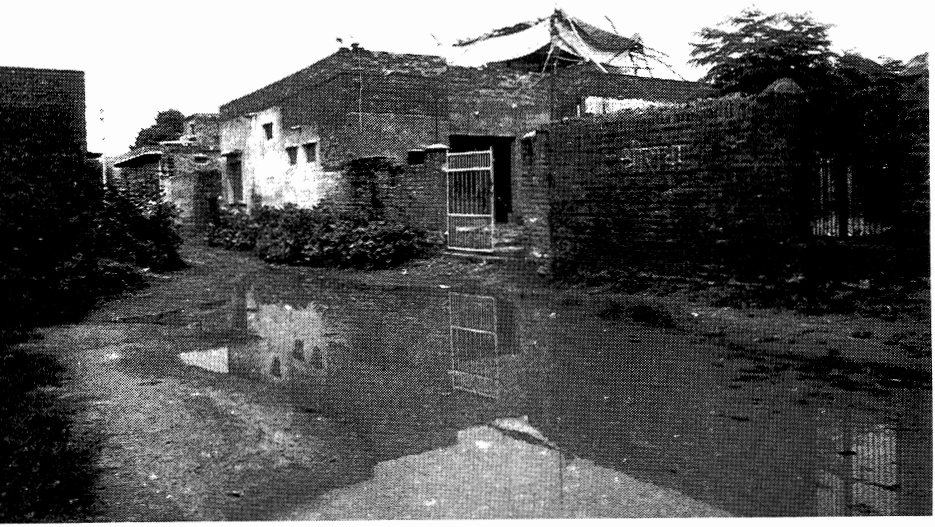
Vṛndāvana Ẇriting



Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

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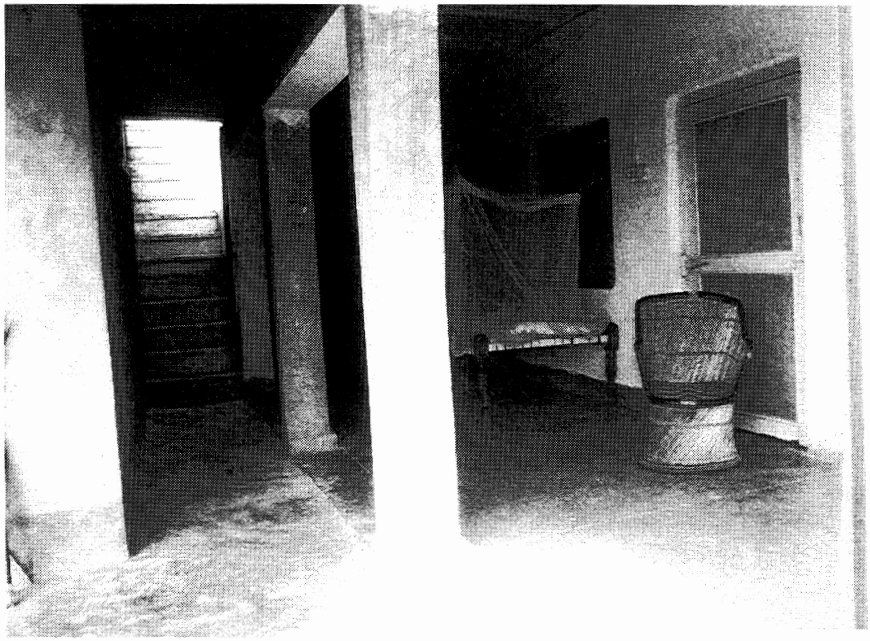
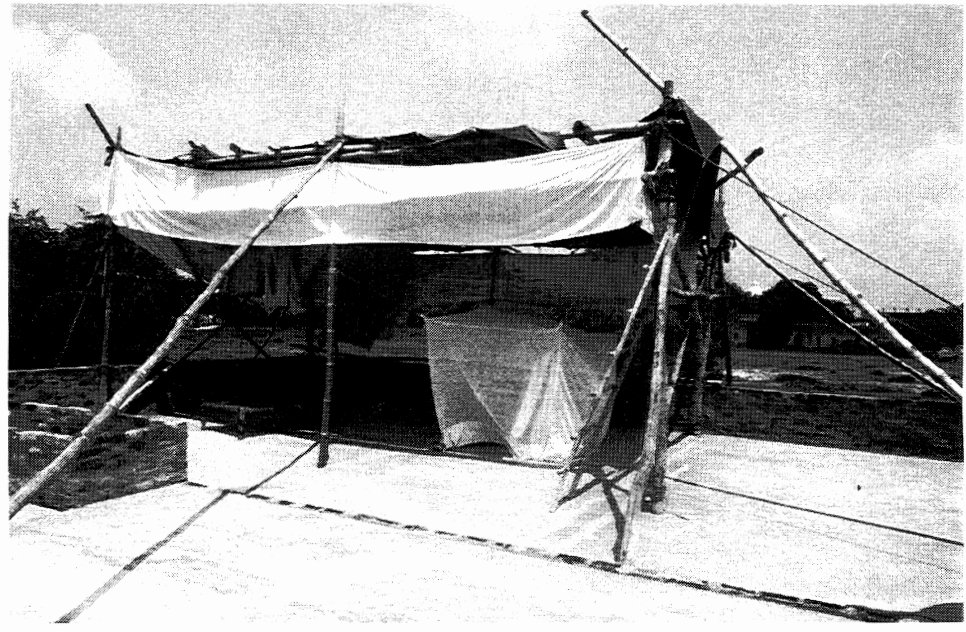


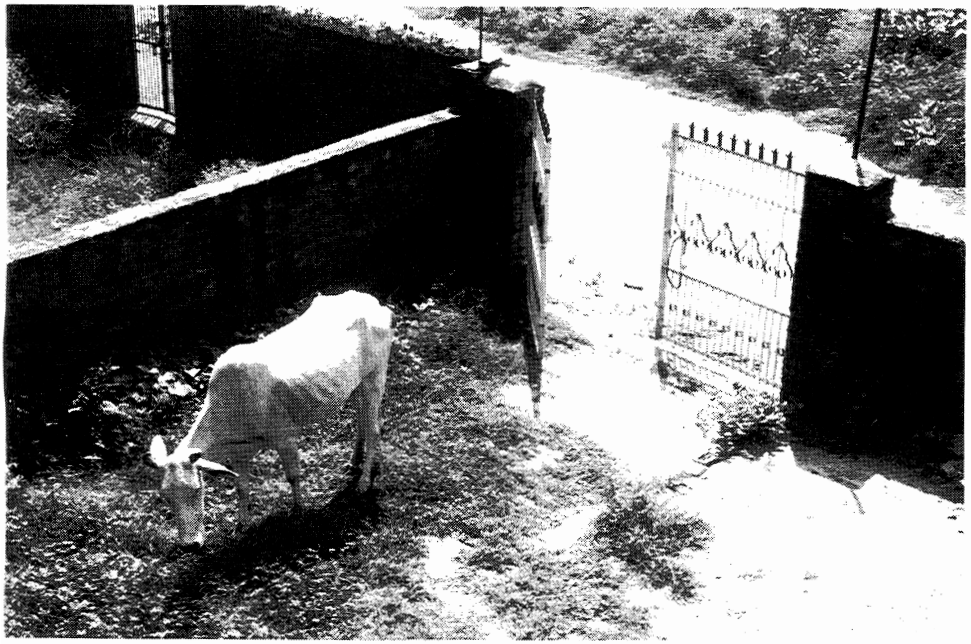
The hallway rattan chair



The roof *paṇḍāla*



One of the Vṛndāvana birds



Cows and dogs would come in if the gate was left open

Preface

June 6, Finale Ligure, Italy

It's still two months before I am scheduled to go to Vṛndāvana. I have been groping for themes for my 1992 diary in Vṛndāvana and things are gradually starting to come together.

Reading the *Hermitage Journals* of John Howard Griffin has provided a study in contrasts for my own work. The subtitle of Griffin's book is "A Diary Kept While Working on the Biography of Thomas Merton." In 1969, about half a year after Thomas Merton died, Griffin was appointed by the Merton Legacy Trust to write Merton's biography. He lived off and on at Merton's hermitage, a little house at the monastery at Gethsemane, Kentucky. He reported in his journal that he became deeply concentrated on his biography project. He read for the first time Merton's massive diary, went over the volumes of correspondence, and even analyzed the reports of Merton's death. Griffin felt that he would learn more about Merton's life by living in Merton's hermitage than he would by interviewing and reading. Griffin's journal mostly discusses his work on the biography, but he also discusses the experience of solitude.

By contrast, I have already written Śrīla Prabhupāda's biography and many other books about Śrīla Prabhupāda. In my 1992 visit to Vṛndāvana, I am not planning to live in Prabhupāda's "hermitage" room at the Rādhā-Dāmodara temple; I am in the process of trying to find a suitable place I can live for four or five weeks, in Vṛndāvana, to write.

Another contrast: my mission in going to India this time is not to try to find and invoke the meaning of Prabhupāda's life and then write about it. I have no such assignment from ISKCON, and neither do I feel a personal drive to do that. Of course, I always feel the drive to improve and maintain my relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda, but it is a quite different feeling than when I was the official biographer ten years ago. I am planning to give a twenty-four-lecture course in Vṛndāvana on "The Life and Teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda," but preparing those lectures is very different from preparing the biography. Still, I would like to write my journal alongside the seminar preparation, just as Griffin kept his journal while he prepared Merton's biography.

One genuine theme or dilemma I will be working on is a question I have about the importance of Prabhupāda's *prakṛta* (manifested) activities in this world. I know that sounds awful the way I just said it. I don't doubt Prabhupāda's tremendous achievement in spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world or the value of that. What I mean to say is that I now know a little more that Prabhupāda has two lives. He has a manifested life which has now disappeared from this world (at least in terms of his *vāpuḥ,* although his *vāṇī* is still with us), but he also has an eternal form in *kṛṣṇa-līlā* or *caitanya-līlā* in the spiritual world. I am not qualified to know the nature of Prabhupāda's unmanifest *(aprakṛta)* identity, but I *want* to know it. My question is, is it now more important for me to discover Prabhupāda's

eternal *līlā* than it is to continue to write book after book about his preaching mission? Most people already know at least the general meaning of Prabhupāda's manifest appearance. As of this date, the Bhaktivedanta Archives have published almost forty volumes of his conversations, and they continue to publish many volumes of his lectures and letters. So this is my question.

If I am going to keep an honest diary in Vṛndāvana, I will also want to continue writing about the *rasika* subjects I am hearing about from Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja. I have already written in *Pilgrimage* and *Returning From Pilgrimage* about the so-called conflict of hearing from a *śikṣā-guru*. I know that there is no conflict, actually, between what Prabhupāda is teaching and what Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja is teaching. At least there is no conflict on the gross level where some devotees might see it. But I continue to search and even grope—how can I assimilate the *rasika* interests with the fact that I am still a struggling *vaidhī-bhakti* practitioner?

Another struggle for me is how to continue reading with keen interest Śrīla Prabhupāda's books? I have been continuously studying them for twenty-five years. It *appears* that Prabhupāda's books mostly emphasize the path of *vaidhī-bhakti*, as is appropriate for us. What does it mean, therefore, if my interests are growing beyond *vaidhī-bhakti* and reaching into hearing about Kṛṣṇa's *parakīya* pastimes in Vṛndāvana? This is a challenge for me, and a private one.

When I first began thinking of the upcoming diary in Vṛndāvana on the writing retreat, it seemed that my writing career was in an anticlimactic stage. Last year with *Pilgrimage*, it was certainly an exciting, unforeseen time. But what about this year? By writing these notes, I see that I actually do have important work to do in developing ongoing appreciation both for Śrīla Prabhupāda and Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja. My relationship with Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja has also been changing.

The fact that I am planning to live outside the Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Mandira is another theme, and not just a concocted, literary theme. I have a need to write on my own schedule outside of the temple morning program, but this presents a kind of social and personal tension when I try to carry it out.

And then there is the "theme" of living in Vṛndāvana. How does one do it? How does one get past the outer Vṛndāvana to get at least a scent of spiritual Vṛndāvana?

•

Something that Griffin wrote about Merton regarding the private nature of his writing seems appropriate to me especially now:

> His most vital writing is private, what he did for himself, because he made constant notes to help clarify things for himself. He thought and sought to express experience on paper; but as a self-guide more than in order to reveal anything. He sought to get rid of the role—to flee the

"role" of the monk in order to *become* the monk; to be and not merely to appear to be. (These are great and profound differences which few perceive even in the religious life.)

This is also similar in some ways to Prabhupāda's statement about transcendental writing from *Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi* 9.5:

Whether I know or know not, it is for self-purification that I write this book.

Purport:

This is the sum and substance of transcendental writing. One must be an authorized Vaiṣṇava, humble and pure. One should write transcendental literature to purify oneself, not for credit. By writing about the pastimes of the Lord, one associates with the Lord directly. One should not ambitiously think, "I shall become a great author. I shall be celebrated as a writer." These are material desires. One should attempt to write for self-purification. It may be published, or it may not be published, but that does not matter. If one is actually sincere in writing, all his ambitions will be fulfilled. Whether one is known as a great author is incidental. One should not attempt to write transcendental literature for material name and fame.

Introduction

In preparing to write in Vṛndāvana, I thought of two appropriate sayings, both about dancers: (1) Since you have come to dance, why do you cover your face with a veil? And, (2) A good dancer doesn't say, "There was a hill, so I couldn't dance."

•

10:20 P.M., Air France terminal, Paris

This afternoon, I spoke to a gathering of devotees in the Paris temple and told them that Madhu and I were going directly to Delhi. I said the standard thing about Vṛndāvana, that everyone is more or less Kṛṣṇa conscious. Even a street sweeper or a rickshaw *walla* calls out, "*Jaya* Rādhe! Hare Kṛṣṇa." Even the animals are not ordinary souls. Prabhupāda wanted us to go to Vṛndāvana for inspiration. He wanted us to learn how to keep Vṛndāvana in our hearts and to return to the preaching field of our *prabhu-datta-deśa*. So here we are, starting out late at night, looking for inspiration.

My mission is to go to Vṛndāvana and write. My mission is to go to Vṛndāvana and petition Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. My mission is to gain the association of Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja. My mission is to please Śrīla Prabhupāda by fulfilling all my other objectives. In the meantime, I will prepare the twenty-

four lectures for my seminar on "The Life and Teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda." And, I hope to speak to him every day.

•

So far so good. I gave you my statement of objectives. But when I look deeper, I see that I am confused, uncertain, and searching. But this is connected to my wanting to go to Vṛndāvana to write. I want to go to Vṛndāvana because it's Vṛndāvana, and I want to write because it clears confusion.

•

O monkeys of Vṛndāvana, are you waiting for me?

Mosquitoes of Vṛndāvana, are you waiting to sink your darts into my flesh? (None of you will sting me like the Parisian wasp that stung me today.)

•

The temple president at Krishna-Balaram Mandir sent me a FAX. I asked him if I could stay at the temple while following my own program for the first few weeks. He wrote back that it was okay. He said he is not the one to judge a devotee's performance in Vṛndāvana. It is up to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and Śrīla Prabhupāda. He said the main thing was to be engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness twenty-four hours a day.

Baladeva has been in Vṛndāvana for a week trying to find us a house outside the temple. In any case, we may decide to live at Krishna-Balaram Mandir since they are welcoming us to serve as we desire. We'll have to see.

•

Before we left today, someone brought us photos of our recent travels. One was a picture of Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma at New Māyāpura. I have that one with me. Although we have been trying to cultivate exclusive interest in the *mādhurya-rasa* in the mood of Rūpa and Raghunātha Gosvāmīs, I feel the need to pray to Kṛṣṇa and His brother Balarāma to protect my devotional creeper. We pray to Baladeva for resolution to worship the guru. I want to be faithful to Śrīla Prabhupāda, even while pursuing the *rasika* topics taught by Mahārāja. In recent months I have not been interested in Kṛṣṇa's *sakhya* pastimes. But now I feel the need to be sheltered by Kṛṣṇa as my Father, as my well-wisher, and as the source of all strength. And I am especially looking for strength in coming to terms with the harmony of my relationships with Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja.

•

Should we worship Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī first and Kṛṣṇa second? That is what the *gopī-mañjarīs* do. They are more inclined to Rādhā than to Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa appreciates this resolution in a devotee.

Sometimes I wonder if I can switch my own emphasis. I have been thinking differently for twenty-six years. To help myself, I brought this prayer by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī:

"O Prince of the cowherders! I offer my obeisances unto You and eagerly pray to You. Please make me the object of the mercy of Rādhikā, who is the crowning jasmine garland of the young girls of Vraja" (*Utkalikā-vallari*, text 19).

•

11:55 P.M.

On board. Without asking us our opinion, they suddenly upgraded us to First Class seats. I would have preferred to stay where we were. In First Class, they dote on you more and offer you wine and meat. It is embarrassing for a monk to ride First Class. They just came by with newspapers. I glanced with interest over the international *Herald Tribune* as the stewardess walked past our seats, but M. remarked, "We're leaving that world behind." At the same moment, my eyes rested on this verse in *Prema-bhakti-candrikā:*

"Vṛndāvana is beyond the descriptive power of words. It is the best of all holy places. It is self-manifest, filled with most intense transcendental bliss, free from the touch of the material miseries of old age and death, and the place where Lord Kṛṣṇa eternally enjoys the nectar pastimes" (Song 8, text 1).

"I am just waiting until midnight. Then I will begin chanting my rounds. I am a real *vaidhī-bhakta* —after midnight, the rounds *count!*"

•

4:00 A.M.

I just thought about my "problem"—whom to worship, Kṛṣṇa or Rādhā. We usually offer obeisances to Kṛṣṇa, but He is more pleased with devotees who assist Him to taste nectar in His pastimes in Vṛndāvana. So *if* you could sincerely pray to Rādhā's party, that would give even more pleasure to Kṛṣṇa than your reverential obeisances in which *you* seek shelter in this world and the next. Śrīla Prabhupāda would also be pleased *if you did it in earnest* (not as a *sahajiyā*). He would say, "Oh, you are shooting for the rhinoceros? You want to become Rādhā-*dāsī?* Very good."

(I pray to my Father when the plane shakes at 37,000 feet. Please protect me in this life and the next. Wipe away inauspicious thoughts at the time of death, dear Lord.)

•

Do you want to stay in your present space?

What do you mean by that?

I mean, "be here now." Appreciate the blessedness of life as it is given by God. Don't try to void out when you don't like the circumstances in which you find yourself. But I don't mean that you should live for the senses and the world.

Now we are on the ground in Karachi. I can see action typical of airports all over the world from my airplane window. But there are Muslim touches—a half moon on the PIA truck, beards, turbans . . . Does the present moment have any integrity? What does it mean to look at this scene and think of Kṛṣṇa consciousness? How to stay with the moment and not slip into the past or plan for the future?

We are not in Vṛndāvana, not even in India. But where we are, we are thinking of Vṛndāvana. We cannot and should not avoid that moment. I should not reject it as if it is not the theme I am seeking. It is.

•

I am looking forward to renewing my acquaintance with Mahārāja. That will put things into proper perspective and enrich my malleable life. Side by side with that, I want to nurture my already strong feelings for Śrīla Prabhupāda. I told the devotees in Paris that I was going to India with the hope that my relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda will deepen. That was not just a "public relations" announcement. I mean it.

From Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura: "I will meditate on the lotus feet of the devotees, hear from them, remember Lord Kṛṣṇa's *gopī*-friends, and always be happy in Vrajapura.

"I will meditate on the youthful Divine Couple and sing of Their nectar pastimes. I pray for that. In

this life or after death, I have no other desire. Thus speaks poor-hearted Narottama dāsa" (*Śrī Prema-bhakti-candrikā*, Song 8, texts 14–15).

•

12 Noon

We are flying over India now at 37,000 feet, 594 mph . . . less than an hour from Delhi. Waiting for events to unfold.

The verses of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura change the whole complexion of my being. I believe it when he says that the material world is illusion and that sense gratification will bring torment. I also believe him when he says that if we worship *kṛṣṇa-nāma*, Rādhā will be pleased and by chanting Rādhā's name, Kṛṣṇa will be pleased. He encourages us to repeatedly hear the *līlā* of the *rāsa* dance. He says he won't even look at the rascal who is averse to hearing *rāsa-līlā*.

The plane is descending.

•

New Delhi arrival

Waiting for our bags. One more to go. Baladeva is here waiting for us. What will Baladeva tell us? Did he find us a place? This will be our reality while we are in Vṛndāvana.

Chapter One (August 9–15)

August 9, 6:21 P.M.

We made it to Vṛndāvana. Baladeva found us a house only five minutes from the Krishna-Balaram Mandir. I already spoke with Navadvīpa dāsa on varied topics, like how demanding it is to follow the teachings of *rāgānugā* and harmonize it with what Prabhupāda is and what he teaches.

Tomorrow is the disappearance day of Rūpa Gosvāmī. Mahārāja is in Vṛndāvana. He will go on *parikrama* tomorrow and then stop to speak at the Rādhā-Dāmodara Mandir. Of course, the whole event will be in Hindi. I think I will go later to Rūpa-Sanātana Mandir and try to catch Mahārāja there.

•

I propose a discipline of reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books daily. I propose that *bhakti-yoga* is beyond my intellect, so I should pray. I propose bowing down physically and mentally, praying to become infused with humility and Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I pray to be able to write.

Madhu says if it doesn't work out in this *āśrama,* we can move over to the Krishna-Balaram Mandir. We are still moving in, keeping only the essentials in the room in case we get robbed. They say a *chowkidar* with a gun patrols this area at night. No candles yet. Mosquitoes?

Leftover jet lag, Air France atmosphere . . . Navadvīpa unshaven like a Vraja *sādhu,* me in the habit of shaving daily.

•

August 10, 12:15 A.M.

I woke to a loud noise and thought someone might be smashing the lock. Then I heard Madhu chanting loudly. I thought he must be scaring off an intruder, but when I went to his room, he said he was up because he was being bitten by mosquitoes. The noise I heard was him chasing a roach with a cup. Anyway, now we're both up.

If I am to follow my "be here now" policy, I would have to start by describing the crickets. They make such a pleasing sound. I am writing with a Sheaffer "No Nonsense" pen. I also have indigestion and I wonder what is ahead for me during this monsoon season.

I will be reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books as a discipline. A theme has been introduced—or it has appeared—I have to come to terms with the deeper implications of inquiry into *rāgānugā.* Navadvīpa dāsa told me that all the ISKCON devotees involved so far are all reaching a similar conclusion: we are insignificant. Direct service to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is far away. We are aware that it is the conclusion of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* and we are intrigued by it. But it is far away.

It is at this point I begin my visit to Vṛndāvana. I have my ways of spending time—planning out the lectures I will give here later, reading, praying,

going to Mathurā, and writing. The first four weeks are for writing.

•

As soon as we got out of the little van yesterday, I made prostrated obeisances in the dust. This place where we are staying is not an official *tīrtha;* you won't find it in the guidebooks. But we have a "lakeside" property. At least I can sidestep the "lake" to get in the front gate.

•

From Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta, Prabhupāda in Vṛndāvana:

"They should not expect to serve him sentimentally but should work hard. Devotional service was dynamic. Prabhupāda wanted his disciples to help him with his projects to serve his *guru mahārāja*—projects which, if successful, could save the world from misery" (*Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta,* Vol. 5, p. 235).

What about preaching? What about his tears of compassion for suffering souls? Is this "lesser" than the inner mood of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī whom Mahārāja said had no time to talk to ordinary people, and whose tears were in separation from Rādhā? How to get through these various levels of teaching and viewpoints without minimizing any Vaiṣṇava? We want to serve our *guru*

mahārāja. I want to do something to serve the people—at least some of them—who come to this movement.

•

We were stopped three or four times by police on our way out here from Delhi. Finally, we had to pay a fifty-rupee fine. Baladeva pointed out that this is only one side of India. Then he gave some examples of the other side: on his way to his room last night, some men stopped him and asked, "Swami, could you please come to our room?" They plied him with sincere questions. They were visiting Vṛndāvana from Delhi and were confused by the variety of answers they had received at different temples. Their questions: Why did Kṛṣṇa go to Dvārakā? If Vṛndāvana is the land of Kṛṣṇa, why do the people here chant "Rādhe, Rādhe"? Do you really believe in transmigration? Can you explain it in the light of modern science? Baladeva stayed up for three hours answering their questions and finally, one man began to cry tears of gratitude. Finally, he had received the answers in a way he could accept—by hearing from a follower of Prabhupāda.

•

My main purpose here is to write without pretense. Dear reader, I have faith in this, so please bear with me.

O creatures residing in Vṛndāvana, this is 1992. I am a pilgrim to your land and I want to record

some of your glories. I attempt it in an odd fashion, sometimes bemused at you, sometimes disturbed, usually at a distance, a stranger. But I mean no harm.

Please tell me what is below the surface of the *dhāma*. How are Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's pastimes which I read about in Sanskrit poetry, being manifest today? I am not an archeologist trying to dig up the facts. I really want to know. I know I am unqualified, but I still desire to serve the *vrajavāsīs* life after life.

•

The well water is salty—I can still taste it in my mouth. I hope that *chowkidar's* whistle keeps the dacoits away. Madhu and I turned our passports and money over to the safe at the guesthouse. All I have left of interest to a dacoit is a few pens, and I won't part with them easily.

•

6:25 A.M.

I'm writing this on the roof of—what should I call this place? The *āśrama?* Cricket Hall? Anyway, the roof is nice. I can see the ISKCON *Gurukula* from here.

"Mathurā . . . Śyāma . . . Yamunā . . . the loudspeaker across from Fogel Āśrama is trying to get my attention. "*Jaya* Śrī Rādhe!" Now a kid takes the microphone and shouts a few words.

Sādhus walking this way in that orange they wear . . . This land belonged to Swami Bon's Oriental Institute. It is mostly open field and footpaths.

•

9:50 A.M.

It should be obvious that even equipped with the best pen and a secluded place, I won't be able to attain the state of advanced Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We have to serve the Vaiṣṇavas and please the spiritual master to get that. Otherwise, we get the result of our desires. I may write and someone may even read it, but what will be left in the end? The desire to fulfill our dreams leaves us holding only the work, the struggle. I am not saying this specifically to cut myself down. But it is something that has to be considered. We have to use our time well with the proper motivation.

•

What will I say when Mahārāja asks me what I am doing right now? I might tell him that I am still stuck in *vaidhī-bhakti,* but I am fully satisfied when I hear *rāgānugā* discussions from him. Sometimes I think I am like the riven cloud described by Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-gītā.* What if I fail both materially and spiritually? Of course, Kṛṣṇa assured Arjuna that one who does good never meets with evil. Whatever I hear of *rāgānugā* from an authorized source is good for me. My dissatisfaction with

vaidhī-bhakti is actually auspicious. But where is my greed to go beyond? I am restless in my *vaidhī* bonds but unable to live only on the rain that falls from the cloud of Kṛṣṇa's *vilāsa-līlā*. What to do? That's what I would like to say to Mahārāja.

•

Someone is at the gate calling out, presumably to the former residents of this house. Someone came by earlier too, asking the same question. Baladeva told them that those people had "shifted."

"Shifted? Where?" We don't know. Ask the landlord. I don't know the circumstances, but I assume they weren't forced out.

The public wants to use our well although there are other, nearby wells. We are worried that they will see something they consider valuable here and it will invite theft. Is this the Vṛndāvana we read of in *Kṛṣṇa* book? And why do these Westerners come and live at a higher material standard? Why does the government of India not protect the land of Vṛndāvana? Why do they declare "the Yamunā unfit for bathing and swimming"? This is Kali-yuga.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said that in the monsoon season when rain is inevitable, *vaiśyas* may protect their shops with canopies or people may carry umbrellas. We are allowed to take precautions. We may not always know what is a suitable precaution and what will produce unnecessary strain. We can't stop the rain from falling.

11:05 A.M.

Navadvīpa dāsa asked Mahārāja if I could see him today. He replied that he was busy all day, but he invited me for lunch. So we are going. But I can see the "game" beginning again. It is not that Mahārāja plays games or is deceitful, but the game of trying to meet the busy *sādhu* is beginning again. The obstacles on the path are challenges to my greed and seriousness. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that we can be unsuccessful on the *bhakti-mārga* if we are not serious enough. "To pursue the transcendental path is more or less to declare war on the illusory energy. Consequently, whenever a person tries to escape the clutches of the illusory energy, she tries to defeat the practitioner by various allurements" (*Bg.* 6.37, purport).

Right away I am thinking, "I don't have many questions to ask Mahārāja. Or, I do have questions, but there is rarely an opportunity for that kind of exchange." At lunch, there will only be time for a "how-are-you-I'm-fine." I don't want to bother him.

I don't like to be bothered. A man approached me after *maṅgala-ārati* and asked if he could see me today "anytime." No, I said. Then could I visit the devotees at the Toronto temple? Yes, but I can't say when. Then again he asked, "Today can I have at least a photo session with you and my family?" No, I said. I felt sorry I had to be brusque in Vṛndāvana, but I have to do it. So I don't want to foist myself on Mahārāja. Besides, the way he lives, it is never possible to talk alone. He is tending to so many people, some of them who help him in his own activities

in his temples, book-writing, *parikramas,* lectures—and they speak his language. I just take up time in the English language, complaining about conflicts and inabilities, or inquiring . . .

So you see, it is me who creates the games, the mental hurdles I don't want to have to jump over again and again . . . I will read in my room. I will venture out too, but right now I am not so eager or anxious for it. If someone says, "You came to India early to associate with Mahārāja and yet you don't do it?" I may reply, "He is hard to see. Besides, I have no greed. So I have been staying to my own schedule, preparing the seminar . . . "

•

4:00 P.M.

We went to lunch *prasādam* at Rūpa-Sanātana Mandira. This is the busiest time of year for pilgrimage in Vṛndāvana. I had a friendly feeling moving through the crowds as I walked the last ten minutes to the *māṭha.*

Mahārāja was in the middle of a lecture in Hindi, but when he saw me come in, he invited me to sit beside him. I touched his foot and he asked, "Are you okay?" Then he finished his lecture on Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī. Later, I met Bhūrijana Prabhu and his wife, Dhanurdhāra Swami, and Navadvīpa and his wife.

The whole time I was there, I felt no anxiety about my relationship with Mahārāja. I didn't feel the need to beg for his attention. He spoke briefly to

the group of ISKCON devotees who had come. He again asked how I was, but before I could answer, he began speaking in Hindi to someone else. That used to make me anxious, but I am used to it now.

He told us he had just spoken for one and a half hours on several verses by Rūpa Gosvāmī, such as the *maṅgalācaraṇa* verse to *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu, anarpita-carīṁ cirāt* from *Caitanya-caritāmṛta,* and *anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam.*

Bhūrijana Prabhu knows clearly what I am up to for the next four weeks and he accepts it—my living outside the temple and writing. He said he would like to go on Govardhana *parikrama* with me whenever I feel settled into my routine. Maybe in a few days.

Madhu and I walked back through the crowds after lunch. We stopped and bought a print of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Rādhā has Her hand on Kṛṣṇa's flute. The print is intimate but tasteful. It cost twenty-five rupees framed.

I spoke with Bhūrijana about my hesitations in harmonizing my relationships between Śrīla Prabhupāda and Mahārāja, and in understanding that a *rāgānugā-bhakta* favors Rādhā over Kṛṣṇa. He said we favor Rādhā in order to please Kṛṣṇa, who is the Supreme worshipable Deity. He said these concerns of mine are "recurring themes." It is important to *balance* things in our lives, he said. Go forward on all fronts. It is important to serve Śrīla Prabhupāda. Yes, I said, and how to do it well differs according to devotees. There are many authorized ways to serve him and please him.

6:25 P.M.

Donkeys are braying in this neighborhood. "The ass sings poetry and philosophy sometimes, but this braying sound only disturbs others" (*Bg.* 7.15, purport). The man next door reads aloud on his rooftop. The sky is darkening. Our first full day here is almost over.

•

August 11, 2:00 A.M.

"Think of Vṛndāvana with love. Roll in its dust. Love it ardently. Please its moving and nonmoving residents. Worship Śrī Rādhā's birthplace. With all your heart, take shelter of Śrī Vṛndāvana, the best of all holy places" (*Śrī Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta, Śataka* 1.5).

"If someone relates to me the faults of one of the moving or nonmoving residents of Vṛndāvana, then how is his action different from cutting me with hundreds of sharpened swords? . . . If one is a little bit inimical to even a single blade of grass in Vṛndāvana, then who will be able to rescue him from the horrible hell that awaits him?" (*Vm., Śataka* 1.13).

Vṛndāvana is called the capital city of the greatest nectar. For me, this may mean a better place to appreciate reading *rasa-śāstra.* It means the chance to associate with a *rasika* Vaiṣṇava, the chance to visit Govardhana, Rādhā-kuṇḍa, the Yamunā. Vṛndāvana is here. I have to overcome all other preoccupations and see Vṛndāvana.

When we went to Rūpa-Sanātana Mandir, Madhu said he prayed to the deity of Vṛndā-devī there to be allowed entrance into Vṛndāvana. I told him I had lacked the presence of mind to even remember she was there. When we took *darśana* of Rādhā-Śyāmasundara at Krishna-Balaram Mandir yesterday, I also forgot.

A "chance" reminder by Bhūrijana yesterday has turned me to the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta.* He mentioned that it is a scripture with the ideal balance of topics. (I had mentioned my hesitation to read exclusively in *parakīya* topics.) I also told him that I thought there might be some subtle neglect on my part of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. I can make a fresh start with the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta.* This is what I mean about Vṛndāvana—the inspiration to read *Caitanya-caritāmṛta,* which I could do anywhere in the world, feels strong here.

I find myself scoffing at the South American devotee wearing the violet-colored "I LOVE VṚNDĀVANA" T-shirt. But what is the harm? We all love Vṛndāvana. My neophyte writing is my proclamation that I love Vṛndāvana. Can I compare my love for Vṛndāvana to Rūpa Gosvāmī's ecstasies? Are they only like the slogan across a T-shirt? What is genuine? That is what we want to manifest.

Not every one of my words is equal to *śāstra.* I fail in my attempts to find the truth of my Kṛṣṇa conscious experience or of my external reality. But still, I yearn to capture Vṛndāvana, and I wish to serve.

Pilgrims are usually advised to leave the *dhāma* after three days so they won't commit offenses. I feel like a low-born person who has suddenly been welcomed into respectable society. I propose to free-write while I am here, but I am a little afraid to relax and lose control in the writing. I am afraid to commit offenses. I want to be conscious what I say and to say the right thing. I have faith that Vṛndā-devī will help me, and the *ācāryas*. They know I am not perfect. They know I have come to be cured.

•

Medicines have collected on my shelf: Liv 52 for prevention of liver poisoning, more likely to happen during monsoon; my usual Chyawan Prash, triphala, and I'm getting some "Telephone Brand" fleaseed husk for constipation. Other digestive aids: Lavan bhaskar, hinga shtak.

Baladeva did some "German housekeeping" in the kitchen—he mouse-proofed and roach-proofed everything. We are trying to avoid disease. Disease comes as our karma, but there is no need to increase the likelihood. For that reason, I didn't overeat yesterday at the Gaudiya Math.

•

6:00 A.M., on the roof

Fifteen minute ago the field across the way was busy with people passing stool. There are only a few left. The pink sun ball has lifted above the trees.

Now it is only half-showing, still half-merged in the blue clouds—slowly it turns yellow.

This roof isn't so private. The neighbors are only about forty feet away and they get up early. Baladeva erected a small bamboo *paṇḍāl* up here to protect me from the sun. The neighbors don't have one; I hope they don't get envious. I don't want to become preoccupied by what the neighbors think of us.

•

A puff of bluish smoke from a squatting human figure in the field. "Oh, he's smoking!" and I make my judgment. But what's worse? His smoking in Vṛndāvana or my judgment on him for smoking in Vṛndāvana? I see a loudspeaker on a pole above a building and think, "Why do they do that? Vṛndāvana shouldn't be broadcast." Why this, why that? Someone is too fat. Someone walks too slowly. A *sādhu* passes by in his too-bright orange, staring at me as he walks. Lucky I'm not God. I would be constantly dissatisfied with the creation.

An Indian crow lands in our front yard. He checks things out and then leaves as suddenly as he arrived. Once the sun clears the layers of horizon-clouds, it will be blazing hot.

It has been a long time since I have seen myna birds. Of course, I haven't seen a monkey in seven months. I saw my first one as we entered under the Bhaktivedanta Swami Arch. There he was, a large, nervous monkey standing at the base of the arch

and looking up at something with a furrowed, anxious brow.

•

We assume from the looks of our neighbors that they are not *sādhus.* Madhu said, "This one man is up here all the time just spacing out—oh, I don't want to say he is spacing out, but he is just looking around." He means he doesn't have a recognizable *bhajana,* no beads, no books, no Vaiṣṇava markings. We have all the markings.

There goes the same old *sādhu* I saw yesterday at this time, swinging his tin tiffin as he walks along the path. And Baladeva has gone for fruit. I am going downstairs. The last thing I want is to be spotted by a curious ISKCON devotee or to be involved with someone coming to the house. Let me go to my room and read.

•

4:45 P.M.

I have a headache, but I think I will write anyway.

Baladeva previously suggested this writing could be called "Return to Vṛndāvana." That seems presumptuous to me. This is my twenty-fourth or so visit to Vṛndāvana, so to imply "*the* return" has no meaning. Return again. It *isn't* humdrum to keep coming here, but that's not clear in the title, "Return to Vṛndāvana."

Another title I rejected was "Residing in Vṛndāvana" or any Sanskrit version of that (*Vṛndāvana-vāsa*). Again it is presumptuous. It says, "I have

entered Vraja and I live here," whereas in truth, I am just a visitor to the external region.

For a few hours yesterday, I thought the title could be "A Cricket in Vṛndāvana," but that's silly. The problem is, I need a working title. I think for now I will call it "Vṛndāvana Writing." The least I hope to come out with is a composite of my notes kept while living in this house. I don't have much realization about Vṛndāvana, but I have observations.

We are living in an area known as Sant Colony (Saints Colony), which is within the Rāman Retī area. It extends on both sides of Bhaktivedanta Swami Mārg.

•

A note from Baladeva:

"As I am out and about, I am trying to see favorably how the Brijbasis are Krsna conscious. If you like, I can report in. A rusty, noisy old tractor goes by pulling an awkward-looking trailer filled with villagers. One man in a turban hanging on the back is calling out, 'Govardhana!—Govardhana!' The face of a pilgrim in the crowd lights up and he says, 'Ah!' He and his family then run off toward the tractor and their next adventure in worship.

"The Brijbasis do things wonderfully that no one else can match . . . Many of them carry a Govardhana-*śilā* which they dip into any liquid before they drink it as a way to offer.

"Dhanurdhāra Swami asked the father of Ganga Prasad (the cloth merchant) why he never leaves—

even to go to Mathura. The old man very seriously exclaimed, 'Why should I go to the place of Kamsa?!'"

Am I falling back and not aspiring for the highest goal, *gopī-mañjarī-bhāva?* But is it even possible for me to aspire for that? Is it a pretense? But the *sannyāsa-mantra* I chant three times a day is a prayer to enter this *bhāva,* and it directly indicates that the spiritual master has seen this *mañjarī* seed in me. "Cultivation of this mantra will reveal all things by proper mood, meditation, and submission." *Svāhā*—I offer myself as a seed into the fire of *gopī-bhāva.* Don't deny the direction of your prayers.

•

6:05 P.M.

All three Sheaffer pens broke down and refused to work. Maybe it's the climate. But I am continuing.

I am not going today and probably not tomorrow either to see Mahārāja. I will go eventually. This is his busiest time. I just want to be careful that I don't become indifferent about it, so I am working out my questions. An opening question is beginning to take shape: "I want to ask questions which I asked you when I first saw you last year. You answered them nicely, but the questions seem to recur for me. For example, our spiritual master does not stress *rāgānugā-bhakti* in his books. On hearing *rāgānugā* topics from you, I have developed a taste for it. I prefer to hear of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's pastimes as described by Rūpa and Raghunātha Gosvāmīs more than

any other topics in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.* Is this a minimization of our Śrīla Prabhupāda's books? Could you speak on this point?"

He may not directly address my concern in his reply, but whatever he says is bound to help. It will be purifying and clarifying. I don't expect him to solve my dilemma. I have to work out my allegiance to Śrīla Prabhupāda on my own. Probably my confusion is unnecessary. I am noting here though, for the record, that even if Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja completely clears the confusion, it is still a recurring theme. I have to find my own balance.

•

7:00 P.M.

I don't like loudspeakers booming out religious songs from nearby *āśramas,* but I do like the general rising up of chants, melodies, and hubbub when it comes from a distance and reaches me in a welling up of sound. Such a festive atmosphere! And it is filled with the worship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. It is filled with Vṛndāvana.

•

10:40 P.M.

I can't sleep—it's too hot. The pain subsided in my right eye and I feel good enough to write. The air is filled with the sounds of pilgrimage. "Rādhe, Rādhe . . . " Is the sound coming from the *āśrama* down the road? Probably it comes from several places. Is that the sound of pilgrims walking on the road? It's "out there," whatever it is.

Just give me at least twenty minutes—to say what? *To pray.* I pray for the mercy of the *dhāma.* I pray that whatever egotistical intentions I have be banished from my writing and from my life.

When we go see Mahārāja, he will speak something perfect. But I cannot expect miracles to be performed on my heart by such meetings. I wrote that here yesterday, that I have to find my own balance between Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja. There is no reason to minimize one for the other and no real conflict between them or what they are teaching. "The fault, dear Brutus, is in ourselves, that we are thus or thus."

What to do about it when the doubt arises? Rūpa Gosvāmī says we should be enthusiastic *and* patient. Some impatience is good, but not the impatience of the *sahajiyā* who starts imagining he is a certain *gopī-mañjarī.*

•

I dreamt I was married again. It was hellish. My wife was throwing rocks at me. In some way she was torturing me, preventing me. I tried bargaining with her to act sanely and allow me to be Kṛṣṇa conscious, but to no avail. My disciples were present in the dream. They were distressed like me, over this influence by my wife. How nice to wake up free. No more dreams, please. When will I receive a *sphurti* (direct vision) "on the pretext of a dream?" (There you go again, being impatient.)

A Godbrother asked me what I was writing. I told him *I'm not* writing. Why should he ask? I couldn't say, "Didn't you see that big *Pilgrimage?* I am doing more of them. My diary."

I hoped by rising here in this private room I could write *and no one would come and stop me.* That's true. No bugs or critters have come to disturb me. I know I have "nothing" to say. But damn it, I am not going to let that stop me either. "You have nothing to say" is obviously the voice of my self-defeating gremlin. He is one of the critters.

I bow down and say Śrīla Prabhupāda's *praṇāma.* I worship Govinda. I worship devotional madness. I am a neophyte. I . . .

•

"O brother, now that you have entered the difficult-to-attain land of Vṛndāvana, which fulfills all desires, why have you allowed yourself to come under the spell of petty materialism? And why do you allow yourself to constantly roam about without entering the realm of pure love of Kṛṣṇa?" (*Vm, Śataka* 1.49).

Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī wrote earlier in *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta,* that one should accept whatever comes by destiny in Vṛndāvana, and concentrate on *smaraṇam.* I am living in this house in the Sant Colony. The well is salty, I have my collection of medicines, my books, my desk and chair—not so austere. It's no big deal. How will it divert me? I just have to accept it and write without either enjoying the comfort or comparing myself against the

Indian standard of living. As Śrīla Prabhupāda would say, I have been given this amenity by Kṛṣṇa. Now I have to work harder.

I disown the petty materialism charge. Neither am I wandering about in Vṛndāvana. No, I'm staying home instead of looking for Kṛṣṇa in Loi Bazaar. Eventually I will go out and visit *tīrthas,* but I am not so qualified to appreciate them. Better I spend time with the Gosvāmīs and their followers, reading their books and learning of their appreciation of Vraja-*dhāma.* That is my plan.

"Oh, now that you have entered difficult-to-attain Vṛndāvana, which fulfills all desires, why do you wander about charmed by the witch of petty desires?" *(Vm, Śataka* 1.49).

My gremlin wants to tell me that these rambling writings are also a form of wandering around. He says I am pursuing the witch of petty egotism and petty artistry in my free-writing. Ain't so, gremlin.

•

"Brother, do you know for certain when you will die? Do you think the *mahā-mantra* will check powerful death? Do you think that death will patiently wait and allow you to die at a time you prescribe? Is it for these reasons that again and again you fearlessly leave Vṛndāvana?" *(Vm, Śataka* 1.50).

•

August 12, 5:30 A.M.

I was chanting on the roof at 3:30 A.M. The near-full moon was covered in long blankets of clouds. Eventually, the clouds blew past and the moon shone brightly. So many blessings are coming to me, but not the blessings of pure love of God. Kṛṣṇa reciprocates with us, so I must be indicating to Him that I want a shelf full of medicines, a mattress and bolster pillows, Bisleri drinking water, my own house to live in—and Kṛṣṇa is saying yes easily enough, since He can grant anything and everything. I have requested pure love, but He hasn't heard that request because I don't ask deeply enough.

It is a sad fact. D.H. Lawrence said, "Ours is a tragic age and therefore we refuse to take it seriously." If I took seriously the fact of what is happening—that I am opting for less than pure love of Kṛṣṇa—it would be more than uncomfortable. It would be unbearable. But I don't take it seriously. Śrīla Prabhupāda said the asuric sinners would shudder if they accepted the facts of transmigration of the soul; therefore they refuse to consider it.

