does that. When I go to pray, I won't be caught up in a mystique of prayer, but will face the fact of who I am in the last years of the 20th century. I want to pray to the transcendental Lord, but not play a game at it. Right now I don't see how the story attempts contribute to the life of prayer. They are always ready to smirk, to bust into a smile and

to pull out with some influence from the writers I just mentioned as well as many I haven't mentioned yet.

One thing about a retreat is it's supposed to be a way to get away from influences. Don't bring them all with you. You go alone and open to your deeper self before God. I never heard of a prayer retreat as being a time for a lot of story-writing. I've got the writer and devotee mixed up together in one. Trying to do everything in a schedule throughout the day. One hour for prayer walk, before that one hour for story, then poems after reading James Tate and Haydn Carouth and then my own WS and trying to log two hours daily in for reading my spiritual master's books. It sounds like quite a mixture. The story is like a prayer, the prayer is a little Christian, the *japa* rounds are filled with everything except attention to the holy names, agnostics are being thrown out the back door and new ones are coming in the front door of the mind . . . and I am lucky if I can get up to the two hours maximum quota in that which is actually the best for me—Śukadeva Gosvāmī speaking to Mahārāja Parikṣit. Where will it end? I am clearing the air here in hopes that within a few days, some of these anamolies may be cleared up. I may even start throwing books out. I may get down to brass tacks, or down to transcendental tacks. Stop touching your nose in a round-about way. Just write whatever comes.

And accept the actual life of the retreat. (Today Bhāgavata Purāṇa dāsa came up the stairs with Prabhupāda's offering plate filled with hot steamy

lunch goodies, but a full hour early. When I told him he went back down again. Then at 1 P.M. he came up again, but the *capātis* were so tough I couldn't eat them.) I think it's nice what's going on here and right now it's sunny, so I think I'll stop this chapter.

Chapter Five Tell Ya a Story

Why are you so embarrassed? There's no one here but me and everyone. You are improvising and there's no harm in that. You are telling your story to a room of hip *brahmacārīs*. You are forgetting yourself. The words are rolling out.

"Yeah, but what would Prabhupāda say?" He says it as if Prabhupāda were an ordinary father. He doesn't know our spiritual master wants art, wants revolution, wants us to somehow remember Kṛṣṇa no matter what else. If you can't even chant, Prabhupāda says, then at least appreciate Kṛṣṇa in the taste of water or even in the taste of wine. Begin there.

Kṛṣṇa is in the improvisation. Coltrane was saying that on the back of the album "A Love Supreme." He said God is in all things. He especially liked to see Him in the beautiful things. In his music. I see God on the walk downhill, the light on in the small house at the landlord's where his sick father is. I see Him in the trees and the hill, even though it's so dark you can't see much of anything. For a writer the main thing is genuine being in voice.

That guy Bausch says a story has to be mainly a story, but what's a story anyway? It's not just that while I was on the walk, I got attacked by a dog, and then the owner came out and it was a girl my age (55 years old) and we conversed about sandwiches and Balzac. A story is what really happens as far as you can figure out. And a story is guided by *śāstra*. It's like prayer or meditation. If you are not guided in your meditation, then you go off on your own thing. All the stories in the world are written by speculators. People who would rather be caught dead than be guided by *śāstra*. They don't know a damn thing, but they are proud. Don't know who they are (they think it's a dumb question to ask nowadays, after Wittengenstein). No one even guesses about the next life. Imagine, such an important thing but nobody gives a damn. They think it's all settled that you become Nothing. Or, even if there's a next life and you go somewhere and become something, it's not important because the struggle here and now is what counts.

It's quite chilly in this room. That kitchen stove doesn't heat the house. I said this before, but when you're shivering, you keep coming back to the same point of not being warm. I mentioned it to M. He said "It's a lot warmer in here than outdoors." Oh sure, but I didn't think of it that way. He said, "Of course, it's not cozy like you could put your feet up." They say the Americans are strange for wanting to keep their houses warm. This house is perfect in almost every respect once you get used to the

primitive ways, like flushing the toilet by throwing a bucket of water down into it and things like that. But the lack of heat is no charm at all. How could we come back here in December? It doesn't seem possible.

Come back in December? Sounds like you're about to tell a story, mate. No I'm not. But neither am I on a trip to *not* tell a story. I just tells what comes.

Oh, if you could only wake up and realize you are living in the best story of your life. It is the tale of trying to be a devotee in a world of nondevotees. Dennis is a nondevotee; he chains that dog up. A devotee is not however, noticable just by superior virtues. In fact, he may lack most of them. But he has the one great virtue—he accepts that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He honors Kṛṣṇa's pure devotee and he chants the holy names of Kṛṣṇa. He likes to hear about Kṛṣṇa and doesn't think He is a myth. He is not swallowed by Darwin's theory.

A devotee is special and very rare. Even an aspiring devotee is rare. So tell the life story of one of them. It's good enough. Therefore I wish you could find your own voice. That's what I like about Henry Miller, not that he writes about sex, but that he found his voice. That much I could learn from him. And even that I can learn without him.

I'm not sure that he's not faking it half the time. I know I complained about reading other books but I can't seem to give them up. I looked at another this morning. It's called *Dear Bruce Springsteen*. It's

supposed to be told by a fourteen-year-old kid, in the style of *Catcher in the Rye* and *Huckleberry Finn*. It's made up of a series of letters the kid writes to his rock hero, Bruce Springsteen. It's okay in some of the letters. I just read one where he says he likes his mom who is a nursing assistant. He told how she tries to get the family the things they need . . . and the boy, Terry, appreciates her effort. I thought it's nice. You could say I fell for it, the novelist caught me in his trap. He may have made the whole thing up. But it's the values he was portraying . . . kindness between mother and son who hit it off okay. My point again, it had some voice, maybe not entirely authentic, but there it was and it touched foolish me.

I think I ought to stop this author's lament about no themes and so on. I've got it right here, the actual story of this retreat. Yes, I am the main subject, but wait a minute—that's not as egotistical as it may sound. I am just a tiny integer. I am myself. I am part of God the infinite. As Terry likes his mom and appreciates her, I appreciate the Supreme Personality of Godhead. I appreciate His pure devotee, Prabhupāda, who came here to bring Kṛṣṇa consciousness to us. I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda telling them in Bombay . . . I was shivering in the bathroom and listening to the tape of his lecture from 1974 (when I was also there as his servant) . . . He was telling them, you in India have blown it. You have put aside Kṛṣṇa and you are wasting your time with -isms. You will never be happy. The Māyāvādīs mislead and those who teach *dharidra-*

nārāyaṇa keep you. People don't know that Kṛṣṇa is God. This is the conclusion of the scriptures in countless verses. Kṛṣṇa is God. The *ācāryas*, even Śaṅkara and Rāmanūja all say Kṛṣṇa is God. Who are you not to accept this? What standard do you have that is better than the authority of scripture? He challenges everyone, but mostly they don't take up the challenge. They put it aside. They are brain-washed by modern science and skepticism. Śrīla Prabhupāda called them on it and said, especially in India, who do you think you are, neglecting your Kṛṣṇa in the *Vedas*?

Tell the story of me adopting Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I am one of the American and European boys and girls he speaks of who "five years ago" (now it's more like twenty-five years ago), "they did not know Kṛṣṇa, but now they are mad after Kṛṣṇa." A priest in Boston wrote a pamphlet and said these boys are our boys coming from Christian and Jewish families, and before they were Kṛṣṇa conscious they didn't care for the Bible or church, but now they are mad after God. How is that? Tell that story and also the dream I had last night—that I was carrying Śrīla Prabhupāda in my arms and he preferred it.

Tell your story. It's fine with me.

Chapter Six

A Retreat is Many Things

Don't be snide. I am feeling okay and have plans. As for a story, this is the story of the time we are spending here. Right, we have no water in the

house. A leak sprung in the water tank, which is located in the kitchen. The landlord said a man will be here in half an hour. That was an hour ago. I've come to the van to be away from any commotion.

The landlord said it's a nice day, which was silly because it keeps changing. M. replied, "It goes back and forth." Sure enough, five minutes after Dennis left with his nice day remark, it rained again. But still, it is not unpleasant. Our peace is pretty much unbroken and it's up to me to fill up the hours.

The plan for the seminar on *Bhagavad-gītā* verses is progressing. I think I'll pick thirty verses which are the most moving ones, the Supreme Lord speaking most directly. Then I will familiarize myself with the meaning of each of them. Then prepare lead questions for writing assignments. What I'll do is take four verses per class hour, speak a little, then say, "Okay class, get ready for ten minutes of writing. I want you to tell me what you feel about this verse, how it enters your life." Or I might say, "Make a prayer now of some practical service you'd like to do to Lord Kṛṣṇa so that you can be free of fear and doubt." I thought of saying, "If you don't have experience of this, then imagine it. Make up a scenario in which you are dedicating your practical works in this world to Kṛṣṇa and as a result you're feeling relief from anxiety. Go ahead."

Then they will all start writing and I'll watch or write something myself. Sounds like a good outline to me. Now I just have to pick my top thirty verses. The whole thing could flop, I know.

So I'm going to carefully go after it each day on my morning walks to build up conviction in it. It will be nice to turn them on to writing. I just have to be willing to read what they write. In the class, immediately after the ten minutes of writing, I'll call on one devotee to read what he or she has written. Then I'll read the rest of their pieces after the class hour.

So that happened today. Bhāgavata Purāṇa dāsa's *capātis* were as hard as yesterday's, but I don't mind. The *dāl* was good, and there were some health biscuits made by Madhu which were served as the sweets. I didn't object to that either. They were tasty, although not sweet. I'm expecting tomorrow they'll make some real sweets because it's Sunday and then Monday is Rādhāṣṭamī. Besides, I have a keen enough appetite each day so anything tastes good. And all the food is remnants of an offering I make to Śrīla Prabhupāda in his picture.

The man has arrived to fix the water tank. I'm eager to meet with M. at around 6 tonight and tell him my thoughts how we could come back here for a winter retreat. It's mostly a frame of mind. We could prepare for living in cold weather without adequate heating in the house. Wear at least two layers of long underwear. A gas heater. Seal off the second floor bedroom and don't use it. Or locate all action on the first floor. It's just a question of attitude because Ireland doesn't get frigid like in North America. M. will have some practical assessment of this.

I ought to take my own medicine. I am planning to ask devotees in the seminar to write their feelings about how Kṛṣṇa is speaking and to pray to Him. When am I going to do that? Hypocrite. I figure it's not hypocritical because I am the guide to the writing class and I don't have to be a liberated person. But still, why come to a retreat in a Kenmare farmhouse unless you are going to do some praying? Before I came here, I read a book about a retreat. It was by a woman who chose Thomas Merton as her guide. She put in many quotes by him and outlined the aims of the seven-day retreat. I put some of the quotes into my travel diary. I'm not going to repeat them here, but I am so busy writing and producing things that I'm not in the quiet mood of that "waiting that you do in a retreat." It's a fact, however, that you do expect in a retreat to . . . think about love of God. Someone could even attain it. Love of Kṛṣṇa is already a fact. He loves us and we have to open to it.

I still have a month to go on this one. I'm trying not to be phony even in a subtle way, thinking I can attain Contemplation or Vaiṣṇava *samādhi*, tears and horripilation, etc. Just go into each day and night and keep doing something in devotional service. Keep writing and making tapes and reading and building up. A retreat is not just one thing but all things added up. And the conviction that it's a good thing to do. I take to them like a duck takes to water.

Chapter Seven

Straight Kṛṣṇa Consciousness

You get ideas when you read. You wouldn't think of them on your own. "By rapt attention fixed upon Kṛṣṇa, one is purified and thus one is delivered from material life." Lord Kṛṣṇa is a person. He has a form. It's not enough to think of Him as formless or to think just of this material life in the city or the country. Neither is it enough to be (as is said of James Tate), "A poet of mad wit and stunning anecdote." Not enough to be Spalding Gray wandering around in NYC worrying about his left eye and telling a witty story about it, "Evocative Scream of Comic Existential Torment." It's not enough.

As for me, I am hiding from myself. I don't want you to know that I am a preacher with an agenda to convince the world to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But that's obvious, isn't it? Just by dedicating his *Forbidden Archaeology* to Śrīla Prabhupāda, Sadāputa was found out and the reviewers called it "Hindu creationist drivel" even though there was nothing about Hinduism in it. My writing is outright for devotees, so why am I hiding the preaching punch? Let them have it. Oh well, I thought . . .

You also hide from yourself that the writing may be good (it may also be bad). When I read last night in *The Wild Garden*, I thought "This is good." But then that takes away from my pure, innocent, humble self, which is the source of writing. I'm thinking that if God will be kind upon me, I can be a mouthpiece for Him. But remember, "His blissful

position is never affected by enmity or friendship" (*Bhāg.* 7.1.26). He is not hurt by a blasphemy or flattered by praise. It is for our good that we praise Him and become His friend. Gosh, He doesn't need one Satsvarūpa little wit down here on earth, pounding out on the Typewriter in a cold room and circulating his writing to his friends. *I* need it. Get that through your skull.

So you are shy and you are yourself, but still you are covered and don't know who you are yet . . . you think, "Maybe I am supreme and there is no one but me and no God." This is all nonsense, says our spiritual master, and I believe him. God allows for and arranges for everything. These scientists and their atheist friends are doing the greatest disservice to keep us away from the rational conclusion that there is a big brain behind everything. Things are happening systematically under the direction of the Supreme Person. But the atheists have become so clever that they find ways to deny Him. That cleverness also comes from God.

Shoot them down, Stevie. Join those who fight against the demons.

Naturally, my story is quiet. I don't go to a sweat lodge with seventeen people and have to tell you about them. And it's quiet because there is no sex. No sex at all. In dreams it comes sometimes, in innuendo mostly. I'll be talking to some lady about devotional service and then there's some innuendo. It happened last night, but I can't remember. The night before that there was a pure servant

dream where I was carrying Śrīla Prabhupāda in my arms. I thought, "Boy if this can happen every night!" So last night, just the opposite. It was a long, drawn-out dream where a company charged an ISKCON temple six million dollars to put on their Janmāṣṭamī festival. It didn't even turn out to be a success, so the temple was wondering if they really had to pay. It was very complicated. Then some sex innuendo came when I was talking to a lady about this legal entanglement. But basically, no sex when awake, so you don't get that in my story.

Another possible difficulty for a reader is that I keep saying the same thing because I'm writing every day, about the walk and the *Gītā* seminar. But I am satisfied with all of that, even with telling about the *capātīs*. I don't care if you don't like it, provided I tell it right. Then I like it. It will look good later.

I was talking about this shyness. The coyness of preaching. The big thing is to enter total Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Prabhupāda said the *gopīs* had total love for Kṛṣṇa and they meditated how He was walking in the forest and maybe hurt His delicate feet. "The *gopīs* are absorbed in such thoughts at home, although Kṛṣṇa is away from them. Similarly, when Kṛṣṇa plays with His young friends, Mother Yaśodā is very much disturbed by thoughts that Kṛṣṇa, because of always playing and not taking his food properly, must be getting weak." This is the mood of the devotees of Vṛndāvana. Whoever constantly thinks of Kṛṣṇa gets a spiritual body

to be with Him. So what do I mean by shy? Maybe I think that if I come out and say that I feel Kṛṣṇa conscious, then what little bit of Kṛṣṇa consciousness I actually have will be taken away. I'm not worried that the nondevotees will be scared off by my proselytizing. Only the devotees read me anyway. But it's another kind of shyness and I just forget what I was going to say.

That kid, Terry Blanchard, in the novel, is okay. He wore a headband to school and the teacher challenged him to take it off, but he stood his ground. Then he dyed his hair. It makes you think that if he kept going in that direction, he might become a Hare Kṛṣṇa. But that doesn't happen in novels. It does happen in real life, however.

Do I make the rules in this story? I don't know. I like to think it is happening by Kṛṣṇa's arrangement. But I have to take responsibility. It is going alone. It is gradually getting colder. The question is whether we could live here in the winter. I don't know. I do look forward to the morning walk. It is more straight Kṛṣṇa consciousness than this.

Chapter Eight Untitled

The story of a what? A retreat. That's just a euphemism. I am here for a month and every day I work out through a schedule of spiritual activities. I am not a character in a novel or an author of one. Get that straight. I'm actually a spiritual soul. I say

that theoretically, and yet it is truer than the other identifications I can readily come up with. Especially when I recall the pre-ISKCON past. A few years ago I went back to Great Kills, Staten Island, where I lived for thirteen years. It was strange. I didn't want to stay there long. I was the only one walking down the block at 6 A.M. in summer who knew that I was looking for my past. Everyone else was either asleep in their houses or just coming out and living in the present, going to the Staten Island Rapid Transit to catch the train. Anyway I am not that body, past or present either.

But how much realization do you have that you are a spirit soul? How much do you realize Lord Kṛṣṇa in your life? On the one hand, I know a lot of theoretical doctrine and I believe in it and live it. But for ready access, I don't have much and that is my fault, my shortcoming.

Here is a picture of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā. In this picture He looks very young, about six years old, and Rādhā too. But it's hard to be pure and see with eyes of love. That means I am affected by the pre-Kṛṣṇa conscious past or by the agnostic present. I have crap on my mind. I am not a pure devotee. That's why I keep on with the Writing Sessions—they allow me to be who I am. But I'm not an ordinary person, not a nondevotee. I am struggling to become a devotee. I would never settle for being a voidist or a speculator. I want Kṛṣṇa consciousness and Śrīla Prabhupāda has given it to me. I chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and when I write, it's on this subject.

It's tough writing about Someone you don't realize, who you do know to a little degree, but who is infinite and who is not attained except by pure devotion. That means I don't have it. Maybe now I'm sounding like a character in a novel, like fourteen-year-old Terry Blanchard. Such a strong voice an author can get. But there are no novels yet with strong voices of conditioned, practicing devotees. In the future, there will be such writers, for sure.

I am making a tape for cueing devotees into writing down their feelings for certain verses of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. At the same time, I ought to practice it myself. I do on my morning walk. I say, "Here is verse 6.30 where Kṛṣṇa says that those who see Him everywhere are never lost to Him." Kṛṣṇa has a sense of humor. But He is all-great, so don't trifle with Him. I go to Him through my spiritual master, who also has a sense of humor, but is mostly grave. I myself am foolish and mad about writing things down. Anyway, I ask myself to go ahead and think of times I have seen Kṛṣṇa in some object. I know the theory pretty well and it appeals to me. It is not theory it is fact. But as yet it is unrealized by me. When a mother sees the little shoe of her child, she feels her love for the child through the shoe. Now, not only a shoe but the whole creation is God's energy. Therefore, a devotee feels for Kṛṣṇa wherever he is. He may see separate objects, but he actually sees Kṛṣṇa within them. I have heard this and I aspire to it. I would like to aspire for it.

I like the idea of asking devotees to write things down. It may get out of hand, however. They may write boring pieces or they may not want to write. I don't want to have to coax them into finding writing fun. I think, though, that I will risk it. They will like to give it a try. Writing is fun if you let yourself go. I'm not trying to turn them into writers per se, but just to use writing as a tool for this particular class so we can get access to the feelings.

Is this going to be another of those psychological courses like the one I did on the *Kṛṣṇa* book? Well, that one was successful. I taught a way that we could get together and read *Kṛṣṇa* book by visualizing the scenes. But it was something that people did not continue to do after the course. I'm thinking all this out as much as I can beforehand. So much preparation for just a seven-day course I'll be giving in January. You'd think I was some New Age guru or writing coach.



All right, end this segment. I take an afternoon slot in the van for writing. We have been here three days. I'm saying that it's going well and I have a green light to move on unobstructed in the inner life. But there may be a road block ahead. You never know. Predictably, I met a big writing block after a week and want to call it quits. Just warning you. So we are rolling and that's how it should be.

Just a little each day. To *Bhagavad-gītā* 6.30 and then 6.47. For that I plan to cue them with this line: "Think of the Deity of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā in a temple, the one you most identify with. Now think of a time you felt like you abided in Him. Write down what it was like. Now think of a time you felt you were worshiping Him and serving Him. Write that down. What was it like, no matter how little it was. Describe something you actually felt. Now write down something that you shared, an intimacy with the Deity (maybe late at night or at *maṅgala-ārati*, whenever)." This is how they can write down feelings. Then ask them to write a prayer to Kṛṣṇa, "Please, I wish to abide in You and serve You and be in an intimate reciprocation like a *bhakti-yogī*." What do you think, is this all right? Is this presumptuous? It's coming out this way.

Chapter Nine

Rādhā's Day, I Pray I Don't Bloop

This is my story. I want to be a good person. I'm getting the idea. You shouldn't look only for some peak experience such as in prayer or *rāgānugā-bhakti*. That was a learning experience. I don't even

want some big achievement. But I want to stay steady for Śrīla Prabhupāda. I want him to like me and recognize me. Let me carry him as I did in my dream. He's actually carrying me. But he let me do that service.

I want to be who I am, but I want that to be acceptable. I haven't read those 1980 diaries yet, the section where I quit the GBC and a long section where I was under the influence of Amala-bhakta dāsa and entered the life of prayer, so-called, and when I thought that I ought to live full-time in seclusion. I was like a kid and I still am in some ways, but I'm steadier. I like what we are doing, going into seclusion sometimes and then sometimes coming out and paying dues by being with people. I think I should call this seclusion, not retreat. Otherwise, it sounds too strange, as if you are always retreating from the battlefield. "Hey, when do we go forward? Why are we always in retreat?" So I call it seclusion, but that too has a negative feel. I don't care so much what it sounds like to others. Write and be to please yourself.

But this is a contradiction. You want to please Kṛṣṇa and your spiritual master, but you want to do it in the most real way, being yourself. I know something about this. I know what it's like to be influenced by others in a religious movement. They want you to be a certain way. They shape you. You attend the meetings and it's like going through a ringer. You lose your sense of integrity for self, but they say, "Good, keep doing this. This is surrender to Kṛṣṇa." But it's not. It's surrender to

them and to the emergencies of the institution—which come about due to mismanagement and the fact that the material world is what it is.

Ranting?

Today is Rādhāṣṭamī. In the early morning reading time I turned to the song of the bumblebee where Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is speaking as if crazy out of intense love for Kṛṣṇa. First, I read a section where the *gopīs* are accusing Kṛṣṇa. It's far-out, of course, how they make all these similes comparing Kṛṣṇa to selfish people who just want to get something out of a situation and then abandon it. For example, there is the student who leaves school once the semester is over, or the prostitute who kicks out the "john" when he has no money. Insulting similes . . . the *gopīs* can do that. Then I started reading Rādhā's talking to the bumblebee in the presence of Uddhava. I didn't get far. I wasn't able to read it in the right mood. I decided to listen to the tape where Śrīla Prabhupāda is speaking his original dictation of *Kṛṣṇa* book. I will hear it while honoring the feast at mid-day.

I went back to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* where I am reading in the Seventh Canto. It's a section where Hiraṇyakaśipu is accusing God of being partial. There was a wonderful purport. What the heck was it? My memory is so bad I have to look at the book.

"Hiraṇyakaśipu accused the Supreme Lord of having a restless mind like that of a small child who can be induced to do anything if simply offered some cakes and *laḍḍus*" (7.2.8, purport). Śrīla

Prabhupāda says that this is actually indirect praise of Kṛṣṇa, who is pleased with the simple foodstuffs a devotee gives Him. "This quality should not be misjudged to be childish. The highest quality of the Supreme Lord is that He is *bhakta-vatsala*; in other words, He is always extremely pleased with His devotees."

I was pleased to go to the Seventh Canto and leave the speech of Rādhā because I wasn't qualified for it right now. Stay on my actual level, stay with the reading sequence I have been following for close to a year now. I realized that something very valuable has been building in this sequential reading. I also realize that Śrīla Prabhupāda *gives us the topmost nectar at every stage, starting with his very first purports in the First Canto and also throughout the Bhagavad-gītā*. Best nectar is not always the most extreme conjugal detail, but the pure devotion and knowledge of *bhakti* which is the foundation of all progress, without which you cannot sail abruptly into Rādhā's speech or the insulting words of the *gopīs* to Kṛṣṇa when He blocks their path at the Dāna-ghāṭa.

It's Rādhā's day and I'm going to depart from the usual schedule. Instead of a 10 A.M. reading in Prabhupāda's *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* lectures followed by a one-hour-long Writing Session, I will sift them in and we will read out loud together in *Vilāpa-kusumāñjali*. That may bring up memories of my recent intensive studying of *rasika* life with a *rasika* guru. We'll read and see what happens. We will

also be fasting. I noticed that they have been mixing some ingredients for a feast. I try not to notice it. When we read Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's prayers; it will be way beyond us, but I figure that one day a year it's all right. There was a custom at Gītā-nāgarī that one day a year they showed Rādhārāṇī's feet. They lifted Her skirt up a little bit. I think this is partly a concoction, but there was a letter by Prabhupāda who said that Viṣṇujana Swami could do it. Also, Prabhupāda wrote a letter to Himavati when she made the skirts too short for Prabhupāda's traveling Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Deities. He consoled her and said, "It's all right, the skirts you made afford us a view of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī's lotus feet."

I guess that's all for now. Today is also the day I was intitated by the Swami twenty-eight years ago. I have told memories of this in some of my books, but I can never remember very much. Just something about him saying the *praṇāma* mantra and me repeating it word for word. And when he said "*bhakti*" I sort of mentally swooned—probably self-induced in those permissive and "ecstatic" days of youth, not long after LSD—and I felt myself free-falling into the bottomless life of dedication which I proposed—the life of dedication that I will actually try to attain up to my dying day.

It's not good when you blow your own horn and say, "Hey, I'm a good disciple all these years and I'm still here. After so many disciples have left I'm good, I'm valid, Prabhupāda knows me, I'm one of the earliest . . . Just shut up and eat your feast and chant. Go on your walk and be here now preparing a seminar for 1995."

It's Rādhā's day—I pray I don't bloop.

Chapter Ten

Simple Facts

They brought some flowers into the room in "vases" which were originally containers for liver pills or something. The flowers were foxgloves and some red ones for Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. Then I led a *kīrtana*. Then Madhu sang, "*Rādhe jaya jaya mādhaba dayite*." Then we started an out loud reading of *Vilāpa-kusumāñjali*. After forty verses I wanted to switch to one of Prabhupāda's books, so we took turns reading aloud from Chapter 46 of *Kṛṣṇa* book, Rādhārāṇī's mad talking to the bumblebee. An hour went by like that.

At noon we had a great feast—cauliflower, mashed potato patties with peas in them, some dried "caccaras" from Mother Kaumodaki in Baltimore, a red chutney, etc., and a dessert consisting of sweet rice and *halavā*. There was also a nice orange juice drink. We all recovered from it soon after.

Tonight we will meet again for more out loud reading. I picked sections from *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Ādi* 4 and *Madhya* 8 about the glories of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. Earlier today the energy was high. Madhu was ordering Bhāgavata Purāṇa and together they were preparing for the feast. I thought it was as nice as any Rādhāṣṭamī observance I might have in a temple. At Krishna-Balaram Mandir last year I couldn't even get close to the altar rail to see Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. And there was the usual politics in the air. This year was quiet, you might say *too* quiet, but I'm always watchful, not wanting to intrude into *rādhā-bhāva*, *mañjarī-bhāva*, beyond my

actual interest and without being explicitly led there by Śrīla Prabhupāda. He certainly has filled his books with much nectar of Rādhā if you want to specialize in it. Tonight we will read aloud *Rādhā-kṛpā-katākṣa-stotra*.

Teasel tassel I don't know what. Words come out or rot your gut. Beezle basel this is to perform, you better watch out or I'll call a reform. Mister, master, beware of shorts. If you don't like this I'll throw you in the forts.

Measel mess, the place is at rest. If I were a devotee I'd be in bliss with God consciousness right now.



Wind in the trees, September is creeping along. A fair moment just now, sunshine everywhere and the highest hills in Ireland, almost mountains, are not far from here, circling the lakes of

Killarney. Then into this van to tell the simple facts of Rādhā's day. If you don't have anything to say just let it go. Maybe you traded natural eloquence for that sweet rice and *halavā* mixed with carob. Maybe it went down with the orange juice. Your restraint from advanced topics is nice, but . . . that may be all I have to say.

Chapter Eleven

Treading in Collnacupogue

In my Writing Session today, I mentioned a story. I hinted that maybe it could play out or evolve. I said it was close-mouthed yesterday. I meant it was a big holiday and yet I didn't have much to say. But I defended that reticence and said that sometimes words don't do the job. There was some reason for the silence.

I want to be honest. Some kind of a narrative tone has crept into this *The Story of a Retreat*. Probably it is the influence of the books I read for a warm-up before I begin each chapter. It's a little weird. I'm always complaining. I complain if there is no narrative and then if I get one going—and it's a story of my own, not exactly autobiography-diary and not a fiction either—then I complain again just because there's even a fragment of artifice. So I can't win at that rate.

What does it mean to write for yourself? What is navel-gazing? I never liked that term, it sounds so derisive. Writing for yourself ought to mean that you try to do something well, a story or whatever,

and you yourself are the main audience. You write for the reader in yourself. In that sense, it's not gibberish or mumble, but rather it's the communication with most integrity. You don't write to sell the soul, to please some editor and his policy; you write what you think is the best way to go.

But another problem is: why do it? Is it going to help other people? Is it going to entertain them? Why write a story? If you are really going to do it, then why not make a suspense-filled fiction? The answer to that is that it's a kind of labor I don't care for. So I run on.

Prose-poem. Stories . . . I like poems, I like language, I like mini-stories or vignettes, flashes of something. But they should be real, not abstract. Tell us how a tree looks on your walk. Or you were reading *Bhāgavatam* at 2 A.M. and the dog that's tied up in the backyard started barking and yelping and another dog somewhere was barking against him or with him . . . but I kept reading.

I was reading Hiraṇyakaśipu's preaching to his relative (Seventh Canto, Second Chapter). I liked it. It's important stuff about how the soul is immortal and is actually not affected by the subtle and gross changes of the body. Then it occurred to me, "Why not write some notes on this terrific material you are reading?" So I did it. I wrote out a quote from the purport. Then I recalled my attempt to combine what I read along with what passes through my head. I did that previously (I was going to say last summer, but it's only a month ago). I started off

what I thought might become a long-term book called *Writing While Reading*. I did it for my own benefit, to read later, with not much thought of it being a readable narrative. But after one day I got tired of it. The two things don't seem to go together so well—flowing with the self-expression of a Writing Session and deliberately making reading notes as you go through a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* chapter. But this morning I started it up again. It's just another thing. The reading notes or whatever I may call them don't have to replace this story or the Writing Session. It's a separate thing. And yet all this writing seems to be like one thing, only in different ways.

But then what is the distinctive feature of this *Story*? It's the telling of the events of what's going on in this place called Collnacuppogue (this is where we actually are, which is four miles from Kenmare). It's a different kind of voice than the WS and I can't quite pin it down. There is some energy that makes it different than plain Writing Sessions where I really just keep the hand moving and jump from one topic to another. This is the story for now. If it could improve into something or change, I don't object. I could start a new section if I got a bright idea. But don't ask me to write another *Nimāi* story or invent a character like Hari-deva of that short novel *Caitanya-dayā*. I'm just myself in Collnacuppogue.

I really don't want to go into fiction. Not even like I was doing last April. I did like those *Stories in*

April and Gîte Stories. The *Gîte Stories* were written in France. They were just getting warmed up but we had to leave after six days. I imagined that some people were sitting around a table. It was the actual green metal table in the backyard where I wrote each afternoon. It was hot as hell out there and I could barely stand it for an hour. I started putting around the idea that there were people sitting around this table, like in a Joseph Conrad novel where one person narrates the whole story while others sit and listen. It's a device he uses for telling his novel. And I see that Jean Shepherd does the same thing in his book. He tells us that he is going to visit his hometown, so he goes into the tavern that's run by his childhood buddy, Flick. Then he and Flick reminisce about the old days and that's the substance of the book—chapters of his childhood memories. I don't feel much like doing that.

Go a little further with this chapter. Don't be close-mouthed. You can't escape playing for the audience. There is a tension and you are playing with it, using it for effect. It's the tension between opposites—wanting to write only for yourself (which also means writing only for God, like the flute player in the pit)—and the desire to write something that will be universally readable. Yeah, I like that success, an objective piece which the majority of intelligent readers really dig. "Wow that's a good piece, so interesting," and so on. I want that. But when I write my own way, part of my is thinking, "How will it go over?" Will she and he

think this is a satisfying chapter even though I just talk about writing? Will it look like some author's notes? This brings us to the point of Bluff and Modern Art.

If we go further, it brings us to "what do you really care about?" Do you have some strong conviction about what you want to write, either for yourself or for the readers? If you have a love for a way, then do it and don't care about other things. That's my sought ideal—just write what you can (not what you can't—don't tear your hair out about that) and do it in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Write what you think will read well. That's all there is to it.

Fail? Pass off notes as a finished product? Don't worry about all that. It could be edited or excerpted later.

This is a somewhat strange energy and I think it may lead somewhere. I am not overjoyed to be writing about the nature of writing. But at least it's the actual story of a retreat—this one.

Today they'll serve some sweets left over from yesterday's feast.

Chapter Twelve Untitled

Dear *Story*, I was talking about you today. It was during my 11 A.M. Writing Session. I said I was willing to give up the afternoon slot for writing this story. I also wrote this down on a Post-it when I was in the bathroom: "You don't have to write so much about writing. Just tell the retreat's story."

But the retreat isn't simply externals. For example, the landlord brought a man over and they installed a brass-looking barrel to replace the leaky water tank. I was upstairs and I heard them talking with Madhu. The Irish rural talk is fast and has its own rhythm. M, talks like one of them. He gave them each a cup of mint tea. They were laughing about that because anyone else would have given them booze. M. told them why we can't do that. They were gentle enough, crude country gentlemen. Thank him downstairs with my coat and hat on and say hello. "Madhu, can I spend some time in the van?" They know him as Maurice. So here I am in the van. These are some of the externals.

Before coming out here, I worked some more on the *Bhagavad-gītā*, preparing short writing assignments to give to the devotees. You know about that already. I'll have to polish them up. They may draw blanks with some devotees who won't be able to express themselves. I'm thinking of saying, "Imagine you are on your deathbed." (This would be for a response to Kṛṣṇa speaking 8.5.) "Describe yourself in the ideal surroundings in which you'd like to die. Think of particular devotees who you'd like to be there and how everyone is chanting. Go ahead." Some may think that's weird, especially a Godbrother who might drop by while I'm speaking it in class. I'm trying to personalize the *Bhagavad-gītā* and coach them to make responses to the statements Kṛṣṇa makes when he speaks directly. The idea for the writing class is good, but I don't know whether it will actually work. I do plan to write

these assignments myself along with the class, so I'll have fun one way or another. We will all have notebooks and we can save the results of our writings to look at later.

It irks me to sit back and have nothing more to say. What kind of a writer or devotee is that? Imagine a devotee getting an opportunity to appear on a T.V. show that many people watch. The host introduces him as a follower of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement and asks him if he has anything he'd like to tell the people of America and those watching around the world via satellite. The devotee looks up blankly and says nothing. Or he talks about a leaky tank in an old farmhouse and then comes abruptly to a stop. The interviewer asks him, "Could you explain to us the aims of a retreat?"

The devotee starts saying things he'd read in Christian books. "It's a time to be alone with God. We are all so busy, we think solitude is a luxury, but actually it is a need. We need to be alone with God. Even if we belong to a church, we need to personalize our relationship with Kṛṣṇa."

"And how do you do that?" the interviewer asks.

"We chant the names of God."

"Well, couldn't you do that without taking a retreat?"

"Yes, I guess so. Matter of fact, I don't chant better when I'm on a retreat, but I get a lot of writing done."

"What are you writing now?"

"I'm writing a pictorial biography to celebrate the Centennial of His Divine Grace, which occurs in 1996" (make some points with the Centennial organizers).

"Could you tell us about His Divine Grace?"

"Oh, you can read that in one of the many books I have prepared about him."

"Is there anything else you would like to tell the people?"

"It is raining tink-tink-tinkle on the metal roof of the van. They haven't finished installing the new water tank. I ought to go on my own. Hare Kṛṣṇa."

Chapter Thirteen

End of One Week

Today ends one week on this secret retreat. Starting today, I'll write in this story only one time, in the morning. I'll give the afternoon hour to interviews with Madhu on my letters from Śrīla Prabhupāda. But just because I write less here doesn't mean I can't tell the story. You may wait sometimes and take it up when more has happened and a pressure has built up to do it.

On my walk I carry a tape recorder in my left jacket pocket and wear earphones. In my right jacket pocket I have a dictaphone. What I do is play the tape recorder, which is a recording of my voice speaking the *Bhagavad-gītā* verses and some suggestions for writing assignments. When I get an idea, then I put the tape recorder on pause and reach for

the dictaphone with my right hand, then speak something. This speaking will become a basis for the writing assignments as I'll give them in the class next January. In the last two days I was surprised to see the first flashes of headlights of an approaching car. So with both hands, I shoved the tape recorders into my pockets, feeling almost as if I'd been caught carrying guns. When the car arrives, they'll see me as a peaceful nonentity out for a morning walk with his hazelwood cane. But once I'm alone, I'm at it again.

The last part of the walk is quite a stiff incline up toward the house. On the tape recorder my voice said to go ahead and speak some inspiration now into the dictaphone, but I had to laugh because my only inspiration was how to climb up that hill. In the distance I saw the smoke curling up from the chimney. For most of the walk it was raining, but now it had mostly stopped—I could tell by looking at the puddles—so I folded up my umbrella and started using the cane again to help me get up the hill. This is sweet stuff, walking and preparing. I have been not been able to enter myself into the prayer states but this is a good consolation to be preparing something for the devotees so that they can enter prayer states. When they do so I'll do it with them. We'll each write in our own words a reponse to Kṛṣṇa speaking in the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

At the end of one week:

Think of Mahārāja Parikṣit and his seven last days. That was the original and bona fide *bhāgavata*-

saptaha. He was given notice. But how can you drastically improve when you only have one week left? Or is it that we should be patient. In the hospital you are a patient. Calm nerves. Here's your mother, here's the nurse holding your hand. You cry regrets. You chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, but it is empty, even at this crucial hour.

There was an old T.V. show on the theme, "What if you had a million dollars?" A person was given a million dollars, but had to spend it within twenty-four hours. The last supper. Money worries up until the end.

Hey, this isn't the last week of my life! It's just a warm-up. Tattva-vit reviewed one of my books and said that I'm usually self-conscious for the first ten or fifteen pages while warming up. What does he know? At the end of one week, you feel that there is plenty where this came from. Have faith in the process. Don't give up.

Who knows what I actually did in this week? I can't figure it out. Where did the week go? Like autumn evenings that have gone West, it will never return. It is a lost week. Gone into oblivion, into the time warp, misspent?

Lord Kṛṣṇa, this material body and this material energy is illusion to the soul. Please give us time and the intelligence to spend it well. There goes a week and I am weak.

In this week I wrote this story.

Part II

Chapter One Don't Go Mum

This is not Ballyferriter. The bathroom gets cold here. We have decided not to return here after India. My main reason is that it's not an ISKCON place and would be hard to explain to the ISKCON authorities why I spend so much time here. But . . . it's also cold and the dogs bark. No, it's a good place, remote. You never hear an electric bass from a rock band over the radio and you hardly hear cars go by. No place is a perfect writer's paradise, and even if you could find such a paradise that doesn't mean the muse would visit you there.

This morning I urged myself gently, "Go ahead and continue regular writing. Write your poem when you come back from the morning walk." Yesterday I wrote no poems morning or night. Not writing was good, but so is the advice to keep at it. It should be a way of life. Still, when you have no desire, you can't do it. You wonder if you are right or wrong.

I was reading about Hirāṇyakaśipu getting the benedictions from Lord Brahmā. It looked so foolish in print, "That I may not be killed by any creature created by you, or any entity not created by you . . . That I not be killed in a house or outside a house, by a man-made or demigod-made weapon . . ." He tried to cover all the possibilities. So vain and demoniac. They continue to do it today in

perhaps more sophisticated language. May I not be killed by cholesterol or AIDS or by nuclear waste or nuclear bombs, by terrorists' or big nations' bombs, by Russian or non-Russian. We all have to die. Truism.

Not much reason to read another writer except to see that he has the balls to write his point of view, so why don't I persist in telling the Kṛṣṇa conscious rap of higher life?

I liked it when Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, "Of course, it is not possible to convince modern scientists of the Vedic information about the universe. Nonetheless, we are not very much impressed by the words of the scientists who say that all other planets are vacant and that only the earth is full of living entities" (*Bhāg.* 7.4.7, purport).

Śrīla Prabhupāda really blasted the scientists and gave inspiration for his scientifically learned disciples to do the same, as Sadāputa is doing in such a defiant way. Prabhupāda didn't speak as much of poets and writers, but he did mention them. They are among the speculators, "thoughtful poets," sense gratifiers, those who deride Kṛṣṇa, etc. Maybe they are not as influential as the scientists, but Prabhupāda was aware of them. Let the writer become Kṛṣṇa conscious, that is Prabhupāda's wish and Nārada's direction when he tells how things should be used in the Lord's service. When I read some pages of *Ballyferriter Stories*, I see a friendly, Kṛṣṇa conscious person talking to any friends who want to listen. It's Kṛṣṇa conscious talk and that's good.

Here is Śrīla Prabhupāda, with relevant comments on being a writer: "One must dedicate everything in the service of the Lord. If one is a learned scholar, scientist, philosopher, poet, etc., then he should employ his learning to establish the supremacy of the Lord. . . . Do not decry Him . . . or take His position simply by fragmental accumulation of knowledge. . . . The best thing, is. . . to . . . engage oneself completely in hearing the transcendental pastimes of the Lord. But in case of the absence of such an opportunity, one should try to engage in the service of the Lord everything for which one has specific attraction" (*Bhāg.* 1.5.32, purport).

This last statement seems to touch on what I have been working with. I recently thought to curtail my stories and poems and do more direct *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* reading. That may be the higher platform. Or even if one were entirely satisfied in only hearing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, one might come down to the world and write in a way that people could relate to. In my case, I'm not sure exactly why I write the way I do. It may be a compulsion, like a material drive or habit. It may be that I have evolved here step by step to free-writing and I don't know how to get out of it. It is also likely that I am materially conditioned and so tend to write of this body, this world. I am not yet addicted to talking of Kṛṣṇa. In any case, it is good for me to use the writing in the service of the Lord.

Nārada Muni says, "O good soul, does not a thing, applied therapeutically, cure a disease which

was caused by the very same thing?" Prabhupāda writes, "The material concept of a thing is at once changed as soon as it is put into the service of the Lord. That is the secret of spiritual success" (*Bhāg.* 1.5.33, verse and purport).

"Thus when all of a man's activities are dedicated to the service of the Lord, those very activities which cause a perpetual bondage become the destroyer of the tree of work" (*Bhāg.* 1.5.34).

Perhaps the best exposure of the mundane writers was done by Śrīla Prabhupāda in his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.5.10, after the verse beginning, "Those words which do not describe the glories of the Lord . . . are like a pilgrimage place for crows." Śrīla Prabhupāda speaks of the crows' literature as decorative language which is like the decoration of a dead body: "Spiritually advanced men who are compared to swans do not take pleasure in such dead literatures, which are the source of pleasure for those who are spiritually dead . . . in the modes of passion and ignorance they are distributed under different labels but can hardly help the spiritual urge of the human being . . . Such literary men . . . mundane poets . . . are all dolls of the material energy."

I advise you to keep on talking as best you can, whether in Ballyferriter where you sifted through the Blasket Island writers and concluded that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is infinitely better, or wherever you find yourself. Go on writing. You are the standard bearer of Prabhupāda's teachings. It's your duty.

One may say it is also my duty to present Kṛṣṇa consciousness in a more elevated form of literature, or in the traditional way, like Vedic commentary on *śāstra*, but as I have said many times, I can only do what I am suited to do. I can talk with you like two friends by the fireside or on the walk, what it's like to try to be a devotee, how I like to read Prabhupāda's books, what we go through . . . what we see with our senses transformed by the *bhakti* process.

I hope to continue one way or another. Don't go mum. Don't abandon the field so that the crows have it all to themselves. Until Western devotees start producing ISKCON Shakespeares, I'll be glad to do a little man's talking on a cold morning.

Chapter Two After the Walk

COMES DAWN AND THE MAHĀ-MANTRA

You are walking in pre-dawn on the lonely road and suddenly you feel and see light from behind you. You think it's the first glint of car's headlights. You turn to see but there is no car. This is the way dawn comes. From where? Over there above that hill, no yellow ball or even hint of red or shine, but a general lighting as if a stage director were slowly turning up some indirect lighting.

Usually you don't catch him in the act, but sometimes the actual moment catches *you*. There it is, Sūrya's chariot is approaching. The night is over.

Listen, please, with your brain and anything else you can bring to bear upon the uttering of Hare Kṛṣṇa mantras and your hearing them. At least feel good about the mantras. Live in them and don't desire any other meditation or yoga or God or method. That much I can do, feel at home and walking and chanting. But it's a shame I'm such a poor representative of the *mahā-mantra*.

So that's how it is. Hold on. Don't become a cynic. It is God's way. Be true to your own experience. I'm gathering the writing assignments for the seminar. I can feel the cynical influence of James Tate hounding me because I just read one of his poems. Can't deny it; it's here, I think he's a friend of a similar madman, Charles Simic. Why not write your own prose-poem?

Keep sniffing your trail like a dog does; don't look up. Your nose and your trail. I told them, "Write what you feel when you hear someone deride Kṛṣṇa." And, "Do you ever flinch when you hear Lord Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda call the non-

devotees asses and dogs and hogs?" I'm asking them to come out with their gut responses to *Bhagavad-gītā* verses. Then adjust or correct wrong visions, make prayers and resolutions. It's fun and I hope it works in the classroom.

We've got it easier than the nondevotees. Christ also said. "Follow me. My way is easy. My yoke is light." Kṛṣṇa supplies what you need and protects what you have, but the nondevotee prefers to suffer because at least he retains his freedom to defy God. He'd rather have eagles eat out his entrails while he's chained down, as long as he can curse God and the gods. He'd prefer to be Sisyphus, punished to roll the big boulder up the hill only to have it roll back down. Some are like that.

Some, if you could explain it to them, would be willing to accept the patronage of Lord Kṛṣṇa who can solve all problems. "No, I'd rather be on my own," most say. "You tell me that God is like a wealthy father and can give me all I need, but I hate Him. Why does He allow suffering and why is everything in His creation messed up and the stupid jerks are always in control of the government?" (more or less that's what I said to Father Hicks in 1960.)

To some extent, you can explain it if you are patient, learned, and expert. If they will listen. Start with yourself.

God is not to blame. Humans bring on the turmoil by their misbehavior, breaking nature's laws. The first big law they break is to defy God Himself.

That leads them into all kinds of trouble. There are modes of nature and sins and illusion and greed. All kinds of things. It's explained step by step in *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. Soften your rock heart a bit by chanting the *mahā-mantra*. Hear from the pure devotee. We can try to tell them, we must. Someone will be interested. Most will prefer to deny the only Supreme God even while they are crushed by the illusory energy.

Chapter Three

Twenty-four Hour Kīrtana

Headache went away overnight. Dogs barking almost all night, but I'd prefer to think they don't bother me much. I'm indoors and have so many nice things including a hot water bottle to embrace to my chest with both my arms. I didn't so much want to get out of bed, but I knew it was right. So to the desk I went, turned on the electric heater at my feet, adjusted the chair pillow, and went at it, my early A.M. Writing Session. After that I read the *Bhāgavatam* for about thirty-five minutes. Then I was chanting *japa* before a candle in a red votive candleholder and a blue-colored one, before the altar pictures. Meanwhile, the dogs continued barking. I saw through the mist-covered window that the near-full moon was very bright and I guess that maybe that's what the dogs were barking about. My *japa* was not soulful, and I don't even know what to think or feel about that. I can't get upset about it, nor do I wish to get upset. Just keep going.