It is not just a matter of giving up amenities, but we have to give up everything, including our sense of identity. I don't seem to be able to do this. This is what is so tragic, but even as I say it, it doesn't mean much.

All *jīvas* participate in the universal conditions of birth and death. Kṛṣṇa preaches to all *jīvas* when He instructs Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Yet each individual has to realize it *alone*. A Godbrother just

wrote me and said how he has been suffering from family attachment. He is married, but now separated from his wife and children. He writes, "Now the words 'family attachment' have taken on a new depth of color and power to me. I have been there and it is not at all an abstract idea. It is a tight, tight bond, and breaking it is like having Godzilla pound on your heart. Maybe even worse."

I have to realize my predicament. It is still an abstract idea—that I don't love Kṛṣṇa. No one can do it for me. They can point out the urgency—but I have to feel it for myself and do the needful.

•

No use prolonging that discussion on this page. It is begging the question. "Purest love is such that upon being investigated, it immediately disappears; and even upon not being analyzed, it also disappears" (*The Love Locket*, by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, verse 52).

•

With dawn, the distractions start, in this house and outside. I missed my early morning writing session. Now I have to mention the metal plates being banged downstairs and how I am trying to bring my attention to something worthwhile.

Oh yes, I wanted to praise Vṛndāvana.

"Vṛndāvana is wonderful. The two sweet fair and dark splendors named Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are wonderful. He who has faith in Them and rises to

the spiritual world is wonderful. The rare soul who understands these truths is wonderful" (*Vm, Śataka* 1.57).

Vrajavāsīs stick to the dust of Vṛndāvana. "Friend, desiring to stay until the body perishes, reside in Vṛndāvana."

I wrote a note to Madhu opening the discussion of whether we should stay in this house after Baladeva leaves in four weeks. Should we move into the temple guesthouse? Some of the issues are: is it too hot here? Does the electricity cut off leaving us without fans? What about security? Will ladies have to come here to cook? Madhu's opinion is important to me. He thinks we should stay here the whole time we are in Vṛndāvana.

"I pray that I may engage in the service of the moving and nonmoving residents of Vṛndāvana." Let my praise be a service, to tell devotees around the world of the glories of Vṛndāvana, as I see it.

" . . . may I, even in the greatest suffering, remain always cheerful at heart in the unlimitedly blissful land of Vṛndāvana."

Baladeva said last night, "It was like New York City on Bhaktivedanta Swami Mārg." Thousands were walking and driving. But of course, it is worlds away from New York City. They are all here to worship Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Rādhe Rādhe Rādhe.

•

The Vraja birds are chirping. I also hear peacocks. It is already past the time when Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa return home after spending the night together in the *kuñja*. Kṛṣṇa will be home in bed. His mother will come into His room and see His sleeping form, which is more dear to her than her own life. "Wake up, child. You look so thin and tired from playing with Your rough and restless friends in the forest. The sun is up and still You are sleeping. She sprinkles His face with a little water. Wake up, son. The cows are waiting for You. Until You come personally, they won't give any milk."

And at Rādhikā's house in Yāvaṭ, Her grandmother, Mukharā, is waking Her. "Rise, dear grandchild, life of my life, sweet girl." Mukharā notices Rādhā is wearing Kṛṣṇa's yellow garment. "What is this?" Lalitā comes and tells Mukharā she is short-sighted and is actually seeing something else . . . Lavāṅgalatikā comes from Kṛṣṇa's house and tells Rādhā what is going on there.

•

Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, cuckoo the cuckoos call. Sparrows chirp . . . the *kīrtana* gong and *bhajanas* from various directions . . . all these sounds drifting through the air.

•

I want to ask Mahārāja to please speak of Rādhikā's devotees and how they please Kṛṣṇa more by serving Her than by serving Him directly. Is that

their motivation? Or are they simply serving Rādhikā? Why in recent days have I been quibbling on these issues as if there is a sectarian competition between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and Their followers? These are all signs that I am on the mental plane and have no greed. "*Vaidhī-bhakti* progresses very slowly toward the goal," writes Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, "but *rāgānugā-bhakti* moves extremely fast and enables one to be quickly situated in the relishable transcendental mellows. By following the path of *rāga-vartma,* real taste awakens in one's mind, and one runs after that current which flows from the lotus feet of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī" (*Rūpānuga-bhajana-darpaṇa,* song 5).

•

The Rādhārāṇī Express is an old train that goes from Vṛndāvana to Mathurā. Its special feature is that *sādhus* can ride free of charge. How do they tell who is a *sādhu?* I'm not sure, but probably an orange *dhotī* is good enough, and chanting *harināma.*

•

"O brothers! Now listen as I sing the glories of the *mādhurya-rasa,* the sweet conjugal mellow, for it is said to be the best and most glorious *rasa* among the five direct mellows . . . These devotees who develop attachment for the worship that follows in the footsteps of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī usually be-

come situated only in the *mādhurya-rasa*" (*Rūpānuga-bhajana-darpaṇa*, song 8).

•

11:12 A.M.

Madhu suggests we try to see Mahārāja this afternoon without an invitation. Just drop by with no expectations. If we can't see him, we will accept it. When Madhu suggested it, I first felt that it was something I wasn't quite ready for. But tomorrow is Balarāma's Appearance Day, the full moon, and after that, Mahārāja returns to Mathurā. I wanted to just stay here by myself.

When Madhu came to me with this abrupt suggestion, I was deep into the preparation of one of the seminar lectures on Śrīla Prabhupāda's boyhood. Seems I would like to just get lost in such studies and not have to think about the world or even about my advancement, duties, etc. I think it is healthy that I have quickly developed a domestic attachment to this house and to this desk and chair. But I will have to go out too.

Baladeva bought a few Brijbasi posters. I told him to look for ones that weren't too sentimental or "sexy." The ones he got are nice, especially a big one of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. It changes the appearance of this room. Now when I chant *japa*, I can look up to Them. A picture also arrived of Vṛndā-devī at Kamyavan. I pray to her in my confusion. And I am looking in my notebook for the list of questions I have been forming over the past seven months. It looks like I will go and see Mahārāja today.

What else can I say? I put the fleaseed box in a plastic bag to dissuade mice, although I know they can get into it anyway.

I don't want to write down that past, my past, in Staten Island. It no longer exists in the here and now. Now I am in Vraja, the capital city of all nectar.

In the bazaar the other day I saw a man blowing on a kazoo Indian style. Of course he was selling it. I couldn't help but notice him as his tune blasted around the crowd. I also saw posters of Kṛṣṇa . . . one of the monk, Rāma-Kṛṣṇa and his wife, and beside that, a poster of Jesus Christ which I liked. He was blessing two pieces of bread like at the Last Supper, but they looked like Indian *iddlis.*

I saw my friend's bare arm as he rode by on a rickshaw with his wife. I saw one long-time *brahmacārī* in a rickshaw now wearing white. I saw big, big books, like library reference books for sale. Everything in Vṛndāvana is out in the open. I saw a large hog attack a smaller one with ferocity. Many people stopped to watch. My brother remarked, "It's a pig-eat-pig world."

I saw a big pyramid stack of red powder and another of yellow. Do they put it out like that every day, then take it in at night? How do they preserve it? Do they sell much? I saw all this two days ago on the road from Mathurā. There was another man selling something from a cart he was wheeling up and down the road. His only likely customers were the police who created the roadblock and stopped people like us. The man was selling fly-covered

samosās. The police told him to move out of the way. I thought, "You guys are his potential customers. If you chase him away, then how and where will he sell?"

Back in Vṛndāvana, we dodged adroitly through the crowds. I used to be good at getting onto crowded subways in Manhattan. Madhu stopped to ask for direction. Three men in white sitting at a shop ignored him as if he didn't exist. Madhu and I exchanged ironic smiles. Then one of the men noticed us and heard Madhu, but didn't know where the *mandira* was. Another man stopped me and asked something I couldn't understand. I gestured that my hearing was unclear. "Cannot understand," I said, and walked away.

Every moment, millions of things happen but *they* are not like what is said, "In one moment of Lord Caitanya's pastimes in Vṛndāvana, there are more spiritual emotions than Ananta-śeṣa could express in millions of volumes." What I see is flotsam and jetsam, like the blue, white, and red flag I saw bobbing at sea when our boat crossed from Ireland to France. In Vṛndāvana, a red stack of dye can remind me of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

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From Baladeva

"This morning going on the rickshaw, a bus came by and blew off my head cloth. I stopped the rickshaw driver and jumped off. A *sādhu* was hurrying toward me with the cloth and handed it to

me exclaiming, 'Rādhe! Rādhe!' I thanked him with a *'haribol,'* but he reprimanded me with 'Rādhe! Rādhe!' I returned a 'Hare Kṛṣṇa,' but he looked me straight in the eye and said, *'Na!* Rādhe! Rādhe!' So I said *'Jaya* Rādhe!' Then he smiled and walked on."

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4:45 P.M.

We got off the rickshaw and walked the last five or ten minutes to Bankebihārī. Now we are inside Rūpa-Sanātana Mandir. A *brahmacārī* unbolted the gate to let us in. Most of the devotees are sleeping. It is quiet, like a church. The *brahmacārī* asked us to sit on a wooden bench outside Mahārāja's room. The wooden bench combined with the overwhelming silence reminds me of being in a Catholic Church, maybe on a Saturday afternoon when I was going to confession.

I rehearsed two questions with Madhu on the rickshaw. We have no tape recorder, although I asked Madhu to bring one. I will say I have asked this question before. We know why our Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasized *vaidhī-bhakti* in his books—because we weren't ready for more. But I fear sometimes that I am minimizing him if I go to read his books or hear his cassettes and think, "Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja is teaching a more advanced subject." Actually, some days I don't think like this at all, but sometimes it occurs. And Mahārāja himself has noted how strong the *guru-niṣṭhā* is in ISKCON for Śrīla Prabhupāda. My whole life depends on pleasing him. So I don't want any minimization.

Another question is how I may determine whether to continue giving initiation or whether to give only *śikṣā* instead.

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6:15 P.M.

We're home. We were with Mahārāja for an hour. I asked my question and he took it in a slightly different way, as if I actually said I was thinking Śrīla Prabhupāda was inferior for not presenting *rāgānugā* topics profusely. He explained that his guru and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Mahārāja also did not present *rāgānugā* topics directly. Even Lord Caitanya did not reveal His identity in the mood of *rādhā-bhāva,* but this was brought out by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī. He said that in his own guru's books—and in our Śrīla Prabhupāda's books—the *rasika* meaning is there in seed form and one who knows can see it. He said he thinks he would like to write expanded commentary on what his own spiritual master gave on *gopī-bhāva* topics. (This made me think the same could be done with Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.)

So *ācāryas* present what they do in order to fulfill God's will. Sanātana Gosvāmī also didn't write much on *gopī-bhāva,* and yet to the degree he didn't, the other *rasika-ācāryas* were able to expand it. Yet Sanātana Gosvāmī was in *gopī-bhāva,* and so is Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission was to preach in the West, so there was no opportunity to present *gopī-bhāva.* Śrīla Prabhupāda feared (rightly) that we

would all become *sahajiyās* if we were exposed too much. Mahārāja said he has seen many become ruined by hearing confidential, conjugal topics while retaining a material conception. He also said he has never had any such doubt in his spiritual master.

We didn't tape it, except for a faint recording made with my dictaphone. Toward the end, he said that even when a topic is *vaidhī-bhakti,* he changes it to something about the *gopīs.* That is because actually, the *gopīs* are the most exemplary devotees. Whether giving examples of *śraddhā* or *āsakti* or *mahā-bhāva,* the *gopīs* are always the best. Hanumān and Prahlāda are completely pure and surrendered, but not as surrendered as the *gopīs.* He said even the teachings of the *Bhagavad-gītā* are best exemplified by the *gopīs,* but the general audience for the *Gītā* doesn't have the qualification to hear about them.

It was reassuring to be back in his presence. He is the *śikṣā-guru* for ISKCON devotees and he says he does more for us than for his own organization. I am grateful and feel new impetus to pursue the precious literatures of Kṛṣṇa and *gopī-bhāva,* and to do it in a way that is service to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

On the rickshaw on the way back, Dhanurdhāra Swami assured me that the relationships we have with Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja are harmonious. Even after hearing from Mahārāja, we still have to make decisions for ourselves based on our own eligibility. When we do that, we rest on what we have learned from Śrīla Prabhupāda. I said, "For me, an ideal result is to feel

assured that Śrīla Prabhupāda is happy that we are hearing from Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja." Śrīla Prabhupāda says in effect, "Go on hearing from him. It is a rare opportunity. Assimilate it carefully in a way that doesn't harm your faith in your *gurudeva* and use whatever you learn to contribute to ISKCON and its devotees." Śrīla Prabhupāda knows it is not for everyone. Yet we need it. The devotees who are learning from Mahārāja are not retiring, but preaching and managing.

Mahārāja will come tomorrow evening to speak at Krishna-Balaram Mandir. Several times he said he wanted to hear from Dhanurdhāra Mahārāja and me first. I hope we can get out of that. But just in case that's impossible, I will try to get a few references together from Śrīla Prabhupāda's books on Lord Balarāma.

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9:45 P.M.

Up sweating, can't sleep. There is a Vedic verse which states *nāyam ātmā bala hinena labhya,* only by spiritual strength can one become Kṛṣṇa conscious. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that Vivekananda interpreted this to mean that we need physical strength to become spiritually advanced. He advocated physical exercise. Some even say we should eat meat and "become like a tiger." But *bala* refers to *spiritual* strength—and that comes from Lord Balarāma, not physical exercise. So we pray to Lord Balarāma for that strength. The guru is also a representative of Balarāma.

When Gargamuni came to do the name-giving ceremony of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, he said that Balarāma, the son of Vasudeva and Rohiṇī, "would be very pleasing to His family members and relatives and therefore He would be called Rāma. In the future, He would be extraordinarily strong and therefore would be called Balarāma." Because the two families—Nanda's and the Yadus—were so intimately connected and attracted, therefore, His name will also be Saṅkārṣaṇa. So His true names were Balarāma, Saṅkārṣaṇa, and Baladeva.

Baladeva is the first expansion of Kṛṣṇa, who is known as Nityānanda Rāma, and from Him come the *puruṣa-avatāras* who bring about all creation of universes and who activate and sustain all *jīvas.*

In installing Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma Deities—as well as Gaura-Nitāi Deities, Śrīla Prabhupāda was showing the world that Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda are the same persons who earlier appeared as Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. He also told us to pray to Balarāma in our admitted weakness and we will get strength to do our duties.

We need strength to rise early, perform our duties, and overcome physical lethargy. We need strength to overcome doubts and to battle against the forces of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the demons, the Māyāvādīs, etc. And we need strength to curb our *anarthas,* our pride, etc.

These are some things I could speak on, but the ISKCON audience is yearning to hear from Mahārāja, not me. Dhanurdhāra Swami said to Mahārāja that last year he compared our Śrīla Prabhupāda to

Balarāma. As Balarāma-Saṅkārṣaṇa has great power to attract (he is the power of the law of gravity, He holds everything together), so Śrīla Prabhupāda has drawn to him *jīvas* from all over the world in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. How nice to make Balarāma's appearance day an occasion to praise Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Mahārāja said our Śrīla Prabhupāda is like Vyāsadeva. Yes, he was empowered and was supersuccessful in the work that Bhagavān and guru gave him to do. Mahārāja said he would have liked to have joined Śrīla Prabhupāda in preaching, but at that time, after the disappearance of his own spiritual master (1968), he thought he should stay in India and follow his guru's order. Mahārāja was in charge of much of the management of his guru's organization. He said had he been free as he is now, he would have joined and gone with Śrīla Prabhupāda.

He also said that by staying in India, he got the opportunity to read so many of the *ācāryas'* books. He was the librarian and read his guru's copies of *rasika* books, although at that time, he didn't even know their titles. He said all these books came to him without his making any effort to get them. When he spoke of how people can become ruined by reading *rasika* books, he said devotees with the right greed go into it and get the right thing.

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Tonight when I awoke, I thought how Mahārāja took my question in a way I didn't intend. He said he never asked such a question about his *gurudeva,* whether he is inferior. And yet my own question wasn't *that* different, was it? I wasn't saying I thought Śrīla Prabhupāda was in any way lesser, but that I felt fearful when I didn't have enthusiasm to read his books and hear his lectures—since admittedly, they are for Westerners who aren't qualified to hear *rasika* topics. Let my *anarthas* be exposed, that's okay—but let me not walk into committing the mad elephant offense (*guru-aparādha*).

Prabhupāda, you know I want to be strong as your servant. I am asking these questions to get myself rightly situated. I will read all of your books, regardless of their content, and I will base my preaching on them wherever I travel on your order, especially to devotees whom I will tell, "Chant and hear, these things come first." I will hear you lecture too, and appreciate and love how you preach. I will talk with you and pray to you. Mahārāja is helping me to do that.

So let my foolishness serve me and others in that way, correcting any doubts we may have and fixing us at Prabhupāda's lotus feet. Even if we consider that Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't dwell on the advanced topics of *gopī-prema* (and Lord Caitanya also didn't dwell on it), consider what he did do instead and why. He rescued more *jīvas* than anyone ever has. He gave the right medicine for Kali-yuga (*harer nāma, Bhagavad-gītā*—which he called the ABCs of spiritual knowledge—*prasādam* distribution). At the

same time, he gave Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa worship, *Kṛṣṇa* book, *Nectar of Devotion, Caitanya-caritāmṛta*—everything we need to gradually develop. He gave so much. Had he dwelt on *gopī-bhāva,* it would not have been effective—and the hippies who became his disciples would have ruined themselves. What he did is always right. He was guided by guru and Kṛṣṇa. May my Śrīla Prabhupāda guide me and protect me.

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August 13, 7:12 A.M. (late start!), Balarāma's Appearance Day

I woke up at 3:45 A.M. Even now I have only five minutes to write, then drink a glass of pomegranate juice, then a little rest, then work on the seminar lectures. Seems like monsoon season has ended and the heat has returned. No shirts.

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"Bajaj Vacco" label on desk lamp staring me in the face as if it had some significance. O Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, Your lotus feet should replace all these *Bajaj Vaccos* in my heart.

I went into the kitchen to tell Madhu I need a seminar file right away. I found Baladeva sitting holding a sock while Madhu poured pomegranate seeds into it. They were using the sock as a strainer.

I was chanting on the roof between 4 and 5 A.M. The moon was covered. I saw a few lights on at the Krishna-Balaram Mandir and heard the conch

blasts and the bell. I hurried along in my *japa,* wide awake, but thoroughly entrenched in *vaidhī* mechanicalism. Bow down your head to the stones between rounds and especially remember Prabhu Nityānanda. Emit a mouse-like squeak, "Please help a mouse to chant."

A breeze started up just before dawn. I want to put up a mosquito net on the roof so I can write up here early in the morning. Madhu also wants to try sleeping up there. He was awake most of the night because of the heat.

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"Just like the *gopīs* and all the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana. They were thinking, 'We are Kṛṣṇa's.' The central point was Kṛṣṇa. That is the beauty of Vṛndāvana. All the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana, the elderly cowherd men, the boys, the trees, the river, the birds, the beasts—*everyone*—they are simply thinking, 'I am Kṛṣṇa's.' This is Kṛṣṇa consciousness. As soon as we think otherwise . . . that is material consciousness" (Lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda, Los Angeles, 1971).

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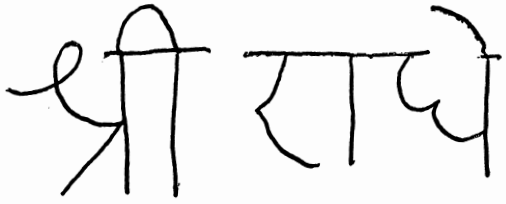
11:10 A.M.

No one is up on their roof at this time of day. The sun is too hot. There are saffron clothes and strips of *kaupins* blowing in the wind on the clothesline just over my head.

There are well-worn paths in the field. I hear someone walk by, unseen, speaking Hindi—calling

to someone. Something to disrupt me? Two *sādhus* (dressed in orange) lying in the full shade of a tree. A boy with a long yellow *dhotī* carrying a faded black umbrella. From the right, toward Fogel Āśrama and the Sītā-Rāma place, a lecturer's voice. Wherever you look, the Rādhā inscription is painted on the wall:



I want to be a devotee and write wonderful things. I really want to be a writer; I *am* a writer and get hung up on wanting people to accept me as such. They don't have to say, "You're a great, great writer," but just know that I write constantly. I want them to acknowledge that it is my way, my personal way to serve, and it is as valid as anyone else's service. One brother was saying that those who go see Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja are not retiring and that this is a good sign. He cited one devotee as an example: "He's on the phone every night and his door is open for whoever wants to see him." But what if you never touch a phone and your door is mostly closed?

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There goes Madhu, walking toward the Krishna-Balaram Mandir. His head is covered with saffron almost like an Arab. He is carrying a green canvas shopping bag. He was enthusiastic about our meeting yesterday. Mahārāja remembered his name. Madhu said he is satisfied being seen as my servant. "And by name," I said. He thanked me for bringing him to see Mahārāja. "Thank *you* for bringing *me*," I said. And it's true, he was the one who pushed that we should go uninvited, yesterday, like my mother pushed me to learn how to ride my first bicycle when it arrived by UPS truck.

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I can write about something other than flies on my skin. I can tolerate the flies. Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are the prime subjects. They are the pinnacle of all meditation and all expression. They are always present in the hearts and minds of those rare *rasika* Vaiṣṇavas. Kṛṣṇa is God, but He is more than that. He is the sweetest nectar, personified bliss, an ocean of attractiveness. And Rādhā is His all-conquering consort, although She is more than that. She attracts Kṛṣṇa. He becomes mad to enjoy with Her. The devotees who assist Her always share Her topmost bliss.

Vṛndāvana is Their land, Their playground. I see its surface. Prabhupāda said that as long as we think according to the bodily designation, we cannot know Kṛṣṇa as His Vraja devotees do.

I can catch glimpses if I am perceptive. Those three figures I see sitting silhouetted in the shade remind me of the six Gosvāmīs. These particular three people might be Māyāvādīs, it doesn't matter. I am trying to see the six Gosvāmīs, not these three people. I want to think of them crying out, "*He rādhe vraja-devike ca lalite, he nanda-sūno kutaḥ.*"

I want to see and worship the trees in Vraja. They know secrets. They have seen Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. They are guardians of Vṛndāvana's blessings. Only *rasika* Vaiṣṇavas and the *rasa-śāstras* can reveal what those blessings are. We have come to Vṛndāvana to find out for ourselves.

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A crowd has gathered out there. Above their heads I see a Śaivite trident and a person's foot. He was standing on his head. Some kind of public austerity.

Mahārāja said that after his lecture at the Gaudiya Math yesterday, a politician spoke and "covered everything with the clouds of Māyāvādī." Mahārāja had spoken on *anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam* and "all were satisfied." But the Māyāvādī politician quoted a Vedic verse to the effect that one should see one's father as God, one's mother as God, one's wife as God: *sarvam khalv idam brahma.* Mahārāja said that this was true, but in the case of Bharata (in the Rāmāyaṇa), he disobeyed his mother. He told her it would have been better he was killed in her womb

than to be born as her son. He called her the killer of her husband.

Yes, I said, and when our Śrīla Prabhupāda came to the West, we also had to disobey our mothers. They told us, "Don't follow the Swami in Kṛṣṇa consciousness," but we said, "No, I won't obey you." When I said that, Mahārāja looked at me in a penetrating way.

Sometimes I wonder whether he has understood me correctly because of the language difference. Despite that, our personal exchanges are significant. Just to see him with his gray beard, neat Gauḍīya *śikhā, sādhu's* physique—thin, soft, renounced, erect back, but not rigid—and to touch his feet is a pleasure for the sense of touch. His words of encouragement and gentle correction go deep into the psyche, never to be forgotten I hope.

He asked me where I usually preach. I went through it in a rushed and jumbled way because others were present and I didn't want to take time bragging about "great preaching" I had done. Trinidad? Guyana? Is that in Africa? No, it's in South America. Fifty percent of the people are Hindus there.

I quickly passed over that and put my first question to him. Later, hearing that I will be here for four and a half months, he said that we can meet on many occasions. I said yes, but I don't want to take up all your time. So many people come to see you. He laughed, but said seriously, "No, you can come." So I will.

He asked Dhanurdhāra Swami to be sure to attend a *nāgar-saṅkīrtana* party the evening before Janmāṣṭamī. He didn't ask me. Later, Dhanurdhāra Swami told me that this *harināma* is a real ordeal. You have to stay up late the day before Janmāṣṭamī. Our group chants in a procession—in front of us is a loud brass band and I think he said a ladies' group directly after us. The ISKCON *kīrtana* leaders get disturbed because they can't even hear their own *kīrtana*. Of course, I plan to not attend, walking four hours like that is not possible for me.

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Caitanya-caritāmṛta begins with fourteen key verses. Then everything expands from that. I am up to reading (once again) the section on *guru-tattva*. It is relevant.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja says the initiating and instructing gurus are both direct representatives of Kṛṣṇa and are equal, although their duties may be different. My relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja are within the bona fide tradition. There is nothing to be bewildered about. Mahārāja said yesterday that our *guru-sampradāya* is *ekadada*. It is one. Śrīla Prabhupāda made the same point in his 1935 essay, "The guru is one." It is all right that I am trying to be scrupulous on this point, but I shouldn't think it is uncharted territory or that the reality of *śikṣā-guru* is not allowed or that it is harmful to my relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda.

I am also reading *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta.* Last night when I couldn't sleep, I read some verses that were blazing. This was the ecstasy I was seeking when I read Rilke and tried to fill my soul with the ecstasy of his poetry. I read about six verses, all declaring, "Come and live immediately in Vṛndāvana!" And to read them here! Of course, I cannot live as renounced as he recommends and I cannot see the dark and fair couple, but when I read him I get a glimpse.

Navadvīpa just arrived. I had to "ignore" him in favor of this. Those who love me let me write. Actually, I write for them. Twelve-year-old Jaya Gurupāda dāsa wrote me, "Our drama will most probably be after *sundara-ārati.* I am still not sure which day. I hope you can come. Will you come to the festival on Balarāma Jayanti? I feel like this writing retreat is an exile. How long will it last? I hope not long because it is becoming unbearable. It already feels like twelve years and more."

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References from Śrīla Prabhupāda's books for Balarāma Jayanti

"In forms of the Personality of Godhead other than Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva, there is no facility for intimate personal contact as in the transcendental pastimes of the Lord at Vraja-bhūmi *(Bhāg.* 1.2.22, purport).

When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira asked Arjuna about the well-being of the members of the Yadu dynasty,

he said, "How is Balarāma, the Personality of Godhead and the protector of devotees?" Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Śrī Rāma, or Balarāma, is the protector . . . [and] acts as the spiritual master of all devotees. . . . [He] appeared as Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu. . . . By His divine grace only one can approach the Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and thus Śrī Balarāma is the mercy incarnation of the Lord, manifested as the spiritual master, the savior of the pure devotees" (*Bhāg.* 1.14.29).

One gets the sword of knowledge from Kṛṣṇa and by the mercy of Balarāma (represented by the spiritual master) one gets the strength to hold the sword of Kṛṣṇa's instruction. Their weapon is *saṅkīrtana-harināma.* "We are therefore worshiping Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma in Vṛndāvana" (*Bhāg.* 7.15.45).

"Not to speak of others, even Lord Baladeva, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is full of emotions like pure friendship and paternal love [for Kṛṣṇa]" (*Cc., Ādi* 6.76).

Ekala iśvara kṛṣṇa āra saba bhṛtya. Kṛṣṇa is the only Supreme Lord; all others are His servants. Thus Balarāma too, although the older brother of Kṛṣṇa, is imbued with desire to serve Kṛṣṇa. Balarāma is the source of the sentiment of servitude.

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4:40 P.M.

It's so hot here. We read the poems of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī where he expresses his desire to witness Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's *dāna-keli* pastimes. He actually enters Their *līlā* and takes part as Tulasī-

mañjarī, but then the vision ends and he laments. Dāna-nivartana-kuṇḍa is the place where Rādhā finally paid Kṛṣṇa the tax on the *gopīs'* milk products. We each read a page and then pass the book around. It is like entering another world.

I heard Mahārāja say that because we want to serve Kṛṣṇa, He works to trick us into fully coming to Him. He has to trick us to give up those plans which are contrary to pure devotional service. When a devotee goes on *parikrama* in Vraja, Kṛṣṇa follows behind him thinking, "How to find a way to trick this devotee into the trap of unalloyed loving service?" When I heard this I wondered if Kṛṣṇa sees me staying in this house. I know He sees everything—but I wonder if He is thinking, "He writes all the time, but it is not unalloyed *bhakti*. There is something blocking the way." He sees my *anarthas* and *aparādhas*. Kṛṣṇa, I hope You find a way. I am not deliberately being perverse. I write in hopes of improving, doing *bhajana*, and helping devotees on the path. I am waiting for You to help me. You know what is best.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said having an expert physician is not a guarantee that a patient won't die. A good boat on the ocean is no guarantee that someone won't drown. Something beyond a person's full endeavor is required. That is Providence. In Vṛndāvana, Kṛṣṇa is present not just as "ordinary" Providence, but in a *rasika* way. If He doesn't deem me fit, then I can never enter the pastimes of Vṛndāvana.

I would like to have gone in the van to pick Mahārāja up and bring him to the Krishna-Balaram Mandir, but it is a complicated arrangement and I don't live in the temple. Besides, when I stand up quickly I feel faint. Headaches are not far away. Perspiration above the upper lip . . .

Madhu called me to look at a "fabulous bird" on the electric wire. It is black with a bright blue-green stripe on each wing, a white breast, and long thin beak. Its mouth is open and it appears to be panting in the heat.

A donkey brays another short poem. *Sādhus* walk by, brown-skinned bodies and dark orange cloth, silver-colored tiffins, barefoot . . .

If they insist I lecture, I will speak for no more than five minutes. I always feel embarrassed lecturing in front of Mahārāja. Mahārāja has so many inner understandings that I lose my confidence. I can't be complacent. I could easily make a mistake.

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August 14, 1:20 A.M.

High point for me—Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja arrived at the temple, greeted the Deities surrounded by many devotees and guests and the two young calves in front of Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma's altar.

This all happened last night. I wasn't able to report in because I had a headache. I am still hesitant to try writing a full report. Mahārāja is very important to life in ISKCON and his place at Krishna-Balaram Mandir is well-established. He

comes every year to speak on the occasion of Lord Balarāma's Appearance Day. He even complained, "What new thing can I say?" But we love to hear whatever he says. We have to hear, however, with faith. I saw one devotee there who didn't look like he had that faith in Mahārāja and I realized what a strain it creates.

Mahārāja's speech was high-level and technical about Baladeva Prabhu being in charge of the *sandhinī* energy. Therefore, He is the platform on which Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's *vilāsa-līlā* (which is *hlādinī-śakti*) takes place. So if it weren't for the power of Balarāma (supplying existence), there would be no *kuñja-līlā, mādhurya-rasa,* etc., I couldn't follow all that he said.

He then launched into one of his favorite topics—that our Śrīla Prabhupāda is not in *sakhya-bhāva* as some "outsiders" have said. He was surely in *gopī-bhāva* and therefore could teach all *bhāvas.* One evidence of this is that he had received the *sannyāsa-mantra* from his *guru mahārāja.* Also, our *sampradāya-gurus* are all in this *gopī-bhāva.* Mahārāja is so outright about this.

He also says Śrīla Prabhupāda is with us and we shouldn't be depressed. He is in Goloka, but also here, all-pervading. We should go on with our preaching even though there are certainly obstacles.

He said Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted us to go on to the *rāgānugā* stage. He couldn't teach it to us when he was here because we weren't qualified (sometimes Mahārāja says Śrīla Prabhupāda had no time because he had to battle atheists with so many

Western conceptions; in the same way, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura spent all his time hacking down the jungle of Māyāvādīs). But it *is* in our Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and he wanted us to attain it. There are warnings in *śāstra* that unqualified persons should not inquire into *rāsa-līlā.* He was saying the unqualified shouldn't inquire but those who have greed should enter.

Before he spoke, he insisted that I speak briefly. The others were prepared to "stonewall" this request and insist that Mahārāja alone speak because there was so little time. But I saw he wanted me to do it; he gestured I should stand, and just for a few minutes at least, speak. So I did. I had prepared nice things and felt confident, and I spoke as service to him. I stood with the Śrīla Prabhupāda *mūrti* behind me, faced the crowd and said Śrīla Prabhupāda's *praṇāmas.* I began quoting a verse from *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* that our Śrīla Prabhupāda liked to quote: *nāyam ātmā bala hinena labhya.* Vivekananda said this *bala* means physical strength, but this is not correct. *Bala* means that no one can make spiritual advancement unless he or she has the spiritual strength bestowed by Balarāma. That spiritual strength is also called *acyuta-bala.* Then I quickly explained why Śrīla Prabhupāda installed Gaura-Nitāi and Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma. The spiritual master is the representative of Balarāma. We are all grateful to Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja for giving us strength to continue our service to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

After Mahārāja finished speaking, the 7 P.M. *ārati* began and he stood in front of each altar. My eye

hurt. The crowds were tight—there were so many guests. At Rādhā-Śyāma's altar, the *pūjārī* gave some flowers to Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja. He turned and gave a few to me. (I also honored some of the water left in the cup after he took a long drink.)

At the end, he got into the van with some of his men. The ISKCON devotees invited me to ride with them in the van back to Mathurā, but my eye hurt, it was almost 8 P.M., and I would have jeopardized my overnight recovery. I had to let the opportunity pass by me, although such an opportunity is so rare. Certainly it is not enough to read *rasika* texts; we need the key applied over and over again by the *rasika* Vaiṣṇava to open them.

Now I will have to make plans to see Mahārāja in Mathurā. They tell me my ex-wife is now in Vṛndāvana and she goes every other day to see Mahārāja. I have to schedule visits to avoid her.

I also want to keep up my intent to follow Mahārāja without being swept into any group-ism or competition. I am not going to him because it is a fad in ISKCON, but there are deep, impelling reasons. I am also trying to work on the *bhajana* he has recommended.

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In *Caitanya-caritāmṛta,* Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja writes, "The instructing spiritual masters are Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī, Śrī Bhaṭṭa Raghunātha, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī, Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, and Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī" *(C.c., Ādi* 1.36). Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "By accepting the

six Gosvāmīs as his instructing spiritual masters, the author specifically makes it clear that one should not be recognized as a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava if he is not obedient to them." So it is clear that the six Gosvāmīs and their permanent followers, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī, Viśvanātha Cakravartī, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, and so on, are our *śikṣā-gurus.* I want to approach them and learn to serve.

The *gopī-bhāva* conception and the *śikṣā-guru* conception are back firmly in my mind. I wavered in the last week or so before coming to India. I am not thinking I can quickly attain it by the sheer number of visits or questions put to Mahārāja. I must *value* the relationship and *always* act upon it. That is more important than how many times I go and "bother" him, trying to draw from him.

Last night I heard how hard it is to enter *gopī-bhāva.* Lord Brahmā cannot enter and neither can Uddhava. (Mahārāja was exhorting these ideas in his speech, and the ISKCON members were leaning in closely to hear and accept. At least many were. We know some don't accept what he says, but he goes ahead boldly—giving us what he is sure we need to go on in Śrīla Prabhupāda's service). Even Śaṅkara could not, although he became Gopīśvara. As Gopīśvara, Lord Śiva didn't know his name or his husband's name, so he was not allowed to enter *gopī-bhāva* or the *rāsa* dance. Mahārāja said, *"But we are so fortunate in this line."*

When he said "this line," he held up his arm indicating the one *sampradāya* coming through Lord

Caitanya and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and Mahārāja's spiritual master, Bhakti-prajña Keśava Mahārāja, and our spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda. We are so fortunate. We can receive it from them. They are not independent gurus. We worship the whole line. Our guru connects us to the whole line. And that line is in *gopī-bhāva.* It appears that we who are drawn to this line have the seed of *gopī-bhāva,* if we can develop it.

Then he spoke on the *gopāla-mantra* and *kāma-gāyatrī.* He spoke how Śrīla Prabhupāda and his followers are preaching successfully in such difficult places as Russia and China. In Russia, when the devotees persisted in chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra even while in jail, this brought about the downfall of the Soviet Union . . .

These are splendid occasions. We sometimes falter or doubt later what he teaches, but he picks us up again and shows us that his words are not concocted; they are the confidential, esoteric essence of our Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava line. We will therefore not forget it or put it aside. But how deeply can we enter?

•

11:00 A.M., roof

A devotee asked Mahārāja, "Is each particle of dust in Vṛndāvana a devotee?" He replied, "It is *rasa.*"

Sometimes our questions are too analytical. We think, "If it makes logical sense, only then will we

accept it and be able to enter the mood." But it is not like that. It is *rasa*.

•

This morning, I saw ants eating something white on the floor. Baladeva mused, "A real Vṛndāvana scene. It began last night. It was a lizard. About forty ants attacked it while it was still alive." I thought, "How is this a Vṛndāvana scene?" Yet it *is* happening here.

•

"*Jaya* Rādhe" . . . they say it superficially, but Śrīla Prabhupāda used to give it credit, the common person's utterance of "Rādhe, Rādhe."

"O Vṛndāvana, if I have even only once seen you, if I have even only once called out the holy names Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, or if I have even only once bowed before you with devotion and surrendered to you, then please, O my Mother, do not ignore me" (*Vm, Śataka* 1.100).

•

A boy with a stick is rounding up the goat and kid. But they are not inclined to follow. They want to eat grass wherever they like.

What is the idea of this writing? It is to keep going with anything that comes. Pay attention to *it* and what comes to the mind.

Plastic clothespins (pink, light blue, and yellow) on the brick wall. The mosquito net on the roof

sways in the wind like an Aghāsura demon in a *gurukula* skit. Mothers with babies—or are they carrying something else? Pots?—I can't see far enough to distinguish what they are carrying.

Baladeva suggests I keep an exercise book for trying my hand at the language and metaphor of *rasika* poetry. "As a sort of literary exercise to help the consciousness absorb the mellows. Something like those notebooks you kept on Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra writing. You could practice repeating the nectarean descriptions you have heard as they flow into your mind." This idea appeals to me, because I have never found a way to write at all like the *rasācāryas*. I seemed "doomed" to my American prose. I am looking for a suitable notebook to try this. But let me do the first exercise here.

Rasa exercise:

The *cātaka* bird lives only on the rain that falls from a certain monsoon cloud and won't accept other water. *Rasika* devotees will starve rather than ingest any literature that doesn't describe Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

The *cakora* birds drink only beams of moonlight. They wait for the moon to rise.

Kṛṣṇa is the taster of mellows. He also tests the *gopīs*. As a goldsmith tests the value of gold by scratching it, Kṛṣṇa tests each of the millions of *gopīs* participating with Him in the *rāsa* dance. He discovers that Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī alone satisfies Him.

The red *lac* from Her feet rubs off on His chest. The red *kuṁkum* from Her breasts rubs off on His

feet and as He walks in the dewy morning, transforms the land of Vṛndāvana into *rasa.*

The beauty of the forms of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa defeat, shame and embarrass the beauty of all forms of Nature. Kāmadeva is pained by Kṛṣṇa's youthful pose when He stands with His flute. Rādhā's thighs put the beauty of banana tree trunks to shame. Kṛṣṇa's arms are "coming to peace talks" with big bolts of doors.

I can go on recalling and collecting like that as an exercise. I do it with faith in what I repeat and appreciating the tasty manner in which they express *kuñja-vilāsa.* I hope to become addicted to hearing the actual pastimes straight from the source.

•

Why do I write? I write because there is sweat on my upper lip. Because I came here to do it. I write because I learned how to do it in college. It is a way I have chosen. If I don't write, I won't collect pages.

I write because there is an old woman in a faded *sarī* slowly walking across the field and I want to tell you about it. I write to chase blues, to race ahead of my agitated mind and not dwell on sex desire. I write to chase the flies. I write because Prabhupāda told me to.

I write because we came to Vṛndāvana and I am always saying this is the best place to write. There is a bamboo-supported tent up here to protect me from the sun, just so I can write.

I write because we have typists and Baladeva and Kaiśorī and Madhu and everybody, even my high school English teacher, and the dictionary—and what would I do if I didn't write?

I write to join the elite order of eternal Vaiṣṇavas. I write in hopes that Kṛṣṇa will say, "All right, give him some mercy. Let his writing improve and be filled with *rasa*." I write to explain myself and to do honest work. I write to serve readers. I write to do something crucial during the crucial hours of the day. When I don't write, I think, "That time could have been spent writing." (I felt that way yesterday. We were alone in a room for fifteen minutes waiting for Mahārāja to arrive. I could have written there, but I was trying to subdue a headache.)

I write to use precious health and life duration. After I die, something will be left behind. They will say, "He wrote many books like Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura. Not *like* Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, but for ordinary strugglers like himself."

Here comes Baladeva on a rickshaw. He has a red *gamchā* on his head. The small *walla* is pedaling the heavy-set *sādhu* in white cloth. Baladeva may have bought me some India ink—which is why I write. I write also to tell you that last night, after Mahārāja's lecture, while he stood before Rādhā-Śyāma, the *pūjārī* gave him flowers. Mahārāja gave me some of those flowers and I will put them in a reticule. Just consider what Mahārāja said about *gopī-bhāva* and Śrīla Prabhupāda—and that he handed me the flowers on Baladeva Jayanti. I pray to Balarāma and

the one *guru-sampradāya*—I treasure all these things as much as I treasure those yellow daisy petals with the brown whorl that are now inside my reticule. It is worth writing down.

I am foolish. I write in hopes of getting beyond foolishness. It doesn't matter that I am a fool; I write and connect with Kṛṣṇa consciousness. *Anyone* can write, and if he lives a *sādhaka's* life, he can give the most valuable thing.

•

August 15

An advanced devotee experiencing Vraja might go on *parikrama* and see the holy places. I stay in one place and like the python, take what comes across my path. The ISKCON devotees don't go so much on *parikrama* because they have institutional or preaching duties to perform.

In former years, we only dreamed what spiritual advancement might mean. Of course, we knew it meant becoming more renounced, more detached, and more surrendered to Kṛṣṇa's service. "And if there is any reluctance to execute such a stern order, which is without consideration of so-called kinsmen . . . that reluctance should be thrown off" (*Bg.* 3.30, purport). But now the goal of advancement is clearer—we aspire to enter the eternal pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and learn our particular service there. This is achieved by spontaneous attraction. Lord Caitanya's devotees are generally in the *mādhurya-rasa,* and their inclination is to serve Śrī Rādhikā as one of Her maidservants. They begin

the inner cultivation of this goal by hearing the *rasa-śāstras* and hearing from the *rasika* Vaiṣṇava. We have to do what is favorable for Kṛṣṇa consciousness and avoid what is unfavorable.

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Mahārāja told us to come alone because a combination of more advanced and less advanced devotees makes it difficult to speak freely.

•

Everyone should be given a chance. We want to see a fighting Vaiṣṇava, Śrīla Prabhupāda said. Not lazy, sleeping, and smoking *biḍi*. Fighting for Kṛṣṇa.

This life is for the advanced stage, residing in Vraja and thinking of Kṛṣṇa, but I admit I am not on the advanced stage. What am I doing here?

I already told you, dear mind, that we are here for a few weeks practicing . . .

They will laugh, he who knows so little is holding a pen. But *acyuta-bala* will help me hold the pen. I will write something appropriate for the people I serve . . .

•

"The *gopīs* said: O friends, those eyes that see the beautiful faces of the sons of Mahārāja Nanda are certainly fortunate. As those two sons enter the forest, surrounded by Their friends, driving the cows before Them, They hold Their flutes to Their

mouths and glance lovingly upon the residents of Vṛndāvana. For those who have eyes, we think there is no greater object of vision" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.7).

This verse is like the painting by our Godbrother, Parīkṣit dāsa. I have a copy of a Vraja version of this scene in my room. Kṛṣṇa is playing His flute and leading the cows through the village. All kinds of elderly *gopas* and *gopīs* see Kṛṣṇa as He walks with His friends led by Balarāma. But as all the residents (and trees and animals) are rapt in the vision of Kṛṣṇa, He is rapt in the vision of the *gopīs*. Even when He looks at various *gopīs*, He is seeking only one, only Rādhā. We want to know this mood and please Him by serving Her.

Devotees ask, "Then what may we do at our present stage to help ourselves?" It is not easy to take direct action. Service in ISKCON is part of it. And service to Prabhupāda. This inner absorption in Vraja-*līlā* is also service to Prabhupāda when done in the right way.

Hear the splendid, most splendid pastimes of Kṛṣṇa.

I am getting a better idea that participation and appreciation of Kṛṣṇa's Vraja pastimes comes through the mercy of Lord Caitanya. "May that Lord, who is known as the son of Śrīmatī Śacīdevī, be transcendentally situated in the innermost chambers of your heart. Resplendent with the radiance of molten gold, He has appeared in the age of Kali by His causeless mercy to bestow what no incarnation has ever offered before: the most sublime and ra-

diant spiritual knowledge of the mellow taste of His service" (*C.c., Ādi* 1.4).

•

What are the obstacles? My impurities. How to remove them? Through service—humble service—and simultaneously, hear from the *śikṣā-gurus*. I understand that by my service to Śrīla Prabhupāda and by whatever work I do to help distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others, I may become rightly situated. Then by hearing from Mahārāja, I may be able to read and benefit from the books. Otherwise, the books will remain a locked treasure to me. But when they are opened, then the divine feast of loving devotional service is manifest. At that time, I follow the six Gosvāmīs, especially Rūpa and Raghunātha, as my *śikṣā* guides. I hear the beauty of Vṛndāvana-*līlā* and my heart is moved.