The bathroom in early morning is gradually getting colder. There is no way to heat it. We can't reach it with our little electric heaters. While I washed, I listened to a recording of Sadāputa lecturing in the U.S.A. He was debunking the theory of the Āryan invasion of India and the chronology of the Vedic civilization according to the Western scholars. It did sound flimsy and absurd. And now I'm back up here facing this chapter.

What did I read in the *Bhāgavatam*? I can't immediately remember. Let me dredge a moment, or better, let me turn to the book. I do recall in general that I'm impressed how Śrīla Prabhupāda goes right to the jugular or right to the best heart of *bhakti* topics. The editors of one collection of Henry Miller's writings said of him, "Reading Miller, I feel experience being communicated—not in a form that needs to be translated back from my head to my heart, but as if it were food and flowing straight to my gut." In the case of reading Śrīla Prabhupāda, it is much more than that. It is flowing directly to the spiritual mind, spiritual gut, spiritual heart, everything. And it happens even if you're not aware of it. But you do need to be attentive. In the half-conscious state, drifting your eyes over the page, you are not actually reading. That's more like dozing or cheating. Reading is a full engagement. Even the hands want to take part. I mean, the way they sit quietly by while the whole breathes and waits, while the souls draws in its nourishment. When you read the *Bhāgavatam* nicely, you are in a state where nonsense activities

are suspended. The soul drinks and eats . . . No matter what the topic discussed, Śrīla Prabhupāda is bringing us up to the highest stage. He may not directly discuss *gopī-bhāva*, but he is giving us what we need in order to reach that stage in the future. Therefore, no one gives more advanced teachings than he does—if by advanced you mean that which will actually make you advanced .

In one verse the word *madārṣanam* is used. The Supreme Lord was replying to the demigods who prayed to Him for relief from Hiraṇyakaśipu's persecutions. The voice of the Lord replied to them and said that they should seek His *darśana*. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that the ability to understand the Supreme Personality of Godhead depends on our *bhakti*. There are nine forms of *bhakti* and any one of them can give us *darśana* or direct meeting with Kṛṣṇa. Hearing the Lord's voice was as good as seeing His form. "Contrary to the laws of the material world, there is no difference between seeing the Lord, offering prayers and hearing the transcendental vibration. Pure devotees therefore are fully satisfied by glorifying the Lord. Such glorification is called *kīrtana*" (*Bhāg.* 3.4.27, purport).

This reminded me that writing is also *kīrtana* as good as singing with drums and *karatālas*. Let's have twenty-four *kīrtana*, of one sort or another.

I am feeling the relief of not having a headache. Happiness is to get a respite from the material miseries. For a practitioner of *vaidhī-bhakti*, it also means that you can do your active service. We are

not so advanced that we can remain fully engaged only in the mind. I need to be able to write and read and chant, all of which takes mental strength. For this I need relative freedom from pain. Only because I was free from head pain could I be generous and tolerant toward the dogs barking. I knew they couldn't stop me from my tasks. But if the head pain comes, then I am stopped and can only retreat to bed and look for rest and time, which are the only known cures for the headaches. I know the headache is not bad or evil. It does make me grateful for this blessed state I'm in now, anticipating my morning walk, writing this chapter, and thinking of the things I'd like to do. I want to become more accomplished and make my contribution to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Besides that, the headache is itself connected to Kṛṣṇa, so it's not evil. When it comes it tells me I cannot do what I like and that the body is not my permanent home, not a place of peace. Kṛṣṇa is always teaching us, either through matter or spirit.

Uninterrupted *bhakti*—

Ah! You'd like that, wouldn't you? You and Henry Miller and Victor Borges. You want to be with them in a writer's heaven? But maybe they're in hell. You better leave them. Or go preach to them if you think you're strong enough. Maybe you just better say, "Good-bye."

Śrīla Prabhupāda. He's the one. Become his menial servant. The bell is ringing and his servant

now has to go to Prabhupāda's room. Would you like those days again? Are they gone? Am I still his menial servant? Yes, when you read, and when you write for him.

Prabhupāda is the teacher. He set the example of uninterrupted *bhakti*. One time he told me that whether you wash the dishes or read, they're all different varieties of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Kṛṣṇa in the heart will teach you when to do one and when to do the other.

Nirāntara means you never stop. Not at death. There was a devotee named Nirāntara dāsa. He used to sing and joke and challenge me. I wonder where he is. We're all moving along.

Diaries. Write and write. Don't stop. No death.

But you know you're not the only one in the world,

You're a tiny mite,
dust mote
spark of the great fire
that is Lord Kṛṣṇa. He will tell you
your *rasa*. Get it together to
give up the false ego "*rasa*,"
the dog *rasa*, dream *rasa*

sweet rice *rasa* or you'll have to come back for that and taste the *rasa* of pain and kicking others and being kicked by them in Bosnia, Rwanda, and in history, the row of presidents being knocked down like bowling pins, all play dead.

Dear Lord, teach us rightly and please deliver us. Śrīla Prabhupāda had the right idea: be always engaged in Lord Caitayna's mission, thinking how to

save the others. We may not be able to save everyone, he said, but at least a few. We are fortunate who follow him and despite our faults, stay always engaged in some attempt to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness twenty-four hours a day in this life and in the next.

Chapter Four

Autumn, Praising

Hey, I'm back. I'm back in the house, back on my routine. Bag of oatmeal on kitchen table. BP is cooking it. The range stuffed with stubby logs. Upstairs there is no heat. There's no heat. Nothing like autumn here. Seems it occurs only in Northeast U.S.A., real autumn. But so what? The whole world is in illusion. It does refer back to something original and pure in the spiritual world. Lord Kṛṣṇa knows autumn nights. They too are not like Vermont foliage with its red and yellow maple and birch—but why not? Vṛndā-devī arranges everything and anything. Be sure His autumn nights are infinitely better . . . and no violence, no beer cans and condoms thrown in the woods or police headlights after the murder on the highway.

In the autumn, *śārat*, the Supreme Lord wanted to enjoy the *rāsa* dance with the doe-eyed *gopīs*, so He arranged through his Yoga-māyā that the moon should be full, the breezes soft, and the flowers aromatic. Then He played His flute, enchanting His best lovers who fled from their houses to be with Him.



Hey, hey, puddles. You can barely see when you start out walking. Walking in the woods is like bumping into a wall. Better use your flashlight and

stay on the track. Going down the hill there's the light ahead in a little house belonging to the landlord. Don't use your cane on the ground. Say Hare Kṛṣṇa in your mind—so the dog won't bark. Then you reach the gate—a long metal gate for cows—lift it up with your foot, slide it off the cement, get through and slide it back. No dog barked. Head for the road.

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare. Let them laugh. I laugh too. Just go on chanting, timing yourself, and go on writing. Go on collecting verses spoken by Lord Kṛṣṇa and planning your future days.

I plan to get my work done on this seminar in a week at most. Then I'll go back over the verses again, but this time for myself. I plan to Listen to Lord Kṛṣṇa speaking, to hear with a better inner ear. I don't know how far I'll get.

Praise—make it sincere, your own. Your own words and music. Do seek it—my own experience in praise. To Kṛṣṇa, the one Kṛṣṇa.

Praise and penance. Four rules is penance and just to be cold in this room, that's enough. I didn't fast on Vāmana's Appearance Day. How is penance connected to praise?

Why? Because God wants it. Just because. He's great. Why do you ask? Ain't you moved? You must be tired, man, to ask why praise. Everything He does is so perfect, everything comes from him.

He lifted Govardhana. He is my pulse. Praise the God of all. Praise the Lord's names, the gift of mercy.

If you can't, you're dead. Take a little nap and come back praising.

Chapter Five

A Scoop

Dear *Story*, I have the scoop for you. In the Writing Session I began at midnight, I hit on the train of thought that this retreat should be more directed toward prayer. I discussed what is prayer. That led me to conclude the best concentrated prayer I could do would be to increase the *japa* quota. I reasoned that the quota increase does not in itself constitute prayer, but it may promote it. I want to be aware and strive to overcome inattentive chanting. I may do some *japa* reading along with this. So, dear *Story*, this will be relevant for you. In order to increase to thirty-two rounds, I will suspend my two morning Writing Sessions. But the time allotted for this *Story of a Retreat* will stay intact. I supposed we will have some incidents to tell about how we fared in the *japa*. What do you think?

Part of me says, "Oh well, I've seen them come and go." But let's not be cynical about attempts to improve chanting. They're always worthwhile, I think. You are as good as dead if you lose all hope. Even in terms of writing, *japa* produces some of your most relevant pieces and interests devotees. Anyway, that's the proposal on the table right now.

I'll be gathering my resolution for it during the day and I plan to start tomorrow, which happens to be the Disappearance Day of Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura. Today is the Appearance Day of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, who was also a great advocate of chanting the holy names of Kṛṣṇa. He said in one song that there's nothing in all the fourteen worlds except the chanting of the holy names of God.

Last night the chained-up dog in our backyard commenced barking at 10:30 P.M. He kept at it and kept me awake until midnight. I wrote a note to M. that maybe we should tell Dennis (the landlord) that this dog is keeping us awake at night. One of the main reasons we rented this place is that we wanted quiet. They assured us it was quiet. But even in ordinary places I don't usually hear a dog barking so close. I was wearing used earplugs and I took them out and put in new ones but still the poor dog's yelps pierced through.

M. said to me that the time of a retreat is rare. Usually I have no chance to take a solitary walk in a place where no one will be able to interrupt me. This retreat is like that (despite the dog), so I should use the time in the most appropriate way. This has led me to thoughts about concentrated forms of prayer. I decided that I would sacrifice my daily Writing Sessions in favor of the *japa*. NG says, "That is the challenge: to let writing teach us about life and life about writing. Let it flow back and forth."

This is a big scoop for you, dear *Story*. It means you can tell the story of a prayer retreat, a *japa* diary sort of thing. I don't have more to say about it right now since it's just a new idea. But speaking of precious time, the morning slot for the story is also precious, so I won't stop now just because I have nothing on the tip of my tongue. I'll continue. Let writing teach us about life and story. Let writing create story.

When you are on a retreat, you can ask God to reveal Himself to you. That may not be so comfortable. But Merton and others say not to set a demanding schedule and an impossible goal for yourself. Don't be like Vṛtrāsura who declared to Lord Śiva, "If you don't appear in a few days to grant my boons, I will cut off pieces of my flesh." That forced Śiva to appear. We take the attitude, "Dear Lord, please see my attempt to chant Your holy names in a lonely place. Be pleased with me." We may go so far as to say, "Please let me not remain so dull and neglectful of the great gift You have given in the form of Your holy names."

One has to persist in this. I am just a beginner, a baby in spiritual life. But I'm not dead.

Chapter Six

Right Here if You Need Me

Begin Chapter Six, man, Chapter Six. How you doin' with your *Gītā* verses for the writing course?

Oh, jes fine. I'm almost done. It will be done to turn on my friends to writing, to express our response to Lord Kṛṣṇa. "Imagine that someone is

disappointed with devotees and you are preaching to them. Use verse 10.9 (*mac-cittā mad-gata-prāṇā*). "Write the way I did in *Living with the Scriptures*; give a fragment of your autobiography and some experience you had with this verse, *api cet sudurācāro*." "Write a letter to Lord Kṛṣṇa responding positively to His invitation in verse 9.30 where He says He's a special friend to His devotee." "Write a prosepoem on the inconceivable greatness of Lord Kṛṣṇa as expressed by Him in *Bhagavad-gītā* 10.7. Begin each sentence with 'He is . . . ' And end it with a personal prayer."

Don't be pretentious or fanatical, but speak Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*, *guṇa*, *rūpa*, and *nāma*.

I didn't notice the landscape so much, but it was light and the sky clear. That much I noticed. I was listening to hear Lord Kṛṣṇa's presence. Don't tell me I didn't feel it, or can't qualify, don't know Kṛṣṇa.



Tired—you better be awake when you chant. Hear alert, walk or spray your face with water or ring a bell.

I've got my physical and mental limits. I was up so early, you know. And there was a dog barking all night.

Then when I hit the sack? Dream, lad, and why don't you catch one of them?

I'm not tired in spirit, just need a little snap. I'm not tired of life. I'm not disgusted with everything, just give me some time to rest.

"I'm sick and tired of sense gratification," said Devahūti to Lord Kapila. That's good. Give it up.

No way.

The express.

You shut down the WS for the time being
and it may shut down on you.

How will you
figure anything out if you don't
write it down?

Oh, there will be a way.

I'll be right here if you need me,
chanting, chanting, I hope
utterable mantras

don't disturb you. How few chant in this
world, huh? They never get the word,
dopes chant anyway,
chant in India and Hinterland.

Therefore, this verse. It leaks out. Did you receive First Communion, *dīkṣā*, of holy name? Better go now. Take rest. Time is up.

I think the proposed *japa* quota is a good idea. And I think there'll be good results. I think you'll be walking along. rain or shine, and one of these days . . . it's like he said about the first sunlight. The name is going to sneak up on him, you know? No, I think it's a good thing and I'm all for it. Here's my ten rupees. Tell him Jiminy Cricket approves.

No kidding.

On my desk I have these books fresh out of the cold van: *Entering the Life of Prayer*, *Japa Reform Notebook*, *Begging for the Nectar of the Holy Name*, *Nāmāmṛta*, *The Way of the Pilgrim*, and *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* chapters on the glories of Haridāsa Ṭhākura.

I told M. and he said as soon as I begin the thirty-two, he'll do it also till I stop.

Chapter Seven

Suspending

I started rearranging my schedule to accommodate the increase to thirty-two *japa* rounds per day. I finished up my *Bhagavad-gītā* seminar writing assignments today. I'll be clear for a new kind of hearing of *Gītā* starting with tomorrow's walk. In other words, the thirty-two-round retreat deserves a fresh start. Then I wrote, "Think—is *The Story of a Retreat* okay or do you want to start a new diary which would incorporate features of both Writing

Sessions and *The Story* and a *japa* diary—in which you could write whenever you want? You don't need a whole hour or even a half hour, although there would be likely times to write in it."

Not yet clear what kind of writing I'll do starting tomorrow, but I think I'll suspend the *Story* for now. Even if I don't add to it, it can live as it is, another slice. It was good while it lasted, like the yogurt-cream-covered pie Madhu offered today in honor of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura (September 17, 1994, in Collnacuppogue).

Part III

Preface

It has been three full weeks since I suspended this story. I didn't think I'd take it up again, but here goes. I'm in the last five days of the retreat.

Since I last wrote, I did a thirty-two-rounds-per-day *yajña* for two weeks, and sixty-four on Ekādaśī. I'm not bragging, just providing data. Completed the syllabus for a seven-day seminar, "Selections from the *Bhagavad-gītā*, A Writing Course." Did two one-hour Writing Sessions per day, fifteen and a half microcassettes. Relished eating every day very much. Saw the days slip by and dwindle. Watched the strong white water rapids of Sheen River from a stone bridge. Began *Letters from a Sannyāsī*. It's well under way now, by Kṛṣṇa's grace; I do them talking out loud on the way home from the walk.



Morning walks start at 7 A.M. now, anything before that is as dark as night outside. In WS I worked out a lot of tension about worrying whether it's all right for me to take frequent retreats. I decided, "Yes." We also decided on our itinerary for the next half year. Reading in Prabhupāda's books never got up to even a steady one and a half hours a day. But I do relish the first session of reading from 1:15 to almost 2 A.M. For one week I had headaches almost every day. Madhu has been interviewing me, reminisces and preaching based on Śrīla Prabhupāda's letters to me in Boston, 1970. It has been quiet and fruitful and detached. Recently, I've gone out into the solitude of backyard pastures for a half hour in the afternoon where I do a kind of *lectio divina* prayer with no more than four verses of *Bhagavad-gītā*. That's what I've been doing.

For the next five days (the last of the retreat) I intend to continue with *The Story of a Retreat*.

Intro to Part III: Natural Kṛṣṇa Consciousness

Still thinkin' of a five-day book

Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday
Saturday

Progresso looks lively, full of bounce
in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

If I'm more Kṛṣṇa conscious serious now
then be that.

But give us a book of who you
are with drawings

clusters,
big sheet
typing.
Going from one to the other,
Night Notes
to full-time in these last
five days.
Improvised chapters . . .

If I can attain some wholeness, even if I don't know it yet . . . something more transcendental and lasting then my tongue's yen for sweets and more sweets . . .

You want more than to skim the surface of your external days, more than saying "We are planning to go to Rome and Māyāpur. By October 27 we will be in . . ."

These five days. I won't shake you down, demand, but tap you—sure you have something you want to say. In Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Just keep thinking long enough and it will come.

The secret may be in the title you give each day's chapter.

The slight shift from the concerns of the recent Writing Sessions will produce some release and newness. A natural form of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

What do you mean natural KC?
Like peanut butter, aloe gel,
something phony sold by a big food
chain in the health food section?
No, I mean it comes naturally
as breathing and definitely not vague.

When I walked back from my
 half hour prayer retreat and reviewed the
 four *Gītā* verses I'd just read and then
 climbed over the cattle fence.
 One verse is *man-manā bhava mad-bhakto*.

I wish on you that you may be able to
 remember Kṛṣṇa at any time
 as your friend.

"I, dwelling in their hearts . . . "

We never tire, are never satiated
 from hearing

Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

And "O Janārdana," spoken by Arjuna,
 I never tire . . . O Thou Great One,
 hearing Your opulences. Prabhupāda said
 we have enough stock for 1,000 years of
 reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* so where is
 the need for

other books? We can't even
 finish our own,
 the best.

Makes you wonder why you ordered from
 "Books of the 90s" catalogue
Poems of Meera and
Nothing Special, American Zen.

Natural means? He makes toast out of
 Irish soda bread (no yeast) by putting the
 bread slice directly on top of
 the hot iron range.

The taste of local Kerry water from a bottle.

Chanting while walking. And more . . .
It will come if I keep practicing disciplines
especially to read the purports and
how they come out of you later.

Good-night Poem to end Chapter One

Night Notes

Why not just take rest and stop
trying to be clever?

In the morning you can rise and there's a
chance you'll be sober and
continue the theme
with a variation.

Blessed by the non-*mauna*
glorification of God.

My spiritual master said . . .
I'll remember.

Keep hearing. He told Professor
Dirkheim. I was there.

In the morning . . . He said he sleeps
(the Professor asked him how much)
two or three hours at night and one or
two in the day, so total four
or five. Our predecessor *ācāryas* slept
one hour at most in twenty-four.

I sleep six. So get up. And
pray. Walk to the little desk
and pray. This is natural KC.

You pray for a theme
to continue
like in *Progresso*.

Remembering Śrīla Prabhupāda needn't
stop. New insights.
New ways. I will tell the story
not only of what I did on this retreat
or what I hope to do—and
how the next one will be called
December Alone and we'll concentrate
on reading, but also I will tell . . .
Tell you in the morning. Something
nice about apples hot and
honey? No, more—the spirit and how a
retreat acts on you imperceptibly.

Especially a sweet dream
when Śrīla Prabhupāda called
me over and humorously said someone
criticized both he and I for
taking too long in the bathroom and
criticized me for my funny-looking
neck exercises.
I dreamed it. Śrīla Prabhupāda
was amused and
confided. The two of us, my guru and I,
a tiny *cela*, love him.

Of course I'll have to do something
besides dreaming and writing
but for these five days
let me play it out.

Then you'll see me work in temples,
 no kidding. Madhu planned it out
 today. I can show you if you don't
 believe me. A terrific busy itinerary.
 But that's later.
 Now rest and
 up to do last five days.

Chapter Two

Open to the Present

Well these last five days I told M. last night, I am going to stay in retreat mode and not start traveling in the mind to van Europe or busy Rome airport and the jet lifting Alitalia to Bombay and . . . That will happen soon enough. While I am still walking clean piss bog and free to live in thoughts of prayer and whatever comes I'll do it.

You want to review? But that is to live in the past and to partly make-up a fiction of the retreat, "I prayed well. In the third week I entered remorse and the *contempt* of union with God." Or you might be a reductionist and make fun of what happened.

You dreamt the devotees had taken up Vedic archery and were piercing steel with arrows. The media covered the event. Rūpānuga and Bhagavān were among the first to try it out. They looked up to Arjuna of old as the ideal archer. And then a jumbo jet started a practice of lowering itself, while all passengers were aboard, to just a few feet over the ocean and they shot arrows down to catch fish!

The airline's advertisement asked the obvious question, "Is it worth it to fish from a jetliner while cruising the ocean filled with passengers?"

But what's the use, you will say, of speaking of these illusions? Unless you want to stop and make sense of it with a Kṛṣṇa conscious purport.

It's past, present, future, no matter how you turn until you go to the eternal *dhāma*. It's past, present, future, and Kṛṣṇa knows it all.

He is all-pervading and yet He continues to exist in his own unique feature of place and person. It's His *yoga-iśvara*, inconceivable mystic potency.

Five days' blues
to beat the band
Don't go back (he says)
and don't go forward (to Roma)
but live in times that are
with ye now.
The rubber band on floor,
the back, the aches, the
purring whirl of electric heater and
the joke—he's got a hot water
bottle against his belly?

No, now means also
Kṛṣṇa is pulse of everything.
You interact.
You go on reading and
chanting to the spiritual world
and my friend, you could
cut through here too.

To pray without earplugs.
 God is your guide.
 Prayer is to prove
 Kṛṣṇa in the universes,
paramparā linking us like a
 field of transcendental electricity back to
 Goloka,
 just hear.
 Just feel it
 open yourself to service
 via medium.

The wise worship Him with all their hearts,
 knowing He's the source of everything spiritual
 and material. He's celebrated in the *Vedas* as that
 Supreme Person.

(And then your little mind writing here, being a
 scribe only by His granting you this minute free-
 dom, your little mind swoops down, or feels it and
 must admit its wings are clipped or small and says,
 "The saffron laundry on the outside clothesline
 yesterday, a rare event, Irish sunshine and the
dhotīs flapping in the breeze—yes, take advantage
 of this day.")

Up and down like an eagle swoops.
 Garuḍa with the Lord
 can come from the sublime *acintya*
 down to the ridiculous "saint"—
 I mean that jokingly, the
 sinner is more like it—
 the figure expiring in the ocean
 hands raised up for help and

the Lord becomes,
 to one who worships and serves Him
 sincerely,
 the swift deliverer from the
 ocean of birth and day.
 Light of the present.

The present knuckle. Tongue sticks out. Unless I
 look at a book, how can I spout Vedic wisdom?
 (And even when I write down what the book says,
 is that *my* wisdom or yours?)

Listen—you better turn to it.
 Wrestle free of *māyā*'s grip as
 you might turn from a dream.
 The events of spiritual life go on
 right now whether you tune
 in or not. So for everyone's good
 why not stay tuned?

In theoretical time,
 academic rhyme . . .
 the book . . .

Book wisdom—now it's open, read the symbols
 on the page. See through the paper because it's
 thin. Stay with it. Surrender to this book that's in
 reality not just your body. Some people say the
 book is a myth, and there are so many other
 obstacles, but it's actually reality.

It's Śrīla Prabhupāda's book. It's intense. Let me
 pray to him. And write poems of separation, to
 break it, that pain of separation or forgetfulness.
 With no pretense.

Book wisdom, you called it, going further and further in like a tunnel of wonderment. Keep going. Practice. But I'm afraid—like that long tunnel into Jāmbavān's cave. Kṛṣṇa went in fearless. He is always true.

Wisdom is taught by Nārada. I didn't make it up. It doesn't come from my creator-self or from some other so-called "wisdom author."

Yes, the book and the great one, Kṛṣṇa. He incorporates everything there.



And so, dear friends, as best we present, open to the present the door of perception . . .

Willy White fuses.

The poet in me walks
over bog talking to you in future,
"When you are stressed you can
come here in the mind, you
can hear this tape and walk out

from your room, wherever you are,
just as now I'm walking over a
pebbled creek on the way to sit
on a rock to pray by hearing Kṛṣṇa
speaking to Arjuna in the *Gītā* . . .
you can do it every day."

So we write now, storing up for a future when
we may be too busy to consider it. But this fellow
has to work and hope springs eternal in the human
breast.

Kṛṣṇa strides the worlds,
His messages spins out,
the carriers of the *bhakti* who
preach it
are His best devotees . . .
now and in the future.
Who stops and talks to someone,
"Tell them about Kṛṣṇa."

"There was this five-year-old boy
living in the palace of his father the
demon. And he learned

Kṛṣṇa consciousness
while in the womb—from
Nārada." Who are you talking to?
They already know this.
Provide for congregational folks
the help with sustenance.
They "know" and I know
but who
opens the vault and sees God

now?
Who is in touch?

Blessed Prabhupāda of old
is with us now and in
1996 and 1997 and you got to
die sometimes in the second
millenium and *come back*.
"This simple fact they cannot
understand. They are so dull!
And yet they call themselves
philosophers, scientists, theologians."

Now a man sighs and wonders if he's done
enough, done all the traffic can bear. Don't want to
push too much liquid through a narrow pipe or
start watering it down.

The marrow permits only so many units per
moment. Hail to the Thee.

Open to distribute presents,
for Johnny a bike,
for Mary a poem,
we eschew the science of evil
and sense grat.

Only a few lovers of God, the
mahātmā is very rare.

But these children want the real
thing, Kṛṣṇa consciousness, to them
you can share the present and
among them a few will tolerate
Satsvarūpa's version.

You want to give a present?
Well, why don't you giftwrap it?

And he will say, "What's this?
 I don't understand the poem.
 Is this a lecture?
 Where is the price tag?
 What am I supposed to do
 with it?"
 Wear it on your collar.
 Just hear it and keep it—
 it's God consciousness in
 the form of early morning
 prayer. Soon the world
 will wake again, at
 least in a few hours.
 The dying mosquitoes . . .
 there you go again,
 poet of the moment.

Prescribed lens. Prescribed media for the pneumonia plague. Now I can't live in isolated moment and not talk of past and future. I don't think you meant to forbid that, did you?

Christ's birthday is also ahead and it looks like we will spend it in an old farmhouse way up the road, and my own birthday, although I have an urge to be with people and receive their worship, call it Vyāsa-pūjā, your heady days of silk saffron are over. You have to pay for all that receiving of presents as you sat on a *vyāsāsana*. Did you think it came free or as a result of good karma?

Christ's birthday, the Western farce. But his actual appearance and life is holy and most influential, son of God. On his day you can be here too

and say we are following the beatitudes, Blessed are they who praise God, who suffer in His name. Blessed are the meek, the peace-makers, they shall enter the kingdom of God. Blessed is God's best son. But that's not for another two and a half months.

Now on October day in a land without pronounced autumn color and air that I can recognize from a childhood stock of memories growing up on the earth of New York seasons. Freedom in less than five days

to trod a path chanting with your companion beads. To say Kṛṣṇa I love You, please reveal to me the truth of our relationship. Kṛṣṇa I am still dirty and puffed-up. I wish to rid myself of bad habits and control the mind for the actual mind of a *jīva*.



Trod path and tarmac road with beads in hand and I worship the opportunity to address a letter in imagination of rhetoric, but sincere and believe in it, my craft. Your gift to me, to share a "letter from a *sannyāsī*." Only at the last moment am I able to choose who to write it to and it comes out, not nonsense, but a chosen person to whom I talk in twenty minutes. Your gift to me and I give it to them.

All glories to God. Master of the universe. All discredit to those who speak against Him, in fact, usurp His place. Prabhupāda, you see, is defending His cause with mighty and earnest fighting words and actions. His soldiers—boys and girls of Europe and America—new generation of them on book distribution and even in Kṛṣṇa conscious rock concerts (incongruous, "keep on rockin'" for Kṛṣṇa) are in the tradition of givers of the Word on behalf of the pure devotee. I too. I wish to be.

Down the chute, the old book is new when you dance for Kṛṣṇa simple as that, hear *Navadvīpa-mahātmya*. I don't understand. Tell me the perimeters you wish to work within. Do you say you don't want to go into the future? What about preparing for going to Māyāpur? One could argue that that takes place in the present. (I don't want to argue if I don't have to.)

No harm. Be here now in bathroom cold. You play a tape of friends reading *Navadvīpa-mahātmya*. Śrī Jīva went calling, "Nādia!" and cried tears of

ecstasy and asked for the whereabouts of Lord Nityānanda. Just then in His place with His devotees, Lord Nityānanda roared in laughter. He knew Jīva was coming to meet Him.

Yes, this is good. One who lives a few days in Māyāpur attains the benefits of many millions of days in Benares. You can tell something.

I just want an honest and falling interesting book and fear too much dear diary kind of stuff about eating and the landlord. Also, I want to stay here in the retreat and benefit by full quiet practices, full-time quiet practices before I am actually lurched into the other kind of life. Wanted to give myself and readers the benefit of that. Still do, in less than five days.

So if you can stay calm and in retreat-mode, I don't mind preparing for going to India or whatever you want to say.

Smartavyaḥ satataṁ viṣṇur, vismartavyo na jātucit

"Always remember Kṛṣṇa, never forget Him. These are the prime objectives, and all over rules and regulations serve this one.

"Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa can remember incidents from millions of years ago. Similarly, his pure devotee like Nārada Muni can also remember incidents from a past life millions and millions of years ago" (7.15.69, purport).

Don't make a big thing out of writing in the present, living in the present. But do tell us some things. I would have listened to my spiritual master. You who read this, you also see your spiritual

master? If not, I have to be careful. Don't want to throw pearls before—swine or even nonswine if they may not sympathize profoundly with Prabhupāda. Those kind of people, when I hear them on tapes, I feel uncomfortable, whether it's Professor Dirkheim or whoever. As for living in the present, Madhu is chanting his *japa* downstairs. You mean like that?

Don't ask me. It's up to you.

You can talk on a phone from Europe to America.

In the present also means in Goloka. But you cannot see what goes on there unless you hear the version of the *śāstra*. The *śāstra* is as dynamic as the spiritual world itself, but it tells a certain amount in codes of *ślokas*. To actually go to Goloka is different. Yet for a very sensitive reader of *śāstra* it is the same thing. In either case, it is an eternal flowing variable present. Professor Dirkheim said that this is one kind of time, but there is another. He described something beyond time, but I think he was manufacturing things. Better he listen to Prabhupāda and the straight *paramparā*. He did listen . . .

Prabhupāda said we perceive past, present, and future in our conditioned state. For example, we live a hundred years according to the species of life we are in. (An ant also lives a hundred years by its own calculation.) But eternal life is beyond past, present, and future. Anyway, what does it matter? What matters is that we will have to die and be put

into another form of life. The question is what is your next life going to be?

That is the crucial question for the present. What are you doing right now—is it the best practice and preparation for your next life?

Just say a little more before you go (because it is always the present). The batteries are running low and will suddenly go dead. When that happens, I have replacements ready and will very quickly insert them so there will be hardly any hiatus.

Now what else? It is cold up here. But I have nice selections of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* to read when I go downstairs at 5:30 to sit with the men. Often they get sleepy and one of them rocks forward. I think of saying, "If you can't stay awake, I won't come down here anymore to read." But I think, "No, it's good for me to read out loud anyway. Besides, he is sincere and works hard. It doesn't mean anything is wrong with him except maybe some vitamin deficiency. Why is someone sleepy at 6 in the morning while sitting on a cushion?" And then it's my turn, and being righteous, I suddenly become sleepy. It's a good thing I didn't accuse them after all. All this is happening in the present.

We already read selections throughout this *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* about Lord Nityānanda. The longest one was when He made Raghunātha hold a chipped rice festival. And joking with Advaita Ācārya. Lord Caitanya told Him to preach in Bengal, but some years Lord Nityānanda would break

that order and come to see the Lord in Jagannātha Purī. He is very merciful and funny. Without His blessings you cannot enter Māyāpur. He blessed Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja and Raghunātha and Jīva and many more. *Avadhuta*.

Now I am reading selections of the pastimes of Lord Caitanya in Navadvīpa, childhood, *ādi-līlā*. This is more real than the sensations of the body. This is the tunnel to the spiritual world of open vista.

Another good present moment is walking down the hill at 7 A.M. with light barely discernible for objects on the path . . . no flashlight needed is about all I can say. You can't grasp that present. It exists, but if you think, "I am chanting. Am I chanting well?"—there is no immediate answer. I mean, there is usually a little disappointment with the present because it is actually taking place rather than me daydreaming about it or anticipating it or looking back at it. And sometimes the present is very painful, so we enter it lightly. God allows each of us to talk a little and be a little and then we get the karma for that. Eat your breakfast as you like. "You pays your money and you takes your choice." I am inclined for God consciousness, Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and have the best guides. Enough of this for now. Later we can start again.

Chapter Three

We Have to Leave Soon

Heave-ho, where you left off before. Fishermen of Puri and Tralee return to their nets for another day, another generation.

Heave-ho.

Harumpf.

Cloud-audience gathers before me. Elated, my sparce dyed a little red, as old men do in India, I clear my throat and tingle my toes. "Attention, please." (No, I wouldn't say that. Make it accurate.)

"Uh . . . *Haribol* . . . "

"Shhh-shh."

"So we're, uh, gonna begin now. I have distributed to you booklets of selections from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. We are going to go over them. I hope you have read the Introduction. What we will do is I will read the selections, the quotes. Then if there is a printed comment by me, I'll ask one of you to read that out loud. Then I may make some further comments. This will be, therefore, a kind of daily *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class on random topics. I hope we will enter and accumulate an effect . . . Śrīla Prabhupāda said he gave enough *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* for 1,000 years of reading and discussing. I want to keep enlivened discussing it with you. These are highlights, sections that particularly attracted me. So this attraction ought to lead to some more discussion. Please feel free to ask me questions as we go along."

Yeah, but do you really love to read and discuss *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*? The measure of your actual

absorption in it will be the measure of your interest in speaking, and that will be a measure of their interest in hearing. Glazed eyes? Weary heads? It all depends on you. Mahārāja Parikṣit is awake. Śukadeva Gosvāmī is blissful and speaking—their stars are all out. They love it. They have forsaken all else . . . so let's see where you measure up.

It's a test of your interest. When you reach a dry patch, I advise you to go on. Yes, it's similar to writing. But in the case of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, there is no silly or digressive, non-sāstric material to sort through as there is in the content of your struggling-to-believe Kṛṣṇa conscious mind.

This is the future you are contemplating.

That's right. Don't object, huh?

But you wrote a chapter, "Forget the Past that Sleeps and the Future Do Not Call at All."

And this is a new chapter. I am allowing it to come in. My concern (fear) was that I'd fly off mentally like a scared duck and leave this retreat, even though I'm entitled to four more days of it. Thought I might fly into travel gear, sorting out bins and belongings, "This stays in the house, this goes in the van, this goes to India. Where is the spectacle lens cleaner?" Ah and the future, India . . . Mooning, like that, you'd miss the peace and still chance for a deep prayer mode of these last days.

But isn't that like *clinging* to something that you ought to let go of?

Maybe so. I say give us the present. The cool winds of October *are* with us. It's time soon to move. I feel that in my blood. Who could deny it?

Birds in America like geese from Canada, flying south with tumult of honking. Good-bye, summer. Good-bye even to fall. We're going south.

Like autumn nights that have gone to the West, the Haryaśvas were never seen again at home by their father. They entered the renounced way of life under Nārada's direction.

Cling. To *mahā-mantra*. Otherwise, good-bye.

Then you'll admit into this narrative, a catalogue of airline tickets, phone calls, new ideas?

I can restrain some of it.

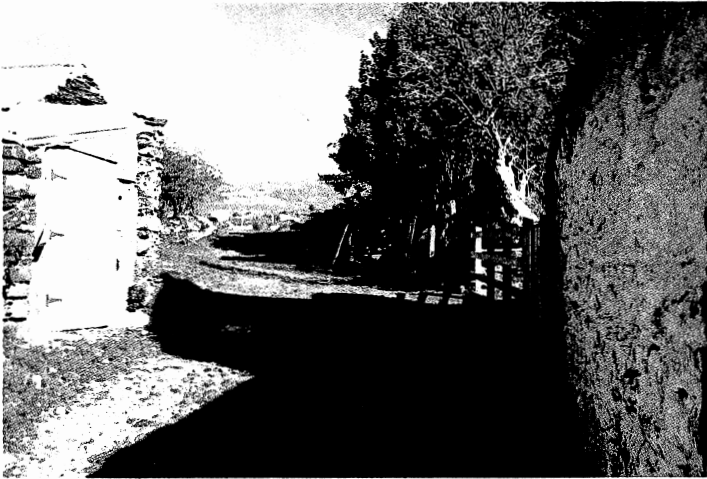
Because . . . what is it you would say instead?

That's it. There may be some careful digging I could do like a gold prospector, in the modes you only find when you go alone like this. I am alone, the days are free to follow, free to create, but there are so few of them left.

Śrīla Prabhupāda would say if I am here for only a few days (as on his visit to Detroit) and staying as a guest in an apartment, why should I get all involved in decorating my apartment? I will have to leave.

Yet on another occasion he advised devotees to beautify the 26 Second Avenue temple, even though they would soon move up the block to a new location. We should always beautify Kṛṣṇa and decorate Him, serve Him, praise Him to our best ability—even though we soon have to leave.

Hiranyakaśipu, Hiroshima, Geronamo. Here you go, bang . . . The stuff. M. is down there working to organize the van for travel. The sunshine is out and the van is covered with wetness from morning's overnight cold dew. The grass too. You walked and spoke a letter to your friends and to the Creator.



The Creator:

There are big and little ones. We create from borrowed ingredients. Create music, Shostakovich, Prokofiev . . . we use tunes and runes and gobble-dee-gook. We use stone and cement and iron ore. We make up plutonium bomb, cobalt bomb, hydrogen bomb, neutron bomb. We little creators.

They argue against His existence. Say we don't need a God. College atheists write "Fuck you" as part of their rebellion. Atheists tell them, "God is responsible for the Jews killed." I subscribed to the

Free Thinker and never knew a learned devotee then.

God is old-fashioned, they say. He's for fuddy-duddies. But then there is God the axe. Coltrane's music. An Eastern mysticism. Learned theists I never met but still . . . Didn't know any Catholics worth their salt.

There are little creators, but also the big one. He is God. Well, who made Him? Jīva Gosvāmī says that unless you accept the inconceivable potency of God, you cannot even begin to discuss Him. Rest and pray to Him. Contact Him.

See His beauty and power. Each one of us is alone, so you can't ultimately listen to others. I mean you cannot accept a "second-hand God." Find Him, accept Him. The big creator who floats the planets just like cotton swabs. Who crashes the planes?

Lord Brahmā is an intermediate one. There's a first creation, a second creation . . . so I say seek the Lord, the creator, and love Him. Love is a cheap word. Take *prema*, *gopīs*, books about that, *rasika* love. He's the creator, including the creator of everything and *rasa-rāja*. I love and want to pray to Kṛṣṇa. Please save us at death.

SONG

Water streaked all over the window.
Is it only in the books?
The *śāstra* I mean. You can
take from it. For example, that
painting by Parikṣit dāsa of Nārada

speaking to Yudhiṣṭhira and
 Nārada gestures
 toward Śrī Kṛṣṇa who is listening
 to them. You can keep it.
 You can grin and growl.
 You can spittle and foam—
pa-var-ga—foam
 at the mouth from labor
 and frustration, fear and finally *ma*,
mṛtyu, death.

You can live with the scriptures.
 Not just place marks in the volume.
 Heavens. A cold hand can be warmed
 in hot water. A bad spirit can
 be rectified and we can discover
 that he's pure
 underneath that covering.
 Is your question answered?

Is it only in the books?
 The body is a covering. The
 nails and flesh and everything—look
 down at it. It seems far away,
 a distance from my eyes to the
 fingertips. Meditate. Examine.
 But you feel for it, this body and
 her and his body, how they look.
 Everything is due to your being
 a neophyte.

Okay, let's take it from the top, a-
 one and a-two . . .

Bee dee bee dee barooper
 dee. Ma mee ma mee
 ba doody wee . . .
 He's playing his plastic sax
 and the sunshine is lasting and
 generous for October. When have we
 ever seen such long lovely days?

Is he crazy, a cynic?
 No it just looks like that. You
 will have to leave. The airplane
 is ready and car too. There may
 be a crash. That's when your
 attachment to Kṛṣṇa will be tested.
 I assume you have done what you could.
 Leave this books too on the pile—
 for reading not burning.
 For the people who come.
 Your service gift to them before you
 go. Right now you are working
 for Kṛṣṇa. Gather the quotes,
 tell the truth. Hope they understand
 even though it's imperfect it's meant to
 tell a true story that is valuable.

I couldn't say it. Why not? Too
 sentimental? I liked the earth,
 the retreats, the mornings especially but
 they all had to go and I didn't want to
 leave it or say This is the last
 bag, the last pen, etc.
 Besides, I don't know how much

more time I have. Love story.
Free Kṛṣṇa conscious people and
hope for *bhāgavata-dharma* world.

Fanning the audience. Forgetting the flame.

Now that you said future-talk (future-shock) is permissible, here goes . . .

Our guide is learned when we get to Māyāpur. Wanna imagine what it will be like? Headache-threat and feet hurt and they got buses and special arrangements. Drink a dob at this hour? My head filled with notions and who can act as he really is? You couldn't do that. So you adjust and say let me be like this, a person from America who has become a devotee, awarded *sannyāsa*, and now fake teeth and eyeglasses and shrunk-up compared to that youth in '73 with an almost-bright violet covered *daṇḍa* bearing it across the Ganges in a boat to come into the presence of his spiritual master who was genuinely glad to see him.

I'll think of that and maybe mention it. Preserve your energies. Play the leader, the guru, that is inevitable. In itself it is not a shame or a lie. You can do it humbly and give out knowledge.

The guide will be doing that. You can ask him questions, "Where are Śrinivāsa Ṭhākura's footprints? When did Vidyāpati live? How is it Lord Caitanya knew of him if Kṛṣṇa consciousness only began in *mādhurya* with Mādhavendra Purī?" These are questions you should know, that you did know but forgot.

And there will be a room. Before that, today . . . and now, a cold left hand. A soul in the heart.

"You've got the *dāl* in a different pot?"

Now . . . it is safe and secure here and that's where we want to come back. I do love these retreats. (Ah, he's found me out, but he looks kindly, kind eye—but after all, I suspect he is a politician and suspect that he suspects me of malingering and therefore not like him. So much mistrust covered over with "Vaiṣṇava etiquette.")

"Oh, where is the mango tree that grew suddenly? Where is the *nīm* tree that disappeared? Could I really expect to get to Ekacakra?"

If you go to a holy place you don't feel something. At least I'll have my note pads—twelve yellow Ecology legal pads produced by Riverside Paper Company. Śrīla Prabhupāda said paper (from cut down trees) may be used to print ISKCON books. Otherwise, cutting trees is a bad sin.

So I like these places. I'll come back here as long as I live. I thought it out whether it's responsible. I love it. It is okay because I read and prepare seminars and prepare myself to meet people.

Someone who reads this

and I myself ask

could he speak more from the heart?

Oh! He'd have to start with that.

Does British Airways have a flight from Barbados direct to London? Please describe to me what the connection is like. How long the layover and all that?

You see, my heart is worried about pain behind the eye. I may learn in future months how to prevent pain or to tolerate it better.

This prevents you from saying? The Kṛṣṇa conscious man in me is okay but his neck hurts in the back. No, not *his* neck, it's the body's neck. That's right, and the body's tongue wants more sweets (he is listening to hear what's up, any fudge in the oven? Any chance—slim chance—of more *halavā*? It's not good for your health).

I'm explaining why he can't speak from the heart like a mango of Kṛṣṇa consciousness direct or a "golden volcano of love." These thoughts running through me now and in Māyāpur. The best is to write on those note pads then and now also.

"We Have to Leave Soon" is a fit title to express the thought of a diminutive fellow who admits to pains, envies, dislike of brothers, distrusts, and protective secrecy—because "those guys" I know cannot appreciate my actual love, which resides in staying here in the remote rural area. And from here you will leave. We have been producing various emotions and I am writing of them in the last four days, *The Story of a Retreat*.

An advance. A stall in heavy traffic expected over two and a half months from now when you arrive at JFK after Christmas. Mind jumps to that and next to the eye doctor in maybe February when you look at the big knot in his necktie while he

stands very close to you and for \$150, replaces glasses and says (Pittsburgh Steelers football helmet on his shelf)—“Mr. Guarino, your eyes are not bad. It’s up to you whether to replace your glasses. I advise you to keep living and drop in here at least every other year. Have a good day. Sure is cold.” And cheerful receptionist ladies. Magazines flip-flop in waiting room . . . emerge and someone drives you back to sad Gītā-nāgarī.

Ah, sad pole with farm sign.

Is it standing still? Oh how

proudly we saw at the twilight’s last . . .

So you see, the mind, left to itself, not chained with chains in backyard like a dog, does fly like the very timid ducks on Sheen River (and well they might, probably they are survivors of gun blasts or know in their genes that men with sticks may shoot shotguns)—the mind does fly horizontal into the future or just as easily goes backward into the past and worries all the time, imagining, rattled, illnesses, is guided by *siddhānta*, thank God, to know what is truth and what is illusion.

All is *not* illusion because all comes from God, but it is all temporary in this world, *asat*, *acit*, *nirānanda*, not happy, not enlightened. I’m sorry if writing too fast like this may cause you a start-of-headache. I’ll stop here.

Hare Kṛṣṇa. Glory shakes. I believe. I scare off atheists within and wait for the future unknown wearing a soft scarf and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa *not* entirely mechanical.

EVENING POEM BEFORE THE MOON AND STARS COME OUT

I'm physically tired and mentally not so encouraged. Can it be worth my while to add something to Chapter Three? Wait until the morning better. Spend this warm October night chanting an "extra" *japa* round.

You have permitted yourself to look into the future. Big deal. You have picked out *Kṛṣṇa* book tapes you'd like to hear, Vṛndāvana and Mathurā. You keep forgetting the next thing. I thought a next chapter could be "Your Duty to Your Spiritual Master." Shall I spend it here?

It goes like this: after all this freedom, you have to ask yourself how you are pleasing your guru. Not that simple. I could review WS of last three weeks. But as I said, I am tired tonight. I hope, and I pin so much effort onto this—to write what will interest me later. I calculate consciously and unconsciously at every step: will this look good? Read lively and be deep *and of course, will it be sufficiently Kṛṣṇa conscious?*

And I fight to get rid of that
obsession. Just let go.
Just cruise like water down the
Sheen River.



In the interview tonight he asked me
what Bhavānanda was like in 1970
in Boston. I said charismatic, flamboyant,
I liked him, he wore a light brown wool
cādar, wrapped loosely and sang with
us in that park near Harvard Square.
He was the interior decorator of the
temple—blue stripe, purple stripe,
yellow stripe . . .
wearing an old *dhotī*, standing on ladder,
painting and talking . . .

Played Nṛsiṃhadeva in
a Sunday drama skit, roared so loud
I thought, "What about your throat?"

I couldn't remember how
 he and Pallikā left
 Boston and he was then T.P. in Brooklyn
 but he out-classed us, his loving,
 spontaneous mood livened up New
 Yorkers and was a great time for
 ISKCON New York, they said, those
 who joined then, Harikeśa,
 Draviḍa, Kuṇḍali, Bhūtādi, tons
 of good devotees who are
 still serving Kṛṣṇa.