This is why I came to Vṛndāvana. I came to dedicate myself to this. I beg Rādhārāṇī and Kṛṣṇa to please accept this faulty attempt. Please allow me to chant the holy names.

Please, Vṛndā-devī, Yogamāyā, I want to be fit to serve others. I will preach what is suitable according to the devotees' level of appreciation, but I want to know . . . I want to be a devotee of the true Vṛndāvana and be released from the bonds of material life. I am prepared to perform austerities, although I am weak and unable in so many ways.

•

The goddesses of Vṛndāvana and Kṛṣṇa Himself (and Gopīśvara) all see what I am attempting. Why has this person come who is always writing? What is he doing in our Vṛndāvana? What are his intentions?

Please purify me so my writing won't be a disturbance to you. You can simply leave me on the perimeters of Vṛndāvana; I won't be a disturbance. Only by your mercy can I enter. By your mercy, I will be able to write love songs under the direction of Tulasī-devī. By your mercy, I can write for the devotees I serve. By your mercy, this writing could become my *bhajana,* my way of expressing the love in my heart.

Kṛṣṇa, please be kind and grant me entry into the moonbeam-filled forest when you meet with Rādhā at Govinda-sṭhāla. Please be kind; please be kind. Let me read and love the poems of the *rūpānuga* poets. I want to be able to write like them in the American idiom. Unfortunately, I am still an American. When I become something else, then I can write differently.

I write because it is good to sweat from all my pores from head to toe. Vṛndāvana, please let me describe your trees. Please teach me the silent secrets which aren't contacted just by hearing what blares out of the megaphones. Please teach me to love Vraja-*dhāma* and learn what the *rasika* persons know. Can writing help?

Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī Ṭhākura writes, "Vṛndāvana is filled with countless supremely beautiful golden trees as splendid as numberless millions of

blazing suns. When these trees appear before the heart, they shower a cooling rain of transcendental bliss that immediately extinguishes the burning sufferings of repeated birth and death. They grant the rarest and most difficult to obtain spiritual treasure" (*Vm, Śataka* 2.5).

•

4:25 P.M.

I was just reading about *guru-tattva* in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. There are different kinds of initiating and instructing spiritual masters. The Supreme Lord as Supersoul is also an instructing spiritual master, but that's not done independently of other gurus, the Vaiṣṇavas. It was interesting to see the context in which Śrīla Prabhupāda quoted the English maxim, "God helps those who help themselves." He said many persons have received instructions from Kṛṣṇa in the heart. Lord Brahmā is one. Bilvamaṅgala Ṭhākura recognizes Somagiri as his *dīkṣā-guru* and Cintāmaṇi as his instructing guru. He also recognizes Śrī Kṛṣṇa as his instructing guru. In the case of Līlāśuka, he makes it clear that he is not thinking of four-armed Paramātmā, but of the peacock-feathered youth of Vraja who sometimes brought milk for His devotee, Bilvamaṅgala. So we shouldn't deny that the Supreme Lord is a prime spiritual master. If we "help ourselves" by consulting and serving the Vaiṣṇavas, and by sometimes going alone to carry out our *gurudeva's* order (as our Śrīla Prabhupāda did), then both *guru-*

deva (even after his disappearance) and the Supreme Lord will help.

•

I am on the roof in the afternoon heat. I have a *guru-tattva* question polished and ready to ask Mahārāja when we see him again, I hope in a few days. I take in what he says, and in some ways, I follow like a puppet and repeat like a parrot. I have to hear what he says and then find my own way with it. I have to find my own taste or inclination. We pray to know our own true taste. We pray not to be whimsical. But we have to find our own spontaneous expression in serving Kṛṣṇa.

•

The ferns and creepers move in the hot breeze. They are not ordinary. I don't know what that means, but I accept that I am in a much different place than Wicklow, Ireland.

Two boys chase a donkey. The donkey's hooves clap-clap across the earth. The boys' feet slap-slap behind him. A calf on the same path stands watching and grunting an observer's *mooo*.

In Ireland, I could gain a sense of the divine in the grass, the hills, and the sky, but it took more work on my part to impose Kṛṣṇa on the meditation. Here Kṛṣṇa is automatically present, even if I forget Him.

The early afternoon *ārati* bell is ringing at Krishna-Balaram Mandir. Each peal hangs in the air. I always associate the sound of that bell with the last months of Śrīla Prabhupāda's presence in 1977. The bell was heavy then with the feelings of his impending departure.

•

Rasa doesn't exactly mean "juice," but it is the "juice" drunk by Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*. They taste *prema* in all they do or speak or think. Love for Kṛṣṇa, love for Rādhā . . .

Here I am with my ordinary body, my body tormented by the flies, sweating, trying to keep the ink flowing evenly onto the page. I have to try again and again to get past this awareness and let all the external details of my existence fall away. What is at the center? A clearing for the *rāsa* dance. The Yamunā kept the rough sands in "her womb" and spread only pure white sand on her bank for the pleasure pastimes of Kṛṣṇa. The moon spread its cooling white effulgence everywhere. Kṛṣṇa enjoyed with the *gopīs*. Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī gives a sustained vision of himself as Tulasī-mañjarī assisting Rādhikā, but then it fades away. My "vision" is a brief focus on something transcendental that I read or experienced. I write it down, even while the external world hits me straight on. (As I write this, those bold, gray-white, fluffy birds are chirping—a harsh sound—very nearby. There are two of them on the bamboo poles up here. And

with them is a dove or a pigeon with a softer coo-coo-coo. Not exactly a distraction.)

Mahārāja said . . . Rādhā is sometimes in *māna* and doesn't allow Kṛṣṇa into the *kuñja.* She tells the *sakhīs* that He is both black in body and within—send Him away. Kṛṣṇa bows at Her feet, but to no avail. He leaves—but this is just further impetus to another meeting.

In Vṛndāvana you can float from remembrance of *līlā* to the sight of the pigeon and it's not such a violent swing from concentration to distraction. Gently you return . . . Prabhupāda said always remember Kṛṣṇa, by chanting on beads or reading books. If you get hungry, take *prasādam,* if get tired, take a "snap" to refresh yourself. Then again, always remember Kṛṣṇa.

•

I didn't bring my books up to the roof and I don't want to stop writing to go get them. In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā,* Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja discussed gurus. Now he is discussing the Vaiṣṇavas. We need their mercy, both the great ones and those very important souls with whom we live nowadays. I saw many of them last night. I shouldn't think of only Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja, but I have to beg for the mercy of all the Vaiṣṇavas—my Godbrothers and Godsisters and nieces and nephews and cousins. We are all one big joint family. All the Vaiṣṇavas are here in Vṛndāvana. We will serve together.

"My Lord, devotees like your good self are verily holy places personified. Because you carry the Personality of Godhead within your heart, you turn all places into places of pilgrimage" (*Bhāg.* 1.13.10).

•

The bell is ringing to end the *ārati.* It is five o'clock. Baladeva just brought me a lemon and rosewater drink.

"Happily picking many kinds of flowers from the trees and vines, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa praise the forest of Vṛndāvana. They bathe and sport in the lakes of Vṛndāvana forest and They play with the birds and the other creatures there. Who would not serve Vṛndāvana forest, the supreme transcendental abode?" (*Vm, Śataka* 2.10).

•

You have to do your own work. I heard a devotee ask Mahārāja whether when we chant, we should think of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. I asked that same question several times myself, and I may end up asking it again. But when I heard another ask it, I thought, "The answer is found when we reach that stage." Before greed comes, what good will it do me to learn a method of meditating on pastimes when I chant? It's good to try anything we think may help us (*anukūla*), but it is not by method alone that we can chant in the *rāgānugā* mood.

Mahārāja answered the question not by giving a method, but by telling a *rasika* pastime as an example of what we might think of while chanting. He told about the way Rādhā and the *sakhīs* chant. Our question really is, "How does a pure devotee chant? What does he think about and what does he feel? Tell me in a way that I may start doing it immediately. I have traveled a long way to get here and I want to take up some practice without delay." It sounds foolish, but if we are persistent, we might become successful. "I *must* do it; I *must* associate with a *rasika* Vaiṣṇava as much as possible and make up for lost time." Others have been here before me; I have to catch up with them. I have succeeded in the lower stages and now I will succeed in the higher.

Look out at the field, you foolish one who calls others foolish. Bide your time under the sky a little longer. Enjoy the fact that you are not a lizard who will be attacked by ants tonight. You will lie under a mosquito net. But time is running out. It is no wonder that Śrīla Prabhupāda ordered full-time active preaching as the best way to burn up *anarthas* and please the spiritual master. Even if people don't take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, our duty is to present it to them. Kṛṣṇa will be pleased.

One form of preaching is to tell the world and remind the devotees of the glories of Vṛndāvana. "With Their soft flower-petal hands, Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa carefully watered the trees and vines from the time of their first sprouting. They nourished them and made them grow, and at the proper time,

married each vine to an appropriate tree. When They saw new flowers beginning to blossom, They became delighted and spoke many playful, joking words. Let us bow down and offer our respectful obeisances to these trees and vines of Vṛndāvana forest" (*Vm, Śataka* 2.11).

•

7:12 P.M.

So much to learn, all of us. What is *braja-barо-nāgara?* Do you know? *Jāmuna-jīvana, keli-parāyaṇa.* Do you know what they mean? You have to know this. And when a devotee starts to tell you a *līlā* you have already heard, slow down and listen. Don't say, "I know that one already." Listen to the first-class devotee. By his association, you can better appreciate the books. Then you can get something from them.

So much to learn. And you have to learn it "on your own." You have to learn it from him. And you cannot do anything without greed.

The lights go off and on. You are happy as a lark to be on your own. Give thanks for this. And be at your spinning wheel to make cloth for devotees back home. Home? I mean where I come from in this body, New York, Western places. No, not that, I mean Gītā-nāgarī in Pennsylvania, devotees' homes in Baltimore, people in France and Italy who are willing to hear. For them, I stay in Vṛndāvana. They validate my visit by allowing me to tell them something when I return. As Śrīla Prabhupāda told his Godbrothers, "There is a vast preaching field,

the whole world. Come and take part in distributing *harināma* in ISKCON."

For them. Start with yourself. Drink the nectar of Vṛndāvana as best you can. Pour the water over your head. Read, associate, assimilate, and tell others.

O Vṛndā-devī, you who make arrangements for the Divine Couple in the groves of Vṛndāvana . . . please allow me to serve here. Give me an assignment to write . . . I love your trees—their silence, their tolerance in midday heat, their fulsome green-leaved branches and stout trunks, their place in this holy ground. My intellect is polluted and stunted. Let me add something . . .

•

You don't know what you are saying or doing. But you know you are not satisfied with any other service as much as this. So you try.

"O brother . . . you have already experienced enjoyment in this world of birth and death . . . see the good qualities in others and not their faults, do not put yourself forward, but remain obscure and unknown, and continually wander, without any companion, through this beautiful forest of Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 2.14).

•

6:25 A.M.

Irritable this morning. I called for Madhu and couldn't find him. I went to the roof. He was under the mosquito net slumped over. I called him. He woke with his *brāhmaṇa* thread wrapped around his hand. It happens. Why find fault with people who are trying so hard? Even if they don't try hard, don't find fault.

Technical teachings are necessary if you want to learn *rāgānugā-bhakti.* If you can have great love for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, you don't need those things. But to learn what we are after is important at our stage. Otherwise, if we hear Rādhā had *mahā-bhāva* or *keli-kiñcita-bhāva,* how will we know what it is?

The nearby *āśrama* is starting up with their loudspeaker, *"Kī jaya! Kī jaya!"* We use our time well, but it still slips through our fingers like a missed opportunity. Each chance to chant *gāyatrī,* each chance to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

" . . . Bhagavān . . . *kī jaya!"*

My whole body feels clammy and I have indigestion. I am making plans. I am staying active and awake. This page represents both my outer world and my inner wish.

The men who stand on one leg all day lean their weight against a decorated swing. What do *I* do all day? What do *you* do?

Non-Vraja thoughts come to mind, and the neighbor distracts me by coming to use our well.

Picture of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa—They are striding together through Vraja. He has His arm around Her and She has Her arm around Him. They are

walking quickly. He is looking into Her eyes and gesturing with His right hand. He appears to be praising Her. The birds fly about Them in ecstasy and the land and overhanging branches are all alive in Him. A blue sky is made white by Their auras.

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, where are You going so quickly? Everyone is left behind as They go to a *kuñja,* barefoot. But we can see Them passing by. And the *kiṅkarīs* can follow Them, watch Their pastimes, and offer services.

Here is a photo of Vṛndā-devī at Kamyavan taken the day I visited last year. She wears shiny silver pleated silk trimmed in gold. Her hair is in two long braids and she is crowned in white-silver. We prayed to her on that visit and I pray to her now: please let me enter Vṛndāvana and serve my gurus here in the one *parampará.* I want to be a menial servant and share with others. Vṛndā-devī, may I be detached from bodily comfort, which is never attainable anyway. Instead, may I be permanently fixed in an inner mood of the particular service to Rādhā's *sakhīs,* even while I carry out the orders of my spiritual master in ISKCON. When I took *sannyāsa* in 1972, Śrīla Prabhupāda said we were taking *sannyāsa* to be kind to the people. He said we should help our countrymen; we should give them an opportunity to hear about Kṛṣṇa. Therefore I am a preacher. But still, I pray for this inner mood of service in Vṛndāvana-*dhāma.*

I am weak and fallen. O Vṛndā-devī, you decorate Vraja for the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. May I

one day assist you, free of false ego, free of my material body. Please let me serve *now* despite my present condition. Please put me into the care of experienced devotees so I can be trained.

•

Sweet plums, banana slices with small circumferences, and tasty papaya and mango. Yogurt fast is on so we try hot milk, although it is harder to digest. All this is temporary.

•

10:20 A.M.

I am ready to justify my writing and state my awareness of the obstacles. But I don't want to complain.

Another possible complaint: the author's ex-wife (from twenty years ago) is living in Vṛndāvana and frequently going to see Mahārāja. It is a bit annoying that I have to check when she is going so we don't show up in Mahārāja's little room at the same time. I don't know what he thinks about it, but he is giving her a lot of time. I also hear her voice on recent tape recordings. It is no big thing, but it is a feature of my visit this year. One never knows what to expect. I am writing it here to be true to the complexion of experience.

Mostly it is a matter of etiquette—a *sannyāsī* never sees his ex-wife again, or at least never talks with her or communicates with her. Śrīla Prabhupāda said it was all right if widows were in a general

temple audience when their *sannyāsī* ex-husband was there. There is no question of taking up a relationship again, but it is an awkward reminder of the past and an awkward presence now. She has a right to her own place at Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja's feet.

•

This table is uneven and rickety. Worked over an hour on the seminar lecture of Śrīla Prabhupāda's early writing career, 1939–43.

If I look up I may see someone. The sky is overcast. There is more action in the field across from this roof than when the sun is shining. I see across the low Vṛndāvana skyline green treetops and the upper portion of red sandstone temple domes. Variations of *mahā-mantra* drift in the sultry air: "Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Rāma, Nitāi-Gaura Rādhe-Śyāma."

•

Running away from self-accusations. Is everyone doing that, being chased by their own critics? If they aren't, it seems they must be pig-headed and vain. Yet too much pursuance of self by dogs of criticism isn't pleasant.

The gate clanks. I am learning to live with the heat (what choice do I have?). But a breeze has become an item of interest and relief.

•

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī says that there are two kinds of pure devotees, personal associates (*pariṣads*) and neophyte devotees (*sādhakas*) (*C.c., Ādi* 1.64). Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Among the associates, some are attracted by the opulences of the Personality of Godhead and others are attracted by nuptial love of Godhead. The former devotees are placed in the realm of Vaikuṇṭha to render reverential devotional service, whereas the latter devotees are placed in Vṛndāvana for the direct service of Śrī Kṛṣṇa."

But a neophyte is a neophyte. He still has to practice controlling his senses and mind and he chants *japa* because the spiritual master assigned a quota. His vow is strong, based on *vaidhī* injunctions. So he is a neophyte within the tradition of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. But after a few decades of practice, he laments his mechanical low state of practice. Still, he keeps his practices and vows by *dṛḍha-vrata*. But there are signs of unrest and flakiness.

Then he gets the chance to associate with a *rasika* Vaiṣṇava . . . what next? Neophyte, can you jump like Hanumān over the sea of obstacles? Is there a ferry going over?

•

Some Māyāvādīs (they must be) passing on the road glance up at me. They are dark-skinned in bright orange cloth. They look like Buddhists. After them come tall, thin men in white, each balancing a bundle on his head. Now no one. But I don't face myself.

I am preoccupied, as we say, occupied with surface matters, and can't go to my own heart because it feels empty. There is a sense of well-being and patience. I am okay, glad to be here, etc., but when I desire to write something vital by this method, then I face a lack of depth, a lack of devotion. I have no access to emotions of *bhāva* for Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

•

A young boy (looks like eight years old) is smoking. He squats, puffs, then gets up and walks away from the blue cloud that forms over his head. I have nothing to say about it. His equally small friend has joined him and they walk out of my sight.

•

Are you trying to escape these outer sights or are you trying to weave them in? I am trying to write Kṛṣṇa consciousness in Vṛndāvana. I write what I perceive and think. I am not attempting to make it into a neat package. I think and see in Vṛndāvana, and I write it down as if it is all that I need at the moment. What can the ringing of a bicycle bell mean at this exact moment? How can it remind me of Vraja-*līlā*?

The rickety table affects me; the scheduling to see Mahārāja is part of my consciousness; dreams (I forget them); the all-pervading heat.

Donkey brays, interested in sex with another donkey. Mottled bird with white breast lands a few feet

from here and chirps intently on the bamboo bar. Those soft-fluffy ones (I will have to find out their names) *are* a disruption, almost a threat.

"In Vṛndāvana, the youthful Divine Couple, whose complexions are dark and fair, and who are two wonderful treasure-houses of beauty and other transcendental qualities, enjoy Their pastimes. In that Vṛndāvana, all transcendental virtues are present to the highest degree. When, with sweet transcendental love, shall I properly worship that Vṛndāvana forest?" *(Vm, Śataka 2.25).*

Okay, so the poet prays that he can worship Vṛndāvana, the place of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Isn't this my prayer too? When? Are we not worshiping Vṛndāvana already?

Rāgānugā-bhakti means to meditate on the nectarean pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*. It means meditating and appreciating it according to your taste and capacity. When will I be able to do this all day and night? That meditation is the mood of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. He called out "Rādhā! Kṛṣṇa!" in madness. He ran on the banks of the Yamunā or rolled in the dust at Rādhā-kuṇḍa. He wrote books and chanted *harināma* with *bhāva*. He cried day and night and had no time for sleeping and eating.

I meditate a little at a time, fifteen minutes or so. Then I hear the sounds of Vṛndāvana today and see the well-dressed pilgrim in the blue *sarī* or hear the lone man playing whompers and singing the holy name. I look down and see the earth again, hear the

pigeons coo. A tractor putt-putts in the field and the breeze is warm at my back.

Be serious. What am I studying? Am I making the best use of my time? Can I chant Hare Kṛṣṇa with a little more feeling?

Better I write that I see a dog trotting across the field than that I remember Burt Lancaster in his leading role in *From Here to Eternity.* I have that choice. I also have a choice to prefer *śāstra* over the dog. But some choices are not immediately mine because they are based on qualification. For example, I cannot choose to feel ecstasy at any moment. I cannot choose to know and understand my *rasa* in the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I can choose to act humbly and to pray and serve and hear. I can choose to work in whatever way is auspicious for my Kṛṣṇa conscious development. I could choose to pursue *rāgānugā* scholarship more, but I can't. It seems too dry and technical, so many terms to memorize. Writing is my service.

The male donkey is tied with two ropes. One joins his right front leg to his right rear leg, and the other joins his left front leg to his left hind leg. There is enough play in the rope that he can walk, but he can't run. They didn't tie the female donkey. The male approaches her from behind, desiring to mount her. She kicks, aiming for his face. She hits him again and again, just like Śrīla Prabhupāda describes. He keeps trying and she keeps running away. I sympathize with her. They run around and around while a little boy with a stick runs after them, trying to get them to go docilely with him.

A genuine Vraja *sādhu* will laugh at these notes. He will see me like a refined Britisher of the Imperial Age recording impressions of India for people to read in London. No, I am not that. The donkeys mean something to me.

My spiritual master will help me. He will redeem my efforts and allow me to serve Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa—when I show more surrender. To learn how to surrender more, devotees are going to Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja. Can we translate what he says into action? Or do we become warmed by his *rasika* presence and then cool again when we are alone?

•

12:20 noon

Sitting at my desk, listening to tapes of Mahārāja. Then into the bathroom and turn on a tape of Śrīla Prabhupāda speaking. They both say the same thing. Mahārāja said that even though he speaks of Kṛṣṇa as a beautiful, darkish boy and Rādhā as a beautiful girl, we have no realization of it. We take it in a relative way, "Some girls I know are beautiful and Rādhā is even more beautiful than they." No, it is not like that. We are conditioned souls. We cannot actually understand the Yugala-kiśora. If we did, how changed we would be.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said that love, feeling, is the whole purpose of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He told the story of the illiterate *brāhmaṇa* in South India who was trying to read *Bhagavad-gītā*. He fell in love with Kṛṣṇa who serves His devotee. Śrīla Prabhupāda said if you can love like that, you don't need to

read books (and if you read books, without love of Kṛṣṇa, it will be useless). People don't understand why the devotees of Hare Kṛṣṇa movement are "wasting time with a brass idol." They think like that because they have no love. But we think how kind Kṛṣṇa is to come in this form so we can dress Him.

Both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Mahārāja make it clear that *bhakti* is required. Mahārāja warned us not to think of the Yugala-kiśora's meeting in a mundane way. Such persons shouldn't read *rasa-śāstras*. Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke generously of his own disciples as lovers of Kṛṣṇa by virtue of their self-sacrifice, temple worship, and preaching. Our gurus expertly lead us on.

I write without love or realization, but at least I know what is required. Not philosophy per se, but *bhakti*. And I know that *bhakti* descends from the *rāgātmikā* devotees. Our spiritual master is himself a lover of Kṛṣṇa. Therefore he can deliver us when we serve him in an ideal way, beginning with hearing and chanting on his order.

•

3:20 P.M., dream

I was in anxiety whether I still had to attend weekly Naval Reserve meetings. I was explaining it to different people and getting their opinions. Mostly they said I *didn't* have to go; my obligation to the Navy had lapsed. But the anxiety continued. Then Śrīla Prabhupāda appeared. I greeted him along with his other disciples. He was amused or sardonic

toward me because of my various attitudes in my relationship with him. He indicated something overhead that needed adjustment (like a chandelier) and said, "Should I stand on you [to fix it] or should you stand on me?" I said, "You stand on me." He did. Then he left that place.

Dear spiritual master, please come again and again in my dreams. I want to know you and be with you. If it takes anxiety, then let me be anxious. If it takes greed, then let me be greedy. Please save me.

•

There was a rainstorm after lunch today. It knocked over the roof *paṇḍāl.* The roof is now covered with the collapsed beams and canvas and there is no place to sit and write.

•

Śrī Rūpānuga-bhajana-darpaṇa is a technical book on the science of *rasa-tattva* and I can only read a little of it at a time. After hearing the symptoms and ingredients in the development of *kṛṣṇa-prema,* we read a chapter titled, "The Process of Becoming One of Rādhā's Girlfriends." It is extremely rare to get entrance into eternal Vraja, and many great saints and devotees are trying to enter as *gopīs,* but as yet they cannot. "This is the only real law which allows one entrance into Vraja—that is, without the favor of another merciful *gopī,* it is absolutely impossible for anyone to attain ecstatic eternal

service of the young couple of Vraja" (*Rūpānuga-bhajana-darpaṇa,* Song 18).

In a 1971 lecture, Śrīla Prabhupāda discusses regulative and spontaneous devotional service. He says we cannot serve Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa unless it is done out of spontaneous love. He says the temple is important for beginners and that regulative *sādhana* is the "groundwork" for ecstatic feelings. To illustrate spontaneous love, he gives the example of the mutual attraction between a boy and girl. He says that in the Indian marriage system, the boy and girl are married at a young age, before amorous feelings have awoken. The girl brings food to her husband—she may be eight years old and he might be eleven—and gradually, love develops. So *vaidhī* practice can stimulate spontaneous feelings, and only when spontaneity comes do we serve Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. If we develop attraction to Kṛṣṇa, we will not be serving Him under order, but "automatically."

•

4:25 P.M.

I am in a neighbor's yard. He is gone for two weeks. I am physically unsteady right now, with pain starting in my right eye. I may not be able to take part in our 6 P.M. reading. There are drops of delicious rain coming down as an aftermath of the storm. I'm sorry I am weak and ill, sorry I am not stronger about it in my mind (detached from pain), and sorry that I am a low devotee. My friends all say they are low devotees too. Devotional service is rare. Devotees are also humble and claim they have

no love—even when they do. My friends are all humble.

I was thinking of Prabhupāda's example of the Indian marriage system in relation to my Kṛṣṇa consciousness. His point was that we have to keep practicing with a view to become attached to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Then real devotional service can begin. I can be like that seven-year-old bride bringing clothes and food to her husband. I am not in love yet, but by offering service, I will eventually fall in love.

(I want to finish this page quickly before it becomes illegible in the rain.) This place is special. Devotees are asking me when I will begin visiting holy places, but I feel that this place is special because I can be alone for awhile in Vraja. And I am here with my precious friends, Madhu and Baladeva. I want to reciprocate with their faith in me.

One of my anxieties is that the one decent attachment I have (writing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness) is one that I may have to give up. Do I? I say I *could* give it up if it is required, but if writing were suddenly deemed an *aparādha,* I might practice it on the sly. Write and burn it; maybe that's the detachment required.

No, a "writer" cannot enter Vraja. That is clear. But it's like preaching. A preacher cannot enter Vraja either. No book distribution there, no temple management, no lecturing. It is not only writing that has no apparent place in the spiritual world, but all forms of preaching. At one point do we give it up?

Too many rain drops.

I would like a drink of water. I would like to be tough. But I like being delicate too.

Tomorrow we are scheduled to go to see Mahārāja in Mathurā. It is the *gurukula* teachers' day off, so quite a few ladies will go. We will try to squeeze into the room and listen to Mahārāja. Listen! *Rāgānugā-bhakti* cannot be accomplished by my staying alone doing writing exercises.

I do sympathize, however, friend, with what you are attempting.

Bring together all you can. The "maddening" nearness of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. The all-night watchman walking past our house blowing his whistle and reciting, "Rādhe-Śyāma!" (Baladeva said he sounds like he has more faith in his Rādhe-Śyāma than in his lonely whistle.) So it is right here, Rādhā and Śyāma, yet it is far away. Outside Vṛndāvana, there is not even the nearness.

•

A dog walked through the front gate and sat down, "offering obeisances" with her long-extended front legs. She sat patiently and quietly, wagging her tail.

Baladeva said to Madhu, "Someone is here to see you." Madhu went to the front porch and assumed a tough expression. Baladeva said, "You know the philosophy." (Meaning, you know this dog is not an ordinary soul and has come to beg.)

"But," I said, "if you feed this one, they will all come around."

She went on wagging her tail and I left it to them to figure out. Then the rains came and the eye ache and the *paṇḍāl* collapsed, and still it is tinkling occasional drops.

•

Prabhupāda is the eternal *gopī* who can grant us entry into Vraja. Interpret it any way you like. He is the eternal resident; without him, without his mercy, it is not possible to enter. He has already come and given his full mercy and friendship. He was demanding and we responded favorably. He continues to demand from us and we must continue to respond. What if I am not such an expert *sādhaka?* Can I respond to the call to jump ahead to learn *rāgānugā* from him? Everything is possible in Vṛndāvana. It is a strict place, not like Navadvīpa, but it is full of mercy.

"In this beginningless world of repeated birth and death, how many times have you not suffered in hell and how many times have you not relished pleasures that eclipse the happiness of Brahmā, Indra, and the other demigods? My friend, in this one body, do not consider happiness or distress, but simply worship the supreme transcendental abode, Śrī Vṛndāvana" *(Vm, Śataka* 2.26).

It is hard for me to get around to see the special places here. Similarly, I encourage devotees who can't come to Vṛndāvana at all that they have to learn to see Vṛndāvana in their own countries. I am in Vṛndāvana, yet I have to see Vṛndāvana more in this house than at Govardhana or Rādhā-

kuṇḍa. I invoke them by reading of their glories as recorded by the six Gosvāmīs and their followers. I read about them in peace and I pray to them. It is better than going out with a howling mind, "Ow! My feet are being bitten by mosquitoes! Look at the welts!"

We are close. We have to get closer still. Beg Mahārāja to open the door with his key.

•

Write as the servant of the process. Your feet sacrificed a little of their blood to mosquitoes so you could write. Baladeva is nearby chanting. Neighbors over the wall are washing their lunch dishes. The door to this house is open and I am at the entrance. There is a broom beside me. There is you to whom I write this. We are related. We all come from Kṛṣṇa. After millions of births, the goal is finally becoming clearer. We have a long way to go. Where is love? Why have we given it to something else and thus cut ourselves off from our ability to love Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa? We sold ourselves to mean, lusty desires.

We tend to think, "I am doing very well and Kṛṣṇa really is testing me to an unusual degree. What more does He need to believe in me?" But we haven't really built His faith in us. Just twenty-six years ago we were taking drugs and having illicit sex. We are still attached to our bodies. We had better apply for welfare. "Kṛṣṇa, please help us. Give me Your mercy."

Chapter Two (August 13–22)

August 13, 10:35 A.M.

Up all night with a headache. It still hasn't gone away. I shouldn't have kept going yesterday when the headache began. I mentioned this to Baladeva this morning. He is also down with a flu-like disease.

He said, "I think that you can cheat with your health in the West, but not here. Usually I just take some Excedrin and go for it. Yesterday I felt sick and kept going, but uh-oh—you can't cheat here."

We can't conquer Vṛndāvana and think that we will extract the nectar by sheer determination. I can't extract nectar by spending many hours at my desk. Everything is dependent on the mercy of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī.

Today I have to stay in bed and miss my scheduled meeting with Mahārāja. I cannot even chant with my normal, vigorous mechanicalism.

Madhu said, "If you can't see Mahārāja, if you can't write, then what good is it to be in Vṛndāvana?" He has advised me to deliberately tone down my activities and not do as much. I think I shall try to continue to do all that I can, but to submissively obey the signals when they come.

•

3:22 P.M.

The pain is somewhat subdued. This is the quiet time of the day—no *āśrama* broadcasts, just a dog barking somewhere.

One devotee here said maybe Mahārāja is treating us on a level beyond our realization. He said we need to be more self-sacrificing. Should I be self-sacrificing in a different way than I am doing? How *am* I self-sacrificing for the good of ISKCON?

The headache is still hanging on the edge, so I won't investigate these doubts right now. I really just came here to say *haribol* and to mention that we are still in the land of Vraja.

I had a dream about the protection of Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva's nails.

•

What am I seeing? Is this at least covered Vṛndāvana? Isn't it the land of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* where so much more is possible? Can we really receive mercy from those trees in the field across the way? How are they different from the trees mentioned in *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta,* which were planted by Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa? A friend replies to my thoughts with these notes:

"As far as I know, those statements about the trees [*Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta*] refer to actual Vṛndāvana, not what we are seeing.

"As far as their relationship with *kṛṣṇa-līlā,* I have heard different relevant information. Mahārāja once said that they are not actually like what we are

seeing. Our eyes are covered by *māyā*, so we cannot see the actual thing. Another time he explained a concept that was even more inconceivable to my present limited senses, that they are appearing to be trees but actually, they are all *mahā-puruṣa* devotees who are witnessing the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa. And another time he said they were sages who are practicing *tapasya* to enter the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa. I asked him if some were more or less pious—ie. thorny as opposed to others—he said they were all *kalpa-vṛkṣa* trees—specific ones. So I feel unqualified to give the exact answer to your questions. Regarding do they grant us mercy, yes. He said they can all grant us mercy if we bow to them and pray to their roots to please give us the *darśana* of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

"Then again I read a very unusual article by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, wherein he referred to what we see and know as Vṛndāvana as a "mundane tract of land."

> It is for the purpose of inspiring a real regard for the transcendental realm of Vraja in the minds of the circumambulators that this function has been manifest by the *sādhu*. The mundane realm allows the *sādhu* to do this in a concrete way. In the realm of Vraja it is not the *jīvas* who enjoy the landscape but Kṛṣṇa, who is the sole enjoyer of that realm. The *jīvas* have no other function than to administer to the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa.
>
> The land of Vraja has been endowed with this privilege by the fact that the appearance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who performed His all-holy pastimes, took place there. Why should it be altogether impossible for the theists to believe in the privileged nature of the land of Vraja in view of

> that fact? The land itself is not spiritual. It will not benefit any person if he serves the inanimate landscape of Vraja by the resources of his mundane nature. The guidance of the *sādhu* must be allowed to make a visual difference, as it enables even the conditioned soul to be used in the quasi-spiritual service of the transcendental realm of Vraja apparently to an external observer in terms of the mundane landscape . . . The *sādhu* uses this privileged mundane tract for the purpose of enabling conditioned souls to obtain unconscious service of the transcendental realm.

"He writes more, but you can see that it is not a subject that a unrealized soul can express fully—nor understand, due to being himself bound by time and space. Therefore, like a father talking to a young baby, the realized person gives little, hard-to-understand hints—or simple analogies that don't quite seem to answer the question. I often tried to ask—then what is it that we see right now? Is it Vraja? Is it spiritual? Is it pure? What is it? Mahārāja would often joke and say, 'You are seeing nothing.' I would reply, 'I am not seeing nothing, I am seeing something. But what is it?' He would laugh. 'You are seeing nothing.' I would reply, 'But I am seeing you.' 'No!' he would reply, pausing dramatically for a second, and with mock scorn, 'You cannot see me at all!' Then I would stop.

"Anyway, you can try. Sometimes, depending on his mood, he will answer general questions, but he prefers us to ask about the directly relevant process, and so he may or may not answer. But if you would

try some questions—we would benefit from his answers to you.

"Here is another interesting note from Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Mahārāja:

> If no *sādhu* visits the *tīrtha* for a time, then the sanctifying efficacy tends to become dormant. The *sādhu* knows whether a *tīrtha* is in a dormant condition or not. When Śrī Nityānanda made His pilgrimage to all the holy *tīrthas* of the country, He found that Kṛṣṇa was not to be found at any one of those places. Those *tīrthas* had been deserted by Godhead. In this iron age, all *tīrthas* are said to have lost their efficacy. This must be evident to all impartial observers. The *tīrthas* are now the haunts for large numbers of persons of questionable character. Add to this fact that the reputation of *tīrthas* for possessing the power to cleanse from sin leads many persons to visit the places to get rid of the effects of most heinous sins. It is said by the scriptures that the presence of these great sinners tends to pollute even the sanctity of these holy places. Many confirmed sinners make it a point of merit to settle down at these holy places to a life of avowed sinfulness with the hope that even the immoralities committed at a holy place have a sanctifying effect. In Kali-yuga, all *tīrthas* have for these reasons become meeting grounds for the most unrepentant sinners (Vṛndāvana is surely no exception). There is no wonder therefore, that Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu did not find Kṛṣṇa at any of those holy places. There were indeed the thrones of Kṛṣṇa, but these thrones were all vacant.

"I think his views—although definitely perfectly correct—are sometimes different from the *bābājīs*, who consider the *dhāma* residents beyond reproach and the *dhāma* transcendental in a seemingly different mood. It must be something for realization. I thought to share these with you, although I have no depth of realization to go with them."

•

This makes me think, "Oh, no! Then all I have written about my feelings for Vṛndāvana is nullified! I don't see anything. It is all imagination." No, no. But be guided as much as you can. Also, rather than devalue your own appreciation, let it grow. And the honesty of perceptions has value . . . although it is the honesty and value of one who *cannot* see Vraja, who admits it, and who reads the sacred texts and wonders, "How can the *līlā-sṭhāli* be the same as what I see? How are they different?"

Śrīla Prabhupāda said there is a special mercy here. I don't see it. Even when I think I see it, I don't see it. But it doesn't matter because there is a benefit to be here in the place of unseen, unfelt pastimes.

Also, the sobering remarks by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura remind me that we want to practice *bhajana* and Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the West. Śrīla Prabhupāda once said New Vrindavana was better than Vṛndāvana because there were so many Māyāvādīs living in Vṛndāvana. But don't use this as an excuse: "No, I don't go to Vṛndāvana any-

more. What we are seeing is not the actual Vṛndāvana. Besides, the place is filled with people of mundane character. I prefer to stay in Europe where there is more preaching."

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I think I am like a seismograph that registers even slight changes in the earth's crust. When I get near someone and they "vibrate," it affects me and gets registered within me. It is okay as long as you know who you are and what you believe. But if every time someone says something you have to revise your own views, then you are getting "too sensitive."

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You are coming here after playing in the gutter in Queens, New York, after going to parties with girls from Public School #8 on Staten Island, and after reading books written by the hardest cynics and most depraved minds ("I have seen the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness"). So what can you expect to see in Vṛndāvana-*dhāma?* But if you can leave the past behind with a contrite heart, it can be done. In *Caitanya-caritāmṛta,* Śrīla Prabhupāda says:

"When Kṛṣṇa descends to the material world, this same Vṛndāvana descends just as an entourage accompanies an important personage. Because when Kṛṣṇa comes, His land also comes, Vṛndāvana is not considered to exist in the material

world. Therefore, devotees take shelter of the Vṛndāvana in India, for it is considered to be a replica of the original Vṛndāvana" (*C.c.*, Introduction, p. 14).

Among the ten offenses to be avoided in the holy *dhāma* it is stated: "To commit violence toward any of the residents of the holy *dhāma* or to any of the pilgrims, or to think they are ordinary, mundane people. . . . To think the holy *dhāma* belongs to some mundane country . . . To blaspheme the *śāstras* which glorify the holy *dhāma. To be faithless and think that the glories of the* dhāma *are imaginary."*

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Is writing freely *dhāma-aparādha?* Does it constitute "performing mundane activities while living in the *dhāma?"* No, it is service. I am ridding myself of *anarthas,* distinguishing between right and wrong, trying to be honest with myself. Whatever comes out strange is just a way to get to something deeper. We sleep in Vraja, although that is mundane. It is necessary bodily maintenance and it gives us the energy to be more conscious during our awake times.

I am permanently "doomed," or *limited,* in this lifetime. Face it. I have no other hope than the mercy of guru and Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma leave Nanda Mahārāja's village in the morning to herd the cows. Kṛṣṇa casts sidelong glances at the *gopīs* who capture Kṛṣṇa with their own network of sidelong glances. How can I return to Kṛṣṇa's other pastimes after tasting

these? Everything else leads to Kṛṣṇa's Vṛndāvana pastimes. I will read again how Dhruva Mahārāja received *darśana* of four-armed Lord Viṣṇu and how Prahlāda preached to his father and then Nṛsiṁhadeva appeared. But now I know they lead to Vraja, to Vrajendra-nandana playing His flute and attracting all the *gopīs* while the moon shines down on the Yamunā.

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A devotee asked Mahārāja if we should see the dilapidated buildings of Vṛndāvana as *cintāmaṇi.* He said we should not "do *kalpana* (imagination). But when Bhakti-devī touches our hearts, then automatically we will see all Vṛndāvana as *cintāmaṇi.*" I liked that instruction. By chanting and hearing we become transformed.

He also said the cleansing process is like the repeated washing out of a dirty pot in the river. Again and again for many years or lifetimes, we hear *harikathā* from *gurudeva* and the Vaiṣṇavas and gradually our *anarthas* are washed out. When the vessel (heart) is cleansed, then it can be filled with pure *prema.* Then we will take birth in a better body, eventually learn our *sambandha* with Kṛṣṇa in our eternal *rasa,* and see all of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in one *bhāva* with other *rasas* acting as supports.

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At the river washing out our pots, we sing of Kṛṣṇa and tell each other things that may help. Here at this house, Madhu washes all the cooking pots every afternoon at our salty water pump. Washing, washing out the *anarthas,* cranking the creaky pump, producing a shiny sluice of water . . .

I know I shouldn't justify my actions, but naturally we want to do the right thing and feel good about it. Therefore, I say this writing is another form of cleansing. The dirty particles appear, and by repeated attempts to infuse my words with *kṛṣṇa-kathā,* I cleanse the "pot."

So it is 7:15 P.M. and you are nobody and you don't have any realizations and you can't see the *dhāma* and you can't see the true form of a Vaiṣṇava. But still you write. They nag, "Why? What's the use of such utterances?" And you reply:

Because I want to. It is my offering. Because you are wrong to want to stop me. I am a baby playing with toys, but this is training. One day I will transfer to the real world and this won't have been harmful. It is not harmful to others. I write because I cannot read much and I have heard enough tapes for the moment. I write because that is what pens and paper are for. I write because evening is coming and my headache has subsided. I should have done this all my life, known Kṛṣṇa and guru, and written it down. So I do it now.

It doesn't matter that I am a child, that I am a fool. I can say it too: Kṛṣṇa, I want to serve You and Your devotees. I want to write an account of a person visiting Vṛndāvana who goes to hear from a

bona fide guru. He tries to understand and says what he sees in the streets or what his friends are doing. I want to write a true story like that. It will be better than the stories of people who went mountain-climbing in Tibet, or that story about someone's last trip to India and how he dropped out of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. Why should I have to wait until I am perfect? It doesn't seem fair. Let's make propaganda now, while we have energy to move the pen and the guts to write . . .

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August 17, 1:10 A.M.

Dear friends, Lord Kṛṣṇa is the dearmost friend of all. As Prahlāda said to his school fellows, dear sons of *daityas,* please take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness now while we are young. Know that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the enjoyer of all sacrifices, the ruler of all planets, and the best friend of everyone. How do we know this? Well, *someone* must be the true enjoyer of sacrifices; that is God, Bhagavān, the original person. All Vedic knowledge proclaims this. And in *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam,* we learn that Kṛṣṇa is the name of God, the source of all gods, the supreme well-wisher.

It is He whom we should worship. Somehow, Śrīla Prabhupāda has brought us to this. That is the greatest miracle in itself. Although I still dream at night of going to a baseball game with my Dad, or of going to the circus at Madison Square Garden, I no longer belong to that world. I cannot seem to cut

myself free from the subtle bonds of that *māyā*, but still I say it is a world I have left forever. I pray to be kept by my eternal spiritual father, my spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, and ushered on to my next life for more Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

By his grace, I worship Govinda, the primeval person, in the temples. And now I want to concentrate on Kṛṣṇa as Gopījanavallabha—or more specifically, as Rādhā-kānta, the lover of Rādhikā. Kṛṣṇa who is loved by Rādhā. Rādhā who is loved by us.

Can I trust my own heart? Can I trust my own mind and senses? I seek direction from the *rasika* Vaiṣṇava. Ask *rasika* questions. How can we be sure? How can we claim "greed" to go forward hearing the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. He can reassure us. He is a follower of Rūpa-Raghunātha. He assures us that this is Śrīla Prabhupāda's heartfelt love. He can reassure us. He can invite us further.

Can people like us overcome our material conception that Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are like an ordinary boy and girl in love? Have you heard the story of the cow who was in a fire? Yes, that cow survived, but now wherever she sees red she thinks, "There is a fire!" Śrīla Prabhupāda said the *materialist* is like that cow. When he sees the picture of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa he thinks, "As I desire to embrace a young girl, so Kṛṣṇa has the same lusty feeling." But Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't say the devotees have to feel that way perpetually. We just have to honest. We can't

be artificial. We have to find our own level and work from that.

O *rasika* Vaiṣṇava, be kind to us. Call us forward, and as you know best, check us from going further. The *śāstras* say greed knows no check, but you are the living guru and you tell us, "You have no greed." But still, you don't forbid us . . . O *rasika* master, bless us to go on like this. Don't take it away.

We will prove ourselves balanced by traveling in our van. We will read and chant and preach with enthusiasm. I will also give a scent of *rasika* interest to all by stressing *sādhana*, the inner life, the *upadeśa-śaram*—chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, desire to swoon at the sound of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* every day, hear the Lord's pastimes and remember them. Live for this.

Let us continue life after life. Even if we cannot become *gopīs* after this life, let us take birth in a place where we can hear of *gopī-bhāva*. And as a *sannyāsī* (or the equivalent), let us go on praying, "I offer myself as a seed unto the fire of *gopī-bhāva*."

Masters, please protect me from falldown. I will do as you order. I will do my best to give the lectures and to counsel others. I will serve. Bless my efforts. Let me love these duties and join with brothers and sisters in Śrīla Prabhupāda's Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.

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"You are on for tomorrow morning," Madhu said last night. He meant our plan to go see Mahārāja is still on. We have anxiety in a good sense, or deep hope, that the little greed he incited last year will grow auspiciously. We cannot force this to happen. We won't get anywhere just by reading books. But when the *rasika* Vaiṣṇava encourages us to concentrate on the Tenth Canto *rasa* pastimes—and when he ultimately leaves it up to us to read them—then our desire is fanned.

If, as Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī said, it is the *sādhu* who manifests the *dhāma,* then let us perceive it through him. We will use our senses as he directs. When our own senses report, "Ugh! That sewer, that pig," we will correct them. And we won't let our imaginations run wild.

"Please worship the land of Vṛndāvana, where a dark youth, who is the personified wonderful treasure of supreme transcendental bliss, plays in waves of eternal transcendental amorous love with a golden young queen who is the personified sweetness of love" (*Vm, Śataka* 2.29).