What's this? I thought you were tired.
 Yeah I'm just talking.
 What about that sought-for quality
 of what you'd like to read later?
 I don't know. You talk and listen.
 It's the milk fast month. The moon
 is small. Just a few more days
 and then we'll drive away from here.
 I'm still trying to figure out how to
 write in India. It's the same
 question—will you like what you
 write? When I get too hung up
 then I just do Writing Sessions and
 pretty much forget that.
 That may be the way to go in
 Māyāpur. Just write like playing a
 guitar fast and slow for Kṛṣṇa,
 to get it out of your system,
 to love,
 to find Māyāpur and underneath it all,

they (Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa) will know even if no one else does.

That may be the way to go.

Or else a timed book:

"My days in Māyāpur, as told to the self in spare time, a book of twenty-eight pre-planned days."

Chapter Four

There's No Need to Speak of Anything but Kṛṣṇa

"Any literature or narration in which the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Uttama-śloka, is described and glorified is certainly great, pure, glorious and all-good" (*Bhāg.* 8.1.32).

There is a story. Once upon a time, a retreat was held without overt permission, but with the blessings of the *ācāryas* as far as I could ascertain. Farsighted, ankle-braced, it's the same person telling his story. He's not so bad off.

Lord Kṛṣṇa is eternally in the sky, in the *para-vyoma* sky of pencil-light shafts, *brahmajyoti*, within the infinite globes each one as Viṣṇu and in Goloka and in Svetadvīpa therein. We can give you His address, Goloka Vṛndāvana, but one can't go there until he's free of all material misconceptions *and* has attained purest *prema* for Lord Kṛṣṇa in His original form. You need the blessings of a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa. So much is required. It is very

rare that one qualifies. Our spiritual master is qualified.

What more need be said?

Why all these words?

It is I who need them. Who claims a kind of *bhajana* in writing practice.

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare. Wherever you are, spirit soul, say these names out of your need. Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. In this age of Kali, there is no other way for God realization except the chanting of the holy names.

One writes to convey some of this, to one's neighbors and to one's self. The direct method approach. If you can keep up their interest.

Who are you? Who am I? Why do the three-fold miseries disturb me? I don't want them. Is there a way to be free of them? Please, Sir, please instruct me. My neighbor-men call me *paṇḍita* and I accept the title. But I am such a *paṇḍita* that I don't even know who I am: *ke ami*? I was born low and my association with Muslims has made me an outcaste. I speak to You from a pit of material misfortune. Please help me.

Sanātana Gosvāmī (also known as Dabira Khāsa) introduced himself to Lord Caitanya and asked to be accepted as His disciple for receiving transcendental knowledge.

The Lord heard these words as heart-breakingly humble and He was pleased to instruct Sanātana as a worthy recipient of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Remember it? Remember typing and learning it in 1967? Remember now?

Your own death a topic as you walk on the grass? Such a sunny mild day it was yesterday. You were able to wander and sit on a rock in pastureland, in hill, valley. And hear Lord Kṛṣṇa speak in the select words of *Gītopaniṣad*. Please make more of this fortune. Ask your Friend, the Lord, to take you back to Him. You have been away a long time, wandering birth after birth in different species of life. The material energy doesn't spare you once you get caught up in the chain of birth and death. You get repeatedly crushed by the wheel of time and there's no escape.

But there is escape for one who gets the combined mercy of guru and Kṛṣṇa. They plant the seed of *bhakti* in his heart, relevant transcendental instructions, and His original Kṛṣṇa conscious nature awakens. Yes, I am pure spirit soul; I am not meant for this suffering. I am not this body; I am pure spirit soul, eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa. My nature is blissful, one in quality with the supreme Self. I can realize my nature (*kṛṣṇa dāsa*, *kṛṣṇera nitya-dāsa*) by hearing about Kṛṣṇa from His pure devotee who gives us the *sāstra* in realized form and by serving him, starting with the service of the tongue, vibrating Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, and tasting *kṛṣṇa-prasādam*

...

There is no need to speak of anything but Kṛṣṇa. No need to go anywhere except on the order of Kṛṣṇa. No need to trust anyone except in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Not yet can I do it so purely and continually, the string of *śloka*s and *śloka* paraphrases must stop sooner or later. I cry out, "Wait! Stop! Hear about my fatigue, my hunger, my thirst, the noises I am subject to. Hear the thoughts, doubts and pains."

Does anyone know a good chiropractor? Any teacher of pain prevention or pain management? Will there be a class today? A walk today? Is there hot water in the pipes? Do we have enough firewood to last us through today, the 12th, the 13th, the 14th, and the 15th? This story, is it all right to continue it? Do you have a mode of operation?

I mean
freer

the time has hit. The suburbs are dark. The electric heater hums. Your shins are pressed against this little table. Your eyes, the running on of the mechanism known as inter-knit body-mind-soul ... is like?

The author possessed of demons, mad wit, leads others like the blind leads the blind into the ditch. Stone boats. Grabbing on to the tail of a swimming dog in hopes he can carry you across the ocean.

That time came, I beseech
whether a fool
can write and justify the use of paper
and pen and people (his own times)
you know he says

he has to do it, like *vāco vegam*
 nature's urge you can't refuse.
 Then purify the action and
 it becomes Kṛṣṇa conscious
tat viplavo, all acts can
 become *hari-kīrtana* even
 hoarse voices
 singing.

It's the *kīrtana* of the lost souls, immovable
 living entities. The fly who has just arrived. An
 attempt to express some of it in the tradition of
 "modern" consciousness. Damned speak all over
 the world, pour out reams of discussion in law
 courts, opinions, proclamations, and orders backed
 up by rifles and money butt
 cigars and cigarettes and pretty girls,
 nation's lobbyist waiting in the
 halls of Big Men who rule,
 handled like puppets of *māyā*.
 See the world through the scripture.

Ah, ah. I promise to write. Now it is too late to
 stop. You mean, he said he finds joy in it?

We laugh at the clown in the moving spotlight.
 Sad smile. He tries to sweep up the spotlight. The
 man operating that spotlight should get credit for
 his comedy routine. He has to know exactly when
 to move it so that Emmet Kelly, the clown with the
 sad face, will make us . . . laugh.

Smile though your heart is breaking,
 smile what's the use of crying,

you'll come through if you
just smile . . .

Now the well-known . . . well-known for their illusions and gang wars. To have wandered into this sector is very dangerous, against your good interest. You say, "I know I have come here taking risks in order to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness." That better be the reason. Ordinary persons, even priests get mugged in the streets. Hurry home. Claim your protective gear.

In Boston, in Copley Square, on New Year's Eve, the people gather so crowded it becomes a concern of police to exert traffic control and devotees come into this scene with drums and *karatālas* in the cold. Last year was heavy snow and it made it more difficult. Ice sculptures draw their attraction, and of course everyone is under the influence of liquor. So they chant and drunken souls join. Will you also join them this year? If not, why not?

I have to attend to an upper limb. I have to get my beauty rest. I left a thought unattended. Please excuse me. My schedule is to go to bed by 8 at the latest. I will be in the basement under a comforter and the alarm clock will go off precisely when they blow their horns for Happy New Year, people running by on Commonwealth Avenue. I didn't want to be there, preferred to be in the woods at Gītā-nāgarī in the cabin at midnight when all you hear is maybe a shotgun. Then quiet. Cold and quiet and

the creatures, maybe mice and snakes in the attic. The end of the year. You can write a poem or little wooden ode for New Year's Day, or as you dress and go walk to the temple of Rādhā-Dāmodara. How long can They endure?

Oh well, I've made my gesture.

You are living in the future. And I don't blame you. Would you like to accompany me now next door where a big sheet of paper awaits a shift in your attention? Surely there is an interesting word, maybe "hot water bottle," you could employ to see how it connects in the Lord's field of *sarvaṁ klav idam brahma*.

Brahman:

It reminds you of the name Brahmānanda which Prabhupāda gave to his disciple. That was in the early days and now he has become so fat. I heard he said something against me. Still, this is something to attend to before you leave this world. There may be rumors and who knows? But he too has suffered. He was rejected. Give him a break. He was the first ISKCON temple president. He is dear to the Swami.

Brahman means that all is one, but you have to make distinctions. For example, there are three Brahman: there is the person *brāhmaṇa*, there is the spirit known as Brahman, and then there's Lord Brahmā.

The soul is also *brahma*, and the body and the *jīva* too. God too. He is *param-brahma*.

Are mice *brahma*? Yes, he is a soul at heart—see it. Don't be afraid.

What about Mickey Mouse? Well, everyone is *brahma*. And then there's *brahma* cow, *brahma* bear, brahmin spaghetti, a *brāhmaṇa* judge. Scholars pronounce it "brachman." Remember Donna Wulff at Brown University? She said it like that. She wrote it on the chalkboard for her students. Me and my friend were there to give a lecture and afterwards we laughed by the car as Donna Wulff came by. We were laughing and happy to preach. Do you preach Brahman today? We knew Him as pure *param-brahma*.

Bra-man, brayman Brag man, be-bop, all is spirit but you got to *act* in *brāhmaṇa* activities, not just say, "All is *brāhmaṇa*."

Bray, donkey, I am one in spirit.

THE BOSTON BRAHMINS

The ant is Brahman, the dog is Brahman,
the dog-eater is Brahman,
the *Bhagavad-gītā*

is teaching Brahman. Stiff neck
and jaw and

lower back and pencil in cold room,
be grateful.

Is everything Brahman? Allen Ginsberg
and Kerouac? John Updike? President
Eisenhower? A cold day in Boston?

Sarvaṁ klav idam brahma?

But you got to distinguish.
 Cold breeze. *Śāstra*. Banish doubts.
 I could tell him the whole history of
 Boston temple how one day
 I found three hundred
 dollars in an envelope on
 Prabhupāda's *vyāsāsana* just
 when we needed it. We thought it
 was Steve Leonard.
 I told how thugs invaded.
 I told a lot, tape after tape.

Kṛṣṇa's *param-brahma*—supreme spirit
 His body is *sac-cit-ānanda*. In *Kṛṣṇa* book
 this is all told. You *will* hear more
 won't you?

Param-brahma defeats the
 impersonalists' notion. That calamity
 that relegates us all to be cold and void
 bluffing "I am God" even as
 we shiver goose pimples and want
 to be home in bed but we go to work
 day and night shift for little profit,
 even the rich man on Beacon Hill
 has to die
 despite "I am Brahman."
 Boston *brāhmaṇas* put that in
 your pipe and smoke it.
 Dastard acts of South Boston *brāhmaṇas*,
 black *brāhmaṇas*, Boston Bruins . . .

This is my own version. But chichory is
 from someone else's poem.
 You stick to gorse, yellow gummy plant.
 They are burning gorse big white clouds
 of smoke on the hill. You sat far enough
 from it and read four verses from treasure
 of *Bhagavad-gītā*.

Keep yourself open and pure.
 My brother went into Russia at risk even
 when he heard the government
 was going to
 arrest groups including
 Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees.
 But what about Glasnost and liberalism?
 Would you have risked your neck?
 What are you doing to serve Prabhupāda?
 This "*brāhmaṇa*" poem? Prabhupāda says
 their chanting of "Brahman Brahman"
 gets tedious
 and they turn to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*
 although they have
 no access to that personalist literature.

They make impersonalist interpretation.
 Ah, forget them. Praise Lord Kṛṣṇa,
 I will read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* now. I
 will read of Gajendra and Viṣṇu.
 I will relate to it . . . I bow down
 to God and guru.
 Know my place.

This poem for you this morning.
 Please accept it. The supreme is
 the Personality of Godhead and we are His
 parts and parcels. Let us give
 Him all our works.
 (Even the jerks can be saved by
 lecture, *kīrtan*,^a and if they accept
 a little *prasāda*. Let's deliver it!)

If there's no need to write of anything but Kṛṣṇa,
 then why do you write of lesser topics?

Well, you see, I have this body, this condition,
 and I am trying to uplift it. It is part of the greater
 topic, a lesser division. I could write of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*,
 glosses. But I have this other tale to tell you. You
 know all this, you are just trying to agitate me like
 a gremlin that you are. I am wedding myself to
 God. I am making the connection. This writing is
 not a bluff. It is helping me. It is also providing
 reading for folks.

As for *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, it is told that the Vaiṣṇava
sannyāsī knows the art of using material things in
 the service of the Lord. Do not be a Māyāvādī at
 anytime, Prabhupāda wrote to me. You can deal in
 real estate to buy the Mount Auburn Christian
 church and make it into the Dallas temple of Kāla-
 chandjī. You can also write in earnest the struggle
 to get yourself on the spiritual plane.

A poem sings. That's the difference.
 Oh you dull people you think
 devotees don't sing? Listen we go to

the *guru-pūjā* of Prabhupāda
 and what do you think we do?
 We sing. Oh but that's the same song
 every day and it is Authorized.
 Okay, maybe someday this one
 will be too.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has taught the art.
 Don't be like the person who pretends
 to be renounced but underneath
 the dry earth a river is running.
 That is Phalgu.
 This river is trickling on top.
 Yes I mean the Sheen and other rivers
 where ducks are waiting.
 The night will end soon.

We will go out and walk with
 Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.
 That is singing.
 This is singing the bushes are quiet
 the birds are singing but this here is
kīrtana for Hari, Gaurahari.
 The mothers call Him
 because He was golden
 and He cried until they chanted Hari.

This is singing the dark earth.
 This is the first time Kṛṣṇa consciousness
 came to Ireland.
 Unfortunately they had a house and land
 at Glenngariff

and now the house is burned down
and we don't own the land.

Those were mistakes,
false starts you could say.
But Kṛṣṇa consciousness is
strongly implanted.

My purpose is to tell what we did here.
BP cooked valiantly, graciously every day
very good *capātis*. He is simple and I have
to live up to the noble act he does.
If he is cooking for me I'd better be
doing something worthwhile.
And M. is making many phone calls
for which he has to drive out to Kenmare.
We are talking in the afternoon
about Prabhupāda. You may say
that's not much.
In the afternoon I pray with *Bhagavad-gītā*.
I am learning to do that
when I am away from here.

I really do want to come back here
listen I'll tell you my romance:
to come back here in winter privacy.
(I have read how Japanese monks
would get very close to their heater,
put their kimonos around it, sit in close
and all winter someone like Basho
might sit there and compose haikus
and read books.)
Well, the Kṛṣṇa conscious version of that

for the delightful month of December
 I will do a marathon
 reading throughout the day and blissfully
 encounter Lord Caitanya in *TLC*
 and Lord Kṛṣṇa in *Kṛṣṇa* book
 and Rādhā and other pure devotees
 in *NOD* and I'll have a great time
 come out of it enlightened
 cold it will be but
 never mind we have a range
 that burns wood
 you could put a slice of bread on top of it
 and have toast but mostly *capātis*
 and warm as toast write odes
 to Kṛṣṇa and your spiritual master,
 feel separation from him. Who knows?
 Maybe write lots of good stuff
 and come out of here eager
 to meet the devotees in Boston, New
 York,

 Gītā-nāgarī, Baltimore, Denver . . .
 You won't tell them where you were but
 they will see in your cheerful face you
 like Prabhupāda's books and can tell them
 honestly
 to read is important.
 That's my dream for a good winter month.

Now I better end this and go on
 right here and now
 chant a nonmechanical round—
 you can try!

Go to the heart, your poor *gāyatrī*,
 then with the men read together,
 porridge, put on your coat get out there
 happy sad alone—not sad at all.
 But waiting, waiting for the
 “Letter from a *Sannyāsī*”
 which He will allow me today
 starting at the bridge.

Chapter Five Trying to Concentrate on a Rare Sunny Day

Ah, permissive straits. We are going to leave
 here three days from now. Well, so be it, blue ink.
 You have all your items lined up. Dive as deep as
 you can into flowing concentration.

That bluish boy
 that one Supreme Person,
 may He always be the object
 of my loving meditation.
 That grave and friendly *sannyāsī*
 guru from Inja, I mean
 the Swami, may he always
 be my leader and spiritual
 father.
 May I hold in mind the ideal
 of a disciple I want to be and
 prosecute Kṛṣṇa consciousness
 in sandman time . . .
 (Whaddya mean by that?)
 I mean
 when singing a ditty

gaily like
 a man in the shower let
 it be allowed
 I love the life of
 Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
 We all do.

So, I was saying, we have just held a five-minute conference on which medicines to carry to India. Only the white powder you take half an hour before eating. M. has his work in the van as usual—everything awry until the last minute. He might object to my saying so.

We have our work cut out for us. The plane terminal in Rome will not be, I think, as plush and calm as the Paris airport. It will be smaller and noisier and more crowded, but the human contact will not be unpleasant and you can relax being in a *dhoti*. Farewell, another one off to India . . .

I said he is whistling and the other is banging pots so you better put on a tape.

Vande 'ham śrī-guroḥ śrī-yuta-pada-kamalaṁ śrī-gurūn vaiṣṇavāṁś ca.

The clatter, the upstart. "I am calm, I am peaceful," chanting that and Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra within, *saha-gaṇa-raghunāthānvitāṁ taṁ sa-jīvam*, as you go, as you go.

Permit me to let you pass. All visitors, all desks, fly over sky in plane and in mind the cabin can explode. You are nervous

you bide your time, hear a tape, eat a biscuit or rather, you don't eat in flight, "Well being in flight." That's British Airways.

Drive six hours on bumpy roads to ferry, everything almost has to happen just right or you'll never make it looking like a damaged but—no, say a slightly faded lily of saffron. All the way he came to be with you, to sit and talk *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*

and pretend he knows what's happening when you go on *parikrama* of Navadvīpa, how it's good for you,

jeez you are getting critical and shifting into the travel gear mode . . .

I saw ducks and wrote a letter to them,
and one to birch trees of horizontal
white bark stripes and one to
a gray fox

running across your
scared-amazed vision!

Yes, and pursued hopes on riding and writing. Took out two folders and labeled them for ideas for "Travel Diary" (here we go over the road and I'm back of the van saluting God and not coffins, *namaste gaura-vāṇī*,—yeah, the travel tale, we hope St. Christopher medal will work and carry us and here's the story of what happens, delays and activities). Another folder is "For Writing in India." (My plan is to just do Writing Sessions, no book, but print it all in nice print, for me to read later, if I want to, if I get time.)



I'm showing you we haven't yet entirely left the retreat. The cool weather and lovely blue skies—so unusual for Ireland. Like a signal, "This won't last." "Better enjoy it while you can."

With that in mind, how rare these days are. I have tape recorded the same prayer routine again and again out in the backyard, just to savor and cling to later in a shut-in Baltimore room, zero degrees outside . . . or who knows where, tune in, the *Bhagavad-gītā* can travel anywhere.

I am not attached,
 but saying good-bye to
 this place with the long Celtic name
 and plan to return in secret
 in rented car
bhakti-śaktikam . . .
pañca . . . kṛṣṇam . . . bhakta-rūpa . . .

This much I know: we won't give up our connection. No Turkish bath, no wrath, no worker in this life like a slave for some *karmī* or wife and kids. Go ahead, declare it. I am free, liberated from much of what binds a human being. My writing is proclaiming that freedom and happiness in simple walk

limited reading stint—Gajendra's prayers,
the body dwindles,
the match goes out . . .

Ah, I want . . .

jayato . . . mama mander mati . . .

I said

I will be a devotee always in this life, but next life we are sent wherever the authority decides based on the input we give in our karmic whole record and a special emphasis on our final grade on death-exam. Did he think of the Lord?

Śrīla Prabhupāda says he goes, he goes to Kṛṣṇa at the end of this life and *that* is the difference in the death of a devotee and the death of a nondevotee.

Pray let me remember You
let me practice now.

Write a book to help others and don't waste your time in damaging sense gratification.

You accumulate baggage and you'll have to get rid of it later. Fear no one, bold prayer-maker
bows down

but even bolder takes on work of his guru to preach and doesn't regard 55 as very old for that

and dares to tell people Kṛṣṇa is God and even nondevotees may be met for this purpose

śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu nityānanda.

Please, Satsvarūpa, take a cluster and shift your center to reality of your self, a speck at His lotus feet.

A speck shining of spirit soul
throwing off curtain of dust
praying mantras that liberate
the servant of the servant
bhaja śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya
he said it.

Soul:

Be a devotee. That's what it takes to be a soul. His body is "soul" spiritual. I've written before on the word "soul," so I don't want to repeat phrases like "soul food." The soul does not undergo birth and death.

In Christian theology they could draw charts horizontally and vertically showing the relationship of God and the soul.

The soul is always new and fresh. He sees Kṛṣṇa, who's always new. The soul also tolerates, is happy in service, and is not the pain-body. He doesn't die. He accepts the teachings of the *Vedas* and he sees new lights.

He's a smiley face, I am. Not the body. The same truths, so don't crave novelty just for it's own sake.

The soul is subordinate. Therefore God protects him. He gives up claiming and yet the soul wants freedom! Does he give up William Carlos

Williams reading? Well, I just read to preach better. He gives up hamburgers, dreams of sex which are deep-rooted. God and guru and the mission are all over the subordinate soul. Now why I don't want to follow certain persons who claim to be authorities, certain highly positioned persons, why I tell them bug off, that's a different thing. You may still be subordinate in any case.

Mantra, mantra, sing it—free of mundane taint.

The soul travels in the sky very fast. Not like in a Renault van, although the soul can also be in a body and bounce along the *autostrade*, and so on.

In conclusion, I desire faith. God save me!

In India, will there be
 a one-man show?
 What? No, hundreds of millions
 of people and hogs and insects . . .
 I mean will *you* think you
 are alone unique writing quickly?

Oh, we'll see when we get
 there. I expect I will do the
 same thing as I do it but it
 is warmer, excited by the
 foreign element you try to
 escape the demands of many
 ISKCON brethren and Indians all
 like one who ask you something and
 you religiously write what he said
 to you when you get a spare
 moment in your notebook
 so basically it may be the same
 but I await and hope to be up to—
 the challenge of writing quickly
 that fabulous
 world. The inner world of
 St. Francis of Italy
 or let's say Raghunātha Gosvāmī—
 I don't know what the hell I
 mean when I write so quickly it
 comes out different than who I am
 if I want to consider it
 accurately
 and make a public relations
 presentation of

Satsvarūpa as faithful disciple
with quirks,
"off-beat honesty,"
who reads only his
 spiritual master's books
I don't know why . . .

Pray, pray, praise and petition
to Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda last
days of retreat—not for "It"
to happen but just because
I want loving spiritual channel
and no reward of triumph
enjoyment, ecstasy or false tears.
Hare Rāma. See me plain, Lord,
at Swami's feet and beck and call.
Let me have the meal of chanting,
the constant breath of it and not
interrupted.
I can chant Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare.

Let's go back to the desk. Your work is not much different from BP kneading and pounding the dough on a borrowed table, muscular effort to sock and knead and punch to the right consistency, all the while thinking it is service to God by connecting it to his servant-devotee. Only difference is mine is mental and I need silence. I insist on it so I can think. Therefore, I play Śrīla Prabhupāda singing with harmonium to drown out other sounds. My work is not much different from M. preparing the van and even my betters the active swamis and book distributors. Well at least we are in the same movement. We can read about it in their newsletters and in my books. *Govinda jaya jaya*.

Yes, we are back to our same little desk. The chapter title? Ah yes, a good question. I could look back over the pages . . . one theme is fighting for concentration in a world which doesn't permit it much. Also a theme is I forget . . . And we are going to travel and cannot keep staying here in my mind, but I do and tell you . . . It's communication.

Slipping, free-write. How I wrote while Śrīla Prabhupāda sang as background.

Prayer. Your prayer to always be a devotee. Take your choice and give a title to what you already just did. I hoped it would be new, would tell how to stay here now for this one day of blessed peace and rest on a patch of land off the road, now Kenmare, but it has a long name I haven't mastered the spelling of.

Dennis in his tractor.

India, me, will you be able to keep going and for how long and what is the worth and position of what you write?

Throw off debris
that clings to soul.

Be a *ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam* man.

She said "Could you explain to me how you fulfill verses two and six of *Gurv-āṣṭakam* in your own person? This is my doubt."

I replied, verse two says the guru feels ecstasy, hairs on end when he chants in *kīrtana*.

"Yes, exactly."

Well that doesn't seem so hard.

I have sometimes felt a follicle tingle, maybe in the bathroom when it's cold. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Uh . . . it just doesn't seem so hard. Besides, if I don't fulfill two and six (or even five) I mean, how many do I have to fulfill and how much and how are you going to examine me?

"We could take you to a doctor.

Weigh you on a scale. Or can't you just be honest? I thought you wanted to be honest."

Okay—I am not feeling hairs on end and crying in *kīrtana*. I don't make plans to assist the *gopīs* in the groves

of Vṛndāvana. In fact I deliberately don't do that.

"I thought so."

Okay. When is lunch?

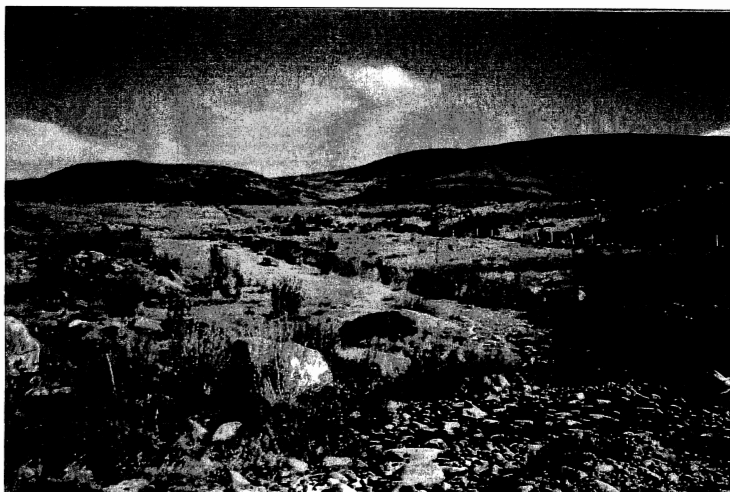
"It's at 1 o'clock as you requested.

Shall I do your laundry? Everything is the same between us but at least I know now you are not a real guru as Prabhupāda is."
(*exit all*)

Trying to concentrate: —the future creeps in while Prabhupāda sings, I write (drowning out all else)—in that state what you found going through your mind.

Oh, come on. Make the title concise. Boil it down. You compare yourself to the cook. So boil it down. A boiled down sweet. A dough of *capātīs* to offer to the Lord and guru. A session in Ireland on a rare sunny day.

Now the hail is browning. You admit you do see signs of autumn. The landlord's car engine is idling, the black and white mongrel collie dog suddenly breathing, panting behind me with a goolish grin and ragged hairs, expects me to do something for him, but I leave him outdoors. His master has a strange eye. When I see him, it reminds me of what it must take for him to be a killer of sheep. You must be habituated to be a covered soul.



The hill is browned. All arrangements under way. Tip-oh-rari—I will chant. He will bang by accident a metal bowl sounding like a bell in monastery. Now they may judge me as an idle fellow and I can't prevent that. I've got a title at least to Chapter Five and sufficient amount of words. We are in the home stretch.

Govinda jaya jaya.

Night Notes

I have not looked at any newspapers in weeks or heard anything on the radio or television. Even the newspapers that I sometimes see on the floor don't attract me enough to look at them. This evening after I did an interview with Madhu, reminiscing on Prabhupāda's letters and some trouble that happened in 1970, Madhu told me some unfortunate

world news. A cult committed group suicide of its members in Canada and also in Switzerland within the last two weeks. Hearing this arouses the old fear in me that the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement will get a backlash of anti-cult propaganda. My mind leaped ahead to some imagined scenario of ourselves and our devotee dress in public, perhaps stopped at some international border and being looked at suspiciously.

When you're in a retreat you forget about the world and you really lose touch with it. Then you have to re-enter it at some point and you realize that it was a kind of a make-believe world you were living in where there were no troubles and no anti-cult movement, no bad news and so on. You feel a kind of loss as if a bubble has been popped—he idyllic morning walks, talking to the birds, seeing Kṛṣṇa everywhere, peace and prayer . . . This doesn't mean that what you gained in a prayer retreat has to all come crashing down as soon as you get in touch with the "real world" again. Should have gained some strong convictions about inner life and be able to take it with you wherever you go. But the fact is, I wasn't worrying, and now that I've heard this news, I'm worrying . . . what will happen? What will they think of us? Will there be some reaction? I feel protective not only for my own skin but for the members of our movement. Even if we can't make great, great gains of influence in the world, at least we are establishing ourselves gradually—fears of being thrown back

into some reactionary state of the public suspecting us as crazies, is a cause for worry.

Sunset cows apparently undisturbed
on the narrow downhill road,
fat sides, chewing while the
sun goes down, light in
puddles. Apparently fat and
peaceful. The world is like
that and the tiny spider thing hurriedly
moves left to right on this page.
I've heard some disturbing news but it's
still far away.
My head aches somewhat and I think
I'll take rest early tonight. Don't
want to miss the early addition when—

Look at that sun. Blazing you
can't stare at it, just a little bit of
space between it and the hilltop then
it will appear to set. It's Kṛṣṇa's
material energy.

Just trust in Him, don't be
envious of Him, He's giving
knowledge and realization by which
you'll be free of all misery.

"Do not be afraid."

Nārāyaṇa-pārāyaṇas are never
afraid; they have grasped the
reality of His lotus feet.

In their pure minds
God appears and gives all solace.
So I too should not worry.

Chapter Six

I Need to Preach

"Wherever a speaker holds discourses from these books and an audience hears him, this will create a good and auspicious situation. Therefore the preaching of Kṛṣṇa consciousness must be done very carefully by the members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, especially the *sannyāsīs*" (*Bhāg.* 8.1.32, purport).

Editorial in *Cork Examiner*: Cults are dangerous. Ha. I dreamt of singing "Yuletide carols being sung by a choir of folks dressed up like Eskimos/everybody knows . . ." And another original line which I didn't have enough conviction to record because it wasn't directly Kṛṣṇa conscious—but now I wish I'd saved it because it might reveal something of my psyche about surrender to Kṛṣṇa and what I need to know.

You see we (me) are capable of only small increments of improvement (if at all), changes in character for the better, so that's a reason to seek help, to seek to improve oneself by waves—pulling oneself up by the bootstrap is it called?—to help yourself. Or the best way is the constant and continual of Kṛṣṇa's words and teachings and chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra . . . I understand that. So live a life . .

And work. Expose yourself even to the rude vibrations or direct threats of the nondevotees and their world (*māyā's* world) when you do it for Kṛṣṇa's purpose. That's the highest type of surrender and austerity. You have to be strong enough

to do it. Some practice *bhakti* in private. Sarasvatī's kids go to school and no one there even knows they are Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees, nor do their children wish to expose it. That's natural. But a swami who goes into Russia hearing that the government is cracking down on our movement, or a book distributor who goes every day to the airport or the parking lots, and various other confrontations and exposures—when done for the right cause and with the right attitude, make Lord Kṛṣṇa pleased with the devotee. He awards strength and devotion. He is especially inclined to sincere workers who want to tell others about Kṛṣṇa. "There is no servant more dear to me than he, nor will there ever be one more dear."

No way off that hook
you read the book
now distribute it too,
the knowledge.

"One cannot please Kṛṣṇa by sitting idly . . . " (One should not sit down to imitate Haridāsa Ṭhākura. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura condemned such imitation . . . "My dear mind, what kind of devotee are you?" Work as you must and do it for Kṛṣṇa.

I am not writing this down in self-accusation. I am encouraging you (believe it or not) to write, which is also a kind of action. In addition, my dear child, to this dancing and chanting, go and tell others about Kṛṣṇa. They may not be inclined to hear; it is a risk to go to them . . . "The organizer of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is teaching

everyone how to follow Lord Rāmacandra, how to follow Lord Kṛṣṇa and how to follow Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu . . . Our only concern is to spread interest in Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

Then why go on a retreat?

It's to become strong and sufficiently absorbed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness that when I do go to the temples—that sacred ground where devotees gather and where new interested people go to inquire—I can speak with conviction. They think, "This swami seems to be good and nice. I don't think he would hurt me. I like it when he speaks of service to Kṛṣṇa by chanting the holy names, hearing of Kṛṣṇa, and dedicating one's life. Maybe I should try it too."

The members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, especially the *sannyāsīs*, should preach. They take the risk. People don't want to hear it. The preachers try anyway and Kṛṣṇa is pleased with them and takes them back to Godhead after this life. What is life for, anyway?

It's good we are planning to leave here and go to the holy *dhāma* and also to the Western cities. God knows we are prone to stay alone and seek peace. but there is no peace in this world. The mind won't be peaceful nor the body. Even if you seem to find relative peace for yourself, it is not so noble to be peaceful while neglecting the fallen souls. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not a destructive cult. We don't kill our members. We seek the life of knowing God and serving Him—that's the constitutional nature of the living being. It's all false propaganda that

there is no God or that God belongs only to one sect or religion and not another. God consciousness can't be neglected by human society or they will get bad reactions. But God consciousness is a science that has to be properly learned, so it's important enough to get yourself trained and then train others.

"I can help," lean old horse
 eyes the swift river,
 now a new hitch in his lower back,
 knees quaver, go forward
 and swim at this stage of life?
 Well, he is eminently qualified to
 tell those who are interested
 in Prabhupāda
 stories of His Divine Grace to
 entertain us, deepen our culture,
 give us solidarity

against *māyā* and boredom and the feeling that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is old stuff and maybe we will give up following its principles. Quickens the circulation. Eyes bright, hoping to be part of the movement in a Centennial year or before or after that . . .

Yes, I can remind them, besides, I need to do it. It's good for me. You can't expect a huge turnout of worshippers and people all hungry for it. Tons of newcomers and governments fanning the fires of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That they do in their own way by nuclear stand-off and threat. Pakistan leader says if India dares to make war on them, there will be a nuclear holocaust. And U.S.A. and other biggies say no nuclear proliferation, please. Don't

make trouble. We've got enough already to blow up the world. A bomb of germs released from the Empire State Building in a paper bag that could kill . . . how many? Sex for all, condoms and meat-eating. Don't stop our right to enjoy our senses. The Catholic Pope is too conservative. I've seen all these new stories and they fan the fire or need for sanity in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Don't be disturbed or unwilling to go forward; it is never so easy. Even Christ was received well one week, riding on a donkey, his way paved with palm leaves, but the next week they tried to kill him.

You are up writing and that's your habit and it's good. Do you think you can give food for thought or *do* something on the page which can be an act in Kṛṣṇa consciousness?

Praise:

God is great. The devotee says it in public and he prays in private too. When he proclaims God's greatness, the Lord protects him.

This world is not a good place. Although it's not in vain that I speak. I am a kind of preacher by praising You in print. I know this flow can be used because it's Your energy and can be converted.

We may also praise Śrīla Prabhupāda as Hari-śauri did, and me, and Śruti-kīrti, his servants. Tell stories of His Divine Grace. Be honest. Praise him.

What can the *jīva* do? He can sing, he can distribute books, he can be a good example, he can pray to Kṛṣṇa, he can follow the rules and talk of God to whomever he meets.

Lord Caitanya praised Kṛṣṇa as Kṛṣṇa's pure devotee. He wanted us to preach *harināma* and praise Kṛṣṇa in that way—*saṅkīrtana*. I am praying to be able to work in the *saṅkīrtana* movement. Please help me to do so, O Lord Caitanya.

We preach in ISKCON, Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, *harer nāma*. We see people and give them information on God. "It's a good thing. Join us and support our movement." So we say and so I go to Māyāpur to live in ISKCON. Praise the Lord. Prabhupāda's place of worship.

If you want to praise you have to expose yourself to the indifferent public in a loud voice so that others may hear. The praises are good for all. Have faith in this process.

Going out from this retreat, this quiet place, where I have sought shelter, go out now. It has been good, I love Kṛṣṇa, I can tell others. I will hear Gajendra and praise the Lord as he did.

This is what came this morning, this sense of guilt over my being alone? This fear of going out in the world, but feeling, "Well, we must. We must combat the idea that we are a destructive cult. The members of this movement need to be seen as decent citizens who contribute to society and world peace and are striving along with other good people to change the world for the better." Everyone knows it's a losing struggle but we need to fight. We have law and order and police and laws to make the world at least less chaotic than was created by the lowest elements but within that

structure of striving for civilization and sanity, people are mostly using it for sense gratification "in peace." Within that world, the devotees make their appeal. People do seek a transcendental life, at least a few do, and this movement may appeal to them. One small member can speak on occasions, especially to those few who are already practicing, and give them further education and consolation.

It's not that "join" and everything goes smoothly for the rest of your life. You need to be enlivened. I'm trying to help with writings, with Kṛṣṇa conscious culture that comes from an honest person speaking.

You need a job, a source of income? Yes we ought to help each other with that. It's *varṇāśrama*. But here too I am praying with *Bhagavad-gītā* verses. I can remind us to know that Lord Kṛṣṇa is our friend and that we shouldn't see Śrīla Prabhupāda only as a statue. I can soften the institutional message, make it understandable and palatable. I can help you and your desire to gain access to Śrīla Prabhupāda. I can do some things and I will do them. One is to sing. Some people like it. It breaks up the fog and the remorse. Sometimes, even while actively living in the ISKCON temple, we feel that inner life is petrified.

I can help. I have no alternative but to use myself in this way. Dear ISKCON folks, let us all . . .

Let us be merciful, and folks dressed up like Eskimos, everybody knows, the tree and some tinsel don't make for Christmas spirit.

Ah, ah. I'm okay and want to help all I can.

The Kṛṣṇa conscious person,
 the devotee of many years
 survivor of original ISKCON,
 please stand up and defend the
 rights of this movement.
 Please tell happily your story
 of good conduct and safe passage.
 Imagine you are being asked to speak
 to a large audience who will judge you.
 What is the worst that could
 happen? Detained at a border
 you might get a headache.
 You can explain why you have
 shaved your head and the *tilaka*
 is ancient tradition of India.
 I'm in India you are not a
 strange cult, but even there . . .

Imagine you can be helpful. It is all right
 to

pray within—
 You must do that
 even while you ride in a van
 and expose your life to view
 "Look, there goes a Hare Kṛṣṇa person,
 a boy in a saffron dress."

This fidgety piece this morning. I'll have to give
 it a title too. Folks, I exposed myself on this page as
 a reluctant, timid, old horse who is willing to pro-
 pel himself into society again. Who doesn't want
 you, any of you, in or out of myself—to reject the

work of this retreat. But I know I need to get physically into the mainstream of life in ISKCON temples and hear what's going on and help them bear shock waves. I don't want to get ruffled and lose priorities that I've already well considered.

This page is exposal,
it needs to preach. It should be
direct and bold and a shelter for
any reader.

I feel challenged in an area that
may not be my expertise.

"Give us a moment to prepare a reply, I think. But there is no time. I am up early and writing this to the world—in ISKCON where I live, where my audience lives—and to the greater world. A better person than I will have to address the court examiner and tell them that we are not a destructive cult, but a good one—this one. Don't lump us in. Here is a good member, the message pure, the behavior okay, the strength of purpose.

Your life is being watched by God; He will judge at the end how much you sacrificed for His cause as clearly enunciated by Śrīla Prabhupāda. Fellow timid folks in ISKCON, I know how you feel. But we can do something, each one. Don't give up trying. There is, of course, no way out of some anxiety as long as we live in this world. Don't feel guilty for any time you spend alone handling the sacred beads and chanting and praying to *tulasī* in a sensitive way for inner enlightenment, but also think how you can contribute to world peace by Kṛṣṇa

conscious acts which project themselves to helping others.

Message on a Thursday.

I am looking forward to writing in India. It is a way to relieve myself of anxiety, but it should also have preaching value. As we travel from here to Rome to catch our plane, I'll also be writing a travel diary. That helps to pass the time and satisfies a need I have to leave a personal history, to make a book. Something to look at later. The nondevotees have written so many books in many genres. Let's have ISKCON equivalents.

For India, I was thinking of writing a book something like this one with separate chapters. But then I thought, "No, let me just write sessions whenever I can, as much as possible, with no themes." Here I am, however, ending these days of the retreat in an attempt to bring it together, to make a story. Does that mean "a story" is a somewhat false effort to give a meaning that isn't there? No, it's all right. Just keep going. There is chaos too, or rather a free admitting that neat themes don't always exist.

Dirty hooded sweatshirt. He said he will be washing his clothes in Kenmare and can do mine also.

I'd like to encourage you not to be despondant and feel that your writing isn't worth something. You've got a file of letters from people who say it is helpful. Why don't you keep going? What little voice in you tells you to stop? Oh, you know. One

feels that he's not a preacher. Here's how tough the world is and it's against this nice movement. One feels guilty he has been staying alone, even though he is deeply convinced in a personal way that this is best for him and he has been over this many times. I don't doubt, but the waves still come and they make you less than enthusiastic. It's a force that keeps robbing you.

Did I tell you? In Newcastle after lunch at Dhan-añjaya's house, I was introduced to a congregational man named Greg. He wanted a moment alone with me about it. He came up close and said he'd had a dream about me years ago and wanted to tell me. It was during the time that he was reading and enjoying *Journal & Poems*. In the dream, Prabhupāda came to him and placed his right hand, which was in a beadbag, onto Greg's shoulder. Then Prabhupāda told Greg to tell me, "He is holding back his power. He should let it loose." Greg told me this "for what it's worth," and then we parted. I don't make much of other people's dreams about me. It's their trip. But I wondered what it meant. And now it comes up: don't hold back your power.

This statement could be taken in different ways. It might mean that you should write more openly and honestly. You have a truth, as someone saw in *Journal & Poems*, but we can tell from your writing that you're holding back. Let that power fully express itself. The statement could also mean that he is frittering away his power by writing or by writing in this way. His power should come out either in

some other kind of preaching service or by more formal writing propaganda. You see? I prefer to take it the first way. Let the power of symbols speak more directly in a writing that goes straight to people's hearts. Make a revolution starting with yourself. But sirs, I am a quiet man. I am not a bomb thrower, not a Rimbaud or Henry Miller of IS-KCON. I am a . . .

Taster of books like a librarian or a school teacher. Would you like to hear some Zen *haiku* by Santoka Taneda? Of course, *haiku* is very brief and the reader has to add the emotions himself.

Going deeper
And still deeper—
The green mountains.

Slightly tipsy,
the leaves fall
one by one.

Looking at the mountains.
All day no need
to put on my *kasa*.

These few ashes
are all that remain
of my diary?

I'd like to be with you in some tangible way when you are in India. I'd like to fulfill Prabhupāda's request to me via Greg's dream to release more power. But you know, if you are pure and

honest, it will cost you. You have to bear the consequences. People may not like what you say and they'll react. You can't be anonymous. But what about India? It doesn't matter so much. The die is cast. I mean, you can call it a book or not a book. What's the difference? In any case, you will write what comes on Ecology note pads and get it typed up and some of it . . .



This is my private business, but I just wanted to let you know what I was thinking about in these last days. I'm writing this book, *A Story of a Retreat*, but the retreat is already mostly done and there is the future. This morning the hill will emerge from night and float. There will be whiteness around it. You ought to see it—it's quite a sight. And I'll go out begging. At the bridge I'll have to start or maybe even before that, "imaginary" letters. Pray for that. It would be nice if I could feel great conviction, "I want to write to this person." But usually I have to

nudge myself, "Go ahead. You can't wait for some absolute conviction. Be sure that it's going to be Kṛṣṇa conscious sooner or later and that is its value. Make it as real and human as you are. Go ahead." The shy letter-writer begins, "Dear . . ."

Make it actually dear with your affections. Don't disbelieve that you have a heart.

Don't think that you cannot preach. Hey man, this *is* preaching. You'd better believe it. It's as good a platform as you'll ever find. To preach, you don't always need to have a microphone and a bunch of people looking at you. You don't even need to be selling someone a book. You can preach on a walk.

I'm very happy
dispel fears
your little way.

Never mind if cultists murder themselves. ISK-CON doesn't do that and you and I know it. We will have to overcome ignorance by not being afraid to appear with shaven head and tell them, whomever we meet, about Kṛṣṇa. See you later, your man near Kenmare . . .

Chapter Seven

Don't Lose Your Nerve

Dear friends, the story of a retreat is running out. I didn't tell the whole story: don't even know what it is. Things happen underground. I did this many tapes, this many hours, something I called prayer in nature's backyard, something I called "Letters from a *Sannyāsi*," so many rounds of increased

quota, so many pages read in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Does it make me a better man and devotee?

I am resolved on some personal issues of my life. My headaches, as frequently as before. I picked up a phrase, awareness that I may "lose my nerve." That came when, for awhile, I thought to stop my travel to India and go stay at Gītā-nāgarī. I resolved it and saw the life of *parivrājakācārya* (or my version of that) as keeping up my nerve and as the desirable way for me. Another way to keep up nerve is to continue the pattern of retreat and temple visits, even if it may not be considered a great or acceptable pattern of activities—in the opinion of God-brothers.

Keep up your nerve—by continuing to write with faith in the process of practice and the outcome. Yes I am a writer as my main service. The books I publish are my main contribution. One could say I have taken an odd and "artistic" service and made it overly important compared to what else I might do as an ISKCON *sannyāsī*. I reply that I'm not only a writer. I write just as someone distributes books or is a temple president or a cook or a GBC of a zone. But one is a devotee, and out of his life of *śravaṇam-kīrtanam*, personal behavior, prayer, consciousness—his practical vocation is performed. Writing adapts itself well to this relationship. It is itself *śravaṇam-kīrtanam* and in Writing Sessions it acts as a moral and spiritual cutting edge to help me in my attempt to cope and surrender.

You write when you are up to it. If you have a headache, maybe you can't write that day. But aside

from that (physical pain), the writing picks you up even when you are not feeling great. Ah yes, it helps. I was thinking of writing a letter, "Dear Writing Sessions." I would probably lavish praises on the process of writing. Maybe it's better not to do that in public. It's my open secret, but to declare the love . . . for now let me live out that love by regular practice.

I'm writing this one with the start of an eye twinge. Keeping up your nerve doesn't mean carrying out all outward functions when that pain comes. You have to lie low. You get less words, maybe less chapters. Gajendra, however, prayed even while in great pain. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that a devotee welcomes the opportunity to pray in times of distress, "an opportunity to think of the Lord very sincerely and with undiverted attention . . . offering thanks for having been given such an opportunity . . . fervently pray to the Lord in great ecstasy." I can't say I'm on that level. I take a "sensible" attitude and retire from activities, wait patiently, try to repair with sleep in bed.

O Mammy the writer says
 I don't know what autumn brings
 in India we hope to go
 for service in the *dhāma*.
 May I do your bidding, speaking and
 not looking for sweet rice pudding.
 May I discover Māyāpur or
 at least behave there, not envious,

and may this bag of bones keep
up on *parikrama* and daily class,
if You desire.

With calmed-down mind,
in Prabhupāda's place,
I go there not in disgrace
or with scrunched up face.

May the liberal awards
that are granted in Nādia
fall on me

and my associates.
It all depends on You.

A cold left hand can be warmed. An ornery mind can be settled in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. A day or two's pain can be tolerated, waited out. Don't change your basic resolve. I like the way things have gelled in this retreat and request you to keep up your nerve.

Accepting the Lord's grace. Another nice inspiration I read in the Gajendra chapters: devotees accept reverses such as curses by sages on them, without any resentment or frustration because they think that nothing can happen without the will of the Supreme Lord. It's *happening* (whatever), so it must be Kṛṣṇa's arrangement for me. Therefore, why complain? There is good in this curse, just as when Indradyumna Mahārāja was cursed to become an elephant—it resulted in his swift return back to Godhead.