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Vṛndāvana is nice because even when we don't get the direct audience of Mahārāja, he is not far away. There is a chance you will see him. *Utsahā* is activated.

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You cannot read verse after verse of *rasika* literature. It is not like reading a newspaper. You can't skim through it or "speed read" to pull out the essence. You simply cannot do it. The *rasa-śāstras* have to be read carefully, thoughtfully, a little at a time.

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Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī neglected everything —all bodily maintenance—because of his all-consuming remembrance of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and his beloved Gosvāmī friends in separation. We maintain our bodies because we are not consumed by Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Someone said that in Vṛndāvana, there is peer pressure among the ISKCON devotees to get into the "Vṛndāvana spirit," into *kṛṣṇa-bhajana,* etc. And in the West, the pressure is to do recognizable preaching. We are supposed to show others that we are meeting their expectations. Of course, that shouldn't be our motivation.

•

8:45 A.M.

It will be an interesting trip to Mathurā. I am going despite the sharp pain in the corner of my right eye. I am sending messages to my unconscious self, "Turn off the pain switch—or at least, confine the area of pain to a small circle. Don't let it get worse." We want to show Mahārāja our eagerness, and actually, both Madhu and I *are* anxious to see him. Madhu keeps saying, "We have come to India

for this." So even if today we don't get to see him, it will be an exercise in *utkāṇṭha*. Again, *keep the pain confined.*

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11:45 A.M.

Returned in the rain after a successful visit to Mahārāja in Mathurā. I stayed within myself on the way there and tried to keep the pain down. I tried to relax and save my energy and it seemed to work. We had the usual "India factor" incidents. First we chose a motor rickshaw driver who left us sitting in his rickshaw while he went around begging for petrol. Then we took another driver, and halfway there, he ran out of petrol, but by pushing his machine, he got it started again and we got to the *māṭha* in time.

While we were riding, I was preparing myself for the possibility of Mahārāja not being there. I had some questions prepared, but if he wasn't in, I thought, I could try answering them myself as a writing exercise. Fortunately, he was there. We saw his brown shoes outside the door as well as his wooden shoes. We sat waiting on the marble wall. After awhile, Navīna gestured to us that we could go in. Mahārāja was sitting on his bed. The room was somewhat dark, although a little light was coming in from behind his head. His face looked gaunt to me, and he was wearing just his *sannyāsa* top piece and *dhotī*. Madhu and I positioned ourselves, Madhu on the floor and me on a chair (they always insist I sit on a chair).

There was a rather old man sitting on the floor and speaking in Hindi to Mahārāja. They went on for several minutes and then Mahārāja turned to me and said that this man has donated the land for Rūpa-Sanātana Mandira. I immediately understood that Mahārāja wanted to give him some time. Still, Mahārāja didn't seem to be really paying attention to him and from the few words I could grasp, it didn't sound like a spiritual conversation. Mahārāja kept saying, *"Teekay, teekay,"* but the man always had something else to say. Finally, Mahārāja rang his bell and when Navīna came, he asked him to give the man a sweet.

Mahārāja turned to me and I told him that I was eager to see him. I told him we had planned to come yesterday, but that I had had a headache. He told me that he used to get headaches too, and when he speaks for too long in the evening, he gets weak. I said if the weakness keeps up, he should consider changing his life and not doing so much meeting.

Then I came out with my prepared statement. I said I have a request to make: "Please continue to encourage us to practice and desire to become the *dāsī* of Rādhārāṇī. I know it is far away and that we have no greed for it, but we desire it and you have given us these desires." Mahārāja reciprocated warmly and began telling us different books to read. None of the information was new, but it was just what I asked for, encouragement. He asked me if I had read the *Veṇu-, Yugala-,* and *Brāhmara-gītas* from the Tenth Canto. I thought of my blue, hard-

bound book in which I have bound all those *gītas* together. I want to always go on reading it. Hearing him ask about the *gītas* reassured me. I said, "Yes, I read it again and again."

"It will help very much." He asked if I had the commentaries by Viśvanātha Cakravartī and Jīva Gosvāmī, and I told him we have just a little bit of them. He invited me to bring a verse each time I visited and we could discuss it. He said this is *rāgānugā-bhakti*—to read and discuss. *Śravaṇaṁ-kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam* occurs both in the *sādhaka* stage and in the *siddha* stage; the *rāgānugā-bhakta* goes on chanting and hearing, but the subject matter is different.

This is what I had in mind when I asked for encouragement. We need to be encouraged to continue this selective concentration on Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*. Are we qualified?

Mahārāja said we should see things from the *gopīs'* viewpoint—the way they see Kṛṣṇa's form when He goes into the forest, or whatever their vision. I liked hearing him say that. I replied that we can appreciate this point, even though we have not fully realized it. He said we should do it "gradually." Then it will happen automatically.

So he does encourage us, knowing well that we are not in the advanced stage. He certainly knows that there are many different *rasas* and different sections of the *Vedas* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that we can study. But he tells us, "Take the viewpoint of the *gopīs*." He also asked us if we had read

Mādhurya-kādambinī. And he mentioned *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and *Ujjvala-nīlamaṇi.*

This much of the conversation took place over a period of ten minutes at most. The man who had donated the land left during this time, but then another man came in. Mahārāja asked that a chair be given to him. This man began to speak in English and in Hindi. He turned out to be inimical to pure *bhakti.* He said that *bhakti* is all right for the *bhaktas,* but not for learned persons. I could hardly believe my ears—I was hearing these classic statements of misunderstanding. Mahārāja replied by waving his hand and saying that this was all bogus. Then they began exchanging words in Hindi and I couldn't catch much except that the man wasn't agreeing at all. He kept trying to assert *jñāna* above *bhakti.* Mahārāja quoted the verse, *Jñāne prayāsam udapāsya namanta eva.* He said that *bhakti* doesn't require *jñāna,* but comes of itself. I was thinking to add that *bhakti* is also the highest *jñāna,* but I didn't want to interrupt. I wanted to defend Mahārāja, but I wasn't sure if he would appreciate it. I didn't want to become too argumentative. I wasn't sure of his mood. But I wanted to say to the man, "Why do you come to see a *sādhu* if you are going to argue with him? You should not do this."

This unfortunate conversation went on for ten or fifteen minutes. Obviously, Mahārāja was not interested in discussing it further. Finally the man left.

Mahārāja then said he had just wasted his time. He said that this man had come to drag him down

into social welfare work on the plea of *jñāna* and Saṁskriti or Indian culture.

I mentioned to Mahārāja that devotees like myself or Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja have secretaries to screen a person like that. Mahārāja said he also wanted to have some system where he wouldn't have to see everybody, but everyone wants to see him directly. It doesn't seem possible that Mahārāja can construct such a system because when people really want to see him, he won't bar himself from them. He said that if they go away without seeing him, they become angry.

Then I had another opportunity to ask something of my own. I quoted *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* where Rūpa Gosvāmī says one shouldn't take too many disciples. But our Prabhupāda says that a follower of Lord Caitanya may take the risk to increase the number of disciples so that the movement can be spread. I wanted to know personally, having initiated over seven hundred disciples, whether I should stop as I sometimes feel, or continue. Mahārāja immediately said I should not stop. But he said I should initiate only qualified people. Don't make it cheap. There should be some kind of test to be sure that the people are serious. Otherwise, they will cause trouble for me and others. They should be serious about their *bhajana*. He said that unless devotees receive initiation from a bona fide guru, they are helpless—so this was another reason why I should do it.

This was very important for me to hear. Even though it was brief, it was conclusive and I will

keep it with me. After that, another man came in with his wife and apparently their daughter. While Mahārāja was talking to me, he suddenly gestured to the daughter. I looked and she had fallen asleep on the floor with her long hair falling all over the white sheet cover. The conversation that followed was all in Hindi, but Mahārāja was asking them what was the matter with her. They seemed to be saying that something was wrong with her physically or mentally. Then a conversation ensued which again I don't think had much spiritual content.

Time was running out and Navīna whispered to Madhu that we should be leaving so Mahārāja could rest. I told Mahārāja that I didn't want to bother him so much, but I would try to see him twice a week if that was all right. He said I could come because when I come, I ask nice questions and it helps him to remember Kṛṣṇa.

A marvelous thing that was happening during this time was that I noticed my pain was ebbing. I took it as a kind of "miracle." It was the potency of Mahārāja's association. Usually if I go out with a stabbing sensation and dare to take a rickshaw and travel and have a personal meeting, I wind up in difficulty. But in Mahārāja's presence, I was losing the sharpness of the pain. When I noticed this, I felt happy and satisfied and I didn't even mind that during the hour we were in Mahārāja's room, there had been constant interruptions and I didn't get much time to speak with him. But whatever

exchanges I did have, I had his full attention and he was very kind and affirming.

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4:10 P.M.

When Mahārāja was encouraging me to take the *gopīs'* point of view toward Kṛṣṇa, he said it would happen gradually, and he used the word *tad-ātmā.*

"Do you understand? *Tad-ātmā?"*

"Uh . . . like . . . self?"

"He doesn't know," the so-called *jñānī* said.

Mahārāja said *tad-ātmā* is like the iron in the fire. Gradually, it turns to fire. He said Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu had the *tad-ātmā* (likeness) of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. He assumed Her golden color and Her mood of separation from Kṛṣṇa.

Also, when He was forced to argue with the so-called *jñānī,* Mahārāja pointed to his bookcase and indicated a row of books. He was saying that this person here, this American *sannyāsī,* has written many books and the biography of his spiritual master. The so-called *jñānī* looked at me and said, "You have . . . " It was an argument in favor of *bhakti* and Mahārāja kindly brought me into it in that way.

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I don't think I can expect to actually go to Mahārāja for a series of study lessons as he suggested. I am to study a verse of *Mādhurya-kādambinī* or the *Yugala-gītā,* and then go to him with questions for discussion. In this way, we would do one verse after

another. It is possible and I shouldn't rule it out. I will do my homework. But as I saw today, he is always busy and people come to interrupt his plans for reading and writing.

More important for me than the expectation of regular private lessons (and why me since there are so many who would like that?) is Mahārāja's confirmation that I should go ahead and read *rasika-śāstras* and ask him questions. On previous occasions, he has said that reading books is not sufficient; one needs the association of a Vaiṣṇava. Yet we do have to spend time alone with books and with the *śikṣā-guru* authors of those books. When we read, we may be assured that Mahārāja is with us. Furthermore, we have to render service to Prabhupāda in order to earn the right to study *rāgānugā* texts. Madhu said, "I can't be lazy in the day and read *rasika* books at night."

•

A busy week is ahead with Janmāṣṭamī coming up. I may have to wait a week before going to see Mahārāja again.

Riding to Mathurā, I couldn't capture comprehensive portraits last year and I won't even attempt it this year. But here and there, I see something that strikes me. Today I saw a *sādhu* with his *daṇḍa* wrapped in plastic bags. He's got the right idea for the monsoon season. There are many other things that capture my imagination—*tyāgis* walking down the Vṛndāvana streets carrying their few possessions

and looking like Vyāsadeva must have looked. There are religionists of all descriptions and wearing all kinds of *tilaka* and *dhotīs*—orange, yellow, white, saffron, softer saffron . . . There is no place in the world like Vṛndāvana because everything is focused on Rādhā-Śyāmasundara. It is not only the pilgrims who are filled with Their presence, but even the local people, the shopkeepers, the rickshaw *wallas*, the policemen—"Rādhe-Śyāma! *Jaya* Rādhe."

•

My desk is getting crowded as the second week here advances. It will soon be Janmāṣṭamī. I have never been in Vṛndāvana for Janmāṣṭamī before, although I heard it's not as big as the *jhulan-yātrā* festival that just passed.

I can't imagine how I will feel celebrating Janmāṣṭamī at the Krishna-Balaram Mandir where a festival means strong ropes cordoning off the crowds and extra security guards and surging crowds. I often have trouble finding the internal mood during a big festival, especially when I am a visitor. The internal mood seems more accessible when I travel to Mathurā for a potential meeting with Mahārāja.

But Janmāṣṭamī is also a mood. It is present in small moments. It is not simply a social inconvenience. What is the deep, personal experience of Janmāṣṭamī? There may be some reward in working intensely cooking and decorating. We can also chant extra rounds on that day. Each of us has to

make it meaningful. What is the *gopīs'* viewpoint of Janmāṣṭamī?

Śrīla Prabhupāda's Appearance Day can also be a day of external observances or internal meditation. So much is expected of us on that day. We have to speak our innermost realizations to crowds of devotees and expose our heartfelt and private sentiments toward Prabhupāda to everyone. We tend to be calculating—what will be relevant to others? What should I say? How to express our appreciation of Śrīla Prabhupāda's greatness while protecting our own hearts?

The simple truth is that Prabhupāda appears in our lives every single day through our service. When we learn to see him, we will cry in separation.

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7:30 P.M.

Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī prays to Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī "again and again that he may protect me from all obstacles to my *bhajana* . . . so that the *kuñja-līlā* will always be manifest to me!" (*Abīṣṭa-sūcanam,* by Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, verse 13).

I pray to Prabhupāda to protect my attempt at *bhajana.* Please don't kick me away. Accept me in ISKCON. Let me make a worthy contribution to your great movement and the many devotees who blissfully serve here. To those who sometimes are troubled and who ask me to help, allow me to assist them so they can serve you and Kṛṣṇa once again. May this writing *bhajana* and living in Vṛndāvana

be acceptable in that way, making me more fit to serve.

May I also take seriously the opportunity offered to me by Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja. Don't be put off by the fact that he is giving himself so thoroughly to his spiritual master's order or that he has no time to tend only to you. He gives you some attention. Instead, I should learn from his example of service to others on the order of his guru. He serves with such quality. He has been able to mine deeply the six Gosvāmīs' *rasika* literature and he distributes it freely, although we have no qualification—no purity and no greed.

Go on taking disciples, he said, but don't do it cheaply. Go on aspiring to become Rādhā-*dāsī*, although it can only be gradually attained. Go on serving Śrīla Prabhupāda, chanting and hearing and remembering, but change the quality.

•

Tonight, four of us read from Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. We came to a prayer praising Rūpa Gosvāmī and I explained what I heard Mahārāja say—that a true *rūpānuga* not only follows and teaches Rūpa Gosvāmī's general teaching on all the *bhakti-rasas*, but he also follows the inner mood of Rūpa-mañjarī. Madhu said, "Yes, and a true follower of Śrīla Prabhupāda follows him in his *sādhaka* form and prays to know and serve him in his internal form." I was astonished to hear that. A true follower of Śrīla Prabhupāda has to do more than serve

the founder-*ācārya's* mission in this world. He has to assist him eternally in Kṛṣṇaloka. Of course, service in this world leads to service in the next, but there is much more to it than we used to think.

Mahārāja explained that the spiritual master gives all mantras and instructions in a covered way. He gives riches locked in an iron box. It is a legacy a father might leave his son, safely locked, but inaccessible. Later, by service and *guru-niṣṭhā*, and by associating with a *rasika* Vaiṣṇava, the disciple may learn to unlock the trunk his *gurudeva* gave him and find—how much more was there than we ever knew! Gurudeva knew it was there all along and he kept it safe for us.

•

August 18, 1:00 A.M.

That simple-looking old man who gave the land to build the Rūpa-Sanātana Mandir preferred to sit on the floor. He has done more practical service to Mahārāja than I have done. I was on the edge of my chair with expectancy, and perhaps my conversation with Mahārāja was more śāstric, but what service am I rendering in reciprocation for the teachings Mahārāja is giving me? All I can offer at this point is to practice his teachings myself and share them with others.

I think of things I didn't understand and this generates urgency for another meeting. He can explain everything to me. What is this Vṛndāvana where the crickets sing so strongly? How am I to understand the natural phenomena here, the

hiddenness of land and trees and river and people—all aiding Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's pastimes? A *rasika* Vaiṣṇava can reveal Vṛndāvana, but even that is rare. At least I want to know, if possible, what it is—what *is* this Vṛndāvana that I cannot perceive? What am I to believe about it?

I know there are many places where Kṛṣṇa has His pastimes here. We can visit them—Govardhana Hill, Rādhā-kuṇḍa, and the Yamunā. Surely they are sacred—so many pilgrims are constantly coming and going. We can get a real glimpse of them by hearing of them from Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura.

We have to have faith to come to Kṛṣṇa's residence and be convinced of its holiness even if we can't feel it. We are willing to agree that our inability is due to our own defects. It would be foolish for a blind man to proclaim the nonexistence of the visual world and to think that everything is as dark as he himself perceives it. He has to learn to see the visual world in his dreams.

Those statements of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī are puzzling—"the land is not spiritual." "God has vacated the throne." That is something I could ask Mahārāja: "What is this Vṛndāvana?"

We know when Kṛṣṇa was here, Vṛndāvana was fully manifest. But even Lord Brahmā failed to appreciate Kṛṣṇa as He played with His *sakhas* and cows in blissful pastimes. Kṛṣṇa had to reveal to Brahmā His supreme majesty and prowess, and in so doing, He revealed the glories of *mādhurya-dhāma.* What to speak of our own lack of vision?

Śrīla Prabhupāda says that this Vṛndāvana today is fully potent, but we cannot perceive it. He brought us here to associate with the *dhāma*. He said it was beautiful, that it could transform us, that service rendered here was more purifying than service done anywhere else in the world. He encouraged us to have faith that this Vṛndāvana is the same as Goloka Vṛndāvana, "but your mind is in America."

•

It may be a week until I see Mahārāja again because during Janmāṣṭamī time, the Gauḍīya Māṭha is a busy place. I don't want to bother him. At least I can hear him on tape. Also, I can listen to Prabhupāda. He is present in Vṛndāvana in his *mūrti* forms at Krishna-Balaram Mandir, and I can go to him anytime and pray. *"Śrīla Prabhupāda, please reveal Vṛndāvana to me."*

Prabhodānanda Sarasvatī says the eternal Goloka is the same as the place in which he was living five hundred years ago. He had that vision. When he couldn't see Goloka in Vṛndāvana, he lamented bitterly in separation. Śrīla Prabhupāda always told us that the six Gosvāmīs lived here in separation from Kṛṣṇa. They were in *gopī-bhāva*, living on the banks of Rādhā-kuṇḍa or wandering to the Yamunā calling out, "Where is Kṛṣṇa? Where is Rādhā?" Śrīla Prabhupāda said they never claimed, "Now we have seen Kṛṣṇa." He told us not to try to see Kṛṣṇa loitering in Loi Bazaar.

As for writing, "I see a donkey, I see a pig, I see a boy smoking a cigarette," there is a limit to that. I say it and then I follow it up with something deeper. I want to be honest. I do see value in my sense perceptions here. I have faith in them. I believe they are closer to Kṛṣṇa than descriptions of what I perceive in Ireland or America. My perceptions are not Goloka, but neither are they ordinary. That's because life isn't ordinary in Vṛndāvana. Kṛṣṇa is present in every atom.

Yesterday, while driving to Mathurā, we saw about six white "brahma" calves cavorting wildly on the side of the road. They were romping with that energy calves have. Was that a Vraja sight? Is it connected to *kṛṣṇa-līlā?* Do I have to prove it? If ordinary life is worth rendering as-it-is and doesn't need an explanation since it is all divine and inexplicable, then how much more this is true of Vṛndāvana, even now in 1992?

Pilgrim, your search has ended. Caress the Vraja details.

"Even if the residents of Vṛndāvana are violent hoodlums in disguise, or thieves who plunder one's money and wife, still, they who are learned and saintly do not see any fault in them.

"O Vṛndāvana, how can there be any auspiciousness for one who does not always praise you with his voice? . . . What person who knows the truth will not take shelter of a blade of grass that grows within you?" (*Vm, Śataka* 2.71–72).

•

10:30 A.M.

"If we remain here in Vṛndāvana, we should know that we are living with Kṛṣṇa. How much we should be cautious, how much we should be careful, if we actually understand what is *dhāma.* The *dhāma* is also Kṛṣṇa. If you actually live in Vṛndāvana carefully without committing any offense or sinful life, then in this life you are going to Kṛṣṇa" (Śrīla Prabhupāda).

•

I am sitting in Baladeva's room while he and Ananta wash the floors in the other rooms. He told me that in this room, I could watch "Vṛndāvana TV." It's facing a lane. But it's late morning and hardly anyone is walking by. I see the brick wall next door with the rusty, iron-grilled window and the green yard. The monsoon weather is just like New Jersey today.

I am trying to relax and listen to the reverberations of recent words and thoughts and allow them to quiet me down. The most recent things that have come to mind are not necessarily the most important, although they seem to be. I live on a superficial level—what is happening in the present is the most vivid detail in my mind. The past fades away like the wake of a ship. But if I can quiet down and look within, feel more, open up more, I will find a deeper level where real concerns are active. And below that, a more important level—

deeper and deeper to where we usually don't have access.

(We usually think dreams are a deep part of our subconscious, but they are *very* disappointing and bizarre. They are not even on the most neophyte level of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They are something separate, a world of phantoms).

Someone writes me a letter: I need to be reinitiated and I am considering you because you have a relationship with Mahārāja. She said Mahārāja recommended me as one who sincerely takes and practices what he advises. Let it be true. Don't be a bluffer. As Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "Be careful." If you go see a *rasika* Vaiṣṇava, don't trifle.

Someone else writes me a letter from America. I hold off reading it for now. A strip of flag on a tall bamboo pole—reminds me of Trinidad where they have all the *yajña* flags.

(The "TV" is on, but I can only see the top half of people's heads.)

Bisleri bottles. We are not renounced *sādhus.* We have bodies manufactured in the West. They take special treatment.

They are washing the floor. First they take everything out of the room, then sweep it, then throw lots of water around, scrape it with a rubber squeegee, then wash it with rags. Is there an equivalent process going on here with my pen and paper? Am I taking things out, taking inventory as they are removed? How do you carry a false ego out of the room? Where do you put it? Sweep and wash.

I am afraid to think too hard in case I get a headache. I worked at a seminar lecture about Śrīla Prabhupāda in Jhansi and in New Delhi in the 1950s. It was such a difficult time for him. He got headaches too, no doubt, but he kept working. He didn't have nice clothing, but wore rags. He walked long distances because he couldn't afford a rickshaw. He skipped breakfast—no money. No permanent residence. Begging for donations to print *BTG*. Selling his magazine on the street. Very few people knew of him or thought of him as an important, spiritual leader. There was no ISKCON, no one to care for him or cook for him or attempt to protect his time. He was alone with his guru's order and his ambition to create a world movement.

•

"Simply bow down to offer respects to the cottages in the groves of Vṛndāvana and you will find the wonderful treasure contained in the nectar oceans of pure love for Lord Kṛṣṇa" (*Vm, Śataka* 2.96).

•

Someone is calling out. It sounds like she is hawking goods in the street. But it could be something else. "People of Vṛndāvana, if you want fruits, come and get them from me!" said the fruit vendor. Kṛṣṇa went to meet her carrying grains for barter. They spilled from His little hands. The fruit

vendor gave Him plenty in exchange and her basket filled up with jewels.

Wake up . . . every inch is Vṛndāvana, the bricks and dirt and grime . . .

•

I am unworthy to write. Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa ride on Their swing together. I don't feel it much as I write it, but the sentence is so potent—"Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa ride on Their swing together"—that it achieves something beyond my poor understanding. It stands by itself. What else can I do but keep making such sentences in my spiritual poverty? Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa always live in Vṛndāvana. This is the place to contact Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa performed his *rāsa-līlā* here. He lived in Nanda Mahārāja's house. He carried the imprint of His mother's hand in turmeric on His back.

•

4:55 P.M.

More from the essay, "Circumambulation of the Realm of Braja," by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī:

He says that only when we surrender unconditionally to the *sādhu* can we understand anything or benefit from Vraja *parikrama.* By walking around viewing the scenery or thinking our own thoughts about Kṛṣṇa or about ourselves, we will not derive any spiritual results. It will just be a lot of work.

He writes, "It is the nature of a conditioned soul to be tempted to assume his own guidance however much he may pretend to be guided by another." It

seems we are naive and sentimental about living and dying in Vṛndāvana. The sages encourage us by saying that the *dhāma* is always beneficial, but we shouldn't sentimentally think we can enter the *dhāma* without realization. We have to face the fact that mundane people are living in the *dhāma* and that we cannot perceive Kṛṣṇa. We don't want to be like the simple villagers in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* who saw a fisherman's light and thought it was Kṛṣṇa dancing on Kāliya's heads in the night. We have to actually advance to *bhāva* by the descending process of receiving mercy before we can realize the mystery of the *dhāma.* Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī stresses that the bona fide *sādhu* uses Vraja-*dhāma* to kindle the spiritual consciousness of dormant souls. This is more important than the service to the land itself.

He writes, "Those who choose to suppose that they are enabled to serve the transcendental realm of Vraja by simply residing in the mundane district of Mathurā or by following mechanically any course of ceremonials laid down by the scriptures under the guidance of persons who have themselves no access to the spiritual plane, are no less deluded than those stubborn atheists . . .

"The intellect of man commits an offense against itself the moment it attempts to comprehend the incomprehensible by its own resources."

Where does this leave me? What would Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī do with someone like me? I dare not imagine it.

I cannot pretend I am seeing and feeling deep sensations in Vraja. I want to have faith, but first I have to understand what to have faith in. If Śrīla Prabhupāda and the *ācāryas* want to create faith in us by telling us simple versions of the Absolute Truth, I shouldn't refuse them. Lord Caitanya's spiritual master told Him He was a fool and should not attempt to study *Vedānta-sūtra*. He said He should simply chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Lord Caitanya abided by that instruction with full faith and immediately tasted the nectar of *harināma*. We can study our spiritual master's words more deeply and pray to realize them.

Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "Anyone who executes devotional service in [Mathurā-Vṛndāvana or Navadvīpa-*dhāma*] certainly goes back to home, back to Godhead, after giving up his body" (*Bhāg*. 10.1.28, purport). We accept this on his authority, but it doesn't necessarily mean any immature, *anartha*-filled devotee who does a little service in Vṛndāvana will enter Vraja-*līlā* in one lifetime. He or she will benefit from serving or living in the *dhāma* and will enter the path back to Godhead . . . but still, everyone has to follow the actual, scientific process —*śraddhā, sādhu-saṅga, bhajana-kriya, anartha-nivṛtti, niṣṭhā, ruci, āsakti, bhāva,* and *prema.*

Perhaps, therefore, I am most truthful when I expose the foolish things we are doing and thinking during our stay here. I am also safe when I hear from the realized souls. But I am on shaky ground when I claim to have realized something from Vṛndāvana-*dhāma* based on my own experience.

And what is the value of my self-examination? Better to examine what the *sādhu* says . . .

•

7:40 P.M.

I had to stay home today because of a headache, but I will be here in the morning to try and write. There *is* potency in this place. I cannot deny it; writing is coming from the charms of this land.

Madhu said he has resumed his practice of saying *parampara* prayers since coming to Vṛndāvana and his *japa* has improved. Baladeva was so entangled in the painting business before he came, but now he is sporting in Vraja-*sevā*. The soul relaxes here, and breathes. The bombardment of the senses which we experience driving on the highways and in the cities, the demanding phone calls, are all left behind. We hear *bhajanas*, not rock music. Granted, it may be "quasi-spiritual," and we have a tendency to be sentimental, imagining everyone who says, "Rādhe! Rādhe!" to be a saintly person—but it is special. We are thriving here. Mahārāja says often that we need to live here to do *rāgānugā-bhajana*.

"One who intends to visit Vṛndāvana should follow the ideal footsteps of Akrūra and always think of the pastimes and activities of the Lord." (So *that's* what you should be doing here.) "As soon as one reaches the boundary of Vṛndāvana, he should immediately smear the dust of Vṛndāvana over his body without thinking of his material position and prestige." (I did it. So it is *not* sentimental.) "Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura has sung in his celebrated song,

viṣaya chāṛiya kabe śuddha ha'be mana: 'When my mind will be purified after leaving the contamination of material sense enjoyment, I shall be able to visit Vṛndāvana.'" (Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī agrees with what Narottama dāsa says here—"You cannot enter Vṛndāvana unless you are free of wrong motives.") "Actually, one cannot go to Vṛndāvana by purchasing a ticket. The process of going to Vṛndāvana is shown by Akrūra" (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. II, Chap. 3, p. 14).

•

August 19, 1:20 A.M.

"Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: Thus the Vṛndāvana forest was filled with transparent autumnal waters and cooled by breezes perfumed with the fragrance of lotus flowers growing in the clear lakes. The infallible Lord, accompanied by His cows and cowherd boyfriends, entered that Vṛndāvana forest" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.1).

Mahārāja said to read these verses and ask questions. Ask him how I may come to love hearing of Kṛṣṇa entering the forest and how I may come to spontaneously see this within myself. Love comes when the outside world is a void without Govinda. I read in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* how a devotee heard one verse being read—the verse of how Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma appeared to the wives of the yajñic *brāhmaṇas*, when Kṛṣṇa was standing in the forest, garlanded with wild flowers, holding a lotus in His

hand—and the devotee went into uncontrolled ecstasy.

Ask how to practice *bhajana.* How to live in the eternal *līlā?* Where is it going on? Where is that forest? How to qualify to yearn for this stage? What is it?

Even to ask these questions in a rhetorical way, half-seriously, takes me away from myself. There is a link between Vṛndāvana as we perceive it and the *līlās* as we read them—the sound of crickets in the early morning leads us toward *kṛṣṇa-kathā.* Can these crickets come to mind when we hear crickets in the West? Can we practice Vṛndāvana-*bhajana* in the West? Does active service to guru qualify us to hear and see *kṛṣṇa-līlā* and to appreciate it? Is this what it means, "Don't try to see Kṛṣṇa, but act in such a way that Kṛṣṇa will see you?" But shouldn't we also try to see Kṛṣṇa in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* by submissive aural reception? Is a quiet life with time for hearing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* conducive to appreciation of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*—or is it a luxury a preacher cannot afford since he is on the battlefield against the opponents of Kṛṣṇa consciousness?

Vṛndāvana-*dhāma kī jaya. Saṅkīrtana-yajña kī jaya.* Transcendental book distribution, *kī jaya.* Subduing the false ego, *kī jaya. Gaura-premānanda, hari haribol.*

•

The weather was cool when Kṛṣṇa entered the forest, which was filled with ponds and streams.

Breezes were blowing from the waterfalls and the lakes were filled with fragrant lotus flowers. Kṛṣṇa, Acyuta, the infallible Supreme Personality of Godhead, entered that Vṛndāvana forest. *Itthaṁ śarat-svaccha-jalaṁ*—in clear-watered autumn; *padmākara-sugandhinā*—with the sweet fragrance of the lotus flowers that grow in the lakes; *nyaviśad vāyunā vātaṁ*—He entered there, where the perfumed breeze blows; *sa-go-gopālako 'cyutaḥ*—surrounded by His cows and *gopas*.

This is the Kṛṣṇa whom Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us by carefully removing our prejudices and *anarthas*. He wanted us to hear Kṛṣṇa, to see Him with our inner eye, to smell the lotuses, and to serve the Lord.

Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us one verse a day to consider, with his purport to accompany and illuminate it. The "vision" fades quickly, but it can return. Sometimes I repeat the descriptions to myself. Mahārāja asked me to study the *Veṇu-gīta* because it is useful in *bhajana*.

Pure devotees remember these pastimes in a *svārsiki* way, as an uninterrupted meditation. They remember it the way honey flows from a jar in an unbroken stream. I am not on that platform, so I am reading again and again.

In the clear-watered autumn when the forests were filled with the fragrance of lotuses, young Vraja-kiśora, the prince of Vraja, the infallible Supreme Lord, took His cows and boyfriends with Him into the forest.

Acyuta, I pray that You will appear in Your names. If you choose not to appear in my *japa,* it is because *I* am fallible *(cyuta).* I don't blame You. I am not satisfied with my failure and I want to try harder. What do I have to do to make You more pleased with me? But I already know.

•

6:10 A.M.

A little frog between the rain splashes. A stream comes down the stairs from the roof. No sunlight. The front yard has become a puddle joining the "lake" at our gate. The drain pipe pours foamy water onto the cement. I saw three miniature frogs jumping together. Will my friends have trouble getting here for lunch?

•

10:40 A.M.

I am inside a room which isn't particularly Vṛndāvanish. But I will consider texts and thoughts to bring me there.

"The glories of Kṛṣṇa nobody can understand. Similarly, Vṛndāvana. The land which is known as Vṛndāvana also has unlimited potency. When you go to Vṛndāvana, you will find unlimited potency of spiritual atmosphere, still. If you go to Vṛndāvana, you will see so many saints and sages—still they are worshiping Vṛndāvana-*dhāma.* As Lord Kṛṣṇa is worshipable, similarly, His place, Vṛndāvana, is as good as Kṛṣṇa. It is also worshipable"

(Śrīla Prabhupāda, quoted in *Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta,* Vol. 1, p. 207).

Śrīla Prabhupāda is consistently encouraging about the glories of Vṛndāvana. *Still,* he says, *even today,* if you go. Let us accept his liberal mood. Accept that Vṛndāvana is inconceivable and unlimited and worshipable. Come here and look for increased opportunities, especially in *śravaṇaṁ-kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam.*

•

"The lakes, rivers, and hills of Vṛndāvana resounded with the sounds of maddened bees and flocks of birds moving about the flowering trees. In the company of the cowherd boys and Balarāma, Madhupati [Śrī Kṛṣṇa] entered that forest, and while herding the cows, He began to vibrate His flute" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.2).

Kṛṣṇa blended His flute-song with the sounds of the birds. He is an expert musician. We will hear the extraordinary effects of His music, unequaled by any other musician who ever existed. He is with Balarāma and the other boys, in *sakhya* intimacy. The forests receive Him like a dear friend. There is no anxiety. There is splendid movement and color and pleasing breezes and fragrant flowers. But the *gopas* are not sense-enjoying in paradise. They are intent on pleasing Kṛṣṇa. "Everyone there is happy by pleasing Kṛṣṇa. . . . The calf is happy, the cat is happy, the dog is happy, the man is happy—everyone" (*Bhāg.* 10.13.60, purport).

Kṛṣṇa is playing His flute. Do I have a question from this verse to ask Mahārāja? No, not yet. I could simply ask him to talk about the verse and describe Kṛṣṇa's flute-song. How is it that everyone becomes struck by the flute, yet not everyone runs to Kṛṣṇa. How can I practice *svārsiki* meditation on these verses, since the world and my mind are so demanding? Is it even possible or advisable? But if we don't do that, then how can we hope to practice *rāgānugā-bhakti?*

tad vraja-striya āśrutya
veṇu-gītaṁ smarodayam
kāścit parokṣaṁ kṛṣṇasya
sva-sakhībhyo 'nvavarṇaya

"When the young ladies in the cowherd village of Vraja heard the song of Kṛṣṇa's flute, which arouses the influence of Cupid, some of them privately began discussing Kṛṣṇa's qualities to their intimate friends" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.3).

Why are *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* verses on *gopī-bhāva* particularly wonderful and influential among *rasika* poetry? Is it because it is such an authoritative literature for *bhakti?* What is the inherent purity of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that makes it so special that Lord Caitanya praised it as the spotless *purāṇa?* And why do you, Mahārāja, refer us to the *Bhāgavata?* Please speak of it in terms of its *rasika* meanings.

What is the influence of Cupid mentioned here? How is it different than material lust? This is very important to learn—it is not just a theoretical issue.

How can we lose all traces of material lust? How can we hear Kṛṣṇa's flute-song? Are these acceptable questions? Will I get a chance to ask them? Will I appreciate the answers?

Tell us how the young girls gathered in private so as not to be found out by their parents. What is *gopī-bhāva?* Sometimes these girls are described as ordinary *(vaiśyas,* uneducated, womenfolk, not *yogīs* or sages), so please tell us how they both seem ordinary and yet are the best of all devotees.

tad varṇayitum ārabdhāḥ
smarantyaḥ kṛṣṇa-ceṣṭitam

"The cowherd girls began to speak about Kṛṣṇa, but when they remembered His activities, O King, the power of Cupid disturbed their minds and thus they could not speak" *(Bhāg.* 10.21.4).

How is the Sanskrit word *"smara"* related to Cupid? Please tell us how the *gopīs* became so disturbed that they could not speak. How does their ecstasy on hearing the flute interfere with their ability to speak? The flute must have great power to awaken such love.

I think this chapter will describe that it worked in a similar way even on those who don't have *mādhurya-rasa* with Kṛṣṇa. Please tell us of these things so we can appreciate them. How can a neophyte think of the flute-song? We have never heard such a sound, so how can we compare it to anything or have any idea of it at all? What is the

flute? Please tell us anything you think we can hear.

•

Hare Kṛṣṇa. Keep a cool head. The late mornings are the time when I tend to push myself enough to get a headache. I don't want to be lazy, but I haven't found a way to be quiet and relaxed and yet focused on Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It requires intensity.

My head and shoulders are covered with oil from the massage Madhu gave me. Now I am chewing fresh pieces of ginger. A bird hopped into the open hallway, looked in at me through the screen door, then turned and hopped away. Today is Baladeva's *yajña*—making lunch for my friends. Extra devotees plan to eat after me and my guests are finished. I am not expert at hosting, but I won't try to prepare conversation. Better to let it flow. I will be with friends. And anyway, lunch is not the time for intense, intricate, demanding talk.

•

1:55 P.M.

Our guests should be arriving at any moment, but it's raining hard. We are ready; lunch is cooked. A new river is coming down the stairs from the roof. Will my friends be able to traverse the flooded paths and wade through our front yard? It is still hot, but pleasantly hot now. I hear the sound of splashing water everywhere. To pass the time, I have been reading *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta*. It makes me wonder how this Vṛndāvana rain is connected

to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I know I have brought this point up before, but I really need to understand it. When I look out the door to see if my Godbrothers have arrived, is that a form of Vaiṣṇava-*sevā?* When I go into the kitchen and remind Baladeva to serve *capātīs* both with ghee and without, what is that . . . ?

It's true, I cannot see Vṛndāvana and I do not weep for that fact.

•

It appears contradictory: you don't enter Vṛndāvana and yet each dust particle in Vṛndāvana is imbued with mercy even for the most sinful man. In a lecture Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "If you come from anywhere by train or airplane and see Vṛndāvana, that is not seeing Vṛndāvana" (Lecture in Vṛndāvana, quoted in *Appreciating Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma,* p. 12). Yet in the Introduction to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta,* Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, " . . . devotees take shelter of the Vṛndāvana in India, for it is considered to be a replica of the original Vṛndāvana."

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja writes, "One should not discriminate between the *dhāmas* on earth and those in the spiritual sky, thinking those on earth to be material and the original abodes to be spiritual. All of them are spiritual" (*C.c., Ādi* 5.19, purport). But there is a māyic covering on the *dhāma.* It may appear to degrade more with the advance of Kali-yuga.

I am not trying to create confusion. The various authorized statements are all correct. I realize better

that I don't understand Vṛndāvana, but I like it here. Living outside the temple has given me a different viewpoint. In any case, I want to serve here under Śrīla Prabhupāda's shelter. It's not ordinary. What I write is my perception, a kind of truthful embrace by one who . . . doesn't know . . . but is allowed for awhile . . . who knows he is somewhere special and cannot resist saying so . . . who thrills to see, even though he can't appreciate it . . . who knows it is different than living in the West. The scriptures say that this is the place, but you cannot perceive it. But this is the place.

•

4:40 P.M.

We will have to wait a long time to become pure devotees. The *mañjarīs* never even think of anything selfishly; they are only concerned for Rādhikā's pleasure. "Yes," I said over lunch, "it will take many lifetimes." We admitted we all do things in our own interest. I can't complain. I am at a certain stage, that's all. Intimacy is always lacking. With whom can I share but with Kṛṣṇa?

•

I am sorry that things aren't better. I wanted to dedicate myself to writing, but I don't break through often enough. Besides, "writing" isn't devotional service per se, so how can I be interested in the "pure" act of writing? It is valid when it connects

(yoga) and I cannot assume that it automatically happens every time I put pen to paper.

The sages give two kinds of instructions on this point. On the one hand, they are encouraging and they emphasize how easy it is to make advancement. Beginners needs this kind of encouragement. If they understood from the beginning how much work is involved in *anartha-nivṛtti,* they would be crushed. Who can face the truth about themselves so constantly but a pure devotee? What to speak of *anartha-nivṛtti,* but to face the fact that it is extremely rare to become the *pālya-dāsī* of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī would be disheartening.

But the sages also give instructions based on the hard truths. They show us how stubborn our *anarthas* are and how rarely *kṛṣṇa-prema* is achieved. I want enthusiasm and encouragement, but I also want honesty. Where do these two instructions meet?

•

We had a nice lunch. They wished me well in this quiet house and they encouraged me to stay here for my entire visit to Vṛndāvana.

Writing down the bones? Writing from my heart? Writing my way through my Vraja experience? I write every day, but how deeply do I go? How much does it help me? I can't say for sure. But I keep the hand moving.

(Baladeva is wandering through the rooms with a spray bottle marked "Poisen." He says he is getting termites. The house could fall down. A nonviolent

advocate might prefer that. Or find a way to ask them to leave nicely.)

•

It was a high level talk we had at lunch. I tried to contribute.

Interesting signs that *rāgānugā* has come to ISKCON Vṛndāvana:

The boys' *gurukula* is doing a skit taken partially from *Śrī Govinda-līlāmṛta* about Kṛṣṇa's activities throughout the day. A *sannyāsī* visited the *gurukula* and asked a younger boy's class, "Who is Rūpa Gosvāmī?" A seven-year-old boy replied, "He is Rūpamañjarī." The temple president heard loud talking at 10 P.M. and went down to the *kīrtana* hall, asking a devotee, "Please be quiet. Kṛṣṇa is sleeping." The devotee replied, "That's what you think!"

•

We tell each other how certain devotees are doing. Of one who has messed up his life, I remarked, "I ought to write him a letter." But how much do I care?

In Vṛndāvana, you want to do better. Being mellow is only a small part of it. Be alert, be sharp. But don't be cutting. They ask me what I am reading. I say some of this and some of that. Nothing concentratedly. He asks me, "What are you doing?" It seems like there is some challenge in the inquiry, not just friendly interest. So I tell my public relations version of what I am doing. They should

know I am doing all I can. I say I am preparing seminars, doing a little writing (not *that* much writing, but they're not wishing me to make a deeper effort there). I say I am also coping with headaches. I am doing too much, I say; I can't do as much as in the West, so I have to slow down. "And what do you do then?" I laugh and say, "I don't know! I don't know how to remain calm and quiet and do something Kṛṣṇa conscious. Even to listen to Mahārāja on earphones takes too much concentration."

Whether they are sympathetic or not, I just have to keep going.

•

August 20, 1:00 A.M.

I dreamt the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement was responsible for felling many trees and leaving them all over the country, creating a major debris problem. On waking I thought, "At least I fear for the reputation of the movement." The tree debris wasn't really the fault of our movement, but a misunderstanding. It made me appreciate devotees who work in communications and who inform the media of what we actually do.

I woke up and slowly remembered I was in Vṛndāvana. I have been wondering about the theme of this writing. That came to mind as I woke up too.

To be true to "the process" of writing means not being concerned with results; writing "in process" means writing earnestly. I brought rules with me to Vṛndāvana, but what if Vraja doesn't accept those rules? What if they are like the heavy Western

clothing that we have to peel off when we get to India?

"Wearing a peacock-feather ornament upon His head, blue *karṇikāra* flowers on His ears, a yellow garment as brilliant as gold, and the Vaijayantī garland, Lord Kṛṣṇa exhibited His transcendental form as the greatest of dancers as He entered the forest of Vṛndāvana, beautifying it with the marks of His footprints. He filled the holes of His flute with the nectar of His lips, and the cowherd boys sang His glories" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.5).

This verse is spoken privately by a *gopī* to her intimate friends. It is full of love. I cannot grasp how deeply the *gopīs* feel or how they know Kṛṣṇa, but I can hear their words again and again. Mahārāja said that this verse is one of the best descriptions of Kṛṣṇa in the entire *Bhāgavatam.* Surely it will move a sincere devotee.

I pray for faith. I submit myself to Śrīla Prabhupāda who knows how to treat our agnostic, weak hearts. He braces us, massages our chests, upbraids our doubts, gives us active service to chase away the cobwebs of desire and the malevolent stars that plague us. He fixes us. Gradually he introduces us to the *gopīs'* point of view.

Yesterday at lunch, my brother told me he had been to see Mahārāja the day before. Mahārāja had pointed out a particular verse in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta,* which describes the *gopīs'* point of view. Mahārāja asked to hear what Śrīla Prabhupāda had written in his purport to this verse. The brother read it, and Mahārāja was pleased. He told him to

tell the others (and he mentioned my name) to look at this verse and purport. The brother recalled that it was somewhere in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā,* Chapter Eight. Just now I thought to look for it. I opened the one-volume edition (2,203 pages) to one page past where the verse actually occurs. We take these "chance" happenings in a casual way, but it is mercy that things happen as they do. I guess Kṛṣṇa wanted me to find it and share it as soon as possible. Here it is:

"Unless one follows in the footsteps of the *gopīs,* he cannot attain the service of the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, the son of Nanda Mahārāja. If one is overcome by knowledge of the Lord's opulence, he cannot attain the Lord's lotus feet, even though he is engaged in devotional service" *(C.c., Madhya* 8.230).

In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that one can worship Nārāyaṇa by the *vidhi-mārga* process, but "the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, cannot be directly worshiped by this process. . . . Those attracted by the conjugal love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa must follow in the footsteps of the *gopīs.* Only then is it possible to enter into the Lord's service in Goloka Vṛndāvana and directly associate with Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa."