So there.
 Fair hair. Beware any
 curse can't hurt the soul.
 A headache can cause you
 to hang out a sign "Closed for
 repairs" and we don't mind,
 but keep us in tune with
 the Lord's service.
 Another gem: if your gross body
 (and mind) touches the
 transcendental body
 of the Supreme Lord you are immensely
 blessed for going back to Godhead.
 Touch Him in service, your
 ears touch when His sound
 vibration reaches you as
 Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and
Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam
 and your tongue touches His
 names and *prasāda*. Will
 you allow your heart
 to be touched by life in
 a Kṛṣṇa conscious way?
 In a nondefensive way?
 Stay in touch with He
 whose touch relieves all pain.
 As Gajendra prayed, "Please save
 me from this present danger and from
 material existence where one
 crocodile after another is
 grabbing at my feet."
Haribol.

The cult suicides are just the tip of the iceberg of what can happen in the material world. It sets me off worrying because we are also seen as a cult. If thousands are killed in Rwanda or Bosnia due to ethnic or gang hatreds (gang wars too in big American cities) or if U.S.A. righteously invades Haiti or even if nuke bombings are committed by super powers, it doesn't cast a bad light on the work of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. But if some two-bit cult leader convinces his followers to commit suicide, that casts a bad light on ISKCON by the logic that "ISKCON is a cult and all cults are bad" and what if ISKCON itself commits crimes?

Why should I worry? Because this is my life. I've staked all on being a member of a benign movement which is meant to save the world. But if the world calls us dangerous and weird . . . The whole thing is confusing and my fears are not so rational either. I should be concerned with *everybody's sufferings*, but I admit that I'm more concerned with harm to ISKCON's work. And that may be partly due to honorable dedication, but also partly a selfish fear. I don't want to be looked at with dislike or mistreated because of my membership in ISKCON.

Keeping your nerve up means having the nerve to admit this stuff to yourself in the book. It also means "brazening it," as M. would say—to go in public with a shaved head. (Just shaved my head right now, shiny as a bullet, so it will be as we travel across borders of France and Italy, although I may wear a knit cap.)

Nerve it. Depend on Lord Kṛṣṇa. The pure devotees do that. They trust that the Lord will take care of them.

Let's go out with honesty and not be afraid to admit our fears. It's a relief to do so. But I know I can't admit all the truth. For example, I like to think about my writing as WCW said of art that "it can absolve all wrongs." I may be in for a rude awakening. I fear that. How will I die? Yeah. Bad image for cults in general and how it may reflect on ISKCON, that's one kind of fear, but what about *my* death? Well, maybe that's not as bad. Because then I'll be dead and not have to worry anymore about ISKCON.

What? Where did you pick up that philosophy? Don't you know you'll have to be reborn and worry again either about ISKCON or FISKCON? Don't you know there's no way out of this? Neither by group suicide or good image or your own death. I don't know about your writing absolving all wrongs; that sounds subjective or solipsistic (if that's the right word).

Well, it makes me feel better, put it that way.

But is it like a pacifying drug?

Hmm. It's my writing. I go to Kṛṣṇa. It happens also when I hear Śrīla Prabhupāda sing the *kīrtana* at Dr. Mishra's in 1965. When I go back in spirit and recall. When I am with devotees and preach to us and feel it's okay, we are in the shelter of Śrīla Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa—Śrīla Prabhupāda said things would happen, reverses, but we should trust in Kṛṣṇa. He said, "Are you afraid about bad news-

paper articles? A day will come when you will be shot for being a devotee. It could happen."

That's what I mean by the tip of the iceberg. Who could imagine the fear of being a Jew in a Nazi country? Killed just for being who you were in your body. No way out.

I'm writing this before lunch, with a headache and pain in my neck. I'll take rest after eating, with a hot water bottle to keep me warm in the sleeping bag.

Kṛṣṇa will protect what I have and provide what I need. Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.

The word "nerve" as I'm using it is defined in the dictionary as "emotional control; coolness in danger; courage (as man of nerve); strength, energy, vigor." A related meaning is "the nervous system regarded as indicating health, emotional stability and endurance."

We used to say, "He gets on my nerves," but I don't want to do that. I am nerving myself to go to Rome and India, to re-enter the world where Hare Kṛṣṇas are seen as cult members. Let the mystique or paranoia dismantle. They—the people of France, the people of America and so on—are what they are, mostly lupen proletariat or *māyā-apṛtya-jñāna*, deluded scholars, *naradhāma*. I won't allow myself to get all nervous worrying about the popular polls, "Do you think the Hare Kṛṣṇas are a dangerous cult?" "Do you think we should make some new laws restricting cults, and if so, what law would you

suggest?" Pablo Neruda, beloved of the poets, had nerve. Nehru ("notoriously cruel and depraved") had another kind of nerve.

Nerve gas. Nerve block. Nervy. Now ashes from an old paper fire of days ago blow in the breeze. The streak of gorgeous sunny days has ended. Mist and cloud, but still a grand aperture where the sun may appear on his way down behind the hill. It's all fixed. We'll leave in two days. We plan to return in a month and a half, but that's classified information. The main thing to say in this chapter ending is

Hi folks I'm riding the wave.
 Kṛṣṇa consciousness is fine. We'll never
 leave it. Pray to God for that.
 He says He will carry what they
 lack and preserve what they have—
 for those who are exclusively devoted
 to Him.

My clerk is on duty tonight, putting papers, books, medicines in various boxes and suitcases. The writer goes tagging along. Clerk has the way and I have not much to say. But I think something important was said here and worth remembering. If the faithful lose their salt and they're fit to be thrown out (see Matthew 5:13). Worth one's wages.

The lesson from the fight between the elephant and the crocodile, where the crocodile, being an animal of the water increased in enthusiasm, physical strength, and sensual power, while the elephant became diminished in his mental, physical,

and sensual strength: "In our fight with *māyā* we should not be in a position in which our strength, enthusiasm and senses will be unable to fight vigorously. Our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement has actually declared war against the illusory energy, in which all the living entities are rotting in the false understanding of civilization. Soldiers in this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement must always possess physical strength, enthusiasm and sensual power. To keep themselves fit, they must therefore place themselves in a normal condition of life. What constitutes a normal condition will not be the same for everyone . . ." (*Bhāg.* 8.2.30, purport).

I feel strong and encouraged when I write and publish and for this I take time alone.

Wile away an afternoon less intense because I feared a headache that never fully bloomed. This skinny body gets daily ails. You got to be so foolish?

FREE FOR THE TAKING

Wished I can sail away in
Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and I do sometimes,
 savoring best parts relevant to me.
 Sail off . . .

On the rock, sat and thought just a
 little while before the mind was
 exhausted with it and had to come
 inside teeming tepid teacup
 of ideas to write down and prayers
 to file. Lord Kṛṣṇa was free
 for the taking by His pure devotees,
 He said I'll carry what they lack.
 . . . I thought of the story of Yamunācārya
 who crossed out that word "I
 carry." Couldn't believe Śrī Kṛṣṇa
 does it Himself. Even a saintly person
 may doubt. Kṛṣṇa showed him,
It's true. I carry.

"Fools deride Me because I come
 in human form. They do not know
 My transcendental form as Supreme Lord
 of all that be." O Lord,
 You are in hills
 and creeks and this lone country.
 Prabhupāda said a very advanced devotee
 doesn't see the *mūrti* of a tree
 or rock but he sees Kṛṣṇa.

I also read from a card in my hands
 "To one who preaches this message
 to the devotees—
 there will never be a servant more dear
 to Me than he." Why then off like this
 so far alone? He knows. I'll be back
 soon enough and into the world
 and then hankering
 for this again.
 Where no one bothers you.
 Where you store up strength so quickly
 expended in the fray.
 Please make an exception for me or
 let me change as You desire or . . .

It is nice here reciting Your
 words and walking . . . Tell them
 about it when you return, "I would
 go into the hills and pray—read the
 words of Lord Kṛṣṇa in *Gitopaniṣad*.
 That reminds me, I'd like to try reading
Īśopaniṣad, a vintage book by our
 spiritual master. Got one here
 in your shop?
 Got an old hard bound from
 ISKCON Press days?

Chapter Eight

I want Kṛṣṇa Consciousness to be the Center of my Life but need Help

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa. You've got
 to leave them behind and be indifferent. A *sannyāsī*
 does that. Lord Caitanya left behind Sārvabhauma

Bhaṭṭācārya who had fainted to the ground. He also walked away from tumultuous crying in the house of Advaita Ācārya. He was as soft as a rose, but could be as hard as a thunderbolt. At least some of that would be good for me.

Don't be indifferent ever to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. "Fools deride Me . . ." He is never indifferent or lazy about our salvation. He is in our heart and always active for our cause, but we refuse Him. That's true. I read it in the purport. The evidence of *śāstra* is final. Must be understood through the spiritual master. I saw (while sitting on the rock yesterday) that I am in the center of my perceptions. I then looked at the statements of Lord Kṛṣṇa, "Fools deride Me . . ." and "To those who worship Me with exclusive devotion, I carry what they lack and preserve what they have . . . there is no servant in this world as dear to Me as he who preaches the message to the devotees." Why can't I turn to Him as the main one? It's a deep conditioning. But it's most foolish that the tiny, bound-in-pain servant thinks himself the center and the Lord is a distant one to him. He says, "It's natural because He is so great. How can I be filled with immediate concern for Him? He lives on the highest perfection of transcendental life and I'm stuck down here." I detect in this a feeling of latent resentment on my part that I have been neglected by the Lord. You might explore that.

Oh, it's a kind of psychotherapy regarding our relationship with the Supreme Father, the supreme friend. Why do we not love Him more?

Some trauma in our childhood? Still suffering from community college atheist professors and those years? The thought, "Why is the world full of suffering if there is a God? How could this be, as Dr. Pangloss says, "The best of all possible worlds'?"

I write it, but am not feeling attached for these agnostic road blocks. I request the Lord in the heart to release me.

Actually, He is so close to me, I cannot distinguish my self from His. Māyāvādī? I don't mean it that way. I mean it in a hopeful sense of awareness that of course He is with me. But still, I am over-familiar with this friend. I call upon Him to help me in bodily functions, pray for my little coping in this world . . . But . . . I want to overcome constipation, say, but I don't want to involve God in that. Neither do I involve Him always in my writing because it's too low level and I have to work out my problems. Neither do I ask Him to partake in the creation of a letter that I write . . . so you keep thinking you are too unworthy to associate with Him or that you prefer to be alone than in His company as if He is a stifling, too restrictive GBC man who won't let you develop your own way. That's very dangerous if you think your way is something you have to work out without God. When you find a fear, a danger on your path, *then* you call out to Him, "God, save me!" Śrīla Prabhupāda has pointed out this theological foolishness. Are you guilty of it?

Dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, I'm thinking of You
when I look at Your words.

But mostly I'm so poor I turn
away from You. It's a madness I cannot even recognize or own up to. It's a great sin of indifference and neglect. I need You. I need You.

I don't want to be alone. I don't want to miss the opportunity of human life. But I'm afraid of pain and distress. I'm afraid of You and surrender to you, guru and Kṛṣṇa. Please help me to overcome these blocks.

A retreat is to get away from the world to be alone for communing with the Lord. Did I use it for that? At least here I've been explaining the ways in which I evade Him.

Out of fear of Bhagavān the wind blows
and the sun goes about its chores.
Out of fear of Bhagavān.

Śūdras operate out of fear. The loss of heaven and the pains of hell. Love God or be punished. They need to understand; I need to understand. So I go alone in hopes of seeing into myself how I operate and what is wrong with me.

Śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu nityānanda.

Those persons with Pañca-tattva, may they become real to me. I may even take a *mūrti* or picture of them away with me from Navadvīpa. Holy relics of the *dhāma*, something to remember. And write while you are there.

But now . . . this "mundane" place is not mundane. Ground is holy if you use it in His service. I walk and think and write a letter in devotional ser-

vice and think how to preach by getting writings published—for those people who say it helps them and who say, “Keep writing. You are doing well, something important that ISKCON needs.”

Petitions, petitions to the One. Śrīla Prabhupāda has our number in all this wrongly motivated worship. God as order supplier. Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “No, you should be ordered by God and you obey Him. Surrender, you rascal!” But we don’t. We prefer to be a rebellious “god,” the *jīva* who prefers to be tortured by *māyā* as long as he can think “I’m free.” Rockefeller Center.

I pray therefore, deliver me.
 But I wish to pray, I love to
 hear of You. I love to serve You.
 Please let me live always in range of
 the sound of Your voice spoken by
 Your pure devotees.
 In any life, as long as we can
 know that the son of Nanda is dear
 to our spiritual master.
 May we walk in holy land,
 recite *śloka*s,
 chant Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.
 All glories to Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa and me:

He is best approached through His holy name. It is a great gift. I recall when I first received Him. I don’t mean like Catholic First Communion, I mean from the Swami.

Chant the holy name, it's a great idea. It was a new thing received in the storefront. Very easy. And still today.

But I have hang-ups and problems with my relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes God feels like an oppressor. I remember when I approached the Catholic priest, Father Hicks, I complained about the Korean War and the treatment of blacks in the South U.S.A. I asked, "Where's love in the world?" I was concerned. He was impressed. Later he said, "I will go now and pray to God."

Kṛṣṇa and me—I see Him however only as the Great. He seems far away. Then, what about Govinda in Vraja? Is He untouchable for me? No, I can approach Him through Kṛṣṇa book. And as Lord Caitanya, in the *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* and *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. And visit the holy *dhāmas*.

Perhaps to help my relationship I could worship a *mūrti* again. But it's too hard for me to travel with Him. Maybe a little one, a stone? How about His picture?

I can understand my relationship with Kṛṣṇa through His pure devotee, Śrīla Prabhupāda. He demands that I preach. Follow the ISKCON rules. But I don't want to be on any committee, please. I have headaches. I'm screwed up. Please help me.

Prabhupāda teaches me there's much to learn still—knowledge and realization Kṛṣṇa gives, "Because You are not envious of Me, I will give you this knowledge by which you will be free of all miseries."

Going on retreats help. You can listen. The Christians have done it too. You go alone with God.

I'm a Hare Kṛṣṇa person. I may be seen by others as a dangerous cultist, but I will take this exposure as preaching. It's an austerity. Don't fall into their illusion. The Hare Kṛṣṇa person is actually wonderful. Try to be one actually. Therefore pray and chant and tell people the truth.

I WANT GOD CONSCIOUSNESS TO BE
THE CENTER OF MY LIFE

Too early and closed curtained for a
poem?

Why? You can remember a time
when you were
outdoors with a specialist guiding you
in relaxation, to imagine a stream and
rocks and synthesized music.
You can pretend you are a writer
making lines to impress people—
impress yourself the college intellectual
or just the guy who likes to read
real-to-life literature.

Write for the puke romantic who wore
his white sailor pants and turtleneck
sweater when the USS Saratoga holiday
group went two days to Capri. A
sailor in suit and tie laughed at him
and said "When is the next whale boat?"
And you said back, "When is the next

ball dance?" indicating that it was he who was dressing artificially.

Ah, what good those memories of hurt and puke romance (I call it)? Because it hurt. It led to here. I was looking for You, Lord, in those walks, even in the wine. So I call it puke because sometimes I puked. I was a misled Genet reader.

Lord I am happy now, like to write early as possible each day.
 You understand me better than I know my own self. You will free me from entangling knots.
 You are never indifferent or lazy about my liberation.
 You've said (I read it once), "I was looking for the chance to take you back to the spiritual world, Goloka.
 In thousands of births I waited . . . "
 We have to turn to You.
 That much we need to do.
 Then You will make all arrangements.

I want God consciousness,
 Kṛṣṇa consciousness
 to be the center and sole reason
 for my life. But body maintenance

is followed
 for that. I may not survive,
 will not survive in this body.
 But soul is eternal. Let me
 be a student of Your teachings.
 Let me serve You in Māyāpur and
 Boston and near Kenmare.

Ah yes.
 I will serve devotees. I will
 read and chant. Kṛṣṇa will do
 with me as He pleases. The *gopīs*
 are the best examples. Lord Christ
 is another favorite. Rūpa Gosvāmī
 teaches the principle of using a thing in
 His service. Nārada too and all this
 comes through Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī,
 through our Śrīla Prabhupāda.
 I knew him and blew the chance to
 serve him. But he's kind, gives me
 more chances. Today, now I'll
 go read and be with him in a quiet way
 all day. Let's think how can I
 sincerely follow him and not be
 afraid—to preach his message,
 as *guru-dakṣiṇā*.

Quickly, not Virginia Woolf or NG can help me
 now, or rather, let's say that any person, lady or
 gent that I ever met *may* help me. See it that way,
 or contributing, even pain.

But my own ugliness of asserted pride has to be given up. Fear is also a lack of trust in God. You turn to Him, believe in His presence. You get afraid if you think, "I'm not a soul. God isn't here with me. I want peace and security for my body and gentle passage of time."

You are fearful in forgetful state. Manfully, you rented the first storefront in Boston. Do it now, or a later version of it, boldly acting as missionary. Shaved head in saffron.

"Oh, in those days there was no anti-cult scare to contend with. I was so young . . ."

Then I say, act appropriate for your age, your desire for anonymous respectability, safe passage, want to be left alone, sadder but wiser, no naif.

Ah, so many apprehensions. Have I not bloomed a little in my own way? Is this the same man?

Even then I preferred that it rain at night so we wouldn't have to go out on *harināma*.

But you lived in a temple

Lord, Lord, You are always with me. So dimly in those prehistoric days. But since Swami came it was clear Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I am his follower, damn it.

As I began this chapter,
you have to walk away indifferently
from certain emotional scenes
where subpersons cling to you
and mothers and illicit lover and
illicit wives and children call to
you, Please come back and don't

leave your duties.
Walk away, too, from fear,
from the catcall,
"Hey Harry! Why don't you
commit suicide?" Hey Harry,
you've got a good shaven head,
you have a thin aging body
wants special
medical insurance now
and a rest home, a walking cane, a
pat on the stooped back, "He's
doin' good as a writer. We
need him too. Be gentle with
the old fart."
Ha ha, he wants
you know what.
So many amenities he can't fit them
in his luggage. Well I
say he's got to be
indifferent and walk away from
the clinging voices. Leave behind what
you don't need
on the journey.

You know Santoka Taneda?
Yeah, he was a Zen Buddhist but
I mean he burned his diaries
sometimes when he felt too attached.
Oh, enough of this.
I'm veering.
Got disciples on my mind and how to
please them and show care.

You need help in attaining the lotus feet of Gaurāṅga? Turn to His pure devotees. Hearing the *Navadvīpa-mahātmya*, why can't I write like that? Taking shelter of Lord Nityānanda and Jāhnavā, this Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura recites the glories of Navadvīpa-dhāma. I'm hearing it for the second time so that when we go there and my Godbrother lectures at each place, I will know something of it. Yes, this is Godruma where the *surabhi* cow brought Lord Indra to receive the *darśana* of Lord Caitanya. Here in Godruma, Markaṇḍeya Ṛṣi also saw the Lord and was told, "Stay here, Ṛṣi, and worship Gaurāṅga."

Look forward to it. First stop in India is Bombay for few days. See Prabhupāda there in his rooms. You like that, don't you? And slices of papaya and mango maybe, and *mahā* sweets from Their opulent Lordships Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Rasabihārī. You are an ISKCON pilgrim. You need it. Starved for love, but yes, you need help. So I'm telling you where to get it.

When you are in Hare Krishna Land, Bombay, you should be friendly with any Godbrothers and younger devotees you find there. You will stay in your room mostly but when there is a chance you can exchange with people. And I may sing one morning *saṁsāra* prayers. And walk on the beach. Be kind to *jīvas*—you are one yourself.

Every morning here we've been having a reading of *Nāmāmṛta* and *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* at 5:30, but today Madhu is kneading a huge piece of dough,

making bread for our travel to Italy. He said he doesn't have time for the class—has to bake and rush out at 6:30 to make more phone calls. Okay, I'll stay up here and chant and get ready for my walk.

There is a wheel as conceived by Lord Brahmā
in his prayer,
spokes stand for this and that, parts of
the human body, elements, etc.
The wheel is turned by *māyā* just as
an ordinary wheel is turned by electricity.
The hub is the Supersoul.
He is the true reality of every life.
Guys more important than you or
your machine-body.
Of course you're important too.
Haribol
you're a spirit soul.

Lord Brahmā also prayed . . . but
it's hard to remember. Suffice to
say here, God is great, no one
equals or surpasses Him.
He has nothing that He has to do
He stays and plays in Goloka and
does everything everywhere else without
even thinking about it as a
distraction from His play
with His devotees in Vṛndāvana.

My spiritual master wrote to me,
 You asked me for subjects to write on
 so pick up stories from the *Bhāgavatam*
 and turn my purports into little books,
 one on Dhruva, one on Prahlaḍa, like that.
 Did you ever do it?
 This is it, sort of. Maybe in
 the future more.

You need help? You need consciousness. He
 gave it to you. Now type a letter to the Supreme.
 Dear Lord, I see You in all things. You are playful
 and great. You are in my heart and everyone's. I am
 writing to You. Dear Lord, please help me. You
 know all about me. This is another case for Your
 consideration. I wish to not make a petition for
 blessings, but the crocodile has me by the foot as
 happened to Gajendra. Let the poet use his art in
 the service of the Lord. You know all about me.
 Not much to know.

Dear Lord, they are trying to run Kṛṣṇa conscious
 centers in many cities. I am wandering and You
 know, I sometimes stop at this here retreat. You
 know it. You know the future past and present. But
 You Yourself are rarely known. Your pure devotees
 know You. I have read it and will read more. I will
 not post this letter because You already read it. You
 read everything, devour everything as Time and
 Death. But in *bhakti*, with Your devotees, You
 accept their offerings and You leave the remnants
 as *prasādam*. You know about my tongue and predi-
 lection.

You know what the mayor of New York City is about to do and the new child tyrant of North Korea. You know which plane will crash. You say to us, Your future is dark from karma of sin, but if you like, you can save yourself. Begin by chanting the names of God and revive your original love. People misunderstand. They think God is another egoist. I must try to tell them, explain the ways that God demands.

Tell them, "Look, I accept it. Why don't you? How can there be no God? Don't defy. Accept the authority of the *Vedas*. Man, by speculation, cannot know. He cheats and is mistaken and his senses are limited.

"God is not to blame for our wrong doing. He offers every one of us the chance to come back. Give up rebellion and false position by which we act as if we are God." I will best help myself by preaching this message. Put Kṛṣṇa in the center where He is already. Put me at the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, by serving the guru's order to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Impress them with your presentation. All credit goes to the Lord.

Chapter Nine

Drum Playing and Song

Dying flies buzzing against the windows. Corpses lie there, a few. Śrīla Prabhupāda remarked on the heaps of dead insects when found in the morning in Māyāpur. Life and death in one night. Here it has to do with seasonal change and longevity; the fly must die. Die one way or another. You can

think of it from the human point of view as you walk and enjoy the view of hills and valleys. (Yea though I walk in the shadow of the valley of death I will fear no evil. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.) God is protecting you. Language of "thee" and vibrations it sent to inner person even while I was just a squirt at eleven years old in a cheap plaid shirt at Public School No. 8. "Thy rod and thy staff, the valley of death . . ." You couldn't ask about it at home. They didn't discuss such things, only the present, white surface of sink and stove and refrigerator. Get a new and better fridge . . . stock it and take out the drinks and eatables at dinner time and snack time too. Be glad you are a Guarino family member in America and not some "pore" person elsewhere. Yes Father, Dad, Mom, whatever you say. This crushed tulip obeys your commands. This squirt is already picking up nasty words in the school playground, which he doesn't share with you. Nothing is discussed except the sense grat of family life and, "Did you do your homework? Clean your room," etc.

Ah, Katon Avenue, I bury you once and for all and all my misgivings. The bad habits and sins (like meat-eating) will not be held against me anymore. Don't go back, no need . . .

Violin case for sale.

Free words,

cook out bastard the father, fire engine red coaster, radio flyer wagon . . .

I said, "Don't go back, but live as robed monk in discredited coat who knows the holy essence of

Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement as most superior, so it's a shame the world is blocking its own reception of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Maybe the work of *māyā* to prevent the *mūḍhas* from getting release. But devotees don't accept it, not resigned to it. They fight *māyā* with the spreading of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. And for this, *māyā* fights back. All this struggle can get intense—suffering losses, heartbreak (if you invest your heart feelings in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement) and yet it all passes.

Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't want us to drop out of the war with *māyā* and find personal relief in the sublimity of *śravaṇaṁ-kīrtanaṁ* without working to save the fallen souls. You need to identify with the preaching and the preachers. The satisfaction of pulling someone out of *māyā*, feeling yes, I am working as Śrī Kṛṣṇa said: "There'll never be a servant more dear to Me than he who preaches to the devotees." Say it in broken language or smooth, but get the meaning out.

Broadcast. Preach. Set up some project. Yes, printing is also preaching. It is called the *bṛhat-mṛdaṅga*. Play it, man, pound the drum. Do it your way, the *paramparā* beat patterned by your own hand's rhythm and get it out to some people. Maybe my role is to preach to devotees who have already decided to serve Lord Kṛṣṇa. They too get hit by *māyā* and need further education and encouragement. Preach to them, give them time. So I am pleased you are going to Māyāpur for that.

Boom boom
teeny taw

I play the drum in good hopes,
 I know some don't get on with
 my playing, but some do and what
 else can I do but play
 the drum as my
 guru taught
 teeny-teeny taw,
 boom boom
 teeny-teeny taw boom boom

Hour after hour, year after
 year, beat on, don't care
 for your own inner critic
 or guys who say "He stinks,"
 teeny-teeny taw.
 Once Prahlāda told his father
 the best thing is to go to Vṛndāvana
 and get out of the well.
 He did not tell his father, "Go
 to hell." No, he cared, was
 gentle, a preacher of compassion.
 "O best of the atheists . . ."
 Boom boom boom.
 "The best thing I heard was to
 practice nine-fold *bhakti* like
 this, *śravaṇaṁ-kīrtanaṁ* . . ."

"And you mean this crap
 is Vedic lit?" He calls out
 from ring of crowd around our
kīrtana. I grimace and smile and patter
 my hands against the drum rim,

and touch it with stiff-boned fingers,
 teeny-teeny taw,
 cry and sweat and get down,
 get down dirty rhythms of despair
 and doubt, a man or gal who will
 listen close will hear I'm workin'
 out best I can with
 limited resources. "Okay, I dig
 it. Very nice. Very much."
 And so it goes, Swami in
 my mind, nods to me as he
 himself played bongo in Tompkin
 Square Park with hip acid heads
 of that era. You were free to
 worship them and now too,
 not wasted youth,
 not wasted early old age,
 not wasted life and death.
 He could do better,
 gone a little odd,
 heavy recoil from head pains and
 got off the GBC to be alone
 discovered the plant and bird world
 at Gītā-nāgarī back road and
 now gone alone, aloft, within,
 uncharted? No man, no ma'am,
 it's all the way as given
 by our *ācāryas*,
 expressed in rough.

But you do admit you could do better and put
 Kṛṣṇa in the center. Sure enough.

Little tree, I like thee
 little bush-fern, you've gone
 brown, Kenmare town, I opt
 to see the room I live in and
 no newspaper, I fear the
 world beyond the meadow,
 prefer to talk to sheep
 who don't talk back,
 afraid of me.

And now a cast of sunlight
 falls upon the lawn,
 I seek in song the
 longed-for *kṛṣṇa-bhajana*

of an ordinary soul. On an ordinary day while BP sighs and grunts while he works at *capātī* dough and cleaning up kitchen towards climax of lunch (he also swept my rug). I am not defeated.

See this as good as working in a temple office. My surrender to words I twist into Kṛṣṇa conscious sense. Can you make wool from a sheep's coat? No, I know nothing about it. Can you drive a car? Only in a dream. Can you dress the Deity? Never did, can't imagine where the snaps go. Can you make a financial running debit and credit? You know me. Then what good are you? How are you earning your keep? "Two hots and a cot" you are getting for just one lecture a day?

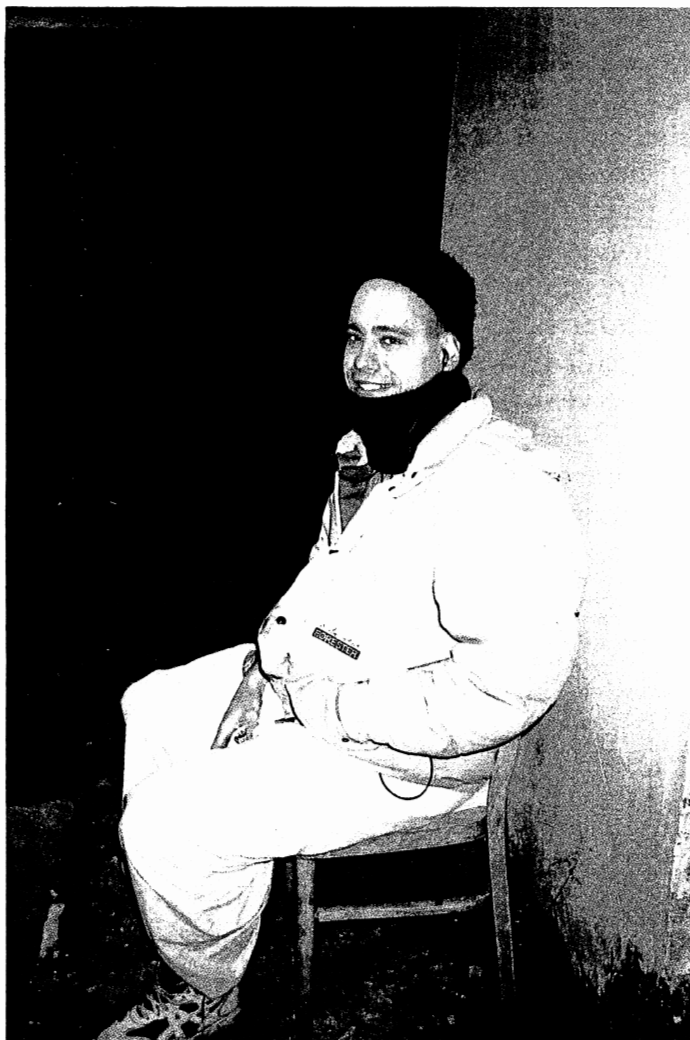
Astray, sit down strike of mortal soul, back against the rock, leans back and sees the dawning sky, "This is the life. Go ahead tell them about it, dear friends." You've got one more shot at it to-

morrow. And this afternoon, for your own sake, go there and read *Gītā* verses.

Aye-aye sir
 squirt water pistol in face
 of kids on line in hallway
 at risk of reprimand.
 Do stick out tongue and make
 fart sound and loud kissing
 sound. Mr. Katz heard it
 and put an angry indelible
 mark on your attendance card,
 forever doomed as rascal
 ne'r-do-well
 to go to hell if this keeps up—
 we'll tell your bad behavior
 to your mom and dad,
 overweight, 5'7" muscular Dad
 and prim hen mom with
 shapely legs in high heels, clerk
 low paid at Chase Manhattan
 Bank.

You dribble all this into drum playing and song.
 That's it. I got your number. You think you can
 drown out contrary thoughts and just be accepted
 as you are,

T-shirt sweating,
 gone for hours,
 play it man, a Hare Kṛṣṇa
 jam-*kīrtana*, bop but this
 is the ordinary . . .
 way to be.



Clean up the act and go home to temple. I said to BP after my walk, "This retreat is ending and I'll be glad to get into action again. But I also like what I've been doing here." He said, "You are going to

active places, but I am going into seclusion." (He is going to join the twenty-four hour *kīrtana* team at Krishna-Balaram Mandir on a five-year visa.)

I said, "Tell your mind when it objects, 'Just give me five years.' We each have to surrender in our service, our life. Some have to surrender to wife and kids and questionable hard acts, but BP, your surrender is to the holy name. If your mind says, 'This isn't preaching' or whatever, tell it 'Just give me five years of chanting the holy name, then we'll see if I'll do something else better.' "

I hope you liked that advice. For myself, I am writing, writing, and I call it the drum playing and song.

Automatic no longer
 I bounce on what I like
 and surrender in pen
 no little hen—here's
paramparā jazz—
 Kṛṣṇa is the tutti-frutti
 (don't stop but think)
 Kṛṣṇa is the tank,
 Iraqi, U.S.A., Russia too—
 all is He and water the
 root by worship of Him my
 master said don't read news
 or T.V. But play *mṛdaṅga* of
saṅkīrtana
 and spread it
 to every town and village,
 my pen *kīrtana*
 practice and edit

distribute the best
Wild Garden
Castlegreg Poems,
 "for some"
 they say "It's not for everyone."
 I concede.
 That I admit.
 That I admit.

Bang, pow, teeny taw, I get raw knuckles and
 bleed sometimes but tape 'em up and use white
 powder too,

ah raw song,
paramparā. M., let's recall more 1970 blues.

I do like that tango rhythm and orange juice in
halavā it all comes out, outer life and write it down
 in pads.

Oh, R Swami and TKG are frowning and smiling
 and Bhakti-tirtha Swami, who I knew *when*,

they say hey man it's okay, cool
 but stop for fuel and direction,
 don't just bang all day that
 way—who you think you are?
 Robinson Jeffers or
 Kolatungi?

Sun Ra?

Elvis?

Ah I am just an olding guy
 serves his guru this way.

Live in the moment and don't be afraid. You
 have a tremendous tradition behind you of saints
 and scripture and your own spiritual master is top-

most and *harināma* is authorized *yajña* of the age. Your position is solid. You also have some names and phone numbers on a card for emergency. And two thousand in your breast pouch and a valid passport. They can tear out your heart, but your death cry will be, "Kṛṣṇa." It's okay if you just stick to your guns. Larry Shinn will speak up for you. They'll get a lawyer for your case and a doctor if needed. Even if you lose your leg or life (in the body), there will be a requiem and an elegy. Besides that, spirit, foot dust of the Lord, you've got an inside track to the Swami wherever he is. So keep up direct writing of him and read and write of his *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

This here outpouring is odd enough, old New Orleans jazz and all, but what the hell, I guess it can be included. I mean, if 108 band is Kṛṣṇa conscious, and cooking with Kūrma, and "Devotee Meets Mayor in Istanbul," then why not? Why not?

Your own song, not male Joan Baez,
 "Just a little rain . . . and what have
 they done to the rain?"
 Not Dylan or Charles Atlas
 McComber or WCW empirical and secular
 and alas
 not Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī of modern era
 but spotty
 guru who
 some say lies, who quivers and
 clutches the
 hot water bottle to chest, who

exalts in private life—O walk
 O imperical-mystic walk protected by
 hood of Ananta thoughts of
 Kṛṣṇa consciousness,
 O quiz for devotees and I've got the
 answers, O writing course for friends
 and I will read what they write—
 my song.

You mean you met the Swami? Were you
 asleep? No I was awakened by him.
 But did you realize his greatness?
 I gave all my money. Got red beads,
 bowed down. Loved, loved . . .
 Yeah, but did you know at that time?
 Know what?
 That twenty-seven years later
 you'd run out
 of steam and—I have this in your own
 words, "Bloop, sort of"?
 Aw, I just said that in a mood
 of passion. Leave me alone.

I'm looking out the window at the
 winding road. He said he'd be back
 before lunchtime with a new sweater
 for me. Tender enough and "Ireland"
 with a shamrock it won't be. Is that
 the car engine now? Looks out.
 No, it's Dennis on his old fart tractor
 putt-ing white smoke big wheels up
 here maybe with last wood for us

or to check up on his doomed sheep
with his crazy eyes and jagged teeth.
Good old trustworthy Dennis.

I said "Last wood." That reminds
me we are leaving this retreat. So
dear folks, dear friends, this is the
story: conceived in liberty and dedicated
to the proposition that a senior ISKCON
devotee who long did what he was
told even when later proved wrong,
may ~~not~~, with no absolute institutional
assurance, take a retreat for holy purpose,
read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and chant extra
but produce surprising drum and song
we don't know where to file it away
—under "off beat"
perhaps "strange literary career."
This is what happens (one said)
when you prematurely or at all
resign from the GBC.

This is what happens.
He is happy. He is older.
He's coming back to society with
recharged batteries and plenty of
tapes to type but all for private books
no one can read for ten years
"Guru Mahārāja some things
in your poems
I don't understand."
This is what happened, a little of it

as I could tell in hard-edge prose,
 begins with first day here as half-
 fiction and the bare external facts and
 left a big middle hiatus when
 I chanted and made Writing Sessions
 instead of

this and came back now to play a
 finale, last three hours in Tompkins
 Square Park October, twenty-eight years
 to the month. Punk rock, no,
 hard edge it ain't, soft head?
 Ah, say what you like. I call it
 sweet mint, sweet rice,
dāl and *capātīs* and I am
 writing for the Swami. I told it to
 Murray right outside the storefront by
 plate glass window and fragile door and
 I say it to you now, and you may
 smile or frown, "I am
 serving the Swami."

And I am not an Ekalavya.
 Okay, self-defense rests his case.
 Jury go.

Prabhupāda is judge. I am just
 fooling around.

I better go now, time to bathe and honor
 BP's lunch—
 which I'll offer to Prabhupāda and
 ask him please take, please accept
 this offering.

Chapter Ten

Eternal Benefits

We have to leave sooner than we thought. Irish Ferries canceled their boat (without bothering to notify us), so M. got us tickets on a different boat and we'll have to leave at 2 A.M. tomorrow. Passionate movements. Now we're all hurrying up, choosing which article goes where. Should we leave our umbrella here for when we return or put it in the van? I'm not going to explain all this to you. (I was just going to say the van will stay all winter in Vicenza, Italy, but either you know that or not; I'm not writing any essay for strangers or near acquaintances.)

Belop. Be good. Okay. Decisions, decisions. I link my life (like leaning on crutches?) from one writing project to the next. It will be *Travel Diary* from here to Italy in five days. Then some sort of writing for the month in India; I'm still negotiating for that. It will either be straight Writing Sessions or some new synthesis of WS combined with the sort of chapters I've been writing here. More writing in any case. Alleviate fear on the road with a Diary. And make meaningful your stay in the *dhāma* by retrieving as much of it as possible in written "codes."

An ode to the retreat? An elegy for after its death? No, it doesn't die. I feel it is now incorporated into me. I don't die, not in spirit soul and what I've gained here is for the immortal soul. Bold words? But is it not true according to Vedic science? The habit of savoring *Gītā* verses directly

spoken by Kṛṣṇa—how can that die? "A little endeavor in *bhakti* never suffers diminution or loss and it can save you from the greatest fear (the falling down to a lower species at death)." One who thinks of Me only when he quits his body at death attains to My nature; of this there is no doubt. And one who studies this dialogue of ours worships Me with his intelligence.

Similarly, the words I read in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and the "extra" rounds of *japa* which were at least a gesture for overcoming neglect of the holy names. As for the writing I did, it may suffer loss or diminution, but the best part of it, the motive for *bhajana* expressed in written words, that's eternal spirit. It's the urge of the soul to serve Kṛṣṇa in our constitutional position. "O son of Mahārāja Nanda, I am Your eternal servant, yet somehow I have fallen in the ocean of birth and death. Please pick up me up from this ocean of death and place me as one of the atoms at Your lotus feet."

Good-bye for awhile
that's all the songs for awhile
good-bye to your hit parade
and the songs that you picked
to be played. So long.

Adios. God be with you. *Via con dios.* God be with you and us too, on the road, in the air, in the temple. Danger at every step. (Pope John Paul falls and breaks his legs on his papal rug in the Vatican and then again breaks a bone falling in the bathroom.) Penances and pain. The road is not so smooth and

has many turns. But with a little effort, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* says, the devotee gets good results beyond his expectations.

Ekādaśī today. No more *capātis* by BP. No more schedule building up to lunch. The valleys and hills of a day here. Getting used to it, you could live here in peace and produce a lot. but it's better to go; you must. You might like to stay, but duty calls. On to the road, think of it that way: "Kṛṣṇa wants us to move on this road. We're going to a temple and then onto India, to the world headquarters of ISKCON (transcendental ISKCON beyond anti-cult propaganda) in Śrīdhāma Māyāpur."

"Best jewelers," says the liner of the case I used to keep my pens. "Precise," says the Pilot pen. And the gloves say nothing. The hand grips the page with no tattoo. Some things are better with ads and words attached.

The walk, I love the walk. One more time today, go on that hill in splendid moments when the earth awakens to first light from the sky. And you stand as witness and then when it's lighter, you sit as friend and converse. You are a little babbler like the creek. Note to myself: "Don't be afraid to personify a thing and speak to it." And you may also speak to past *ācāryas*. In your imagination of blessed use: *yukta-vairāgya*. Don't forget to also Listen. What do they say to you, dawn and creek and hill and even sheep? What lessons? What cues and warnings? "Don't do as we did. Go upward in your evolution."

Lord Kṛṣṇa is in all things. But He is not there in His full original personal form. He's in Goloka. Of course, He can appear anywhere in His original form too, in the heart of the pure devotee. One becomes attracted to Kṛṣṇa by hearing about Him. I am doing that too.

Got a *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* lined up for a fresh re-reading starting today and to accompany me on our travels, which can be harrowing to the inner man. Don't drop contact with Prabhupāda's voice in the books. The sacred and sustaining words stay in your consciousness . . . to be an animal for Kṛṣṇa in Goloka Vṛndāvana is not a bad thing. He said that in Melbourne after the newspaper printed that the Swami said he will become an animal in his next life. Kṛṣṇa loves the "*paśus*" in Vṛndāvana-dhāma.

My dear spiritual master, wherever I go . . .

Farewell, pilot. Come on, let's go. Leave one place as we must and go on to the next. There is no need for the story of a retreat once the retreat is over. We can read it as history, but we are forced now (and I'm willing also) to write the story of an unknown journey to Rosalare, starting at 2 A.M., in a van with biscuits, to Holyhead, Wales, to Dover (is it?) to the Haver, to . . . down the *belle* route and me writing, "We just stopped here. I just thought this."

The Irish flies cannot go with us, or the cows of Dennis and his neighbors, or Dennis, or his brother, or father, or Madhu's cousins.

What did I do here? How many devotees did I “make”? Who did I introduce to Kṛṣṇa consciousness? How may I justify such a stay off the preaching path? I’ve given the answer to that in some of these pages and much more so in the 700 pages of Writing Sessions done here. Won’t repeat it now. At least I won’t wrangle with my soul back and forth. Just say it’s justified as I see it. I do some good whenever I gain conviction, as I did here in steady reading and *japa*. And a low state in attraction for Kṛṣṇa’s teachings and His holy names. As a preacher, ideally I should have a high attraction or how will I be able to influence others (as Prabhupāda influenced us in NYC in ’66)? So to gain taste and discipline for *śravaṇam-kīrtanam* is good and worthy time spent.

A book you write, that’s your main service. You can’t write as well—as much—when you are lecturing and meeting and going through the group schedule in the temple. At this stage in my life, I take the personal golden opportunity to go alone to make hay, to make transcendental hay. And I come out. We go down the hill and head for the port and the temple, and the news of the world, always in His protection. Work always within My protection, give the results of your work to Me. Surely you will come to Me, passing over all obstacles. Despite so many activities in this world, in the end you will come back to Me. Of this there is no doubt.

Think of Me, become My devotee
offer homage to Me, being absorbed
in Me, surely you will come to Me.

Kṛṣṇa:

He belongs in the center of my life, just as He is the center of all existence. Anything else is illusion.

Find Him in the books, the beads, the devotees, in everything, because He is all. When I think of Kṛṣṇa's qualities, I don't want it to be just like scanning my eye down a book index. Do it in heart. Believe in Him. Pray to Him.

It's not just a "writing cluster" exercise. But Kṛṣṇa consciousness means acts in His name. Act for Him. And He wants us to preach, however we can. Exert yourself for that. How? If you don't know associate, with preachers and serve them.

Down with *māyā*! I have to avoid her and fight her influences. She fights back.

See clearly with the eyes of *śāstra* through the traps of *māyā*. The truth, the truth. If my body hurts, know it as another kind of lesson.

Kṛṣṇa is attained only by *bhakti*. Kṛṣṇa! Kṛṣṇa! The way to Kṛṣṇa. Glorify Him.

Lord Kṛṣṇa appears as Lord Caitanya. He taught us all, "Chant. Become a guru."

Kṛṣṇa is the cause of all causes. I want to read it again and again in *Brahma-saṁhitā* and worship that statement.

Kṛṣṇa is my best friend. Dear Lord, please awaken in me. Give me Your strong presence, Your gentle presence. You live in the *śāstras*.

NO MORE TO SAY

If you say it right it's always welcome.
What's this "farewell"? What's this
"My story is complete. I just choked myself
off from anymore significant words by
saying we've got our marching orders at
2 A.M. and biscuits in the van and stuff
packed in boxes for our return here"?

It's all right on one level to say
I'm finished.

But then there is art which can
infinitely express simple things—
a daisy on the path
and there's *dharma* (the bull) and
Bhūmi the earth. The sky each
morning doesn't say, "That's all for
now, folks." Not yet.

Well I didn't say I'm dying today.
I just said this particular book
has burned down like a votive candle.
You've got to admit it. It's going
down. Burning still.

In the last moments you make a wish
you wish to change better.
"I've heard that one before."
Hear it again. As the sky lights new
each day that hope perpetual—
may it always come even when
I die, may I chant better.

May I serve better.
May I become attracted
to Your holy name.

In your retreat did you realize
your *rasa*? Which of the five?
No, I am not ready for it.
"Why not chose the top one now?
You're entitled . . . as a follower
of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu."
Yes, it's in the works. You serve
the Supreme happily in this world,
in His book study *rasa* in
all stages and it will come.
It is coming as you serve Him,
yourself a disciple
of *sad-guru*.

No harm I'm in a human
"good-bye" mood to all I see,
a friendly sort of fellow you might
meet in overalls, who is going to India,
who says he will return, who is lucky
to be serving his Guru Mahārāja.
No harm in that. He waves and he
promises. He's got a cheerful word and
a last walk to speak his *Letters*
from a Sannyāsī.
It will be cold when he returns.
It will never be the same. He wants
some glory, we all do.
Step in cow dung. Say so much
and pass on, walk on. Loving, loving.

I looked in a book I'd read but
 couldn't find it—something like, "Now
 Santoka knew he'd die soon, so this was it,
 this was his last chance to feel the rain on
 his body as he walked over the bridge,
 the river below." Feeling more intensity
 as your years dwindle. And the so-
 called controversies as to how you
 serve ISKCON

is no longer an issue.

No one cares.

No one really interferes.

You are free to make your expression.

So get on with it.

Do what you will as fully
 and nicely and faithfully as you can.

(I hereby release whoever wants me
 to release him.)

I hereby die and live. I wish to
 replace myself in

the center in favor of the
 real hub—Lord Kṛṣṇa.

So when you see me, read me,
 you see Him and get in touch.

Touch Him and you are transformed.

Sorry I detained you with a
 whine.

"To put it bluntly, I'm weary
 of it." (Reading in my books that
 I go back and forth regarding
 my relationship

with ISKCON and how they accept me if I live as I am.)

Well, pal, let me tell you,
it's better that I go on negotiating that
relationship rather than break it
as you did. Continue to say dear
ISKCON, we've got to live together,
but see here, you must accept
me as I am. And ISKCON (or
its image) says back, "Wait a
minute. You've got to pay some
dues for all we have given."

And I say, bargaining, "What?"
Better to haggle friendly
you intense,

but never give up connection.

"What do you want now?"

"We want your life."

"I already gave it."

"Well, give it again."

"Okay, but this time note what
I do best, will you? Here I'm
doing it—don't forget ISKCON is
a volunteer outfit."

"Yeah . . . well . . ."

We both go to the books, to
our founder-*ācārya's* lessons
looking for a favorable quote.

Good-bye. I hope the van works.
It's embarrassing to wave good-bye while
people watch and then your van

doesn't move. But this is
a good one, Renault.
Good-bye. I'll be back. We've
left boxes in the upper room.
Wish me a *bon voyage*, will you?
I leave you with
my best.