Accept the mood of the *gopīs*—this is a deep instruction that isn't easily understood. It cannot be grasped just by saying, "Oh, you mean love Kṛṣṇa like a paramour?" It *means* that, although "paramour" is usually taken materially by these ears and this dirty heart. The way of the *gopīs* also means no

other desire but to serve and please Kṛṣṇa. This is the super-excellent standard of their service, which Lord Caitanya recommends: "There is no better method of worshiping Kṛṣṇa than that followed by the Vraja-*vadhūs*, the *gopīs* of Vṛndāvana."

We have to learn to see from the viewpoint of the *gopīs*. We have heard that we have to see through the eyes of the *śāstra*, and now we have to practice seeing through the eyes of the *gopīs*. The *gopīs* speak privately among one another, intimately. Śukadeva Gosvāmī gives us a glimpse of their *bhāva*. He tells us what they are saying in the courtyards of their homes or under the village trees or at the well. "Kṛṣṇa is so beautiful when He enters the forest in the morning. He wears a peacock feather on the top of His head and fresh mango sprouts as decorations. He wears a blue *karṇikāra* flower (blue lotus) over His ear and His *dhotī* is a brilliant yellow. His *vaijayantī* garland falls to His feet and the bees buzz around it, looking for the *tulasī-mañjarīs*. He appears like the greatest of dancers (*naṭa-vara*). He beautifies the forest with the marks of His lotus feet. The nectar of His lips, which is so much desired by the *gopīs*, is filling the holes of His flute. His dear *gopa* friends are close by singing His glories."

There is so little in our purport about this verse. I would like to ask Mahārāja to speak more. And how can we take a verse like this and use it as *bhajana*? How can we adopt the vision of the *gopīs*? Do we write it down? Memorize it? Repeat it? Try to see it? But how can we achieve this vision by rote

memorization? That schoolboy approach of repeating words again and again belongs to the regulative (*vaidhī*) method of study. How can we *follow* the way of the *gopīs?* How can we make a verse like this live in us with at least a fraction of their love?

The BBT purport states that the *gopīs* remembered Kṛṣṇa's transcendental qualities and that Kṛṣṇa's artful way of dressing "excited the *gopīs'* romantic desires, and as He poured the nectar of His lips into His flute, they simply lost themselves in ecstatic love for Kṛṣṇa."

I write it down with my pen or I repeat it to my friends, but when my ear and mind registers the information, the pure meaning is lost. We have been told that the ear shouldn't hear it, but what can we do? I want to ask Mahārāja to explain this phenomena of the ear "spoiling" the nectar. I think I know what it means—the sweetness of the secret is spoiled by our mundane apparatus. The same ear that hears nonsense and doesn't appreciate sublime Kṛṣṇa will be incapable of hearing this secret exchange between the *gopīs. Ataḥ śrī-kṛṣṇa-nāmādi na bhaved grāhyam indriyaiḥ*—we cannot see Kṛṣṇa with the blunt senses. We need to purify ourselves, beginning with the tongue. Chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, chant this verse, *barhāpīḍaṁ naṭa-vara,* and eventually it will be purified.

If some ordinary person overheard the *gopīs* speaking of Kṛṣṇa in this way, they would not be able to understand the intensity of their love. Even devotees in other *rasas* are incapable of appreciating Kṛṣṇa in the same way.

"Therefore, one should accept the mood of the *gopīs* in their service. In such a transcendental mood, one should always think of the pastimes of Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. After thinking of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and Their pastimes for a long time and after getting completely free from material contamination, one is transferred to the spiritual world. Therefore, the devotee attains an opportunity to serve Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as one of the *gopīs*" (*C.c., Madhya* 8.228–9).

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "This verse specifically mentions *sakhī-bhāve pāya rādhā-kṛṣṇera caraṇa:* only transcendentally elevated persons in the mood of the *gopīs* can engage in the service of the lotus feet of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa."

Ask Mahārāja how we can meditate on this verse of the *Veṇu-gīta* in the footsteps of the *gopīs?* We don't have that pure *gopī-bhāva* as yet, but we want to enter the spirit of the verse as spoken by one *gopī* to another, please tell us more *how* to read a verse like this.

•

Japa isn't moving beads like a Chinese launderer moving his abacus to figure out your bill. It is calling to Kṛṣṇa. Don't forget the *gopīs* talking to one another, Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa . . . Don't forget Kṛṣṇa, the best of dancers entering the forest, beautifying the land with the marks of His feet. Hare Rāma . . . He has placed blue *karṇikāra* flowers over His ears . . . Rāma Rāma . . . the *gopīs* are speaking to each other privately . . . Don't be mechanical.

11:12 A.M.

Hanging out in the hallway. We have a well-used rattan chair, trimmed with worn down bicycle tires inscribed "Heavy duty tyre." I put it in the outdoor hall which faces the front gate. I can sit there and write when I am not at my desk. Does this imply that my work isn't serious?

I have lost my concentration on this writing retreat, so we have decided to cut back extra activities like *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* classes and lunch with Godbrothers for the next two weeks. Also, devotees are handing me letters and I have been replying immediately.

•

I seem to have weathered the blast from my *parama-guru* Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī who said that the *dhāma* isn't worshipable unless we are completely surrendered to the guru and receive the *dhāma's* teachings from him. I gave Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's essay to Baladeva, because he may have been naive in his affection for all the people moving through Vṛndāvana.

He wrote me back: "It was good for me to read that article, but still there seems to be a lot of things that are wonderful here like the different kind of *kīrtanas: kīrtana* procession before a dead body heading for the Yamunā; *kīrtana* led by a well-dressed swami, broadcast over a loudspeaker. Dancers following him, all chanting "Govinda *jaya jaya*" right through the center of town. It stopped traffic for forty minutes, but no one was annoyed. A large three-

wheeler filled with 'devotees' going somewhere and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa *kīrtana* in a tune familiar in our temples; widows at an *āśrama* chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa while waiting for breakfast to be served.

"If you go to the shops early, you can see that most shopkeepers are just coming from a temple or some kind of *pūjā*. They are definitely in a more devotional mood than later in the day . . . Beadbags, clean clothes, nice *kuṁkum* on their foreheads, quoting verses, etc."

•

The Indian squirrel is shy, and yet he comes forward in his own way, much bolder than an American squirrel. (They are actually gray chipmunks. It is said that they got the stripes on their backs when Lord Rāmacandra petted them after they attempted to help Him build the bridge of stones to Lanka.) As I write, one squirrel has climbed in the garbage bucket and come out with a morsel of food. He is eating with two hands, quickly finishing it and looking for more.

On the low brick wall, there is a bird with a pointy head and black and white wings which he is fluffing and preening. So many things are difficult to do in India, including finding out the names of the birds. Someone will tell me a Hindi name, but still I can't get it. I keep using my own names—small-green-bird-on-electric wire, sparrows, bold-fluffy-white birds. So many varieties in Vṛndāvana!

The flies make my hallway chair not so congenial, but I am too happy to be in Vṛndāvana to mind much.

•

Gave the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class. One Indian man from Singapore approached me afterwards and thanked me. Otherwise, it is the usual scenario—I become enthusiastic about what I said, wonder how it affected others, but no one says anything. Then I realize that my class was a routine *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class and even the best things I said were good, not because *I* said them, but because they are the eternal teachings of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I did my bit.

•

I am a writer in the service of my spiritual master. People recognize it, so what is my complaint? I publish many books and have a couple hundred avid readers. How could I possibly complain? I think, I want someone to accept *me* and my full-time pursuit—journals of everyday life. It is what I do.

•

Madhu has brought all the cooking pots and plates out to the pump with two big plastic buckets to wash and rinse them in. A white butterfly hovers around violet-colored wildflowers near the gate.

Madhu begins to pump. The flies are tickling me to distraction.

•

Mahārāja said a devotee with greed will only do things that are favorable to *rāgānugā-bhakti.* He is not interested in other things, even if someone tries to force them on him. This means he knows what is helpful to his greed.

Mahārāja said the persons who were gurus in ISKCON and fell down could have been saved if there had been Vaiṣṇava *saṅga* to regulate their activities. But they were "free" to do whatever they liked, so they mixed with women and were "fearless."

This made me think also, about my free-writing. I want to do what is favorable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and avoid what is unfavorable, but I don't see writing as unfavorable. I have gone over this before. That is, I accept Mahārāja as *śikṣā-guru,* and he is teaching me how to aspire for *rāgānugā-bhakti.* Why not ask him if my writing is favorable? In the past, I *have* asked him and he has been encouraging.

As for the specific idioms I use in writing, I don't need to explain all that to him. Whether to write poems in the American idiom or fiction or to admit doubts and struggles or to use a fountain pen or a typewriter—the value of all this has to be judged by the results. The GBC members and preachers who follow Mahārāja don't ask him about management. We have to decide some things on our own based on what he is teaching us.

Kṛṣṇa is in our hearts and He is guiding us. We pray to Śrīla Prabhupāda. We go ahead and wait for further symptoms.

Prabhupāda used to say that in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we would know for ourselves. As a hungry man doesn't have to ask another person if he is satisfied, so a devotee will himself know best how he is advancing. He will feel satisfied; he won't desire material things.

Someone asked Mahārāja, "How can I avoid the *puruṣa-bhāva* when I am lecturing?" He replied that we should think we are servants of Kṛṣṇa. We have to do that ourselves. Take the instruction and apply it. Does it work for you? Does it help your Kṛṣṇa consciousness? One person may feel that extensive travel and lecturing is not good for him. Another may think management in ISKCON is good for his surrender. We are at different places, in different times and spaces.

Go on hearing, go on reading, chanting, and writing. Pray for direction and it will come.

•

4:15 P.M., neighbor's yard

Our neighbor has gone to the Himalayas for a two-week *pada-yātrā*. It is hot and humid out. A smooth-shelled turtle is crawling across in the mud-topped yard. I have been worshiping Kṛṣṇa, but not very well, for twenty-six years. That's not a long time. I shouldn't criticize Kṛṣṇa for not revealing Himself to me.

He is looking for a way to trick me out of my hold on *māyā*. I am thankful to Him for all He is doing, especially thankful that He has sent His empowered representative, Śrīla Prabhupāda. I have been brought into the Ganges stream of Lord Caitanya's *sampradāya*.

Let me not bother my head over other things. If I had more heads and eyes and brains, I would study all *rasika* scriptures day and night. Then what I write would be an overflow of their mercy.

"When will I happily and indifferent to everything, my heart unshaken by millions of praises and rebukes, worship Rādhā's lover in the land of Vṛndāvana?" (*Vm, Śataka* 3.56).

•

I hear a truck horn instead of Kṛṣṇa's flute. But I hear about His flute, especially early in the morning when I am fresh. I am not indifferent to my material situation. I prefer indoors because there is a fan and no flies.

To make advancement, we have to perform *sevā* for our spiritual master. We have to contribute to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. We have to serve Kṛṣṇa. The whole Vedic system, he told his Lower East Side audience in 1966, is for giving facility in human life so that misery can be relieved. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is for stopping birth and death. People shouldn't live like cats and dogs. I want to always serve the guru who said that, who drove hard, his voice excited and strong over the barking

dogs and car traffic on Second Avenue. That guru has an eternal form that brings Kṛṣṇa pleasure (*kṛṣṇānandāya vidmahi*) and I will serve him in this life and future ones. Now I am writing. Previously I did other services—I gave him my paycheck, gave lectures, managed things (although I didn't do that well), organized the *gurukula*. In the future I may be cooking or sweeping or grinding sandalwood paste, making garlands—any humble service. The important thing is to be earnest and to do menial service.

•

The turtle is trampling down the blades of grass on his path. His chassis is low-slung. He stops and stretches his long yellow neck upward—it bulges like a frog's. He gets around.

This yard has nice shade but I think of reasons to leave soon. The neighbors are suddenly noisy as they clean their pots on the other side of the wall. The flies are merciless, as is the heat.

O Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, all universes emanate from You. You are the best persons of all. You reside in the *aprakṛta* Vraja and in the hearts of pure *rasika* devotees. I know how to form letters of the alphabet in English and make sentences. Therefore, I can record the things I have heard in *śāstra*. Is it all right if I do so? Will it be a consolation? Will it be pleasing to You? I cannot sing or write poems like Tulasī-mañjarī or Tuñgavidyā-gopī.

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa love blissful Vraja. Sometimes Kṛṣṇa points out to Rādhā, "Just see the moon, the

lotuses, and the Yamunā. They are all praising You." Vraja's nature serves Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. They please all who are pure in heart. He is God and She is His eternal consort. To the *vrajavāsīs,* They are even dearer than that.

I am in *prakṛta* Vṛndāvana with the mosquitoes. I am startled when a squirrel suddenly runs up a tree two feet away from me. I am begging to be able to serve in writing and bring nice things back from these practice writing sessions.

I heard that when Ganges water mixes with any water, even water in a drain, that water becomes Ganges. So I beg that the genius of this place, Vṛndāvana, will mix with any streams of words I write and they will become Vṛndāvana writing.

The turtle came up behind me. He is making quite a few circumambulations of this yard.

Dear Gurudeva, I mean no harm. I am a jester, a caretaker of spiritual children and uneasy *bhaktas.* I am one myself. I amuse myself. But I want to be serious too. I keep insisting you take me as I am. But if you don't want to, you will not take me. You will allow me to follow my whimsy and it will leave me stranded.

I hope you will not kick me away. I hope to learn to love Vṛndāvana on this visit this year. I hope not to offend. I am working at this craft for you and the *bhaktas.*

•

August 21, 1:10 A.M., Janmāṣṭamī
Śrī Kṛṣṇa, please appear in my heart.

iti veṇu-ravaṁ rājan
sarva-bhūta-manoharam
śrutvā vraja-striyaḥ sarvā
varṇayantyo 'bhirebhire

"O King, when the young ladies in Vraja heard the sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute, which captivates the mind of all living beings, they all embraced one another and began describing it." Is it that the flute song reminds them of Kṛṣṇa? I mean, although we cannot hear it now, can we say it produces overwhelming feelings of Kṛṣṇa's sweet presence? The verse says they "began describing it." But in the verses that follow, they don't attempt to describe a melody but a person, Kṛṣṇa—and the *effect* His flute has upon those who hear its song. For us, if we want to know the flute, is it a process of *neti, neti,* not this, not that?

Those who have love can hear. Those who do not are given encouragement by the words of the *gopīs* and the descriptions of the transformations caused by the flute. The girls embraced one another, as they realized they all shared the same love for Kṛṣṇa. Is this *pūrva-rāga,* a time of first awakening of love for Kṛṣṇa prior to direct meeting?

How can a *sādhaka* become eligible to hear the flute? Should he try to imagine it? I think the answer is, "No, no imagination." What about those who play the flute in this world? In India especially,

people are fond of the flute. There are many expert flutists and it is even sometimes played in *bhajanas.* Does a devotee "spit on" such noise, taking it as irrelevant to Kṛṣṇa's flute? Or does it remind advanced devotees of Kṛṣṇa? I seem to remember that in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā,* Lord Caitanya once heard a cowherd playing a flute and it sent Him into ecstatic trance.

The words *veṇu-ravam* in this verse indicate "the vibration of the flute." This reminds us that the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is also a sound vibration. Sometimes it is said that the *gāyatrī-mantra* has a connection to the flute song—what is it? Brahmā heard the flute of Kṛṣṇa and spoke it in the form of *gāyatrī.* What does that mean?

I try to think of questions, but it is a sort of scholarship of the intellect. Do I think I can probe a Vaiṣṇava's heart in this way so he will reveal his devotional gems and the path of *rāgānugā-mārga?* It cannot be gained by intellectual exchange. The best descriptions of the flute-song are in this chapter of the *Bhāgavatam* in the *gopīs'* own words. Try to hear them and then inquire from the Vaiṣṇava so that you can better hear and appreciate what the *gopīs* say.

It is from hearing their words that we may one day join them in hearing Kṛṣṇa's flute, that we may one day hear them reveal their hearts. They know Kṛṣṇa and by hearing from them, a submissive devotee—a student of the *gopīs*—may also know Kṛṣṇa to some extent.

So it is said, *gopī-ānugatya,* "Unless one follows in the footsteps of the *gopīs,* he cannot attain the service of the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, the son of Nanda Mahārāja" (*C.c., Madhya* 8.230). When Rāmānanda Rāya said this to Lord Caitanya, the Lord embraced Rāmānanda Rāya, "and both of them, clasping one another's shoulders, began to cry." That sounds similar to the *gopīs'* embracing one another when they realized they shared the same ecstatic love within their hearts. Devotees embrace, not exactly out of love for each other—and certainly not out of physical passion—because they realize they share the same love, and both become "overwhelmed with conjugal love for young Kṛṣṇa."

We write of these things from a great distance, but something is better than nothing. Don't be chased away from these thoughts by some stern admonition that "you are not supposed to think of this," or "you are not eligible." The pastimes are here in my spiritual master's books and he wants me to respond.

•

Devotees will observe Janmāṣṭamī throughout the day. We will attend a special *darśana* of the Deities in the temple, hear Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, fast all day, and try to remember Kṛṣṇa and the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Cooking will be one of the main activities today for the devotees at the temple. There is a room filled with *bhoga* and ten fires for cooking. Devotees can sign up to go in and cook.

On my own, I cannot expect to spend a day of unusual intensity in Kṛṣṇa-thought. I want to say, "I remember Kṛṣṇa every day." But . . . anyway, I will be here writing and trying to use the fasting to be more Kṛṣṇa conscious. This is my first Janmāṣṭamī in Vṛndāvana.

•

I ask you, my writer-self, please tell us more about Kṛṣṇa. Please don't be disturbed by my request. You say you like to write and I know you do. Sometimes you are unwilling because you feel ashamed and unworthy. So I am coming to you requesting you not to feel this way. Today is Kṛṣṇa's appearance day. Be positive. Write something about Nanda-suta. You are not devoid of faith and devotion, because you are connected to *bhakti-vedānta.*

My writer-self responds: but what if what I write is not always Kṛṣṇa? Will it be all right? Will it be all right if I report my actual state or the state of reality that I perceive?

Yes, but be brief. If you are captivated by a turtle crawling around the yard, I don't mind hearing that. But you are a responsible devotee, so link it up to Kṛṣṇa. That will be your art.

•

Līlā-smaraṇam is the most recommended process. "*Līlā-smaraṇam* . . . is the process of associating with Kṛṣṇa most recommended by the great devotees; even Lord Caitanya enjoyed *līlā-smaraṇam* assoc-

iation with Kṛṣṇa when He was in Purī" (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 2, Chapter 11, p. 57).

"It is not offensive to think of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes while chanting. It is required. One must try for the point when he simply hears Kṛṣṇa and immediately all of Kṛṣṇa—His pastimes, His form and His qualities are all in his thoughts. So to be always immersed in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa, this is our process. This is our duty, to remember Kṛṣṇa's pastimes" (letter from Śrīla Prabhupāda, 12/12/68).

•

3:30 A.M.

For a *sādhaka* like me, today is not that much different than other days. But that is not such a bad thing. I am beginning to take for granted that we are living in a place where you hear *mandira* bells around four in the morning and chants and *bhajanas* and peacocks for the rest of the day. That's where we are.

Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. You will get below the surface some day. It shouldn't be so difficult or complicated. You just have to speak to Kṛṣṇa through Śrīla Prabhupāda. Yesterday, I lectured how Kṛṣṇa is far away yet very near: *tad ejati tan naijati, tad dūre tad vantike* . . . Kṛṣṇa is far away when we forget Him and put our own sense gratification first. He comes near when we sincerely call His names. Why is it so hard to gain access? Maybe because I have been such a rascal for such a long time. Still, Kṛṣṇa wants us near and dear. The temple is a place and devotees are people who can help

immensely in bringing me closer to Kṛṣṇa. Don't be satisfied with the outer covering.

Today the Deities will have a "special *darśana.*" Don't see just clothes and necklaces, etc. Don't see only fallible people standing there with you. Bring the spark of faith; carry the torch.

•

Rattan chair

High volume of air traffic in early morning light—the mosquitoes are honing in like 747s over a city airport. I see passersby. They have to step along a narrow strip of earth because the puddle has become huge. An old man stops to retch and spit. He carries a ubiquitous tiffin. I am at my observation post.

What would I like, to melt out of existence and discover myself a new person more in the footsteps of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī? Transformations like that just don't happen. Neither do they come only by our endeavor. We can only let Kṛṣṇa know of our desires and He will arrange to fulfill them. But please, Lord, take my best desires and not my worst. I have faith that You will do that. Whatever comes, I will be assured that it is sent by You in my best interest.

Kṛṣṇa is not going to force us to surrender. He is waiting for us to bend our wills to Him voluntarily. And He always looks for the best of what we ask for and gives us something even better.

I hear a constant background noise of parrots screeching. They are not so loud, just telling us that it's morning. Their constant "song" is punctuated by the mourning doves' occasional coos. A distant car horn reminds us people do come and go from outer areas of Vraja (I am not looking forward to when we have to go to Delhi and get stopped a few times by police demanding money). From here, if you stand near the gate, you can see one section of the Vṛndāvana *parikrama* trail, near the end of the whole circumambulation. This morning, an unbroken line of people in drab clothes have walked by. I also see a dog on a roof and the pieces of broken bottles stuck set in cement on top of the neighbor's wall.

Time moves along and I feel it. There are more important things to do than spot birds.

When I go to the temple this morning, try to ease off on the mentality, "Who is here? Whom do I see? Men and women of ISKCON." They are here, and I am here, and it's no big deal. These are my family members.

I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda this morning end a 1966 lecture like this: "I think that I am an old man and will die soon, but that some of you will take this Kṛṣṇa consciousness seriously. Become spiritual masters for everyone."

•

11:28 A.M.

Reporting in: we went to the temple at 7:00 A.M., attended *guru-pūjā* and greeted the Deities, then stayed for the class. The lecturer was pleasant and

forceful in his presentation, a narration of events leading up to Kṛṣṇa's appearance. I began to feel head pressure and then the social pressure of having to stay there like everyone else. Finally, I didn't care what they thought and I left. Now the day looks like it's simply lying low trying to recover. I won't be able to work at the seminar lecture or an extended writing session. If I had deep love (or *any* love) for Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, this body wouldn't stop me so much. I depend on being able to do regular activities to feel "engaged."

•

Mahārāja said that in *rāgānugā-bhakti,* the only question is the greedy one: "How can I get it?" We would steal it or purchase it, do whatever we could to get. When we ask other questions or offer arguments, it is a sign we have no greed. In that case, we have to keep practicing *vaidhī-bhakti* and eventually greed will come.

When I hear someone inquiring rapid-fire from Mahārāja in an intellectual way, I think, "I have learned that it can't be gained that way." Perhaps it means my understanding has matured. It may also mean I am unwilling to do the needful to attain greed. I am not willing to fight, beg, borrow, or steal. I will go ahead hearing *rasika* texts, and I do depend on Mahārāja and hanker for his affectionate attention . . . but I know something about my limits. That may change too.

What to do on a headachey Janmāṣṭamī?

"Discuss *rāgānugā* very carefully with one or two, not in a group."

•

1:45 P.M.

For some reason, I am being pinned down today. I wonder why? What benefit can I gain from this pain? What can I do despite the band of pain circling my forehead? I can face myself here. I have no love for devotional service or the devotees or the holy names. Rūpa Gosvāmī says we have to "hope against hope." He says he has no hope of improving, he's of a low birth and bad association, but then he addresses Kṛṣṇa as Gopījanavallabha—such a *rasika* name—and says, "I still maintain a hope to attain You, and this hope is giving me pain."

Maybe my pain is that frustration that I cannot improve. Another transcendental frustration is felt by the *gopī* Khaṇḍitā. She waited all night for Kṛṣṇa to meet Her (as He promised) but He never came.

Great devotees are never stopped by physical discomfort. They don't worry about headaches, chest colds, heat, or what will come next. Day and night they think of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and Their *vilāsa-līlā.* They feel love in separation. They thrive in Vṛndāvana.

•

We are hearing Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's "108 Names of Rādhā" with commentaries. It is quite wonderful and it is saving my day. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is pleased when His devotees listen to the glories of Śrī Rādhā.

(It is thundering. Maybe there will be a Janmāṣṭamī rain.)

More and more we learn that most instructions are given in an external, covered form, although they have an inner form. Rādhā-Dāmodara refers to the pastime when Rādhā bound Kṛṣṇa. "Discuss very carefully with one or two; not in a group." She is the Goddess of Kārttika, when the pastime of tying Kṛṣṇa took place.

Her younger sister is Anaṅga-mañjarī; Her elder brother is Śrīdāmā. Kīrtidā showers Her with motherly love. She was born at the same moment as Viśākhā who is Her most intimate friend. One time, Paurṇamāsī wanted to test Rādhā's love. She said to Her, "You should give up your aspiration for loving Kṛṣṇa. He is very difficult to attain. You are like a dwarf trying to catch the moon." Rādhā replied submissively, "I shall do as you say. But then please grant me the wish that I may give up my body today and tonight become a bumble bee hovering around the garland of Kṛṣṇa."

•

3:35 P.M., rattan chair

It has been thundering for hours. The sky is getting dark. Any minute it may rain. I hear bus horns, but maybe it is a conch from a temple. White *brahman* cows walk the street in front of our house. A woman is singing somewhere in the distance, sad and religious. It is a relief not to hear the amplified *bhajanas*. I am waiting for the rain and hope that

my ache won't be so bad that I can't go see the drama at 8:00 P.M.

Now the rain is starting. Treetops swaying as the breeze picks up. A bird feather blows across the floor. Baladeva has gone to the temple to cook for Kṛṣṇa. Madhu is inside. The rooms are dark; there's not even enough light for reading inside. A patrol of about ten big black ants is marching across the gray cement.

The raindrops are starting to infringe on the edge of our veranda. A *sādhu* goes by carrying a tiffin, but no umbrella. He is going to get caught in the downpour. More people walk by carrying bags, but no umbrellas.

Now it is a steady rain and I can smell it. Someone is giving a lecture over a loudspeaker. There is a whole canopy of dark clouds, but the horizon is light. Boys are herding donkeys past our gate. The rain doesn't stop activities like it would in the West. No one is panicking that they got caught in the rain.

Small leaves blow off the tree in our yard. The rain is new and steady, but not a monsoon extravaganza of waterfalls pounding into the drains. At least not yet.

•

5:12 P.M.

Rādhā is dear to all the *gopas,* cows, and parents of Vraja. She is especially dear to Mother Yaśodā, who loves Her as much as She loves Kṛṣṇa. Balarāma loves Her like His younger sister-in-law. (He gave Her the *śaṅkacūḍa* jewel after Kṛṣṇa gave it to

Him.) Rādhā appears in the meditation of Dhaniṣṭhā-gopī . Dhaniṣṭhā is a servant at Nandagrām and she waits anxiously each day for Rādhā's arrival. Dhaniṣṭhā walks in and out of the house restlessly. When Rādhā arrives, Dhaniṣṭhā asks, "Why are You so late?" Rādhā softly replies, "You know I am not independent."

These names of Rādhā and their explanations are attracting me to Śrīmatī Rādhikā. I wish to go on hearing and relishing them more and more. Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī utters these names with fathomless feelings of love-in-separation. When he cannot see Rādhā, the nectar of Her names, which he has spontaneously composed, keeps him alive.

•

5:35 P.M.

A beautiful brown hump-backed bull came to our front gate. He ate some grass at the entrance and then tried to open the gate by butting his head against it. A chain and lock hold the gate shut, but he hit against it again and again, hoping to enter and taste the fresh grass. I went out and raised my arm, thinking that would be enough to chase him, but he stared back at me. We stood facing each other awhile and then he decided it wasn't worth it and walked off. That bull looked just like those in the Brijabasi prints and in Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's *Vraja-rīti-cintāmaṇi.*

•

Lost . . . in between worlds . . . he floats . . . how long will it take?

If I had more physical strength, I could do something today. And paltry practice . . . Don't mention it. Folks don't want to hear and it doesn't help me much either. No matter who you find to unburden yourself to, you are still stuck with yourself. We have to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness on our own. Individuality is good, although we want to be individuals protected by *sādhu-saṅga*. By associating with certain classes of people, impressions are formed, either favorable or unfavorable. It is called *saṁskāra*.

I am starting to feel better.

•

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa . . . accessible (by His mercy) and inaccessible (due to our rascaldom) . . . Hare Kṛṣṇa, the weak heart falters.

Where is the faith Śrīla Prabhupāda gave you?

•

Rādhā and Subala have a sweet friendship based on pleasing Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes Subala dresses like Rādhā in order to help Her avoid Jaṭilā. One time Jaṭilā was guarding Rādhā's door and Subala went there. He told Jaṭilā he was looking for a lost calf and that he was thirsty. Jaṭilā sent him inside to Rādhā to get water to drink. Subala and Rādhā then exchanged clothes and Rādhā escaped.

Rādhā also has a nectarean friendship with Kṛṣṇa's intimate friend, Madhumaṅgala. She enjoys his jokes during the *dāna-keli-līlā*, or when they are playing dice, water sports, picking flowers, and so on. All glories to Madhumaṅgala's funny gestures and words which cause moon-beam smiles on Rādhā's beautiful face.

Rādhā is called the caged She-parrot in the heart of Paurṇamāsī. Yogamāyā affectionately protects Rādhā and makes arrangements so She can meet with Kṛṣṇa despite all obstacles.

And so I was able to spend some blissful moments today by the grace of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. My friends attended *abhiśekas* at the Rādhā-Dāmodara and Rādhā-Ramaṇa temples and spent hours cooking at the Krishna-Balaram Mandir. I had to stay home "doing nothing," but it has helped me after all. I came closer to Śrīmatī Rādhikā and I desire to go on hearing Her glories from the words of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī and his followers.

•

7:45 P.M.

Time to go to the temple. We have locked the doors. My head is clear. It's hot and I am sweating. I am looking for happiness. I am eager to write better in the early morning—but tomorrow will be another heavy *yajña* for me, to sit through homages to Śrīla Prabhupāda. I will have to walk out early, I know that already. For now, I will go to the temple and chant, and then watch Jaya Gurupāda dāsa play Mother Yaśodā in the *gurukula* play.

9:55 P.M.

Nice theater. Back home, waiting to break fast.

•

10:40 P.M.

Big ants crawl on the mattress where I sit. I flick them off a distance of a few feet, but they come right back. Suddenly, one is on my arm, another on my foot. Madhu reads the 108 Names of Rādhā, lifting us above physical weakness, straying mind, and ant-flicking.

One of Rādhā's names is "She who increases the pride of Her maidservants." But God consciousness is for the humble, so what is this? It is a pride in their Svāmīnī's victory over Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Another name is "She who is the life support of Her maidservants." The *mañjarīs* are totally surrendered to Śrī Rādhikā and they cannot live without Her. Another name for Rādhā is "She who is very happy when Her girlfriends are alone to meet with Kṛṣṇa." With these sublime loving dealings, we get through the day and transcend all problems. I pray to go on hearing from the *rasika* Vaiṣṇavas, serving my *gurudeva,* and reading *rasika-śāstras* with a like-minded friend.

•

August 22, 4:50 A.M., Śrīla Prabhupāda's Appearance Day

Bombay ISKCON is preparing a 1993 calendar and asked me to "write in two or three lines a summary

of Prabhupāda's achievements." I could only boil a statement down to four sentences as follows:

"His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda did what no incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu had ever done—spread *sanātana-dharma,* Kṛṣṇa consciousness, all over the modern world. Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself desired the spreading of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and so did Lord Caitanya (who is Kṛṣṇa in the form of His pure devotee). They desired it, because unless people receive *bhakti* unto God, there cannot be peace or happiness in this life or in future lives. That our Śrīla Prabhupāda was alone chosen to go to America, to Europe, then back to India, to Russia, Africa and all over the world—and that he established an international society whose followers continue to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness seriously—this is the greatest miracle and it is proof that Prabhupāda was empowered by Lord Kṛṣṇa."

Once Śrīla Prabhupāda was asked for information for a short biography. He said a summary of his life should state that he transplanted Vedic culture from East to West. He said, "Just as it is very difficult and requires expertise in transplanting a *tulasī* plant from India to America, so the birth and growth of Kṛṣṇa consciousness required such care."

We may say this is the external achievement of his life. And it is true that the spiritual master has two lives, that of a *sādhaka* and that of a *siddha.* In his *sādhaka* form, he preaches, and that may be considered to exist within Caitanya-*līlā.* (ISKCON is a branch of the Caitanya tree.) In the *siddha* form, the

pure devotee spiritual master remembers his eternal identity and eventually joins Kṛṣṇa in the *nitya-līlā praviṣṭa,* the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vraja.

Except for occasional glimpses, Śrīla Prabhupāda didn't reveal to us his *siddha* identity. But his role as preacher in this world was so extraordinary that learned persons conclude he was a *śaktyāveṣa-avatāra.* If we apply ourselves to serve Śrīla Prabhupāda in his mission to spread and maintain some of its many fields of work—temple life, congregational preaching, book distribution, devotee education, *gurukula,* or any of the other activities that are part of this mission, that is the way to qualify ourselves for further understanding of Śrīla Prabhupāda's identity. That in turn will reveal to us who we are in our own spiritual identities.

The development of our own Kṛṣṇa consciousness is an important service to Śrīla Prabhupāda. That begins with *śravaṇaṁ-kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam.* Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, read Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, chant with others—and always remember Kṛṣṇa and devotional service. That will please Śrīla Prabhupāda. Pleasing Śrīla Prabhupāda is the goal of our lives.

•

A note written on the last day of the second week:

"Dear Baladeva, please keep me writing in these weeks. There is no 'trick' to the writing except to externally relax and then 'get down' and say what

really counts for you, including worries, fears, joys—and always linking it to Kṛṣṇa."

•

Memorable moments in the drama:

Jaya Gurupāda dāsa's portrayal of Mother Yaśodā was good. He was dressed in a gold *sarī* and gold nose jewelry. A skinny mother, worried "when is Kṛṣṇa coming back?" Looking out at the rows in the audience from where Kṛṣṇa would eventually appear. He was dressed like a woman, but walked like a boy. In the scene where the yajñic *brāhmaṇas* tried to stop their wives from going to see Kṛṣṇa, the *brāhmaṇas* were all grouped on the left side of the stage and wives on the right. The *brāhmaṇas* delivered speeches of reprimand, forbidding their wives. Then the ladies in unison said, "Hmpf!" and all ran off the stage while their husbands chased after them.

In several scenes, Kṛṣṇa and His boyfriends sat and ate together. They were really eating, not just going through the motions. Madhumaṅgala was played by a fat boy, and he gulped big bites from his banana and voraciously ate everything on his plate. The audience was fasting for Janmāṣṭamī, so we enjoyed watching Kṛṣṇa and His friends eating..

The boy who played Balarāma was good-natured and at ease. He was a well-built boy, with belly bigger than his chest, a ready smile, a blue *dhotī*. Kṛṣṇa was an Indian-American boy, beautiful and well-built. He shouted his lines with a Gujarati accent:

"My dear wives, rest assured that your husbands will not reject you on your return."

Tiny boys dressed in turbans and colorful *dhotīs* hung around on stage even when it didn't seem to be their time to be there. They were the most convincing of all, artless *gopas* in *kṛṣṇa-līlā*, staring to see the fun and forgetting where they were.

Kṛṣṇa's several entrances from the audience to the stage were well done. He walked like a regal baby elephant and His friends with Him, just as we would expect. Rādhā's entrance, as a devotee sang, "*Jaya* Rādhe, *jaya* Rādhe Rādhe . . . " was joined by cheers and applause from the audience.

•

I attended one and half hours of homages out of a total of six hours. I heard one *sannyāsī* emphasize that Śrīla Prabhupāda was a servant of Rādhārāṇī. Another learned disciple said that Śrīla Prabhupāda emanated preaching from all his pores. No matter what Śrīla Prabhupāda did, he did it for preaching. Another devotee said we should pray to Śrīla Prabhupāda to remove from us any deviations in our service to him. On and on they went, nicer and newer realizations. Yes, I want to do as they say, serve him and pray to have deviations removed.

Now the ceremony is over and a rainstorm has come up. I am back at the house waiting for lunch and hungry to get some uninterrupted time.

•

3:30 P.M., rattan chair

End of the two-day holiday. Back to normal worship of Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda and regulated hours. This is the afternoon when devotees are resting from the fasting-feasting and the lack of regular sleep. A light rain continues after the downpour.

All my talk of outer and inner forms of Prabhupāda . . . is this the outer form of a puddle tinkling with rain drops? Loose bricks on a wall in a temporary world where mosquitoes chase the philosopher. The birds can only know eating, mating, sleeping, and defending. Humans can hear from the *śāstras* about the soul and about Bhagavān.

A long line of *brahman* cows all have to pass single file on the edge of our "pond." They walk patiently, but occasionally one butts another between her rear legs.

Tomorrow morning's planned trip to Mathurā will break up my solitary retreat, but it will be worth it. We will get the juice that keeps us going.

•

I belong to this family. Everyone who was there this morning belongs to it. I don't doubt it. Madhu was telling me examples of loving exchanges among devotees. He says devotees often complain of harsh dealings in ISKCON, so he likes to "collect" the affectionate moments—someone who insisted he give up a chair last night so Madhu could sit in it; a man who saved him some last remaining flower petals to offer to Śrīla Prabhupāda; a devotee

from Rome who embraces Madhu whenever they meet. Yeah, I said, and we have to add to these exchanges (not just wait for them to happen to us).

My mind could be kinder. I think, "Why has this man come from Jhansi to talk about Prabhupāda's visit there in the 1950s?" But if someone remembers fondly his moments with Śrīla Prabhupāda, why do I object? A devotee told how he was initiated along with fifty others, but he didn't receive a name. He later went alone to Śrīla Prabhupāda's room at Bury Place in London. He was afraid of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and sensing this, Śrīla Prabhupāda handed him a sweet ball.

•

A monk has to live within bounds, right? The movement or institution determines what he can do. A Cistercian monk cannot leave the monastery without permission from the Abbot. I am a senior citizen in ISKCON and I have a somewhat longer leash. My duty is to wander from temple to temple, so that adds to my personal freedom. But still, I often chafe as if I have a bridle in my mouth. This happens during any group ceremony or ritual.

I want to sit back and drink water in my own room, but I hear a speaker saying, "You have to please Śrīla Prabhupāda by giving up all sense gratification—which means attachment to doing things your own way—and instead do things Kṛṣṇa's way." I hear this and think, "He's right." Then why don't I do it? Why don't I believe them when they say we

should always be preaching? Even the word "preaching" sometimes makes me recoil. But when it is my turn to speak, I say a similar thing: only by service to Śrīla Prabhupāda in his movement can we qualify to know him in his eternal identity. I believe it. Part of me always asks, "But this person who is speaking and pushing us, what about him? Why can't we be more honest?" I suspect hype, or oppression! He is trying to control me because he only feels comfortable when he sees everyone is under control.

All this is petty, I know. But there is something better behind it. The craving for genuine spiritual love—and for a relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda that sings of joy and freedom and willingness to serve him. That's what we all want.

•

Devotees asked Mahārāja if they get the benefit of visiting the holy places in Vṛndāvana by honoring the dust from a bottle or sprinkling bottled Rādhā-kuṇḍa water on their heads. He said it is much better to actually visit the place. The *tīrtha* will see that we have taken the pains to get there and its dust will bestow mercy on us. He gave an example: if we can listen to Mahārāja speaking on tape, why bother going to see him in person? But it is beneficial even to see a saintly person, even if there is no verbal exchange. In the same way, if we go to a holy place, even if that place doesn't speak to us (or

we don't feel inspired while there), still it is beneficial.

I heard on another occasion, a devotee told Mahārāja about an extensive *parikrama* of Vṛndāvana he had just completed. Mahārāja seemed unimpressed and said, "The real dust of Vṛndāvana is the *sādhu.*"

But since I am in Vṛndāvana, I should go and pay respects to the holy places, especially Govardhana, Rādhā-kuṇḍa, Yamunā, Yavāṭ, Varṣāṇa, Saṅket, etc. And I should pray in those places.

The reasons I haven't so far: (1) I am on a writing retreat and feel responsible to settle down and concentrate; (2) I have been permitted not to attend the morning program because I am preparing lectures for the seminar. I think I can visit *tīrthas* later. I will go later, and maybe some places soon. This Sant Colony has no direct *līlā* sacredness, although it is blessedly close to Krishna-Balaram Mandir and Śrīla Prabhupāda's *samādhi.*

I stay in this place because I claim that peaceful solitude anywhere in Vṛndāvana is the precious thing I seek. Reading and chanting and writing at a stretch without botheration—that is the secret. Especially in Vṛndāvana. Go to visit a *rasika* Vaiṣṇava, then come back here as quickly as possible, think it over, and practice *bhajana.*

It was good to hear him say the *tīrtha* appreciates the trouble you take to get there. For me, it means losing the inner mood, bracing myself (with elastic foot brace) for the ride and the socializing with my companions. Walking and seeing people, braving possible headaches . . . it is austerity. Studying at

home is also good when your home is a place like this, stocked with good books and tapes and protection to write and loving friends.

•

6:15 P.M.

I have no special place to write in right now. The neighbor's yard is flooded and our *pāṇḍāla* is still collapsed on the roof and it is too dark in the hallway. So I am in this room under the pictures of Kṛṣṇa and Yaśodā and of Kṛṣṇa starting in the morning with His cows and friends and glancing at the *gopīs* while He enters the forest.

I like Vṛndāvana rain. Madhu is washing the pots in the rain. I saw a small herd of cows—a few calves and small-sized cows followed by a humpbacked bull—coming home for the evening in the rain. Our "pond" is becoming a lake.

When Madhu had to run out just before a big downpour, he glanced unhappily at the sky. A man sitting on his haunches nearby saw Madhu's expression and both he and Madhu broke into smiles. The man gestured and said, *"Pānī, pānī,"* indicating, "After all, it's only water and won't hurt you." This is especially so in such a hot climate where a shower is a relief.

•

Nondevotee writers don't have such an opportunity to come to a place and get so close to perfection that almost anything they write mixes with the perfection. I don't want to miss the chance while I

am here. But I have to keep writing honestly, getting past non-Vṛndāvana *anarthas* and impressions.

A man is singing in the distance. Earlier, I heard a dull bell and looked out. A man was offering a ghee lamp in a small building a little ways away, in a place I hadn't noticed before. Every house is a potential temple for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda used to say there were 5,000 temples in Vṛndāvana.

•

My homage speech today represented my current meditations and the evolution of my relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda. I cut it short and kept it somewhat hidden, but it was all there, at least in my mind. I am in a different place than I have been in the past years. I said we have to keep developing our relationship, deepening it, or it will atrophy. I wished that everyone present would find a service in Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement (the words "according to your tendency" stuck in my throat and I couldn't say them). I said the essence of knowing Śrīla Prabhupāda's inner form is to serve him in his mission, and the essence of service is to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, hear about Kṛṣṇa, and remember Him.

Vṛndāvana is kind. But we may cheat ourselves if we don't try for the best. One elderly lady spoke sincere appreciation that Śrīla Prabhupāda is allowing her to live in Vṛndāvana and render some acceptable service. I have heard that she is terminally ill, but she didn't mention it.

Vṛndāvana is kind. We have been able to read of Śrīmatī Rādhikā here. All the animals, like the does, bucks, and cranes, and all the vines and trees—all love Rādhā. They beautify the forest so that Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā will enjoy it as They roam in the *kuñjas*. Rādhā is filled with love for Kṛṣṇa; that is why He is so attracted to Her. She wears necklaces that carry a reflection of Kṛṣṇa. When Rādhā is alone with her superiors at Yavāṭ, She breaks the thread of the necklace and then one by one looks at Kṛṣṇa's reflection in each bead of Her necklace. Kṛṣṇa relieves the fatigue of all beings, and Rādhā relieves His fatigue.

•

This week is over. It is my second week here. The first week I was euphoric in a quiet way, excited that we had met such success—finding our own house and being allowed to stay on our own. I was self-satisfied and not over-anxious as to when I would be able to see Mahārāja. We were able to see him and it was satisfying. During the second week, I dealt more with doubts, such as those raised by the essay by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī on Vṛndāvana. I also felt writing blocks, doubted whether my writing was pleasing to Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda and Vṛndāvana. I am overcoming those doubts and pushing on.

Writing is work, but it is also immediately rewarding. During this second week, I was lonely and felt the pinch of my limitations, including my physical ones. I saw that I can't read so much, can't enter

so deeply, although I keep coming back to basic affirmations. Thank your lucky stars, boy, you are in Vṛndāvana under the shelter of your spiritual master.

•

7:20 P.M.

Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda, it is your appearance day. We celebrate it in ISKCON in the only way we know how, as you taught us. Fast till noon on the day after Janmāṣṭamī. Gather in the temple and hear devotees speak homages and speak our own. Offer *puṣpāñjali,* standing around your *vyāsāsana,* then feast. These are the external observances. The day usually dwindles off into extra rest and making up of *japa* quotas. Even if it is external, Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda see that we are trying. We would never neglect to observe it with this etiquette, and within the etiquette, we each have to find our own sincere expression. Those devotees who sit through all the homages show surrender.

Your Krishna-Balaram temple is open and thriving, Śrīla Prabhupāda. When they close it for even a few hours in the afternoon, pilgrims gather, and at 4:30 P.M., the crowd presses to get in.

This appearance day is ending, but we will always be with you. As the spirit-soul is eternal and the Lord, His entourage, and His *dhāma* are eternal, so our relationship with you is unending. That is the basic *tattva* and the basic faith of the devotee.

I am *me,* but we are all together too. My identity is as part of a group. *We,* the devotees of Prabhupāda, the followers of Lord Caitanya—I am writing for us.

Chapter Three (August 23–August 29)

August 23, 1:05 A.M.

"The cowherd girls said, 'O friends, those eyes that see the beautiful faces of the sons of Mahārāja Nanda are certainly fortunate. As these two sons enter the forest, surrounded by Their friends, driving the cows before Them, They hold Their flutes to Their mouths and glance lovingly upon the residents of Vṛndāvana. For those who have eyes, we think there is no greater object of vision'" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.7).

See from the *gopīs'* point of view. Desire to see Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma in the morning as They enter the forest playing on Their flutes, surrounded by cows and driving the cows before Them. How can I see? *Premāñjana-cchurita-bhakti-vilocanena,* I have to see with eyes anointed with the salve of love. How can I see with love-anointed eyes? Dear spiritual masters, you know I am unable to do this, and yet I desire it. It seems that Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā will make me wait a long time. In the meantime, please allow me to serve you and to practice chanting and hearing and remembering. The process is so nice that even the mechanical stage is better than anything else. And it holds the hope of attaining pure love some day (or some life) in the future.

Without imitating, I say yes, I will take the *gopīs'* point of view. Without pretending, yet I pray to know the eternal *kṛṣṇānandāya* form of my spiritual master. Without realization, but at least without false imagination, I pray to offer myself as a seed into the fire of *gopī-bhāva.*

•

You ask if I have any questions on the verse, "O friends, those eyes that see the beautiful faces of the sons of Mahārāja Nanda . . . " But my only question is *how* to see in the way the *gopīs* describe. Is it all right to put these verses on cards and to carry them around? I mean, if we do not love, will it help to practice reading the *gopīs'* words? What else should we do? Master, we are hard-hearted and selfish. These words of the *gopīs,* spoken among themselves, are hardly fit for our hearing, but Śrīla Prabhupāda wants us to hear them.

In the *Kṛṣṇa* book, Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this verse in a shortened way, "One of the *gopīs* told her friends: 'The highest perfection of the eyes is to see Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma entering the forest and playing Their flutes and tending the cows with Their friends'" (*Kṛṣṇa,* Vol. 1, Chap. 21, p. 147). He recommends a "transcendental meditation of seeing Kṛṣṇa, internally and externally, by thinking of Him playing the flute and entering the Vṛndāvana forest." Śrīla Prabhupāda says those who can do this attain *samādhi.* This is the perfection of meditation. "It is also confirmed in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that any-

one who is always absorbed in the thought of Kṛṣṇa is the topmost of all *yogīs*" (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 1, Chap. 21, p. 148).

It seems that this is attainable only for a very advanced soul. How can we practice it? Does it require that we live in a *bhajana-kuṭira* in Vṛndāvana and meditate constantly? We have our duties of preaching and therefore traveling. Is it possible (please encourage us that it can be done) that we may be able to meditate on these scenes, even before we reach constant *samādhi*?

As Śrīla Prabhupāda says, it requires love. Think of Kṛṣṇa while you fight on His behalf. He doesn't say stop fighting, and neither does he say stop meditating. Please give us some clues and guidance how a busy servitor can meditate in love upon the son of Mahārāja Nanda, even while he goes about his tasks of *guru-sevā*.

•

It is nice to think I will be able to keep the *Veṇu-gīta* verses close at hand and read them often. I also want to collect verses describing pastimes according to the time of day when they occur. Mostly we chant our *japa* very early when Kṛṣṇa is with Rādhā in the *kuñja* or at the *rāsa* dance. It is a "heavy" time to chant. We are still chanting as the sun begins to appear, when Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa wake up and have to part. I cannot sustain such meditation, but still . . . I hope against hope and lament my inability.

The *gopīs* say those who can see Kṛṣṇa (internally and externally) are fortunate. I am unfortunate. I

am an unripe mango. Weeds still threaten to choke my devotional creeper. I simply have to continue to practice.

•

I talk to myself in Vṛndāvana. And sometimes I write down the data. I was about to write the words, "I write what I see," but I hesitated because it would reveal that I see air-cooling machines (and hear them) instead of seeing Kṛṣṇa entering the forest while exchanging loving glances with the *gopīs*. I am not at the stage where I see the whole world as void in the absence of Kṛṣṇa. I try to make friends with the objects in my world and employ them in the service of Kṛṣṇa. Dead material objects come to life—a pocket note pad, even an old tissue, and scotch tape for taping notes for a seminar lecture, and pens in a pen box. This is *yukta-vairāgya*.

But in the midst of these objects, I have to find the space to think of Kṛṣṇa from the *gopīs'* point of view. That is *rāgānugā-sādhana-bhajana*.

•

I think of asking the *rasika* Vaiṣṇava so many similar questions, "How to do it? How to attain tears of ecstasy, visions of Kṛṣṇa, ability to hear the flute?" But the answer is mostly, "If you cannot do it now, then go on practicing." And to give an example, the Vaiṣṇava may explain another pastime and relish it, as if to say, *see?* There is no technique per se. Even if a *rasika* devotee has a

method or practice, you cannot just copy it and get the result. It's not by rising early or by sitting in a certain position . . .

You just have to practice what you can do. The *rasika* Vaiṣṇava encourages you to go on and to know your actual place, devoid of the *gopīs' bhāva.* He encourages you to pray for *their* mercy. "This is the only real law . . . without the favor of another merciful *gopī,* it is absolutely impossible for anyone to attain ecstatic eternal service of the young couple of Vraja" (*Śrī Śrī Rāgānugā-bhajana-darpaṇa,* Song 18).

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. Over and over. Don't think the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is a *vaidhī-bhakti* practice. It is saturated with *rasa* for those who know it and can feel. Make your constant supplication in your most simple language.

•

3:30 A.M.

Life at Sant Colony: squeaking doors, miniature frogs on the cement, half moon high above in a hazy sky. Sit on the roof so as not to disturb Madhu who is sleeping late after all-night diarrhea. Baladeva walks off with a tiffin to fetch milk. He locks the gate as he leaves.

Sounds like some "heavenly" cinema music or rhythm with violins and horns drifting from a new distance. I don't know what the neighbors say about us.

•

11:35 A.M.

We have just returned from Mathurā. It won't be an easy meeting to capture because it was so nectarean. Mahārāja himself says he cannot express his feelings because he feels hampered by broken English. He said this after expressing so much *rasika-bhāva* to us from a few verses of the *Veṇu-gīta.* He certainly is able to convey a lot to us, although he may feel unable to do as much as he could in Hindi or Bengali. I also don't think I can convey much here.

As soon as we arrived at the *māṭha,* Mahārāja's servant, Navīna Kṛṣṇa, told us we should not expect a meeting today. He said the electricity has been off for some days and Mahārāja can't sleep at night. We should go in, have a brief *darśana,* and not provoke any discussion.

When we first went in, we talked about the electricity. I mentioned Navīna's order not to take much time. Mahārāja immediately said no, that it was all right and we could discuss. I asked Madhu to shut the doors so that people wouldn't come in. During the course of our stay (about an hour) people did come and go, but they were sweet people, Mathurā-vāsīs—a young boy, an old lady, and other people who all came in, spoke a few affectionate words with Mahārāja, touched his feet, and left. None of them constituted a major interruption as happened the other day.

I reminded Mahārāja that he has asked me to prepare questions from the *Veṇu-gīta.* I took out my

notebook. He asked me how many verses I had prepared and I said about seven.

I said, "I have heard that you said this is the most beautiful of all the verses in the *Bhāgavatam* for descriptions of the form of Kṛṣṇa." Then I read text five of Chapter Twenty-one of the Tenth Canto: *barhāpīḍāṁ naṭa-vara vapuḥ karṇayoḥ karṇikāram . . .* and at his request I read the English translation: "Wearing a peacock feather ornament upon His head, blue *karṇikāra* flowers on His ears, a yellow garment as brilliant as gold, and the Vaijayantī garland, Lord Kṛṣṇa exhibited His transcendental form as the greatest of dancers as He entered the forest of Vṛndāvana, beautifying it with the marks of His footprints. He filled the holes of His flute with the nectar of His lips, and the cowherd boys sang His glories."

Mahārāja said that these descriptions of Kṛṣṇa were spoken by the *gopīs* in different groups. He described some of the various *yuṭhas* and their subdivisions, like Lalitā's group, Candrāvalī's group, etc. Then he wanted to discuss earlier verses in this chapter. We turned to the first verse in which the atmosphere of Vṛndāvana is described. It begins *itthaṁ śarat-svaccha-jalam,* "The Vṛndāvana forest was filled with transparent autumnal waters and cooled by breezes perfumed with the fragrance of lotus flowers . . . " Mahārāja said that the fragrance of the air created such a weight that the wind couldn't blow freely. If a person tried to get up quickly, he would stagger from side to side because the air was so heavy. But the air was filled with

sweetness. This is a morning pastime when Kṛṣṇa is entering the forest with the cows and cowherd boys.

Mahārāja said the *gopīs* saw this vision in their hearts after Kṛṣṇa had already left their sight and gone into the forest. Mahārāja began to look at the next verse which describes the maddened bees (*śuṣmi bhṛṅga*). He spoke at length on this madness. He said the bees are like little Kṛṣṇas and Kṛṣṇa is the complete Kṛṣṇa. They are similar in many ways. They have the same color and the same *jati* (caste or nature). The *gopīs* sometimes describe Kṛṣṇa as a bee. They say that a bee first goes to a nice lotus flower. But then it becomes intoxicated and loses its discrimination and will sit on any flower, even a flower with no fragrance. Kṛṣṇa is also like that, they say. He is able to enjoy the beautiful and highly qualified *gopīs,* but then He goes to other women like Kubjā like an intoxicated bee with no discrimination.

Mahārāja took the book from my hands and began reading the *devanāgarī.* I was afraid of Navīna's anger—we had already been there for more than half an hour—but what could we do? It wasn't our fault. Mahārāja was enlivened. I was pleased to be there and to see him. The room was as dark as it had been on our last visit, and the only light was coming through a small window behind him. It outlined his face. I thought his facial features resembled a classic Vaiṣṇava *ācārya,* a Gaura-kiśora dāsa Bābājī or a Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī or a Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. The face of a pure de-

votee is beautiful, refined, scholarly, and filled with inner feelings that cannot be easily defined.

I think I know a little better what Mahārāja is saying when he tells us that he cannot really express himself. The feelings he is trying to convey are so deep. How can anyone express the depth of the *gopīs'* emotions? Their *bhāva* is aroused by the sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute and by the beautiful atmosphere. They are not even experiencing ordinary *prema,* but *kāma,* love for Kṛṣṇa in the conjugal mood.

Mahārāja then explained the specific sounds made by the birds. The cuckoo sounds like this, "coo-*coo,* coo-*coo.*" Mahārāja asked me what it means. Then he answered that the first word, "coo," is actually the first letter of Kṛṣṇa's name. Actually, the cuckoos are calling Kṛṣṇa. The peacocks' call is made up of two words, "kee-kao." He said the first word in the peacock's call indicates the male lover and the second one indicates the female lover. The peacocks' calls are *uddīpana,* a stimulus for loving feelings between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs.*

When I couldn't catch the meaning of the word *uddīpana,* Mahārāja said that unless we learn these terms, we cannot really appreciate verses like those in the *Veṇu-gīta.* It was a reminder that sooner or later, I am going to have to get down and learn all the terminology of *rāgānugā.*

There are more things that were said, but I cannot recall them all now. When we were finished, Mahārāja was saying that *ācāryas* like Viśvanātha Cakravartī can expand from any point to give us more and more *mādhurya-rasa.* He said Vyāsadeva

has put the whole world into a bottle, and that even one word is enough to speak on all day or more. But we have to know the *rasa* in order to do it.

He then asked me, "What is your name?" Before I could answer, he said, "Your name is Satsvarūpa." He then asked what it meant.

I replied, "The form of truth, or truth personified. It is a name of Kṛṣṇa. That is what I have heard."

Mahārāja then said the word refers to my *svarūpa.* And *sat* is a reference to my true, eternal form. He then asked, "So what is the best *svarūpa?"*

"Gopī-mañjarī."

With a slight smile, Mahārāja then explained that my name, Satsvarūpa, means the true form, *gopī-mañjarī.* It does not mean Kṛṣṇa, but *mañjarī* of Rādhā. That is the *sat-svarūpa.*

Enough said!

•

After our *darśana* and our touching his feet, we went to pay respects to the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Lord Caitanya Deities in the temple room. I was still thrilled with Mahārāja's *Veṇu-gīta* discussion and with the explanation of *satsvarūpa.* I prayed to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. As I beheld Them, I felt some inclination for Rādhā and what it means to be in Her camp. I could understand at least a tiny bit how this inclination for Rādhā is pleasing to Kṛṣṇa, who stands so beautifully in His three-fold bending form. I prayed to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa for the uplifting taste which Mahārāja has given us by his discussion

of a few verses of *Veṇu-gīta.* I expressed my mind to the Deities. Whatever They wanted me to do to attain this state of serving Them and relishing such verses, I would be willing to do it. We then circumambulated the Deities three times and emerged into the maddening (and not in a *rasika* way) auto rickshaw scene and drove back to this house.

•

A visit with Mahārāja makes *gopī-bhāva* real. You want to enter that mood as the bee enters the lotus. Let the evening come and the petals close on you, trapping you there. He said the bee could bite its way out, but it is too intoxicated by *madhu.* May we become like that.

The *gopīs* didn't care for worldly duties, the opinions of their superiors, or their own bodies. They became overwhelmed with conjugal love for Kṛṣṇa just by remembering His glance or the sound of His flute which they felt in their hearts.

It becomes real. There is hope that your form is *satsvarūpa,* the form of *gopī-mañjarī-bhāva.* Now away from his *rasika* words, we "come down," but some impressions will never be lost. And we will do something to keep it alive.

•

5:45 P.M.

I am in Vṛndāvana writing this. I am not afraid of it. I want to connect with who I am in writing. Report some things and say something.

The cinema singer is broadcasting loudly. The yellow painted rods in the iron front gate are just sitting there, doing their duty. This place is suitable for us foreigners. Baladeva keeps bringing amenities, but not too many. The workers came and put the roof *pāṇḍāla* back together. To make it firmer, they stuck two poles into the neighbor's garden. Baladeva went and spoke with the neighbor and encouraged him to grow his creepers around the poles.

Even Mahārāja lives with ordinary things. When we went there, Navīna told us they have no electricity and they can't sleep at night—it is so hot and there is no ventilation without the fans. When I saw Mahārāja, he said some electric lines fell, burning down three shops. He said they purchased a generator, but it is only big enough to light up the Ṭhākura (Deity) and not power the fan in his room. After this, I introduced my questions from the *Veṇu-gīta*. But that talk about the electricity is important too. If you can't sleep at night, then you can't do your *bhajana* nicely. Same with headaches. And so with this writing—

It is nice to pour the salty water on our heads while we sit on the little bathing platform. We have clear water for washing our mouths. This is important because it will help prevent disease. I saw devotees at the temple with boils as big as eggs. The rainy season has washed all kinds of sewage and filth into the water system. There is no standard of hygiene here. All right, enough of that.

It is evening now. The squirrel runs around the yard and a frog crawled into my stainless steel cup and couldn't get out. A cow got into our yard and quickly gulped leaves and grass while Baladeva slowly showed her the gate and she casually wandered out.

When Śrīmatī Rādhikā spoke to the bumblebee, She told it about Kṛṣṇa's faults. The bee replied, "If Kṛṣṇa is so wrong, then why are You always speaking about Him?"

Rādhikā replied, "O bumblebee! I know it all, but still I am unable to give up the treasure of speaking about Him! O bee! We can give up everything, even your friend Kṛṣṇa, but we cannot give up speaking about Him! We can still survive the painful separation from your friend, but we cannot survive if we give up talking about Him. Our bodies will burn up in a fire of separation from Him."

In my tiny, tiny way, I also seem unable to give up speaking, and I am actually speaking about Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. Whatever we speak of, that is also Kṛṣṇa. The front gate to this house, the parrots screeching as dusk comes, the pesky motor sound of a scooter passing, and anything else we may perceive or imagine—and anything or anyone we may love—they are all coming from Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, whatever we love, we are loving Kṛṣṇa, if only indirectly. If this attachment to speaking (writing) is not a spiritual drive, then let me dovetail it so it becomes a purified passion—a way of directly speaking of Kṛṣṇa, as Rādhā does. May I one day praise Kṛṣṇa to Rādhā as a maidservant does. Then there

will be no need to stop speaking. The Vaiṣṇavas who taste mellows will say, "Go on speaking! Go on speaking!"

•

7:40 P.M.

The nearby *āśrama* chants their funny evening *ārati* with lots of "Oṁ Jagadīśa" in it and heavy-handed gong beats, and we accept it in our little *āśrama,* we three. We accept it along with all the Vraja sounds.

"What nonsense! What nonsense! What misfortune! Even though he is a 'great man,' he still does not like blissful Vṛndāvana!" *(Vm, Śataka* 4.24).

"Lord Caitanya's feet are far away. Powerful Kali has appeared. How will love for Kṛṣṇa be attained without love for Vṛndāvana?" *(Vm, Śataka* 4.29).

"What can I do? I am a madman. I will just say this: knowledge, devotion, renunciation and all other virtues are worthless without Vṛndāvana" *(Vm, Śataka* 4.33).

•

August 24, 1:12 A.M., Ekādaśī

"Dressed in a charming variety of garments, upon which Their garlands rest, and decorating Themselves with peacock feathers, lotuses, lilies, newly-grown mango sprouts and clusters of flower buds, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma shine forth magnificently among the assembly of cowherd boys. They look just like the best of dancers appearing on a

dramatic stage, and sometimes They sing" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.8).

I usually don't like it when people say the English language is inadequate to convey *rasa,* but I am becoming aware that it is true. Words like "garments" are so prosaic and filled with connotations—the New York City "garment district." And "garland" is not as good as "*mālā.*" But it is our native tongue and after all, Śrīla Prabhupāda first preached in English. The day he was awarded *sannyāsa* and was asked to speak, he realized (even though he was in Mathurā where the common language was Hindi) that he must speak in English.

The *gopīs* wanted to go into the forest with Kṛṣṇa, but they could not, so they sang this ecstatic song among themselves. We also cannot go with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. Not yet. But neither can we claim to stand among the *gopīs,* overwhelmed with love in separation. Let us hear (or overhear) them, by the mercy of Vyāsadeva and Śukadeva Gosvāmī, in English translation.

Hearing from Mahārāja, I realize that this verse comes alive by the *ṭīkā* (commentaries) of Viśvanātha Cakravartī, Sanātana Gosvāmī, Jīva Gosvāmī, Śrīdhara Swami, and others. It may seem ordinary when read without explanation. I do not have Śrīla Prabhupāda's commentaries on this verse, nor do I have the commentaries of Viśvanātha Cakravartī or the other *ācāryas.* I will have to bring these verses to Mahārāja and hope he will say something.

Why are Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma compared to dancers on a stage? There are wonderful pastimes related to words like *raṅge naṭa-varau.* Each word connotes conjugal love from the *gopīs'* point of view. We don't recognize them because we are not *rasika* scholars. Neither do we feel *rasa* with our hearts. We are ignorant, or at the least, like the person trying to taste honey by licking the outside of the jar.

Please tell us why they sing. What songs do they sing? How are They dressed? Where do They place Their flowers? When the *gopīs* say Kṛṣṇa looks "charming," I know that they don't say it from the viewpoint of a parent or a detached observer. The *gopīs* are overwhelmed by *smara* (here we get the English word "Cupid," which is unfortunately associated with worldly lust and mythology).

Kṛṣṇa looks charming in His dress and flower decorations. He looks like a dancer on the stage. He shines forth magnificently—these words are all spoken from the *gopīs'* point of view. All I can say is that I will have to go to Mathurā. And if I go on reciting the *Veṇu-gīta* and praying as I chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, something may come to me. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are entering the forest. They are dressed in yellow and blue with beautiful varieties of flowers . . . They decorated Themselves for fun . . . They were free with Their *gopa* friends and cows, no fears—and They sang. Their feet marked the earth with symbols. The air was heavy with flower scents, and cool and pleasant. This is a morning *līlā.*

The night is dark, but I have an electric lamp lit. The *chowkidar* blows his whistle somewhere out there. A storm came last night as I tried to sleep, and I had to climb up the shelves to shut the windows. Lightning and thunder kept us awake for awhile. But the rainfall is auspicious. I write to the music of the Indian air cooler and the crickets. The *Veṇu-gīta* carries me into another world as long as I can sustain the meditation. I am hoping today will be a peaceful Ekādaśī, and that I will be able to stay home and read and write. May I begin with *japa*, freed from deliberate indulgence in mundane thoughts.

Today I want to look at the poems Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote on the Jaladuta and in Boston. There are so many things I would like to do, but I have to take it easy and not press too hard. Learn to pray and appreciate even when you don't possess passionate energy. You have to say, "Kṛṣṇa, I am Yours; if You like You can let me worship You, serve You, and remember You today. Put me in the mood of a follower of the follower of the *gopīs* in Rādhā's group." As Rāmānanda Rāya said, *gopī-ānugatya vinā*—unless one follows in the footsteps of the *gopīs*, he cannot serve the lotus feet of the son of Nanda Mahārāja.

•

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Another *gopī* expressed her opinion that Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, while tending the cows, appeared just like actors going to play on a dramatic stage. Kṛṣṇa was dressed in glowing

garments of yellow, Balarāma in blue, and They held new twigs of mango tree . . . They were sometimes singing very sweetly among Their friends. One *gopī* told her friend, 'How is it Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are looking so beautiful?'" (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 1, Chap. 21, p. 148).

Śrīla Prabhupāda said that whoever can do transcendental meditation on Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma in this way will attain the perfection of *samādhi*. I know I am repeating myself.

•

5:45 A.M., back to the roof

I was thinking of another title for this book: "Life in the Sant Colony," but it sounds too much like "Ant Colony." And the meaning would be unclear. Also, there is no reference to Vṛndāvana. Aside from these defects, "Life in the Sant Colony" speaks to me. It describes what this four-week period is. We are trying to keep to ourselves in this house and not even take advantage of the outstanding *tīrthas* and *mandiras* in Vṛndāvana. For better or for worse, it is life in the Sant Colony with its frogs and rains and Baladeva's tasty cooking and all our little doings, external and internal.

I came up here to write and had to wipe last night's rain off my desk. I am determined not to look at people passing stool in the field across the road, and not to be concerned with what our rooftop neighbors are doing. I put a *gamchā* over my

arms and head against the mosquitoes and flies—but these last two obstacles are the real test.

I am thinking of Mahārāja in Mathurā without electricity. Was he able to sleep last night? Was there a storm there to cool the air? I tend to think of him in the way we used to think of Śrīla Prabhupāda—as transcendental in all ways. One fault in a neophyte's seeing in this way is that he may neglect the guru's needs for human amenities. Kṛṣṇa's friends never neglect *Him* in that way. At least Navīna Kṛṣṇa, Mahārāja's servant, is always looking after his spiritual master's personal bodily and material comforts.

A few rain drops plop on the page. The Oriental Institute Field is soaked, and the trees and shrubbery are green and leafy. Here comes a file of elderly, wizened pilgrims down a windy foot path.

O Vṛndāvana, even I . . .

Every place on earth, especially rural places, can be divine at this time of day. A dawn sky streaked with blue clouds, birds flying like silhouettes. Maybe I will be able to think more of Vṛndāvana when I am in those other places. Let a bell anywhere remind me of the bell at Krishna-Balaram Mandir. Let me not forget this most special place.

"All directions are filled with glory! The world is full of bliss! Oh! Oh! I do not see anything except Vṛndāvana" *(Vm, Śataka* 4.32).

•

Mahārāja gently reprimanded me for not knowing the word *uddīpana.* He said unless I learn the terms in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu,* I won't be able to appreciate the *Veṇu-gīta.* So I want to tend to that. It is hard to memorize them all, what to speak of comprehend them. Different texts seem to give different and almost arbitrary, vague definitions. All my fault. I remember in a freshman Economics class in college how I resented having to memorize terms. It seemed that the phenomena themselves were understandable without having to define them by an official term. But *rasa* isn't like that. Learn it and you will have a valuable tool for understanding Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's *līlā.* It will help you avoid mundane conceptions of Their love. One way I could do it is to teach a course next year on the Southern Wave of *The Nectar of Devotion.*

•

Many men live into their seventies and eighties, but it is possible I could die younger, me and my friends. In any case . . . what are the differences among the *sakhīs, nitya-sakhīs, praṇa-sakhīs, praja-sakhīs,* and *parama-śreṣṭha-sakhīs?* What are the sixteen services of a *sakhī* listed by Rūpa Gosvāmī? What are the six categories of *uddīpana?* What is *anubhāva?* List the thirteen subdivisions of *anubhāva.* What is *alaṅkara?* What are the eight symptoms of *sāttvika-bhāva?* What are *vyabhicāri* and *sañcāri-bhāva?*

At least I know where to look these terms up. *Śrī Śrī Rūpānuga-bhajana-darpaṇa* by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura contains them in brief, and they are elaborated on in *The Nectar of Devotion* and *Ujjvala-nīlamaṇi.* Sooner or later I will have to apply myself like a dutiful student. With the right association and a study climate, it could be fun.

•

A bird formation flying across the sky in Vṛndāvana is special. Because while seeing them, I hear someone intoning Vaiṣṇava chants, and I know I am in Vṛndāvana in the morning. It is not the same as being in Guyana or Pennsylvania. I am not entirely sure what the difference is, but I cherish that difference anyway and I pray to return to Vraja.

"If fools see defects in this inconceivably glorious earthly Vṛndāvana, where everything is effulgent . . . then what can the wise, who have the eyes to see, say to enlighten them?" *(Vm, Śataka* 4.51).

"O dearmost, supremely blissful Vṛndāvana, if I could see the splendor of your moving and nonmoving residents with millions of transcendental eyes, if I could smell your sweet fragrance with millions of nostrils, if I could hear about your noble virtues with millions of ears, if I could wander through you with millions of feet, and if I could bow down to offer respects to you with many millions of heads and hands, I would still not be satisfied" *(Vm, Śataka* 4.53).

Vṛndāvana is glorious because it is the playground of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and Their associates. Śrīla Prabhupāda was eager to bring his Western disciples here, so he constructed the Krishna-Balaram Mandir. He wanted us to visit and live here carefully, avoiding offenses, chanting and hearing and becoming purified by the spiritual atmosphere. Then we should go out and preach.

I am glad this roof is accessible again. Thank you, Śrīla Prabhupāda.

•

10:20 A.M.

I want to write as much as possible in these last two weeks. This refers to quantity and time spent at it—but also quality, living wholeheartedly in a writing retreat where I am not afraid to speak my truth. I tend to think that in Vṛndāvana, I really have to be on good behavior. That is a fact. If I offend the Lord or devotees here, there is a heavier penalty than anywhere else. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "So it is very risky. Just like a gambler has the opportunity to profit a hundred times or a hundred times lose. That is the special atmosphere of Vṛndāvana. And you cannot play hide and seek with Kṛṣṇa" (*Life With the Perfect Master*, p. 66). But does cautious behavior mean I should not be truthful?

Is Vṛndāvana the land of rules and regulations? No, it is the land of worshiping Kṛṣṇa from the heart. But being honest is also risky. I don't want to give up the guidance of the *guru-parampara* in the name of honesty. I think I can trust the process of admitting where I am at, then correcting it, then

again admitting where I am at, and giving myself guidance. I should treat myself like a beloved disciple.

A little thing that happened this morning: I was preparing a seminar lecture and I met with resistance. I decided to go on working for awhile, even though I didn't feel like it. It went all right, although usually I have to be careful about ignoring signals that tell me to stop, especially in India. I have to observe my limits so I don't get headaches and wind up losing an afternoon's work. I thought about how I had pushed myself with the seminar lecture: it seemed to be a clear example of austerity. Then I thought, "You hardly ever perform austerity; you just do what you want." I started berating myself.

Austerity is a tricky thing. Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes: "If you worship Kṛṣṇa, then what is the use of penance? And if you perform your austerities but don't worship Kṛṣṇa, then what is the use of the austerities?" Do I only do what I want? Good ISKCON soldiers do as they are told. Heck, I work too. Don't harass me with that. Maybe I like my service so much that I can work hard at it all day and not even think of it as "austerity."

•

More on living in Vṛndāvana: "Vṛndāvana specifically is the most exalted and preferred holy place for Vaiṣṇava devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa who are

aspiring to return back to Godhead" (*Bhāg.* 5.8.31, purport).

"As the saying goes, 'Familiarity breeds contempt.' If one stays in Vṛndāvana for many days, he may fail to maintain proper respect for its inhabitants. Therefore those who have not attained the stage of spontaneous love for Kṛṣṇa should not live in Vṛndāvana for very long. It is better for them to make short visits" (*C.c., Antya* 13.39, purport). You have to consider all the pros and cons. But don't be so afraid that you avoid bathing in the mercy available here.

I am writing these thoughts because I am considering "letting all the stops out"—for two weeks.

You mean use Vṛndāvana as your psychoanalyst? Lie in Vṛndāvana's lap and tell all? But shouldn't you come here only when you are ready to leave the past behind?

Yes, of course. But even a *sannyāsī* will have subtle bonds to material desire until he attains *prema.* I say yes, pull out the stops and praise Vṛndāvana. Write day and night while sitting in her lap. But don't deliberately go searching for 1940s–1950s garbage from Stevie Guarino and his parents.

•

12:55 noon

Mahārāja says that the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa are experienced as always new and fresh. Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* don't even think in terms of whether this is a "different" pastime or a "repeated" pastime. They simply see it as new. This is the

powerful and sweet influence of Yogamāyā on Them. Rādhā is with Kṛṣṇa all night, but when She goes in the morning to Nandagrām to cook for Kṛṣṇa, She feels She is meeting Him for the first time. She thinks that she has heard Kṛṣṇa's name and been told of His qualities, but She has never met Him. When They meet at Nandagrām, They exchange sidelong glances.

I would love to serve in that way—and it is possible. Each day when I begin *japa,* it is with difficulty, but the newness is there too, and always the hope and hankering—fresh hunger.

•

India is slower than the West. I put on *tilaka* after I bathe and then wait for it to dry. I don't put on my shirt right away and I take my time to chant *gāyatrī.* The chipmunk sits in the shade preening herself. We all have to push on in little increments.

This morning my brain has been manufacturing literary plans, calculating when I will do editing, when I will try Vṛndāvana poems again based on models of American poetry . . . Baladeva says he can get a good phone connection today to the U.S.—is there anything I want devotees to bring me from America?

When I went to chant *gāyatrī,* I couldn't meditate at all on the words. I couldn't find faith and access. Was that because of my planmaking? But is it possible or advisable to leave everything behind like a *bābājī?*

Yesterday I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda say that the six Gosvāmīs left society to go live in Vṛndāvana forest out of compassion for the suffering souls. It was an appealing statement, but it sounded strange externally. One might ask, "How are the Gosvāmīs helping people by living in seclusion?" Today I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda make a similar statement while discussing how Vyāsadeva prepared the *Mahābhārata* for the less intelligent classes of people. He said we should know that those great *ṛṣis* who are sitting in the forest are not living idly. They are always thinking how to do good for the conditioned souls. Their method of help is to create Kṛṣṇa conscious literature suitable for the minds of the masses.

•

4:15 P.M., roof

(That cinema *bhajana* cassette is playing loudly for the benefit of the whole Sant Colony, and the flies like to jump from my arms to my face. I am trying to get beyond my annoyance and hone in on a verse from the *Veṇu-gīta.*)

"My dear *gopīs,* what auspicious activities must the flute have performed to enjoy the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's lips independently and leave only a taste for us *gopīs,* for whom that nectar is actually meant! The forefathers of the flute, the bamboo trees, shed tears of pleasure. His mother, the river on whose bank the bamboo was born, feels jubilation, and therefore her blooming lotus flowers are standing like hair on her body" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.9).

I have heard Mahārāja comment on this verse before. Does this mean I shouldn't ask him again? Lord Caitanya speaks this verse in the mood of Rādhā. The *gopīs* "bad talk" the flute as dry and simply full of holes, yet he dares to take the *amṛta* from Kṛṣṇa, although it is actually meant for them. The flute speaks back to the *gopīs* saying, "You should give up all hesitation and come and take the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's lips. Otherwise, I will take it all for myself."

But in this verse, the *gopīs* are appreciative of the flute. We may think of this as only poetry. Do Śukadeva Gosvāmī and the *rasika* poets create expressions from their own devotional meditations? There seems to be a thin, indefinable line between the poets' devotional ecstasy and their reporting of the ecstatic *līlā* as it is revealed to them. I don't know anything about *rasa,* so I am inquiring.

•

From hundreds of yards away I see a monkey walking on all fours across the roof of the *gurukula.* If they came to this roof, it would be too distracting. That's another opulence of the Sant Colony—no monkeys.

Yes, I know, this is surface stuff. I should know better. But that is what I am for now. I cannot expect to be one of those *vairāgi* mendicants mentioned by Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī in this lifetime. They wear only a torn cloth and wander homeless in Vraja, always crying in *gopī-bhāva.* That form of

worship is not even recommended by our spiritual master. At least I aspire to read verses like this:

"I think the ultimate goal of life is to attain even a small amount of love for the land of Vṛndāvana, which is opulent with the splendid pastimes of Śrī Rādhā-Muralī-manohara's feet" *(Vm, Śataka* 4.65).

"O Śrī Vṛndāvana, I am now very fortunate. I have become the object of your very, very great mercy. You have given me the right to reside within your boundaries, a right that is prayed for by Lord Brahmā, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, Sanaka Kumāra, and other great souls. This gift gives me hope that some day I will directly serve the splendid, charming, eternally youthful, eternally amorous fair and dark divine couple" *(Vm, Śataka* 4.80).

•

It's humid. I can't get inspiring dictation from my own skin, and right now, the sight of four young *vrajavāsī* boys loitering along the path doesn't direct me to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Pray for mercy. You say you are what you are, but you pray, "Dear Lord, please forgive me and improve me." Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī prays directly to Śrī Vṛndāvana: "Since you have granted me residence within your boundaries . . . then why do you now hesitate to allow me to serve the great souls that live within you?" *(Vm, Śataka* 4.81).

I can also pray to Vṛndāvana-*dhāma* by his mercy. Let me beg for attachment to the *dhāma;* let me

travel to your holy sites. Let me one day aspire to live here all the time.

Recently, I read references to retiring to Vṛndāvana in your fifties as a *vānaprastha* (Prahlāda recommended it to his father as "the best thing" he had learned.) But I am not a *vānaprastha.* Śrīla Prabhupāda once said to one of his disciples, "Preach while you are young. When you are old, retire to Vṛndāvana and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. But you cannot retire unless you have preached sufficiently. The mind will agitate. If you have preached, you can retire and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa—so preach as much as possible" (*Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta,* quoted in *Appreciating Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma,* p. 247).

What is young? What is a devotee's retirement age? It varies. Retiring in the spiritual sense is for the very advanced. Mahānidhi Swami makes the point that Śrīla Prabhupāda approves our living in Vṛndāvana if we continue preaching here (as I might do by writing—or if I could improve myself as befits one who accepts disciples).

"Although Śrīla Prabhupāda rejected Subala's idea for solitary *bhajana,* he did accept that one could continue living in Vṛndāvana provided he preached vigorously. Śrīla Prabhupāda told Subala: 'Better we spend our whole life and die just to make one person Kṛṣṇa conscious. That is our line, to become so absorbed in preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness, whether in Vṛndāvana or anywhere" (*Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta,* quoted in *Appreciating Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma,* p. 247).

That is a good point—that one may also preach in Vṛndāvana. When a brother hears that someone is residing in Vṛndāvana he says, "Oh, but Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted us to preach." The six Gosvāmīs came here *just to preach.*

Thoughts on a humid afternoon.

•

A radio drama broadcast nearby, the villain laughing wickedly: "Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Is it Kaṁsa? Must be, or one of his clan. Every speech he makes is either full of fury or he is laughing, "Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Vṛndāvana is so beautiful when it is green. Just imagine how it looked when Kṛṣṇa had His pastimes here. Śrīla Prabhupāda describes it: "The lakes of Vṛndāvana are surrounded by green grasses and various kinds of lotus flowers bloom there . . . the air blowing in Vṛndāvana carries the aromatic pollen of those lotus flowers" (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 1, Chap. 18, p. 131).

Droplets of water from the Yamunā and the lakes and waterfalls touch the bodies of the *vrajavāsīs.* "Therefore, they were practically undisturbed by the summer season."

I come up here with books and look through them for something to say. I looked into myself, but couldn't find much. The books are the basis and there is nothing shameful about admitting that and then sharing something nice. The other day with Mahārāja, I got a glimpse that the books are more

than I have guessed so far. It is not just by "hitting the books" that I can enter Vraja-*līlā*. But if I can enter the *līlās* described in *uttamaḥ-śloka*, discussing them with a *rasika* Vaiṣṇava and remembering them on my own—then I can enter fully, as Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī does. The *līlās* are not *only* in the verses; the verses are the experience in an expressed word-form. The experience is with Kṛṣṇa and His *pariṣad* in Vraja, and in the heart of the pure devotee of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

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"This is the summit of *bhajana*, when one will be crying and there will be tears, torrently; and one will see everything vacant for being separated from Govinda" (*Conversations With Śrīla Prabhupāda*, Vol. 9, p 9).

"Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura has commented as follows on this verse: ' . . . after developing a taste for [*sādhana-bhakti*] (chanting and remembering Kṛṣṇa's name, form, qualities, pastimes, etc.), one should try to live in Vṛndāvana and pass his time constantly in remembering Kṛṣṇa's name, form, pastimes, and qualities under the direction and protection of an expert devotee.' This is the sum and substance of all instructions regarding the cult of devotional service" (*Nectar of Instruction*, text 8, purport).

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7:12 P.M.

This is an auspicious time. Come to the page with your whole heart and life. Prabhupāda, you are allowing me to enter Vṛndāvana more than ever before. Everything you did for me was always meant as training, even though I didn't know it at that time. I am made of your mercy. You have given me *guru-niṣṭhā* because you impressed me so much. Please let me continue to act in ways you will find acceptable.

I am in Rādhā's land, and the devotees here tell me how everything is happening—or not happening—by Her will. I like to think that way. Every night we are reading from the "108 Names of Rādhā." We desire to gain Her affection as Her servants. But this is only possible when I serve you to your satisfaction. This is the open secret. You are Rādhā's intimate servant and my approach to Rādhā can only be made through you. "The spiritual master is always considered either one of the confidential associates of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī or a manifested representation of Śrīla Nityānanda Prabhu" *(C.c., Ādi* 1.46, purport).

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Rādhārāṇī decorates the *kuñjas* and caves of Govardhana for Her meetings with Her Praṇakānta. It is not that these "caves" are empty and uncomfortable, filled with jagged rocks and with bats hanging from the ceilings. No, they are filled with paraphernalia for serving Kṛṣṇa, and Rādhā is

the "housewife in the caves of Govardhana Hill." She also has many sweet pastimes in or near the Yamunā (water sports, and the *rāsa* dance on the banks, etc.). She mistakes the Yamunā for Her sister. She is also called Karuṇa-vidravad-dehā, She who melts with compassion. She is an abundance of sweetness personified and very attached to glorifying Mādhava, who is dearer to Her than hundreds of thousands of lives.

Whatever I can copy down is only a drop. Even Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, in the final verse of his book, *Ujjvala-nīlamaṇi,* states that the ocean of *mādhurya-rasa* is fathomless. He says he has only stood on its shore and licked one drop with his finger. I am still working out my foolishness. But the nectar is available to all of us residing in Vṛndāvana or wherever we are faithfully serving Śrīla Prabhupāda and the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

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August 25, 12:56 A.M.

vṛndāvanaṁ sakhi bhuvo vitanoti kīrtiṁ
yad devakī-suta-padāmbuja-labdha-lakṣmi
govinda-veṇum anu matta-mayūra-nṛtyaṁ
prekṣādri-sānv-avaratānya-samasta-sattvam

"O friend, Vṛndāvana is spreading the glory of the earth, having obtained the treasure of the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, the son of Devakī. The peacocks dance madly when they hear Govinda's flute, and when

other creatures see them from the hilltops, they all become stunned" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.10).

The earth's glory is that Kṛṣṇa came here and sported in Vṛndāvana. So it is not a rotten place, this earth planet. Kṛṣṇa walked here with His lotus feet.

The word "Devakī-suta" also refers to Mother Yaśodā, since that is one of her names. These facts are in the BBT purports, quoting from authorities like Śrīdhara Swami and Viśvanātha Cakravartī. But if Mahārāja will explain the same points when I bring this verse to him, I will consider myself blessed. If I hear him nicely, it will create new and permanent impressions. Rādhā and the *gopīs* see Kṛṣṇa as new every day. Become blessed with the earth planet.

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī explains Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* with the *mayūra,* or peacock. I heard it last year from Mahārāja. The peacocks come before Govinda and ask Him, "Please make us dance." Kṛṣṇa then plays His flute and they surround Him in a circle and dance. When the performance is finished, the peacocks, who are satisfied with Kṛṣṇa's flute-playing, offer Him their beautiful tail feathers in gratitude. Kṛṣṇa accepts them and places their feathers in a place of honor—on His head.

I do have one question about these series of verses, and that is, whether creatures like the peacocks and deer, who are mentioned here as dancing madly or becoming stunned—whether their emotions are within *mādhurya-rasa.* The verse is spoken by the *gopīs* who feel conjugal emotions. But do all creatures share these emotions to some extent

when they see and hear Kṛṣṇa, even though they may not be souls in *mādhurya-rasa?* Especially in this chapter, the *mādhurya-rasa* seems to be universal, as all who hear Kṛṣṇa become stunned. The *gopīs* say, "Since everyone else who hears Kṛṣṇa's flute is expressing love for Him, why can't we?"

I want to learn the art of reading and savoring verses repeatedly. I usually feel the Vraja pastimes in the *Kṛṣṇa* book go by too quickly. But I can stay with them longer, if I learn how.

Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this verse as follows: "Dear friends, our Vṛndāvana is proclaiming the glories of this entire earth because this planet is glorified by the lotus footprints of the son of Devakī. Besides that, when Govinda plays His flute, the peacocks immediately become mad. When all the animals and trees and plants, either on the top of Govardhana Hill or in the valley, see the dancing of the peacock, they all stand still and listen to the transcendental sound of the flute with great attention. We think that this boon is not possible or available on any other planet" (*Kṛṣṇa,* Vol. 1, Chap. 21, p. 148).

How easily I can lose attention. A mosquito buzzed past my nose and I took out my earplugs to better hear where it was. Then I heard my pen scratching loudly and Madhu move in his cot on the other side of this screen door. These sounds have broken my "meditation." I often write of the outer world because it has done this to me, and I try to regain entry into *kṛṣṇa-kathā* by first acknowledging that I

have lost attention, and then by trying to link the distractions to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Come back, don't fly away. Think something more about Govinda's *veṇu*. Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "Although the *gopīs* were village cowherd women and girls, they had knowledge of Kṛṣṇa." This refers to the *gopīs'* estimation that the earth planet is glorified by Kṛṣṇa's presence. It is an appreciation of Kṛṣṇa's *aiśvarya* or opulence. But it is within the *mādhurya* appreciation. The *gopīs* aren't saying the earth is blessed because Bhagavān or Paramātmā, the Cause of all Causes is walking the earth. They are saying no planet in the universe is as fortunate as the earth, because here in Vṛndāvana forest, this enchanting boy is stealing everyone's mind with His attractive bodily features, His dress, His footmarks, and above all, His heart-stealing flute music. There is also a touch of *aiśvarya* appreciation in the reference to many planets and the boons they may offer. Śrīla Prabhupāda indicates that the *gopīs* were able to learn this, even though they were not *brāhmaṇa* boys hearing from gurus or studying the *Vedas*. "Similarly, one can learn the highest truths simply by hearing the *Veda* from authoritative sources." In other words, as the *gopīs* learned about Kṛṣṇa from their grandmother, Paurṇamāsī, and from other experienced persons, even without attending the brāhminical school, we in Kali-yuga, despite our low births and preoccupations with worldly vocations, can take the time to read *Kṛṣṇa* book and learn about Kṛṣṇa, about the universe, and about the science of self-realization.

The electricity is off this morning. I am using the battery-run fluorescent lamp. No fan noises, just the same crickets I noticed the first mornings I read here over two weeks ago. The crickets of Vṛndāvana!

Look one more time at the verse you just "finished." It is the viewpoint of the *gopīs*. I can ask Mahārāja questions. For example, "You said that these verses of *Veṇu-gīta* are valuable. This is because they are direct descriptions of Kṛṣṇa and the effect of His flute on the *vrajavāsīs*. Are they especially valuable for we who want to enter *rāgānugā-sādhana-bhakti* because everything is stated from the viewpoint of the *gopīs?* It is the *gopīs* who say the earth is glorious among all planets because Kṛṣṇa is walking here. It is the *gopīs* who are describing the potency of the flute. It is the *gopīs* who are describing Kṛṣṇa's beauty and the fortune of all Vṛndāvana's residents.

These verses are like mantras, jewel mines, containing gems like *vṛndāvanam,* Devakī-*suta, padāmbuja* (lotus feet), and Govinda-*veṇum*. I seem to be too feeble-minded and it is too late in my life to memorize whole verses. Let me at least collect them, copy them down, say them, look at their individual words, and try to keep their content in my mind.

Then I may lecture on them. Their instructions can be part of my preaching. Although *mādhurya-rasa* is not a subject for general preaching, the *Veṇu-gīta,* spoken by the *gopī* "professors" of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, teach us how to love Kṛṣṇa. The *gopīs*

are the best examples of unalloyed devotees; they know best how to please Kṛṣṇa.

(How quickly an hour has passed. Time for prayer and then *japa*. May the impressions of Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet on the earth of Vraja remain in my mind.)

As distractions and memories and desires for sense gratification come to us, may we replace them with the taste derived from the *Veṇu-gīta*. When speculations and doubts arise, may we return to the knowledge of the *ācāryas* and the humble, devotional mood which is so prominent in Vṛndāvana-*dhāma*. Remember the crickets and this still morning when you looked carefully for a few moments at a single verse describing the *gopīs'* love for Kṛṣṇa.

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5:55 A.M., roof

The tabletop is soaked again. I tilt the table and the water rolls off. Then I wipe it as dry as possible and sit to write. We are still without electricity. No loudspeakers! I can hear tremendous choruses of birds—and nothing else. If a bell rings or someone chants, it is only with the power of their own voice. Amplification needs electricity. This is more like what Vṛndāvana was like hundreds of years ago. But I am here *now*, groggy after my early-rising, and aware of my dullness after thirteen mechanically chanted rounds. I did *ask* at several points why this had to be so.

Then I fell asleep for a short while and saw old invitations from lust mixed in with current affairs of *Back to Godhead* magazine. It may be that I cannot advance because of what I have done in this lifetime before I met Śrīla Prabhupāda . . .

"If we ignore Vṛndāvana, which is flooded with the nectar of Rādhā's lotus feet and filled with the bliss of love for Lord Hari's feet, then what are the other things we will talk about?" (*Vm, Śataka* 4.85).

Well said, good friend and great *sādhu,* Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī. Why talk of other things? Why ever forget Vṛndāvana? Even these rolling choruses of bird calls and chirping and peacock's "keegaw" are part of Vṛndāvana. And the trees dripping in the rain. Who can complain about dark morning monsoon clouds in Vṛndāvana? Not me. But the symptoms of inattentive *japa* mean I have a hard heart filled with unredeemed *aparādhas.* I say I live with it. Others are worse than I am, I say. I look for encouragement in that fact and find it. Then I shake that off and turn to the *sādhu:*

"Śrīmatī Rādhikā's forest is the perfect atonement of sins, the ultimate shelter from offenses to great souls, the crest jewel of all principles of religion, and the crest jewel of all goals of life" (*Vm, Śataka* 4.88).

Note: it is *Rādhikā's* forest, and that is what makes it so glorious. Just by living here . . . it doesn't mean you can misbehave here, but you can admit, "I am helpless to overcome my bad habits in prayer. I feel no love. Please, I don't like this condition."

I have read that sometimes Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa watch while a devotee suffers in separation. This happened to Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. He entered the mood of Rati-mañjarī, but then lamented that he could not serve Rādhā directly. Rādhārāṇī saw Her maidservant's laments and She wept with her. For Their own reasons, to nurture our love, Rādhā or Kṛṣṇa sometimes stay apart from us.

But someone like me, I am not like Raghunātha. I freely address myself as a *sādhaka,* but Mahārāja says of himself, "I am not a *sādhaka.* You are a *sādhaka* because you do so many things for your *gurudeva* and travel so far to come and see me. But I just sit here; I am not even a *sādhaka* or a *kaniṣṭha* . . . " So how can I dare think that Rādhā watches me? But She and Her Lord see all. They especially see all *sādhana* and *bhajana* in Vṛndāvana. Please forgive me.

I sat in the darkness of my room. There was a little light from a high, barred window, but that light was really more of a lighter shade of darkness. It was similar to my mental conception of a dungeon. From my mat on the floor, I chanted and heard the *japa* of my two devotee-friends in the other part of the house.

Later, I paced on the rain-soaked roof in the Vṛndāvana quiet—tenth round, eleventh . . . where was my heart? Where was my feeling for Hare, Kṛṣṇa, and Rāma? I ask why this has to be so.

I can articulate better in writing, so here, on this page, on behalf of my *japa-sādhana,* I ask the Lords of Vṛndāvana to please help me. You make all

arrangements in Vṛndāvana. I approach You through Your representatives, Vṛndā-devī (who awards desires), Bhakti-devī, and Yogamāyā. You have already given us so much mercy on this visit—this house to live in, permission to study and write, time to chant in peace. But if we cannot use it to love You, then what use is it? Please give me a clue as to how to find the essence.

"The fortunate bow down before a person who, always seeing the eternal and sweet spiritual forms of Vṛndāvana grass, bushes, and other living entities, and bowing down before them with great devotion, resides here in Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 4.90).

Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī has great *niṣṭhā* for Vṛndāvana. I cannot imitate him. But I worship his statements. I hold them up, place them on my head as sacred. He is right! He sees the true Vṛndāvana. I cannot follow him in his advice to live here always—live like a wandering mendicant, bow down everywhere, serve everyone, see even the thieves as saints—but he knows there are persons like me, still in *māyā,* but with a developing affection for Vṛndāvana. He offers us hope as we hear from him and build our own *niṣṭhā* upon his. He will not kick us away as hypocrites or just because we are fools. But he will tell us plainly that we are foolish to abandon the dust of Vṛndāvana even for a moment.

So by worship of *rasika* Vaiṣṇavas, I ask their mercy to chant better, serve better, and learn better

what I must do to receive the nectar of the pure name.

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Here are the words of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, who speaks what I want to say, who speaks for all:

"O mind, tell me how I can possibly attain ultimate refuge at the lotus feet of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa? This most fallen servant has been living for a very long time being desirous of Those lotus feet. O Rādhe, O Kṛṣṇacandra, the very life of Your devotees! Please give charity to this fallen sinner by making me devoted unto You. Please don't neglect me because I am devoid of devotion. Kindly instruct this fool. Your servant is very much diseased with the thirst for material sense gratification, so he is asking You to kindly give him the capacity to assist in Your divine conjugal pastimes" (*Kalyāṇa-kalpataru*, 3.4, verses 1–5).

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9:40 A.M.

Mahārāja was telling devotees about *Bṛhad-Bhāgavatāmṛta*. One asked if the *gopāla-mantra* chanted by Gopa Kumāra is the same as the one we chant, *klīṁ kṛṣṇāya govindāya* . . . Yes, he said, but we cannot expect to get the same result so quickly. It takes *lakhs* and *lakhs* of years. We have to become like a fish who cannot bear to be taken out of the water of chanting the mantra. We have to give up eating, sleeping, and other *kathā* and go on chanting

the mantra—then we can get results like Nārada or Prahlāda. So don't expect everything so quickly.

This is an answer to the question I was asking this morning, "Why can't I see my way to better *japa*? Why don't They give me more mercy?" The answer is, "Go on chanting. Intensify it. Be patient about results."

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There is a low wall made of bricks around this house. On top of it, there are four rows of bricks stacked with no mortar at all. They are just sitting there. Sometimes someone comes and takes one away, but most of them sit there as the earth spins in its orbit.

It's muggy and gray, monsoon season, but no rain right now. When I go up to the roof with books and select quotes, it feels genuine. I come back down happy, thinking, "They will be able to read about Vṛndāvana from me." But this is also real, sitting here without quoting a book and right now not quoting Mahārāja. In any case, what counts is sincerity . . . whatever that is.

It's so gray, so muggy, just like the New Jersey shore, or Staten Island. Then I think, "Hey, you better pick up a book on Vraja and quote something." All right, I will, but just stay with me a minute longer. Let me stay with where I am at before I speak as I am supposed to in Vṛndāvana.

I wanted to write a book. It would be filled with experiences . . . something would happen to the person writing the book and it would be conveyed

to the reader. In the book there would be green, fern-like trees growing outside the barred window.

•

10:57 A.M., roof

Nobody on the neighbors' roofs. A dark donkey with big ears, despised creature, peacefully chewing grass until his master comes along.

Keep asking yourself why you write and what you want to write. And what you want. Of course, you want to do as you are told by your superiors. And you want to do something you like. And you want to do a service that is helpful to others. You have your chosen field and art form. You are like everyone else.

And you are in Vṛndāvana where flies are pestering you. That's okay; that's how it is. It is a world of misery. But this is a peaceful place, removed from the worldly fever. People come here to retire and prepare themselves for going back to Godhead.

Only rare souls can comprehend what is actually going on in Vṛndāvana. I am not one of them. I have heard about the summit of *bhajana* where we think always of the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The invitation to do *bhajana* in Vṛndāvana is the open secret of this place. Otherwise, why would someone want to retire in such a materially backward place? There is no sense in coming here unless you are serious for *rāgānugā-bhajana*. If that is what you want, it is the best place in the universe.

An insistent bird—sounds almost like a sea gull. Another one, equally repetitious and demanding, like a summer locust. Are they more insistent than I?

"May limitless Vṛndāvana . . . fulfill my desires without limit" (*Vm, Śataka* 5.32).

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I have been trained. I am not going to leave this spot, not for a few puny mosquitoes. Cover yourself with *gamchā*. Write on. The things I have read pop up at me . . . put them aside.

What about that book, this book? I said it already—it is an open-air book and a closed room book, an author wandering from room to roof searching for the right words.

He had better be careful. He had better chant his rounds. He had better not allow *māyā* to enter. Don't bray like the donkeys in the Sant Colony.

It is too late to learn the names of the birds and too late to learn Sanskrit, Hindi, or Bengali. Too late for material life too, for women, marriage, or a job. I am past it all. Too late for "midlife" crisis. Too late but I don't know it; I am as crass as a young man. Please don't say it is too late to love Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in this lifetime. You offer encouraging advice to others, so why not to yourself?

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They performed Their pastimes in Vṛndāvana. A saintly devotee may go to those places and think, "They danced here, They were together here." Few people do this. Most people come and go and remain on the surface. They pass stool in the fields or in their houses and they make money deals and study scripture or give lectures (usually over the loudspeakers), but rarely does one cry out, "O Queen of Vṛndāvana, I will die on this spot unless you allow me to serve You!"

"I meditate on the most fortunate persons who, even though they commit offenses, place Śrī Rādhikā's feet in their hearts and live in Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 5.28).

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He is all by himself, braying in the middle of the field, the jackass.

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A person in Vṛndāvana bows down. He is proud, foolish, but he worships the *dhāma* and the holy name. His writing is *bhajana.*

A bird like the whippoorwill . . . Now I will quit writing, he says, but no, go on.

Downstairs in an empty room, writing on the oversized pad:

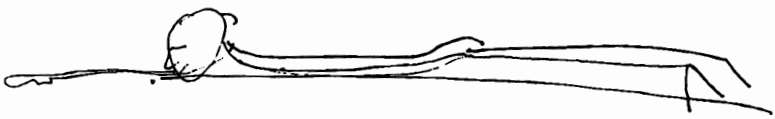
I am a little nuts and this isn't a perfect pen. In Vṛndāvana, *in Vṛndāvana.* I keep saying it like a magic formula. I keep begging. But what do I want? I think I will be satisfied if I can write a pleasing,

flowing book of experiences. Commendable, commendable.

I am not being sarcastic, but why not go deeper? The book should be the by-product of your prayer.

Okay, okay.

And you ought to know by now that book-writing is your *dharma,* so stop criticizing yourself for it. You may desire to go deeper, but writing isn't exactly a "by-product." It *is* your head on the earth and all parts of your body in *daṇḍavats.*



My prayers to Vṛndāvana are for simple things like, "Please let me chant with attention in the morning, and love. Or let me feel unworthy that I cannot do it—but not in a neurotic way. Let *me cry.* (That would be nice.) Let me improve. Teach me how to chant."

Yes, Lord, I would like to write sweet love songs to You when You faint due to the ecstasy of Rādhā's love, but Mahārāja has made it clear that I am not qualified. So what does a guy do who wants to write in Vṛndāvana, who has come to Vṛndāvana just to write? He can write Prabhupāda's biography and purports to the "Prayers of King Kulaśekhara," and he can do this—the simple days and nights in a house of old bricks and cement in Rāman Retī. It is the best situation I have ever had in Vṛndāvana, and I thank you for it.

I am just stressing and digging *a little* here to look for more. My wish-blessing; may you continue to hear from Mahārāja in good consciousness and stay serious about that. May it penetrate your thick skull and your dry heart.

O Vṛndāvana-*dhāma,* I am a bit rapacious in looking through books for suitable quotes. I need to quiet down.

•

4:10 P.M.

The partridges have strong legs and their tail feathers are not long. They make loud calamitous noise. When I first saw them I thought maybe they were just-born peacocks who couldn't fly. But they can fly. Two just walked along the brick wall and then flew off. By contrast, a pink-necked, gray-backed dove sits on our electric line making dovey sounds. A temple bell rings again for a four o'clock *ārati* nearby. Which would you rather have, electricity to run the fans or a quiet Vṛndāvana with no amplified music?

By the description of the birds, I am reasserting the simple. Two small sparrows are twitting on the electric line. You find them at Rādhā-Madana-mohana temple, the first ones to rise in the morning, and you see them at Rādhā-kuṇḍa. You usually don't notice them while you are out worshiping and searching for the Supreme Lord. But sometimes you stop and notice and there they are, with their inconsequential twit-twit, and their little doings. They were here before you and they will be here after you leave.

Certainly the trees will see you come and go from Vṛndāvana. They don't write books trying to average a hundred pages a week, and they don't make photocopies so it doesn't get lost.

If we don't have lights by this evening, we will still get by.

•

5:05 P.M.

"Although I am very wretched and fallen, I still yearn to attain the wonderful state that even Lakṣmī, Śiva, and all the demigods cannot attain. Because I have offended you, I cannot attain even a single drop of your transcendental nectar. I do not make even the slightest attempt to renounce the objects of sense gratification, which make one forget the path of religion. I am filled with bewilderment, grief, fear, and shame. O Vṛndāvana, please protect me" (*Vm, Śataka* 6.3).

How do I relate to this verse? I lack the intensity to feel myself wretched and fallen or to be filled with shame. But when he says I have offended Vṛndāvana, I think maybe that is why I cannot attain the nectar for which I am anxious. And when he says, "I don't make even the slightest effort to renounce sense gratification," I think, "What does he mean?" Does he mean illicit sense gratification, heavy stuff like the *karmīs* do? I have renounced all that, smoking, drinking, going out for entertainment . . . but if you mean the regulated sense gratification which is allowable, then it is true I make no effort to reduce it. I am attached to my bodily comfort. Then if I am guilty of *aparādha* and

sense gratification, why don't I admit it and feel low and ashamed? I don't know why.

Berating my complacency. But let me be peaceful, I say. I want to hear the flapping of the laundry in the wind, see the play of shadows as the clothes line flaps in the evening sunlight. Don't tear me away from this peaceful vision. I am here on an assignment, so why are you distracting me by telling me I am so unworthy?

Vṛndāvana is rural and religious, even today. More *dhotīs* than pants. When you see a young man in a gold and black striped shirt, gray pants, and sandals, it looks out of place. Your eyes are used to the old *dhotīs* and informal religious garb, or mendicants, poor people, Indian cowherd garb.

If I lived here all the time, I wouldn't try so hard. I would settle for a regular, long-term service. I would read calmly. I doubt that I am ready for that. I think I need to go to places where people want me to visit and give lectures. Guide disciples.

So I am here like any Western-based devotee, soaking up the nectar. We want to go back with something to share. This is my slide show, my gifts for my friends. Don't make out that you are something else, a long-time resident, just because you are staying in a separate place.

And do you have a *rāgānugā* practice? If I do, it is only what I mention here.

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The black Indian crow, world famous rascal, perched on our roof. Black beak, gray head, black body. Known to fetch food even from the plates of guests sitting in their rooms in 5-star hotels. Out here in Vṛndāvana, he blends in more with the scene, not such an outstanding ruffian as in the city. Gets what he can, endowed with good flight equipment, especially a long black tail.

"The devotees living in Vṛndāvana are very fond of all the walking, climbing, jumping, flying, singing, mooing, barking, and braying creatures of Vraja-*dhāma*. The animals and people co-exist peacefully in a dynamic relationship of interdependence, sustained by their loving connection with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Not only the human beings, but all the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana are accepted as *vrajavāsīs* (residents of Vṛndāvana) and they are treated without discrimination" (*Appreciating Vṛndāvana-dhāma*, p. 49).

"One should treat animals such as deer, camels, asses, monkeys, mice, snakes, birds, and flies exactly like one's own son. How little difference there actually is between children and these innocent animals" (*Bhāg.* 7.14.9).

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6:45 P.M.

I am forming regular habits during these weeks. One is to share with you some of Rādhā's names just after reading. One of Her names means, "Her beautiful nectar words cool Mādhava." Kṛṣṇa so much loves to hear Rādhā speak that He asks Her to repeat what She says. The *gopīs* consider their

ears useless if they cannot hear Kṛṣṇa's nectarean words, but Kṛṣṇa Himself is like a *cakora* bird that dies without drinking the nectar of Rādhā's words. Rādhā is also called, "She who defeats Kṛṣṇa in a water fight in Her own lake." When I heard this, I remarked to Madhu that sometimes we say Rādhā is actually superior to Kṛṣṇa, but sometimes we say He allows Her to dominate Him. But in a water fight, it would seem clear that Kṛṣṇa was allowing Rādhā to win since He is so strong. However, when we read the commentary, we saw that Rādhā is so charming as they fight that Śyāma's body and mind become stunned. Thus, even a hero like powerful Balarāma's younger brother must accept defeat. When Rādhā wins, the creatures around Rādhā-kuṇḍa—the *sakhīs*, the *mañjarīs*, the birds and bees and monkeys—all cheer, and a tumultuous sound arises from the lake. Rādhā has another name which means "Viśākhā fans Her while She sleeps." Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, in his *kiṅkarī-svarūpa*, assists Viśākhā in the fanning.

And this is how twilight comes. The last blue of the sky is visible. People are sitting on their roofs. A peacock calls, crickets have begun chirping. Baladeva has to go out to meet someone. I am beginning to feel the stirring of hope for tomorrow's early morning *bhajana*.

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7:10 P.M., big note pad

Earlier today, I wrote in this pad when I was ready to explode. I had been feeling the pressure of restless searching through *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta* to find suitable verses for my book; I was questioning my writing and whether I shouldn't be reading instead; everything seemed to be in danger of falling apart. Now I want to prove that I can also write here peacefully.

It's almost time to take rest. I hope to sleep peacefully so I can rise early and feel strong enough to chant. If one day I become so fortunate that I cannot sleep out of excessive love for Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, that will be different. But for now, it's "early to bed, early to rise . . . " Go on, little man, to your mosquito-net-covered cot, and sweet dreams if possible. Rest without so much inner turmoil over your lacking. And "if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."

Kṛṣṇa is the supreme and Rādhā is His most beloved. Their eternal playground is *aprakṛta,* unmanifested Goloka Vṛndāvana. On earth the replica is Gokula Vṛndāvana, a few hours from New Delhi.

From this house, I hear the evening *bhajana* and gong of the "Oṁ Jaya Jagadīśa" people. Next door, a man with a loud, gruff voice is demanding something. It doesn't affect us here. We are self-sufficient with our bodies and prayers and duties. I will see you in the morning, under that desk lamp spotlight . . . ever-fresh Kṛṣṇa . . . don't mind the distractions . . . it is surface Vraja . . . there is a mystery here and

even though you sleep, oblivious to it and wake with almost no trace of knowledge of it, this is the playground of transcendence and love, Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. Śrīla Prabhupāda has brought us here to serve and qualify.

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August 26, 1:00 A.M.

Tumbled out of bed unwilling to write . . . But I know once I get going . . . I am feeling I won't talk of myself . . . we will go at once to Kṛṣṇa then . . . and thinking of a disciple, "Let me write to him saying, 'I know the search for the self is never easy. Please keep in touch with me and let me know how you are doing so I can offer some help.'" I must turn to meditation on Kṛṣṇa "as if" that will solve all my problems.

What are my problems? I have to learn how to teach and guide a disciple with his own problems. I have the problem of trying to write this book. I have the problem of finding *kṛṣṇa-kathā* among the other problems.

Today I will go and see Mahārāja. Sometimes I think we are measuring or testing Mahārāja according to our own standards, which isn't fair to him. My disciples may be measuring or testing me in the same way. "Let's see how he affects us and whether he can lift us up." As Śrīla Prabhupāda once said, "Even if you have the most expert guru, you still have to help yourself. It is you who have to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, as offered by your spiritual master.

"Blessed are all these foolish deer because they have approached Mahārāja Nanda's son, who is gorgeously dressed and is playing on His flute. Indeed, both the doe and the bucks worship the Lord with looks of love and affection" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.11).

Now the *gopīs* turn their attention to the deer, as another way of expressing their love for Kṛṣṇa. The *gopīs* think the deer are more fortunate than themselves because the bucks encourage their wives, the does, to go to Kṛṣṇa. But the *gopīs'* husbands don't like Kṛṣṇa at all. "Therefore, what is the use of our lives?" We tend to smile at the *gopīs'* difficulty. But to them it is real. And it is an impetus to increase their love for Kṛṣṇa. The central point is loving Kṛṣṇa, and nothing else.

Lord Caitanya recited this verse while He was traveling to Vṛndāvana. He and His servant, Balabhadra, were passing through the jungle. They saw tigers and elephants and the Lord induced them to chant "Kṛṣṇa! Kṛṣṇa!" As Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu chanted loudly in the jungle, all the does came near Him and followed Him on both sides. The Lord patted them and recited this verse from the *Veṇu-gīta:* "Blessed are all these foolish deer." Then tigers appeared, joining the deer, and began to follow the Lord. This reminded Lord Caitanya of Vṛndāvana and he quoted, "Vṛndāvana is the transcendental abode of the Lord, where there is no hunger, anger, or thirst. Though naturally inimical, both human beings and fierce animals live together in transcendental friendship" (*Bhāg.* 10.13.60).

This is how a verse should live in the mind of a pure devotee. It springs to life on different occasions and appears in his mind. He quotes it to taste the transcendental emotion. Lord Caitanya would go in mad ecstasy just by recalling key verses. His intimate friends would recite a verse and the Lord would be overwhelmed.

This is the answer to my question about how to use these verses. It doesn't answer the question of how *I* can use these verses now, because I can't feel even a fraction of what the *gopīs* feel. The *gopīs* call the deer *mūḍhas*, because, after all, they have taken birth as ignorant animals. Yet these so-called *mūḍhas* are approaching Nanda-nandana, the son of Mahārāja Nanda, who is dressed very attractively and playing on His flute. The *gopīs* feel transcendental envy. They are not as blessed, they think, as the foolish deer. "Why can't we freely go to Kṛṣṇa?" the *gopīs* ask. "And if we cannot go to Him, then what is the use of our lives?"

Just recite and listen; let it work on you. Use your brain and time to express the logic and psychology of the *gopīs'* situation. Describe the scene. Let it work on you. Approach a *rasika* Vaiṣṇava, not to test him, but trusting that his explanation of the verse will unlock it for you. Even if you already know the details of the verse, he knows the *bhāva*. And he expresses that *bhāva* from his own heart because he knows the science of *rasa*.

(I am telling you everything I do because we are friends. If I tell you, it can help both of us learn how to control our minds. If I can't teach you that, since I

can't do it myself, at least you can be inspired by our mutual struggle. While I was writing of the foolish deer, a mosquito bit my foot. I have covered my feet with a *cādar* and I am writing a note to Madhu, "Is there a mosquito spray I can put on my feet?" Now breathe, sit back, and re-enter the meditation.)

I say let me expose myself to these verses. I pray for *śraddhā*. The verses of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and the Six Gosvāmīs are "radioactive," and if I expose myself to them, I will get the "fallout" of ruined material desires. But I have to expose myself by hearing with *śraddhā*. The potent *darśana* of a "radioactive" person will also do wonders—if my desire is to become caught up in the life of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. If I don't have faith, then how will any of this help me?

Am I a "Doubting Thomas"? Do I have to see and touch the body of the Lord before I will believe? But as Jesus said, blessed are they who are faithful by hearing. And blessed are the deer of Vṛndāvana. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes: "Another *gopī* said, 'My dear friends, just see the deer! Although they are dumb animals, they have approached the son of Mahārāja Nanda, Kṛṣṇa. Not only are they attracted by the dress of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, but as soon as they hear the playing of the flute, the deer, along with their husbands, offer respectful obeisances unto the Lord by looking at Him with great affection'" (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 1, Chap. 21, p. 149).

Śrīla Prabhupāda states that the *gopīs* were envious of the deer. A devotee asked Mahārāja, "What is transcendental *veśa* (envy)?" He gave an

example of a husband with several wives. One of them is less favored, so what can she do? What is her position? She is forced to admit, "I am not loved as much as the other wives." In spiritual life, if we can handle it, such admission of inferiority is good for us. Mahārāja also gave the example of Uddhava. He used to think of himself as the best of Kṛṣṇa's *bhaktas,* but when he met the *gopīs* of Vraja, Uddhava thought, "I am like a speck of dust and they are the Himalayan Mountains." He returned to Dvārakā thinking like that.

I remember last year how crushed I felt seeing that Mahārāja was more attentive and affectionate to two of my brothers than he was to me. Envy. It was humiliating and painful. We may not be able to expose ourselves to so much competition, need for affection, waves of anxiety, etc. Then we back off and proceed at a slower rate.

Blessed are the foolish deer. Blessed are the "ordinary" people born in India, especially in Vraja, for whom faith in Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā comes naturally.

I think I am learning a bit more how verses should live in a devotee's life. First, he has to know them and assign them actual value. Then they will blaze forth at different times, evoked by things that *stimulate* his attraction to Kṛṣṇa. I am praying for this to happen in my own life. And I can practice it even before I reach the spontaneous stage.

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6:20 A.M., roof, what is a writing retreat?

A writing retreat is a time when you go as alone as possible, cutting off all ties to the world and people, so that you can give them the best attention and love, much more intensely than when you are mixing with and bumping against them. Here in Vṛndāvana, it means that I sometimes forget I am in India and I try to push and rush to get more done each day. But India dictates its own pace. It will let me know when I am acting too much in the *puruṣa-bhāva.*

A servant can sing and dance, but the *mañjarīs* do everything to please their Svāmīnī. I cannot be sure of myself and my motivations, and yet I am sure too, at least, that I use my energy in His service and do all I can—writing day and night.

As the sun comes up bright and yellow behind a small blue cloud, it is time for Sūrya's devotees to witness his first splendor. I write about the sun.

As I write, the man on the roof next door starts reading loudly from a Sanskrit scripture. Fair is fair—we were chanting *japa* up here at 4 A.M., although we weren't so loud.

I can't keep the world out. I try to do it for awhile. I get keyed up and speak too sharply to my servant and he speaks back sharply to me. It startles me.

Lots of "Nārāyaṇa" and "Oṁ Mahādeva" and "Oṁ Sūrayaha" in the man's reading. I worship Nārāyaṇa too. Why am I so sarcastic and "superior" all the time? Do I think ISKCON prayers are the only ones heard by God? What is this tongue-in-

cheek pose from one who is about to die? Why hurt feelings, why proud of your efforts?

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11:40 A.M.

Returning from Mathurā. Again we were fortunate. Mahārāja gave us almost an hour of his time without interruption. We went at once into discussion of the *Veṇu-gīta.*

First we discussed verse five, *barhāpīḍam naṭa-vara.* Mahārāja explained that the *barha* (peacock feather) has seven colors like a rainbow. He says that the beautiful new rain cloud is compared to the color of Kṛṣṇa's body and the lightning that sometimes appears is like the color of Kṛṣṇa's yellow garment. The peacock feather is like the rainbow in the sky. Thus the *gopīs* see Kṛṣṇa as beautiful and colorful. He is called *naṭa-vara,* which means the best of dancers.

In Indian drama, the first persons who appear on the stage are a *kaiśora* and *kaiśorī,* a young teenage couple. They are always dressed attractively and everyone gives them their attention and becomes enchanted. So Kṛṣṇa is a *naṭa* like that. There are many dancers—Naṭarāja Śiva or the Gandharvas—but Kṛṣṇa is *naṭa-śreṣṭha,* the best of dancers.

Another word for *vara* is bridegroom. When he appears for his wedding, even if he is physically ugly, the bridegroom looks like the most handsome prince because of all the cosmetics and his beautiful dress. These words help us to understand that Kṛṣṇa was beautifully dressed. He was so gorgeous that

there was no one as attractive as He. He wore many different flowers in a garland from His neck to His feet, and He filled the holes of His flute with the nectar from His lips.

Mahārāja explained that the nectar goes into the flute and cannot stay there; it comes out in the form of sound vibration. The sound vibration cannot find anyone qualified to hear it on the earth, so it goes to Svarga-loka. Still there is no one qualified to hear it. Then it goes to Brahmāloka, to Vaikuṇṭha—still no one is qualified. Finally, it goes to Goloka Vṛndāvana—and there only the *gopīs* are qualified to hear the flute.

Mahārāja commented on the statement that Kṛṣṇa beautified the earth with the footprints. He said the earth feels as if Kṛṣṇa is gently putting His feet on her breasts and she becomes ecstatic. Seeing Kṛṣṇa enter the forest in their minds' eyes, the *gopīs* are unable to speak because of overwhelming ecstasy.

In verse six, the sound of the flute is described as *sarva-bhūta-manoharam,* it steals the minds of all living beings. Mahārāja says that although the flute is *generally* attractive to all, it is *most* attractive to the *gopīs*. When they hear the flute-song, they immediately stop what they are doing. They may be putting *kajjala* on their eyes, and even if it is not completed, they stop and run after Kṛṣṇa. Even if they are half-dressed, they immediately run out of their homes. That is because they are running after a thief. When the sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute enters their ears, it enters their hearts and steals their

hearts and minds. The *gopīs* run after Him just as we would run after a thief who entered our house and stole our most valuable possessions.

Mahārāja said that the *gopīs* spoke to other *gopīs* of the same age and *bhāva*. "They all embraced one another and began describing it." They spoke softly among themselves so others could not hear. If their superiors heard their descriptions of their love for Kṛṣṇa, the *gopīs* would be reprimanded as "wrong ladies."

Mahārāja then explained at length text seven, *akṣaṇvatāṁ phalam* . . . First he asked me to read the translation and then asked if I knew any further meaning. The translation gives a picture of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma entering the forest and playing Their flutes, glancing lovingly upon the residents of Vṛndāvana. "For those who have eyes, we think there is no greater object of vision."

Mahārāja said that this is the external meaning for ordinary people. He called for his Sanskrit Tenth Canto with commentaries. He propped the book up on his bolster and sat erect. He was becoming more and more interested in what he was saying. Now he was going to demonstrate the difference between the external meaning and the inner meaning. He said he would give four meanings to this verse according to Jīva Gosvāmī, Sanātana Gosvāmī, and especially Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura. I relished the fact that Mahārāja himself was relishing the description. I was drinking it in aware that we were *saubhāga* (fortunate). We were becom-

ing greedy too, and happy to be there to "steal" as much time and nectar from Mahārāja as we could.

He explained that the picture of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma together is external and is not exactly correct. He asked us to look at the phrase, *vrajeśa-sutayor anuveṇu-juṣṭam.* And before that, a key phrase is *anuviveśayator.* According to the BBT edition, this means "causing to enter one forest after another." But Mahārāja says it actually means that Balarāma has gone ahead of Kṛṣṇa into the forest. Kṛṣṇa is *anu,* or following behind. *Anu* may also refer to the fact that Kṛṣṇa is the younger of the two. The inner meaning is that the *gopīs* are not seeing Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma together, because when they see Balarāma, the *gopīs* cover their heads with their veils and cannot express their full conjugal feelings. But by the meaning of *anu viveśayatoḥ,* we understand that Balarāma has gone ahead. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa is able to cast sidelong glances at the *gopīs.* The *gopīs* see that Kṛṣṇa is begging something from them by this sidelong glance. He wants *mādhurya* pastimes with them.

Another *rasika* meaning is that the flute-playing here refers only to Kṛṣṇa, not both Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. Although Balarāma can play the flute, He is not as expert as Kṛṣṇa. Balarāma more often plays the buffalo horn. So the word *anu-veṇu-juṣṭam,* actually refers to the most expert player of the flute, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. It is *His* flute playing which is attracting the *gopīs.*

Thus the more confidential meaning of the verse is that the *gopīs* are paying attention not to Kṛṣṇa

and Balarāma because Balarāma has gone ahead and Kṛṣṇa is following. Kṛṣṇa is glancing at the *gopīs* from the corner of His eyes and the *gopīs* are reciprocating with His "begging."

The *gopīs* decided to immediately go to Kṛṣṇa. One *gopī* reasons, however, that if they do so, their husbands will get angry and try to stop them. Another *gopī* says, "Why worry? When we see Kṛṣṇa, we will become mad. We will just run to Kṛṣṇa and whatever will happen will happen. We are ready for it. Even if we cannot go home, it doesn't matter. And since everyone else is attracted to Kṛṣṇa's beauty and flute, what is wrong if we are attracted also? We will go spontaneously, in madness to Kṛṣṇa, and His flute will take care of the rest."

With a sudden glitter in his eyes, Mahārāja indicated that there was an even further meaning. He seemed to hesitate whether to explain it to us, but then he proceeded. He said the words *vraja-īśa-sutayo* are generally translated as "the two sons of Mahārāja Nanda," Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. But *vraja-īśa,* by grammatical investigation, can mean the two kings of Vṛndāvana—Mahārāja Nanda and Mahārāja Vṛṣabhānu. They are both *vraja-īśa. Sutayo* refers to the children of these two kings, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. If the Sanskrit is translated in this way, then the verse means that there is no greater object of vision than to see Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa together. Those eyes that can see the beautiful faces of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are certainly fortunate.

Similarly, the phrase *anuveṇu-juṣṭam,* can indicate that two persons are playing the flute. It refers

to both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes Rādhā takes Kṛṣṇa's flute from Him and plays it. She is so expert that She gives Kṛṣṇa lessons on how to play the flute. Anyone who can see these playful pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa with the flute when They are in the *kuñjas* of Vṛndāvana, certainly attains the fruit of vision. Unless one can see this vision, the eyes are useless. "For those who have eyes, we think there is no greater object of vision."

A summation: for ordinary people, the verse describes Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. For those who are more fortunate, it describes only Kṛṣṇa. Those who are most fortunate can see Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. But of course, this requires the commentary of a *rasika* Vaiṣṇava.

Mahārāja then asked us if we had taken an hour of his time. We said it had been about forty-five minutes. This was a hint that we should stop, so we wound down. He shut the book, said a few more kind things to us, then said that without these explanations, we were getting as good as nothing from the translations as they are in our own BBT book. I thanked him for using his key to open the verses for us. I hinted that unless he explained each verse, we would not be able to get anywhere.

Mahārāja then asked me what I am doing in Vṛndāvana these days.

Falteringly, I said, "I'm doing some writing . . . "

"What are you writing?"

(Oh, and before that, he actually asked me to write. He said I should write what he had explained about the verse and then bring it back and read it to

him. He said it could only be shared among a few devotees who are coming to hear from him. He said that if it could be written down, it would be a beautiful thing for the Western readers, but not for all.)

When he asked me what I was writing, I said I am writing down things he says and also from books I read. I told him I am reading *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta.* He said that book has deep meanings and requires explanations. I said, "I don't have any explanations for them at all." He then said that it is more or less useless.

I also told him I was reading the translations and commentaries of *Stavāvali.*

I felt a little of the old guilt we sometimes have in ISKCON of only reading books and not doing something more active. But Mahārāja didn't indicate in any way that he disapproved. He said in a serious and encouraging way, "Go on." He then said that we were fortunate. He said he wastes most of his time with people who come to see him. Only when we come for half an hour can he speak some of this *rasika* meaning. I said this isn't true, but that he always has these thoughts in his heart. Navīna Kṛṣṇa was in the room at this time. He smiled and said, "Mahārāja is like a fountain."

So we lingered for a few more moments, but then left, grateful and blessed. I hope to make a transcription of the tape we made of today's talk and write a small essay on the inner meanings of the verse he gave us. I can read it to him, and if he likes, I can share it with the other devotees. Maybe

this is the beginning of more writing assignments from him.

Madhu and I went and expressed our thanks before Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the temple room and circumambulated Them three times. We also bought a few English titles of Gauḍīya Māṭha books. All the way home, we talked about our good fortune and how to capitalize on it.

•

4:00 P.M., roof

Mahārāja asked me what I will be teaching in the upcoming seminar. I said, "About the life of our Prabhupāda . . . from his biography . . . segments of his life and lessons from them . . . "

He said don't teach "the boys" what he had just been teaching me. The *rasika* topics are for small, confidential audiences.

•

Kṛṣṇa Gopāla Prabhu came today with an invitation to attend a Deity installation ceremony. They are moving the Deities in New Delhi to a new location. He also went to invite Mahārāja. Mahārāja told him he is not feeling well, but if three persons at ISKCON Vṛndāvana (including me) insist, then he will go. I told Kṛṣṇa Gopāla to leave Mahārāja alone. He already attended their "Grand Opening" some months ago and I heard he was just a figurehead presence. I also explained to Kṛṣṇa Gopāla

how I will still be on my "study retreat" on August 30, so I cannot go either.

Another thing came up today: Baladeva wants to purchase this *"āśrama"* house, although it won't be easy to arrange. Madhu told me some reasons why we shouldn't do it. Although Baladeva will be the owner, it will be seen as my place. Madhu thinks it is too spacious—two rooms for me plus use of the roof. It will look too much like a "zonal" guru with his extensive facilities rather than a simple *sannyāsī's* room in the Krishna-Balaram Mandir. I will be expected to use it to entertain guests, hold *darśanas,* etc. I hadn't thought of it that way until he mentioned it. It isn't a fancy place, and neither does Baladeva intend to upgrade it with marble floors, refrigerator, furniture, etc. He says he wants to keep its simple *āśrama* flavor. He does want to build a higher wall, put a steel door in the front for security, and purchase the adjoining garden so no one builds there. I will have to sort out the pros and cons of acquiring the property. Madhu mentioned his viewpoint while we were sitting outside Mahārāja's room. He said, "See what a simple place Mahārāja has."

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While I have been writing this, an elderly man with a long white beard has been doing something unusual on the path. He appears to be feeding the bushes or some tiny creatures on the ground. He has a small paper container (the kind a merchant gives you when you buy sweets). He carefully looks

at the ground, then sprinkles something on the spot. He walks a few feet, examines the bush, and sprinkles a little more of whatever is in the container on a specific spot. He looks like an artist's rendition of Vālmīki, and I can only guess that he is doing some pious *sevā* to Vraja-*dhāma* and the *vraja-vāsīs.*

•

I got a headache from going to and from Mathurā, then talking with Kṛṣṇa Gopāla, then the flurry of activities I got caught up in when I got back. I also noticed a weird brown growth on the bottom of my favorite poster of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. When I tried to peel it off, it uncovered a batch of writhing termites. I removed the whole thing, but they had already eaten a patch off the poster. A shipment of Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatams* also arrived here. But we were warned that the termites might eat them. We will have to examine the books every other day to see.

All these small things are happening and I am not reading deeply. Mahārāja said that I am fortunate to be doing *bhajana* in Vṛndāvana. But aside from reading *Stavāvalī* in the evening and the visits to Mahārāja (and hearing his and Śrīla Prabhupāda's tapes), what do I do? I write.

•

After meeting with Mahārāja today, I am more convinced that reading scriptures without *ṭīkās* is of

limited value. We still don't have translations of the major Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *ṭīkās* of the Tenth Canto, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. I should look for whatever has commentary, like the Bhaktivedanta Purports to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. And the commentaries on Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's work which Mahārāja approved.

I also want to do some kind of drill to memorize the terms and categories of *rāgānugā-bhakti*. I am asking Navadvīpa dāsa to help me. Of course, *rāgānugā* is a stage that comes with greed. It requires love for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. But there is a theoretical aspect that is also needed. I see it as similar to learning to read music and practicing on an instrument. It will take disciplined study.

•

Here come some tan cows "floating" along in the afternoon heat. You would never see this in the West. They aren't beef cows or fat cows. They are small and lovely. Behind them come whitish cows which have a bit of that ghostly look Indian cows develop when they are starving. Still, they are more graceful than the lumbering bovines in the West. They walk with a dainty gait, heads nodding lightly and—what can I say—they are "right out of Kṛṣṇa's Vraja-*līlā*."

•

Mahārāja has enhanced our study of *rasika* texts, yet he has also made us aware that we usually don't sense the *rasa* at all. It won't be attained by leafing through the pages of two hundred volumes of translations from the Kṛṣṇa Institute. Those translations are all we have, but they remain hidden treasures without commentaries from persons who know *rasa*. So many books, therefore, are almost useless. We have to find a way to get at their hidden meanings and taste their essences. We are like bees licking the outside of the bottle and complaining, "It's dry, it's tedious, it's too advanced, you have to be liberated."

•

Yesterday's black donkey is back today. Respectable lone jackass of the field. How does he get to roam so freely?

Old lady with tiffin, how do you bear the heat?

When you ride the auto rickshaw to Mathurā, sights and sounds flash by. Today, when we passed through one neighborhood, we saw that the sewage had been cleaned out of the gutters but awaiting pick-up by the street sweepers. We were careening along when suddenly I heard and sensed that some children were laughing at us. It all happened so quickly. I turned and saw a girl of about ten years old standing a few feet away. She was surprised and tickled to see me and Madhu's white bodies in saffron, in the back seat of the rickshaw. So she laughed as if to say, "Oh, look! How funny they are!" I saw her innocent, laughing face for a mom-

think, "It is impossible to always think as a *gopī* does, so let me settle for less," that won't be good. Then we will give our heart to surviving (*praṇa-māyā*) or to eating (*ānna-māyā*). We will ruin the chance of human life. We cannot become *cakora* birds living only on moonlight. Not yet. But we shouldn't give up hope.

In Vṛndāvana, all things are possible. This is the only place in the universe where there is a chance to enter Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa-*līlā*. "Brother, are you trapped in the jungle of repeated births and death? Can you find not even a moment's relief from the threefold sufferings? The words of scriptures don't tell you how to escape? Simply meditate on the trees of Vṛndāvana, which are so dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa" (*Vm, Śataka* 6.95).

Most of *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta* is too deep for me, too *rasa*-saturated, and I have no commentary to open its secrets. That is why I look through them for an occasional verse stating the simple fact that living in Vṛndāvana in any condition is worthwhile. If the verse begins, "I meditate on the beautiful land of Vṛndāvana, which is paved with glistening *cintāmaṇi* jewels, marked with the nectar pollen of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's footprints . . . " (*Vm, Śataka* 6.88)—then I think, "But I can't meditate like that" and I put the book down. But if the verse says, "Just come here and enter the precincts of Vṛndāvana even if you can't feel anything" then I feel hopeful: "Oh, here is a verse I can relate to."

Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke about Vṛndāvana in that mood. He encouraged us that even if we didn't

know anything about Kṛṣṇa, just being in Vṛndāvana will make us feel Kṛṣṇa conscious. He told us this when he lived on the Bowery and at Second Avenue in 1966. He told us to perform *vaidhī-bhakti* services in Vṛndāvana and assured us that Kṛṣṇa would be pleased. "You will advance a hundred times more than you will in the West."

"Bhakti-devī, the goddess of devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet, who never appears before the liberated souls, and whom even Śukadeva, Nārada, and other saints cannot approach with their pure deeds, continually wanders here and there, searching for someone who lives in beautiful Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 7.2).

Offer your obeisances to your spiritual masters. Don't waste time. Avoid finding faults with others. These are things I can do from the stage I am at now. Don't overeat. Don't worry about the opinions of others. Avoid feeling guilty that you use all your time for *śravaṇaṁ-kīrtanam.* Try to feel the sorrow of poor chanting. Can you stay awake and work to bring the mind back to hearing the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra?

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. All *rasa* is present in the names. Do your "bitter" duty and stick to the names, although you suffer from mental jaundice. Throw a little light on the situation by recalling the mercy of the name and how easy it is to chant and hear. Beg for Lord Nityānanda's mercy.

•

Vṛndāvana is new, the trees are new, the blooming flowers on them are new, the spring is new, the Malayan breezes are new, and the intoxicated bumblebees are new" (Vidyāpati).

•

5:58 A.M., roof

"Friend, why are you morose? What is the need for this useless talking? Simply hear, describe, and glorify in song the transcendental qualities of Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 7.16).

The man on the next roof, wearing only a *gamchā,* is chewing on a twig while a young child talks to him. It is cool and cloudy-blue. I would like to concentrate and sing realized glories of Vṛndāvana. Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī says that even if we don't consider Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, even a blossoming tree in Vṛndāvana can enchant the whole world.

I won't be disturbed by the man and woman talking next door—I won't shut them out. I will just write in a breezy flow, as bold-fluffy birds chirp sharply and sparrows twitter. Who can resist praising the blue sky and blue clouds reminiscent of Kṛṣṇa's hue? Is that what you are praising, mourning dove? I saw you flash your wingspan and I was startled by the beauty. How God has made you! (These ordinary "Oriental Institute" field trees are gorgeous Vraja species. I wish someone could come and draw them.)

"Why are you suffocated by thousands of useless concerns for public opinion and the niceties of religious practice? Simply place your body in the

beautiful land of Vṛndāvana and become happy" (*Vm, Śataka* 7.17).

How extreme and fixed he is in his purpose, loving and living in Vṛndāvana. You *must* stay here, he says. Don't leave. Vṛndāvana will be your scripture and your guru. But the way of life he prescribes for staying in Vṛndāvana is renounced—spit at the thought of sex, avoid palatable food and drink as "the beginning of your troubles," and "fear handsome garments." Cry day and night to enter the pastimes of the dark and fair Yugala-kiśora.

A parrot sits on a TV antennae next door (I bet the TV doesn't work). I hear the brass gongs being struck with a wooden stick—one in the *āśrama* on the right, and one on the left.

I am going to go on writing in the spirit of Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī's advice. I will be supremely confident of the fortune of residing in Vṛndāvana and write praising *any* aspect of the *dhāma*—and that will catch the *cintāmaṇi.* But I want to follow the way taught by the six Gosvāmīs and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

I have looked around enough on this roof to have mentioned the externals. Birds are running on the canvas *paṇḍāla* roof close to my head. The two-way loudspeaker is mounted on a pole above an *āśrama,* and their morning *bhajana* is offered to the neighborhood. Small stone "monuments" in the field—are they ruins from a building or *samādhis* of the deceased?

A brown and white spotted dog is trotting at a quick pace, almost as if he has an appointment in

town. He passes by a slow moving old man in a red *gamchā* and white undershirt, carrying a cane. I have mentioned things similar to these and I will continue making a catalogue of impressions. But I wish I could enter the heartland with the same readiness. The sages will guide me.

Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī says he is fallen, crushed by lust, anger, and other vices. He cannot tolerate the dualities of the world. "O Vṛndāvana, only if you are very kind, generous, and forgiving, and only if you protect me as a mother protects her child, will I ever become happy" (*Vm, Śataka* 7.22).

If I were staying outside Vṛndāvana, I don't think I could write out verses of *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta* with the same pleasure and sense of rightness as I do here. When I am out there, I am an expatriate. I think, "Yes, it would be nice to go to India again. But it seems far away." I consider the obstacles in travel to and living in Vṛndāvana. When I am in the West, I am even doubtful whether *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta's* statements have any bearing on the reality of the Vṛndāvana I see. But now that I am here, I find a verse and say to myself, "Here is a good one! It says just what I think. Amazing how he reads my mind and makes the prayer I would like to make if I were qualified."

So let me not be troubled by what happens here. I am in my place. There are problems—I don't claim they have been dissolved—but despite it all ". . . never flaunting your own virtues, bow down and serve all the living entities in Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 7.32).

I am looking through the *"Nāma-bhajana"* pamphlet we picked up at the Keśavajī Gauḍīya Māṭha. It is a chapter from a book by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, translated into English by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. He says *"Prema* alone is the purpose of the life of *jīvas."* Those who intensely long to attain *prema* follow the principles of *śaraṇāgati.* They don't doubt that Kṛṣṇa is their protector.

(If there was ever a right moment for Sūrya-*pūjā,* it is now. The sun has burst free from the clouds and is soaring into the sky, proclaiming its glory. The sun as herald—he worships Rādhikā in the land of Vraja.)

Bhaktivinoda states, "Devotees firmly and sincerely believe themselves to be very humble and insignificant. The faith of an earnest and exclusive devotee is that he himself can do nothing, that not even a straw moves without the will of Kṛṣṇa" (*Nāma-bhajana,* p. 2). These *śaraṇāgati* devotees prefer embracing Śrī Nāma over every other practice of devotion. "They have more an intense appetite for singing and meditating upon Śrī Nāma than anything else. Of all the means of *bhajana,* the name of Bhagavān is most purely spiritual." But he must strive to know his own *"cit-svarūpa."* Not that he chants in ignorance.

•

How to do it?
How to receive the mercy?
All I know now is
vigorous pacing and calm sitting
(chasing off flies and distractions)
in the pre-dawn dusk
on some roof or in some room,
glad to be awake and sometimes
grateful and thinking,
"Just be humble and accept
that what you are doing
is your best effort."
It's all I can do and
even when I try,
it's all I can do.
I chant in gratitude and
accept that
vigorous counting of the *mālā,*
and staying awake in open air,
calling out God's name with
care for it—
this is my prayer.
All glories to the holy name—
please accept me.
I wait for You to teach
me more.

•

10:15 A.M.

Baladeva knows I still don't have a title for this book, so he suggested, "Waiting in Vṛndāvana."

"Waiting for what?" I asked.

"Waiting for the mercy that can be granted by one of the servants of Rādhārāṇī. You mentioned that there are *sādhus* here waiting and praying to be granted entrance."

Yes, Prabhupāda says they are waiting to go back to Godhead and spending all their time chanting and hearing. But I don't think of myself as waiting. To me, the word "waiting" implies either an inactive state, like sitting around when you should be striving—or the advanced state of full surrender. "I won't eat or sleep or move from the bank of Rādhākuṇḍa where I am crying Your names until You give me a drop of Your mercy."

I am not waiting, just going ahead doing what I can with whatever resources I have. I hope to be in the mood that Śrīla Prabhupāda taught—don't wait until you are liberated, but go ahead and preach and serve. Of course, I am waiting, but I don't want to mention it as a major theme. I don't want to be impatient.

•

The day continues humid and gray. I am sitting under the fan, looking at the window . . .

I heard Madhu humming the same rock *bhajana* I heard him hum in Ireland. I thought he would drop that here. The gate creaks. Baladeva is back with his tiffin. He stops to bathe his feet in the basin, then walks inside. Madhu tells him Nitāi, the rickshaw *walla,* came by looking to take him on his daily shopping errand.

Squirrels run lively along the wall. Me in here looking outside, looking inside, looking over at my books.

I am always satisfied if I can tell some truth. I am starting to look forward to finishing this book. That is not so good. You have waited a long time to get these precious days. "Only nine left"? The reason is I am anxious that I cannot make it all the way. In baseball language, it is called "choking up." It always happens. I pitch about five and a half good innings, then start to tire. Then before I know it, I wonder how I will continue. I should abandon this doubt. I can float in the Yamunā. I am not carrying this on my own. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja said the mercy of the saints was like a walking stick he leaned on. He is crippled and blind, leaning on the mercy of the saints. I want to be like that.

"Day and night may my tongue be filled with the sweet nectar of Śrī Rādhā's glories. May I pray for the position of the maidservant of Her lotus feet in Vṛndāvana forest. May my peaceful composure be stolen away by the youthful beauty of the golden-complexioned Goddess, Śrī Rādhā. By the power of my tears, hairs standing erect, and the other symptoms of my love for Śrī Rādhā, may I cross beyond this world of repeated birth and death" *(Vm, Śataka* 8.53).

If I cannot reach the Divine Couple, then at least let me use my time well. At least let me evoke honest impressions of Vṛndāvana. At least let me understand the goal of living in Vṛndāvana. To aspire to be nonviolent in Vṛndāvana, and to per-

form devotional service here . . . offering myself to the *rasika-gurus* . . . I remember how Rumi said there is more than one way to bow down. So I am bowing down—please make my words the words of a devotee. Please make my service love.

•

Mahārāja said that when we hear *Vilāpa-kusumāñjali* and a picture of the pastime comes to our mind, it is not *kalpana* (imagination). It should be honored as spiritual. We are meditating on Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's vision. It comes from *svarūpa-śakti.* Gradually as we hear and think about it, it becomes *tad-ātmā,* like the iron in the fire. This was encouraging to us. Don't reject what comes from Yogamāyā through the transcendental words of the six Gosvāmīs.

Now I have to position myself so that the nectar can enter. It can't be poured too quickly. I saw a merchant here today selling Baladeva honey. He carried his honey in a steel bucket and then poured it into one of our empty Bisleri bottles. Some of it spilled, but he poured most of it carefully into the bottle's narrow opening. I am restless and superficial, but I need to sit still and pour in the honey, a little at a time. Today, there is still time. Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī will be kind to us, if we can calm down and hear.

•

3:10 P.M.

I have no sister, no wife, no mother. No father, no buddy? (Not true) . . . I *have* a guru—many gurus—and I have a worshipable Lord. Got an eternal soul and an eternal purpose. So don't complain.

I have a congregation. I have work. Peace and even ecstasy are not so far away. Oh, what do I know?

I can't go deeper. I am on the surface of a sacred land. At least I can stay on the surface of that land by the physical act of writing. It doesn't have to be *rasika*—that can't be imitated—but writer self, find a way to keep going.

•

As I write, I hear the bell strike 3:30 P.M. at the Krishna-Balaram Mandir. Even Śrīla Prabhupāda passed away from this world, so why not me?

Am I morose for this reason? Do I want to live forever? Is this the world-sadness I read in Nietzsche when I was a teenager?

•

"The world is deep,
deeper than they can comprehend.
Deep is its woe,
joy—deeper than heart's agony:
Woe says: Fade! Go!
But all joy wants eternity—
wants, deep, deep, deep eternity!"

But Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are so far away. What is now my only goal seems unattainable. Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī went through agony for his love. It was a spiritual "suffering," a suffering of love. Who knows exactly what disease we have contracted? An Āyurvedic doctor can't analyze it from our pulse or urine. It is something in the heart, a religious ailment. In these matters, it is hard to distinguish the ailment from good health. But it's no reason to stop writing.

•

Nine days left isn't much.

Rūpa Gosvāmī says: "A very poor man living in Vṛndāvana forest presents the following appeal at the lotus feet of Vraja's King and Queen.

'Although I have not the dimmest shadow of pure devotion, which is the only way to attain You, still, because You are the masters of playful transcendental pastimes, please be merciful to me'" (*Karpaṇya-pañjikā-stotra,* texts 1, 13).

He wants direct service to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. He wants it more than anything else. "Placing his face in his hands, this person cries in anguish! 'O King and Queen, please, please give me a small drop of Your mercy!'" (*Karpaṇya-pañjikā-stotra,* text 22). Why do I hesitate to write this verse? Do I think tears and admission of anguish are too much? Are you better, stranded in dryness?

•

4:10 P.M., roof

This foreigner on the roof with blood in his veins and his mother's skin given to him along with brown birth marks here and there on the body, never mind all that . . .

Baladeva is back again, carrying stuff, coming through the gate. I wanted to get up here in my touchy mood and start writing alone before anyone got to me . . . I want to be happy and write like a breeze—or pay my dues, "heartbreak," to write a good session.

Remember in the calf's shed where you wrote in Wicklow, Ireland? Go somewhere alone if you can bear it. This is different. It is a roof with afternoon breezes. It is India, Vṛndāvana. You ascribe to the belief . . . doctrine . . . as do the *vrajavāsīs*—that the most refined and learned and ascetic saints of God consciousness are millions of miles and lives ahead of any other conception of *prema* for Godhead. *Prema* is Queen Rādhā, triumphant even over the object of love, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Yes, I follow this path, dragged here from the New York City streets by my spiritual master.

•

Dirty-white cow the color of Indian laundry that never comes out quite clean. Beside the cow, a sparkling white heron waits for bugs.

And there is the Vālmīki sage I saw yesterday. Amazing. He is bent close to the bushes in that same spot and he is sprinkling something, lovingly, carefully. His white hair is as long as a woman's,

and he bends down and sprinkles whatever it is with the tenderness of a woman. His dark skin, white hair and beard, gentleness—how different he is from that loud, bawling *śūdra* who came to our gate demanding and cajoling Baladeva to buy his honey. One is refined and *dhīra,* not asking anything, but giving to the creatures in the bushes—and the other is begging, demanding, *adhīra* . . .

•

Every day the field
gets a rain bath—
shades of green.
Please, see only Vṛndāvana.
Don't see a motor scooter
with five people on it.
But that's Vraja too.
It is what I see—
the heron follows the cow.

New York-raised *sādhu*
looks around from his
second-story roof—
Got to find some Vraja love.
That dirt path is the same
for hundreds of years . . .
only the *śāstras* remain
to guide us,
and the *rasikas.*
From here you see the
turrets and façade
—hope of the future,
Bhaktivedanta Swami *gurukula.*

Looking in books, unable to read anything steadily. I turned to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* although I don't have all the volumes. I began with *Madhya-līlā,* Chapter 17, "Lord Caitanya travels to Vṛndāvana." It is good. He says He wants one *brāhmaṇa* to go with Him who is a new man, determined and simple, not like Kāla-kṛṣṇa dāsa. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments that even if we are in the personal association of the Personality of Godhead or the spiritual master, we may fall. God cannot protect us if we are determined to fall down (free will).

Lord Caitanya took permission from Lord Jagannātha at night, and then early in the morning He left. His devotees woke and couldn't find Him. They were distressed, but Svarūpa Dāmodara restrained them. They all meditated, knowing the mind of Lord Caitanya. They understood that He wanted to travel almost alone to Vṛndāvana in the *sannyāsa-bhakta* mood.

•

"I've given up the desire for fame. I don't care if I become infamous. I don't follow the path of material piety. . . . " (I feel resistance to writing this because it is not me. It is Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī. He has "arrived," he has made it, he is beyond the dualities in Vṛndāvana. So what if it is not me? It is much better than me. Let me hear about him. What, do you think he is "too much?")

"I have renounced the game of scholarship. I don't practice austerity, *aṣṭaṅga-yoga* or *jñāna-yoga.* I

don't hear the words of my elders. I don't even notice my own body. . . . " (Up to this point in the verse, he sounds like one of those *avadhutas* who appear in every religious culture, who leave the world behind for good. In China there was Han Shan who went to Cold Mountain. But then, the big difference is:) "O Vṛndāvana, now that I have taken shelter of you, I shall never divert my attention from you" (*Vm, Śataka* 8.63).

He says, "Let us meditate on the very wonderful, sweet, melodious tinkling of the ankle bells of Śrī Rādhā's lotus feet in Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 8.65).

•

Sant Colony, no place like it. The house across the street is an *āśrama* for religious people. The place next door houses a man who says, "I am happy now." He came from Nepal and found a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* teacher in Vṛndāvana. And us, the fat white man in the *gamchā* who makes things happen, who has money and is the most friendly of the three; the sturdy Irishman pumping water, cleaning pots, sometimes angry, but blissful . . . I can't describe him or anyone. It comes off phony. Least of all myself.

The more I think about it, "Life in the Sant Colony" sounds like a fitting title. If I said "Life in Vraja," it would be a hoax, as if I am talking about my "*rāgānugā* meditation" on Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I *can* claim to live in the Sant Colony. Three foreigners do their *sādhana,* as taught by A.C. Bhakti-

vedanta Swami Prabhupāda. So what if it sounds like a situation comedy (or as you said, the ant colony)? So what if you hang your clothes out to dry on the beams of the ungainly roof *paṇḍāl?* "So this is where you have been hanging out? The Sant what? What kind of a name is that?"

•

"You call this *bhajana?*
What do you do for fun?
Hey, what's that sound?!
It's a donkey? How can
you guys live out here?
What if someone breaks in
on you at night?
Why is that donkey rolling
on his back in the dirt?
You're not gonna tell
me he's feeling ecstasy, are you?
Do you really believe that
every blade of grass is in
love with God and all that?
Okay, okay, I won't make fun
of your religion.
Everyone has got his own way, right?"

•

6:47 P.M.

A batch of mail just arrived from America. I opened only a few pieces. One was a letter to the editors of *BTG* magazine criticizing my article, "Re-

turning From Pilgrimage." I had said that after four months of chanting and hearing in Vṛndāvana (in 1991), I returned to America and experienced culture shock when I met the devotees. I found them engaged more in economic pursuits and the search for self-esteem instead of *bhajana.* I asserted that chanting and hearing are the primary concerns for all devotees, and that they should make their lives simple so they don't forget to practice *sādhana.* I mentioned rising early in the morning.

But the devotee criticized me saying I didn't offer a solution as to how the hard-working devotees could actually simplify their lives. He said for someone to spend four months in Vṛndāvana free to chant and hear is a privilege—and it is paid for by those who work in the West. He said we ISKCON devotees have to develop *"varṇāśrama."* Then we will be able to work together and appreciate each other. He said I didn't appreciate the sacrifice and the struggles of those who have to work for a living.

I can respond, but not here. No polemics. I can answer this challenge, or pass it on to one of my friends. But it is a challenge in another sense. It is a voice saying, "Why are you off there again chanting and hearing full-time?" I am thinking I am not absorbed enough in reading and chanting and not able to immerse myself in the inner meaning of Vraja—but here is a voice criticizing me for even trying. As if my coming to Vṛndāvana is parasitic. At least I shouldn't advocate Vṛndāvana-*bhajana* to others. But this is the opposite of Prabodhānanda

Sarasvatī's mood. He tells people to cut their worldly ties and run to Vṛndāvana.

After peeking at the batch of mail, we read Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī. I recalled that line in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta:* "Vṛndāvana is very soft due to the conjugal love which is prominent there." It is delicate and one has to worship and hear with tender feelings. Vṛndāvana is not a place for polemics. You don't make arguments why you prefer to worship Rādhā, or why you have come to live in Vṛndāvana. You don't feel guilty that Kṛṣṇa has made arrangements for you to come here. You take to it as much as you can, although you are unworthy and unable. And when you return West, you share the *cintāmaṇi* with persons who are grateful for the sacred dust.

At the end of each verse of *Rādhāṣṭakam,* Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī asks, "When will Śrī Rādhikā bathe me in Her service?" As a *phala-śruti,* he blesses the reader: "Anyone who eagerly reads this pure *Rādhāṣṭakam* with a spotless heart, having given up all material desires, will please Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the prince of cowherds, who will give that person a place among Śrī Rādhikā's own girlfriends or maidservants."

I wish to be a bee and wriggle into the lotus flower, get stuck to the pollen, and never find my way out. Let them call me proud or irresponsible. I will get drunk. I will be compassionate to others only if I can get that taste myself. As Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote in the first line of his poem aboard the Jaladuta, "O brothers, you will attain your good fortune from

the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa only when Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī becomes pleased with you."

•

August 28, 1:00 A.M.

"Using their upraised ears as vessels, the cows are drinking the nectar of the flute-song flowing out of Kṛṣṇa's mouth. The calves, their mouths full of milk from their mother's moist nipples, stand still as they take Govinda within themselves through their tear-filled eyes and embrace Him within their hearts" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.13).

As I write this, my first thought is to pray for *śraddhā*. Without faith, I see this as mere poetry. What is the use of our lecturing on *kṛṣṇa-kathā* and learning more and more (or writing) if we don't have faith? We have to believe what the *ācāryas* say. Actually, we need more than *śraddhā*. We need *niṣṭhā*, faith that isn't shaken. Śrīla Prabhupāda used to say *niṣṭhā* means that no matter what nonsense is spoken by a *māyāvādī*, we will not be shaken. Unflinching faith. It is founded on knowledge and on service to guru and Kṛṣṇa. They will infuse us with revelation. We have to surrender our intellect in humility before our superiors. And then, even while imperfect in many ways, speak what we can without the motive of self-aggrandizement.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes on this verse: "These phenomena indicate that even the cows and calves in Vṛndāvana knew how to cry for Kṛṣṇa and em-

brace Him heart to heart. Actually, Kṛṣṇa conscious affection can be culminated in shedding tears from the eyes" (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 1, Chap. 21, p. 149).

We are trying to capture the moon if we think, "I too shall hear the flute." And what to speak of our aspiration (as expressed in the *sannyāsa-mantra*) to surrender to *gopī-bhāva?* But no one should dissuade us. Even if an ISKCON *brāhmaṇa* says this is too ambitious, I say to him or her, "Then why do you say your *klīṁ gāyatrī-mantra* every day? What are you praying for? Why do you worship Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in your temple? What do you expect to derive from your *sevā?*"

•

So I have come to Vṛndāvana and I tell others it is nice. But some say I should not have said there is a difference between this *bhajana* and the life of hard-working devotees in the West. I say to you, "I thought I could be your messenger. I thought you too would like to come to Vṛndāvana, but since you cannot, I will go and come back to you. If I sound arrogant and belittle your struggle, then I have not learned my lesson well." I admitted that when I lectured on returning to America, I missed my step at first, but that only lasted a few moments. Then I realized my audience's interests and I tried to address them. What is the harm if I emphasized chanting and hearing for you? Who else will tell you? I cannot tell you how to find the time for *sādhana* within your busy days, but I know it can be

done, and work can be dedicated to the service of Kṛṣṇa.

•

Mahārāja is always available to the people who come to see him, even though they are religious *karmīs*. Yet he expresses a frustration that they steal his time. He says he has no time left for *bhajana*. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave all his energy to preaching and knocking down the opposition to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He certainly insisted that time could be spared for chanting and hearing during the day—not that anyone was expected to perform *sādhana* all day long. But at least we should chant our sixteen rounds and hear the *Bhāgavatam* for an hour a day and the *Bhagavad-gītā* at night. *Sannyāsīs* should travel and preach.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also worked to establish bases in Vṛndāvana and Māyāpur so people of the West could come here. He hoped his disciples' economic problems could be solved by living in ISKCON and selling books, or the temples could receive donations for their work. Whoever lives outside and works at his job, or goes to college, raises a family, etc., has to take responsibility for it and purify it. The "temple devotees" and *sannyāsīs* need to encourage the congregation. The devotees living outside should also respect a life of *bhajana* and not see it as a luxury they cannot afford. They shouldn't think the *sannyāsīs* are chanting while living at their expense. We all live at God's expense and we all need to help each other.

I may see the critic of my staying in Vṛndāvana as a loving family member saying, "Don't forget us." I cannot forget you. I have mail from you. And some devotees visit briefly in Vṛndāvana. They will be gathering for the Kārttika festival. Soon I will return to you in your cities and homes. I have heard your call.

But there *is* another call and I am attending to it. Spending time in the place my spiritual master spoke about as the best place. If this New York-raised person is finally overcoming aversion to Vṛndāvana and feeling at home here, what a blessing for him. Let him become conditioned to the sands of Rāman Retī. It is good for him to bathe by the pump and not be afraid of the pigs and monkeys and people of India. And if he can gain the rare association of a *rasika* Vaiṣṇava, then don't chide him for taking four months out of a year to hear what we all want to know. If you only knew, you might tell him, "Stick to his feet. We didn't realize what you were doing. This will benefit all whom you meet. Take as much of it as possible."

•

The cows are motionless. The calves stop drinking their mother's milk as they listen to Govinda's flute. I am straining to hear the *mahā-mantra* issuing from my own tongue. May Kṛṣṇa bless us with ability to hear. Hasn't Śrīla Prabhupāda said the chanting of the Lord's names is like His flute?

Yesterday when I hit strong resistance to this writing, I told Baladeva what was happening. Since then, I have overcome it and face a new day with new resolve. Baladeva responded:

"I read your note regarding the writing block and also the latest batch of writing. What came to mind was Nārada's advice to Vyāsadeva. You will never be happy until you write directly about Kṛṣṇa! So that's a tall order and for a writer-servant, that means you are going to have to write your way to the lotus feet, and even when you get to see Them and serve Them, the vision will come and go . . . painfully. Maybe you are going to have to accept more the fact that you have signed up for many lifetimes of pain and madness. Headaches mean heartaches! I think these soft sands—Rāman Retī—are more like quick sand . . . but there is too much nectar to turn back. You have to write about it, I have to try to buy some of it—somehow or other we have to love it. Sand, sand, sand!"

•

Prabhupāda says Kṛṣṇa conscious affection culminates in tears. Come to Vṛndāvana.

•

It is amazing to me that I am attracted to stay here a little longer each year. I used to make my obligatory yearly visit either before or after the GBC meetings. Sometimes I would go to the meetings in

Māyāpura and not even stop in Vṛndāvana. Or I would come here for a few days while meditating on getting back to my zone in America—Dallas, Los Angeles, Boston, wherever—eager for proper milk and hot water and newspapers. I am still like that—not for newspapers, but always feeling alien. I am not a brown-skinned Hindu and not one of the resident Westerners who have learned how to live here. I come and go, but stay a little longer each year.

"A person who even once tastes in his heart Vṛndāvana's sweetness, which is wonderful with the splendor of Rādhā-Mādhava's pure amorous pastimes, at once abandons all Vedic and conventional duties, and his body, filled with symptoms of ecstatic love, looks like a madman.

"He who considers Rādhā-Muralīdhara's lotus feet the sole object of his love, who considers others' wives his mothers, all plants and animals his good children, those who rebuke him his own kin, those who hate him his dear friends, and his body the same as the bodies of others, is qualified to reside in Śrī Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 8.80–1).

I am not qualified, but Vṛndāvana-*dhāma* and Śrīla Prabhupāda have allowed me to stay here for a little while. I am grateful.

•

5:55 A.M., roof

"How can anyone enter the Śyāma-ocean of *rasa* without having worshiped the dust of Śrī Rādhā's lotus feet, without having taken shelter of Vṛndā-

vana, where Her footprints lie, and without conversing with those persons whose hearts are deep with loving feelings for Her?" (*Śrī Sva-saṅkalpa-prakāśa-stotram*, by Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, text 1).

Everything is nicely summed up in this verse. If someone says, "I will definitely be a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, but not necessarily by worshiping Rādhā's footdust in Vṛndāvana or talking with devotees who have deep love for Her," he is foolish. It is like saying you want to enjoy the full moon without the full moon night. You cannot avoid Vṛndāvana. Uddhava prayed to become a blade of grass here. (When I say *here*, what do I mean? Absurdity of absurdities—do I say this smugly as if I have attained that which Uddhava prayed for? Do I assume I am *in* Vṛndāvana?)

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī advises the *sādhu* to live always in Vraja-*dhāma, kuryad vasam vraje sādhu* . . . And if you cannot, then you can attain the same result by living there internally. (Aye, there is the rub—it is not easy to remember Vraja even while living in its precincts, and it is much harder to remember Vṛndāvana from America or Europe.)

Śrī Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī has written, "My dear *mind!* Always find pleasure in Rādhā's play forest Vṛndāvana, the sweet place which is marked by Her footprints!"

Sometimes the *ācāryas* say it is better to live outside Vṛndāvana and remember it from there. I have to be away sometimes, but I also want to be "here." In either case, my mind is either my worst

enemy or my best friend. Vṛndāvana is kind and open to the pure in heart who give up material desires.

The advice to converse with those who love Rādhā deeply is crucial. But where will you find such a person? How can you be sure you won't be misled by a Kali-yuga pretender? Therefore, we are *saubhāgya, bhagyavan,* most fortunate . . .

•

Some twelve-year-old boys walk by in bright white *dhotīs* with clean orange *kūrtas.* Their heads are shaven and they have *śikhās.* It appears that ISKCON is not the only *gurukula* in the *dhāma.* Our boys wear yellow and are not always as clean and well-laundered as this small group.

What do I know? What can I say? Flies are persistently jumping onto my pen hand and my *gamchā*-covered face. No matter how I wave them away, they know they can come right back. I am helpless except to tolerate them. Reminds me of my *japa* where I am helpless and have to tolerate the bothered, distracted state.

•

I'm reading Lord Caitanya's travels to Vṛndāvana. He walked through a jungle region where the Bheels lived ("like Black Africans") and he delivered them by giving them the chance to chant the holy name. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments that we are

experiencing further evidence of Lord Caitanya's mercy as the people of Africa take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. "This is all due to the power of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Who can understand how His potency is working all over the world?" (*C.c., Madhya* 17.54, purport).

Devotees leave Vṛndāvana to preach. Lord Caitanya left Vṛndāvana and went back to His preaching field, Nīlācala-*dhāma*. Wherever Lord Caitanya (or Śrīla Prabhupāda) went, He never forgot Kṛṣṇa. "When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu passed through the Jhārikhaṇḍa forest, He took it for granted that it was Vṛndāvana. When He passed over the hills, He took it for granted that they were Govardhana . . . Whenever He saw a river, He immediately accepted it as the River Yamunā. Thus, while in the forest, He was filled with great ecstatic love and He danced and fell down crying" (*C.c., Madhya* 17.55–6).

•

Now that the mail is here, every once in awhile I peek at the stash, shuffle the sealed envelopes, but don't open any. I will answer mail in a week. That doesn't mean I will leave Vṛndāvana. I will just have to become busy with many things, as I always have done on my previous visits to Vṛndāvana. These four weeks have been for something else.

•

A brāhmiṇical-looking young man, wearing neat Vaiṣṇava *tilaka* (thicker than the *tilaka* of our *sampradāya)* and a *gamchā* and *brāhmaṇa* thread passes by. He picks some long weeds by the roots and walks off with them. Are they for worship?

One time Rādhā was angry with Kṛṣṇa for no reason (no fault of His). He approached Tulasī-mañjarī and asked her to plead to Rādhā on His behalf. Tulasī-mañjarī thought, "Why should my Svāmīnī's dearmost suffer so much? She went to Rādhā and pleaded His case: please allow Him to meet you again. Lalitā intervened and said, "Don't plead on behalf of that cheater who has hurt Rādhā so!" and Lalitā put Tulasī out of the *kuñja.*

It is *demanding* being a *mañjarī.* You can get reprimanded. But Rādhā will take you back.

(As I leave the roof, I see that the young man with the big *tilaka* is our next door neighbor. He is sitting on a stone bench reading *śāstra* aloud. The grass he picked is beside him pointing in the direction of the sunrise. It is *kuśa* grass.)

•

When I have meetings here I can read "What is a disciple?" from Prabhupāda's books and discuss the good qualities of a disciple. A disciple is inquisitive; he is eager to serve. A good disciple thinks he is not a good devotee, but he feels confident of his connection with guru and Kṛṣṇa.

•

10:52 A.M.

Soft, steady rain coming down. No breeze to blow it into the rooms. I stand in the yard feeling it fall on me, trying not to get a headache. I worked for over an hour on a seminar lecture. Breathe deeply a few times and hold the breaths. Then let them go. I don't have much energy right now.

Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī wrote a verse asking Viśākhā-devī to teach him how to sing. Then as Tulasī-mañjarī, she will please Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and Viśākhā will be satisfied with her disciple. Rādhā will give necklaces and medallions as gifts to Tulasī.

How can we go to the spiritual world unless we are expert in devotional service? But we can't just learn the feminine *kiṅkarī* arts and expect that that is the qualification. A pure heart, pure love for the Yugala-kiśora, no more material desires, dedication to the guru, giving up selfishness . . .

In a week this retreat will be up and people will be coming and going at this house. I will hold weekly meetings and Baladeva will go back to North America. I hope no one expects to move in here with us. Tell them I prefer to stay alone and go to the temple. This is my sanctuary. I know others are more hospitable but I am not, even though there is room to fit several *sannyāsīs* here . . .

When Kṛṣṇa plays His flute, Yaśodā-mayī hears, "Give Me some butter!" The *gopas* hear, "Let's go play in the forest." And the *gopīs* hear, "Rādhā, please come out!"

•

11:38 A.M., roof

A student was inquiring on high topics from *Jaiva Dharma.* Mahārāja said that talking about advanced topics is not the same as knowing them. The beginner may use the terminology of *rāgānugā,* but he cannot taste *bhakti-rasa.* That only comes at the stage of *rati.* Talking helps. Then along with *bhajana* and *sevā,* the devotee will gradually begin to taste the meaning of the *rāgānugā* topics.

When *rasa* thoughts come in the right way, it won't be *kalpana* (imagination). Now *bhakti-rasa* is in a seed form in the heart. At this stage, we cannot see the leaves and fruits. When they come, we will recognize them. It may take many lives.

•

I have come up here after the rain. A big black ant is crawling on my skinny forearm. Rain on the surface of the paths. It will dry with a little sunlight. "Many lifetimes . . . " Śrīla Prabhupāda used to say, commenting on the verse *bahunam janmanam:* if the conclusion of many lifetimes of inquiring is to know that Kṛṣṇa is everything—then why wait many lifetimes? Why not finish learn it at once? He quoted Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī: "Finish your business." Don't come back. But as we learn what has to actually take place—we have to develop so much *bhāva* and as yet we don't even have a trace of it—when we see our lack of progress, we wonder how to take those statements, "Go back to Godhead in this life."

At least we are headed in the right direction. No more *gramya-kathā*. Pray for a birth where we can serve the Vaiṣṇavas.

•

When Lord Caitanya traveled in the jungle, He was pleased by the service of Balabhadra. When there were no people to invite them to meals, Balabhadra would cook grains and vegetables, *śak*, roots, and fruits he collected from the forest. "The Lord was always happy to eat these forest vegetables, and He was even happier when He had the opportunity to stay in a solitary place" *(C.c., Madhya* 17.64).

Lord Caitanya explained to Balabhadra that originally, He had wanted to go to Vṛndāvana with the devotees from Bengal, but when He left Bengal, millions of people gathered and began to follow Him. Sanātana hinted to Lord Caitanya that it was better to go to Vṛndāvana in a humble way, with only a few persons. Lord Caitanya said, "through the mouth of Sanātana, Kṛṣṇa taught me a lesson." Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu then thanked Balabhadra for his affectionate care in assisting Him through the forest. Balabhadra replied, "You have made me your carrier Garuḍa, although I am no better than a condemned crow. Thus You are the independent Personality of Godhead" *(C.c., Madhya* 17.79). Balabhadra said that the Lord turns the dumb into eloquent speakers and enables the lame to cross mountains.

As I look into the field, I see three small, gray weasels. They come out of the low bushes, cavort together, and then run back into the undergrowth. These bushes are probably the home for so many forms of life. We can hardly see anything. Being quiet helps you see more in nature, but actually, we need a different process to lift the material coverings and see the real Vṛndāvana. Lord Brahmā got to see it by Kṛṣṇa's grace. The curtain has to be removed.

•

After lunch

Devotees were asking Mahārāja to explain the words of a *rasika* verse. He said Kṛṣṇa is restless. He sees Rādhā, but still His eyes are restless, His hands want to touch Her, His mouth is restless, His heart is restless.

They asked for more and Mahārāja said it cannot be explained. Don't think it is so easy. I shouldn't expose it or explain it, he said, "but I am shameless, so I explain. But it should not be. By explaining, only a very lean and thin taste can come according to your heart."

If a man has greed, Kṛṣṇa will allow him to taste. Every *śloka* will be revealed by the grace of the spiritual master.

•

4:00 P.M., downstairs

I can't speak of restless Kṛṣṇa or of His *kāma* for the *gopīs*. Śrīla Prabhupāda is arranging for me to learn about these things. Śrīla Prabhupāda told us

in 1966 that the *rāsa* dance is not exactly like "your ball dance." He said the young girls all wanted to marry Kṛṣṇa, but that wasn't possible because He was just a sixteen-year-old boy. Still, they maintained that desire and prayed to demigods like Śiva and others to get Kṛṣṇa as their husband. Some of them were already married.

In response to their desires, Kṛṣṇa played His flute in the evening and they all came to Him. He gave them good moral instruction that they should return to their homes and husbands. The system in India is that if a girl spends a night out with a boy, then no one will marry her. But they insisted and Kṛṣṇa had a *rāsa* dance with the *gopīs*. He expanded Himself to be with each *gopī*. Śrīla Prabhupāda explained in December of '66 that this is called the *vaibhāva-vilāsa* expansion.

•

4:25 P.M., roof

We have put a white mosquito net over my desk so the flies won't harass me. I can't see out as well, and people can't see in either. The wind is flapping the net. I hope I don't blow off the roof like a man in a parachute.

Nakedness and faith in outer Vraja. Let's give some spiritual considerations first . . .

"O Vṛndāvana, even though I am very fallen and even though I boldly lie when I say, 'O Vṛndāvana, I am yours,' I beg you: please be merciful and accept me anyway" (*Vm, Śataka* 8.90).

open and honest with one another and religious. We were so busy I found it hard to find the time and privacy to tell my partner that I had changed my mind and didn't want to sell the boys for slaughter.

All right, you are up and writing. You want to talk of Kṛṣṇa and purify yourself. You are in Vṛndāvana and feeling that you cannot worship with love or knowledge, but at least you are aware of it.

•

"O mother, in this forest all the birds have risen onto the beautiful branches of the trees to see Kṛṣṇa. With closed eyes, they are simply listening in silence to the sweet vibrations of His flute, and they are not attracted to any other sound. Surely these birds are on the same level as great sages" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.14).

Mahārāja will have to use his key to open the meanings of these verses. He himself understands the verses by studying the commentaries of Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura. We could do that too if we had a translation of the commentaries. One devotee asked Mahārāja to explain a purport and he replied as if complaining, "You want to hear everything from my mouth. I have to chew everything." The devotee said, "I cannot taste. So I have to ask you to chew it first."

It is like that, too. If we hear the purports from his mouth, then we remember what he says and it gives us faith. We are like that with Śrīla Prabhu-

pāda too. We are faithful to the *līlās* because we remember what he wrote or said about them. If we had read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* even with the translated purports of Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, it would not have transformed us into devotees. We still would have needed the favor of guru. We receive the guru's favor by "submissive aural reception." It's hard to understand, but it's true.

If my own speaking has any potency, it is because I repeat what Śrīla Prabhupāda (and now Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja) says. I say it in faith and someone can hear it with faith. That is *parampará*. I cannot speak it on my own; I have to be linked to the disciplic succession. I stay linked by repeating the words of my spiritual masters. Therefore, although I don't *see* Kṛṣṇa's pastimes or realize them, I pass on the *śraddhā* and the pleasure and conviction that comes when you hear from the pure devotee.

In this verse, the birds are compared to sages. They close their eyes in ecstasy when they hear the flute. The branches of the trees are also transformed in ecstasy. These statements are given in the BBT purport. In *Kṛṣṇa* book, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "From the behavior of these birds, it appeared that they were great scholars in Vedic knowledge and that they took to Kṛṣṇa's transcendental vibration and rejected all branches of Vedic knowledge" (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 1, Chap. 21, p. 150). They rejected other Vedic branches and preferred the branches of an ecstatic tree that was struck with the vibration of Kṛṣṇa's flute.

•

I keep hitting the wall of the inaccessibility of Vraja—and I opt for describing its external features. It is becoming clearer that this is what I am writing about.

The birds hear the flute. Don't ask, "How can there be such birds?" Don't ask, "Why is there anything?" Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that there is a ball dance in this world because it comes from the original *rāsa* dance of Kṛṣṇa. Everything here has its origin in the Supreme. This is stated in the *Vedānta* aphorism, *janmādy asya yataḥ*—everything emanates from the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

That is why there are birds. In this world, the birds are an expression of His artistic nature. Various species exist to fulfill the desires of conditioned souls to have certain types of bodies with a certain set of senses. It is *māyā's* arrangement. It is a punishment or an awarding of karma. We wanted the human form of life, thinking it could satisfy our desires for happiness. But it is defective—*asat, acit, nirānanda.* In human life, we can learn of our big mistake and learn of the terrible system we have bought into. We can desire to get out of the cycle of birth and death. This awakening comes from hearing the spiritual master. One who awakens our devotion to Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the spiritual master.

Vedic science is passed down from guru to disciple. By the same system that teaches us transcendental ABCs ("You are not this body"), we can also learn of Kṛṣṇa's flute and the bliss it gives the birds who hear it in Vraja. And we can learn to under-

stand Kṛṣṇa's flute from the viewpoint of the *gopīs*. The *gopīs* are the last word in spiritual advancement. If we become interested to learn exclusively from them, then we can be completely successful in the human form of life. "Unless one follows in the footsteps of the *gopīs*, he cannot attain the service of the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, the son of Nanda Mahārāja. If one is overcome by knowledge of the Lord's opulence, he cannot attain the Lord's lotus feet, even though he is engaged in devotional service" (*C.c., Madhya* 8.230).

The birds are not symbolic. They are birds. But to understand anything about these *vrajavāsī* birds, we have to hear from the Vedic literature. We can do this not only in sessions where we sit at the guru's lotus feet and hear him speak, but we can read the commentaries and verses of scripture. By hearing from the guru in person, and by serving him, we can hear the *parampara* speak in the books. The books are enhanced by hearing—the books are opened by the explanations of the spiritual master. We should be in the mood of Mahārāja Parīkṣit, who heard his spiritual speak with great urgency. Impending death should make us inquisitive, learned, and faithful.

•

I make a great deal about the fact that I am trying to be honest and that I have to deal with the karma of a *mleccha* upbringing. In writing I try to come clean. I use the writing as a way to rid myself of doubts and to be honest. That means I have to

make painful admissions. Those who want reading to take them above that struggle may find it strange that a so-called spiritual author is still struggling, and they may find it even stranger that he insists on writing down the record of his struggle.

It is a private kind of writing made public. I am committed to including the imperfect self, as he exists today, and the reality he perceives—and his act of correcting faulty perceptions by Vedic knowledge. Can such a faulty writer give us perfection? Yes, or he can point to it. It is the same *parampara* knowledge you get from an author who doesn't include his faulty self (if he has one). But with the writing I do, you get fear of the monkey and the overcoming of that fear—and then the return of that fear, and the toleration of that fear even before it is completely overcome.

But let's talk more about the birds who were hearing Kṛṣṇa's flute. They are sages. They have come to Vṛndāvana to take part in Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Once, a devotee was inquiring about some lesser liberated souls—of course, they are all absolute in Kṛṣṇa's eyes—and asked Mahārāja whether there are dogs in Vraja. A *rasa-śāstra* says Kṛṣṇa has two pet dogs, one tiger-colored and one black as a bee. They even help Kṛṣṇa in meeting with Rādhā. A devotee then asked, "Are there hogs in the spiritual world?" Mahārāja said everything is there, but we should be more interested in hearing about the *gopīs*. Sometimes our interest is merely curiosity or just for acquiring knowledge so that we can answer any question that is thrown at us. "If I can find out

everything about the spiritual world, then I won't be stumped anymore at the end of my *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* lecture."

Our questions should be motivated by something deeper. How can I get rid of false ego? How can I overcome the weakness of the heart which prevents me from surrendering to my guru? How can I develop love so when I hear the verses of the *Veṇu-gīta,* I will feel as the *gopīs* do, or at least feel a fraction of what they feel?

•

5:45 A.M., roof

The neighbor is sitting cross-legged on the highest part of his roof. He is loudly reciting prayers to the gods as he faces the sunrise. There is no sun visible yet, but sunrise is imminent. I am facing the east also.

•

In Vraja, there is no *aiśvarya* as in Dvārakā. Even in Goloka, which is the covering around Vraja, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are worshiped as married, flowers are jewels, Nanda's cowshed is made of emeralds and crystals. But in Vraja, although a *kadamba* flower can produce jewels, it prefers to be a flower and serve Kṛṣṇa in a natural way. In Vraja, the *gopīs* have no concept of Kṛṣṇa as "mine" in the sense that His married wives do. The wives think, "Kṛṣṇa is my husband and this is my palace and these are my sons." The *gopīs* have no such claim over Kṛṣṇa. They are not His wives and He doesn't even let

them pick flowers in "His" forest. So the *gopīs* have nothing for themselves. Everything they do and are is for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa.

Is this my house (my disciple's house)? Is this my book that I am writing? Am I holding my pen in my hand, with my tape recorder on the table and my watch on my wrist as I await my breakfast and my rest and my study time? So much "my" conception. My way of serving Kṛṣṇa. My service to my guru.

My perceptions of Vṛndāvana with my eyes. (My fly-bothered skin.)

"The ground here is only ground. The water is only water. The trees and vines are only trees and vines. The moonlight is only moonlight. The birds, beasts, and humans are only birds, beasts, and humans. The Deity of Kṛṣṇa is only a Deity of Kṛṣṇa, the enemy of the demons. The Deity of Śrī Rādhikā is only a Deity of Śrī Rādhikā. Enough with this nonsense! I pray that I may be able to directly see the reality that everything in Vṛndāvana is spiritual and transcendental" (*Vm, Śataka* 9.75).

•

Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī wants to always think of Rādhikā's feet in Her pastimes with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He wants to live in Vṛndāvana and insists he will do it against all possible objections. He will simply do it, even if it is wrong. He has faith. Yet he feels himself unworthy and so prays to Vṛndāvana to please accept his faulty prayers and service. Some-

times he feels pain and claims he is the most sinful and offensive person. Sometimes his heart sings with joy as he enters the pastimes of Rādhā and Her *sakhīs* who please Lord Kṛṣṇa in the groves of Vṛndāvana. In any case, in any season, he remains firm in faith that residence in Vṛndāvana is a "must."

"Alas! I am very unfortunate. My intelligence has deviated from the path of righteousness. I am a fallen outcaste (*patita-cāṇḍāla*). Nevertheless, because I know the power of the land of Vṛndāvana, I still continue to hope that I shall one day attain my desire" (*Vm, Śataka* 9.96).

Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī may call himself a fallen *cāṇḍāla,* but he is actually always a high-class *brāhmaṇa.* It is we who are *cāṇḍālas,* former meat-eaters, drunkards, sex-mongers, and atheists. We are therefore objects of mercy for those who are saviors of the fallen (*patita-pāvana*). Śrīla Prabhupāda came to us and didn't hesitate to sit with us for *prasādam.* He induced us to bathe daily (at *least* once a day) and give up smoking and drinking. He brought us to Vṛndāvana and Māyāpur. Our prayer is that of a fallen person asking for the mercy of Vṛndāvana-*dhāma.*

•

A man in bright blue pants and shoes is jogging. He is the only one around here who I see out exercising like that. Doesn't he know that jogging is not favorable for *gopī-bhāva?*

Two men on the path are watching me on the roof. I am a bit of a surprise to them. I glance back, waiting for them to move on.

•

So many disjointed phrases and interrupted thoughts and fragments. But I hope it will flow. It is life, jerking along. The day is consumed bit by bit, but before each period passes, I write as honestly as I can.

Four school children with back packs, white shirts, short pants, and knee-length socks pass an elderly gentleman in a white *dhotī*. He carries a silver-headed cane with his right hand and flicks away flies with a cloth. Not many are rushing off to work. Many are retired. Some loiter. A cow and calf saunter along toward a day of searching for grass and other food. "Sītā-Rāma, Sītā-Rāma, Rādhe-Śyāma, Rādhe-Śyāma"—my neighbor is reaching a climax in his prayers. I am running out of time.

•

10:19 A.M.

Baladeva asked me whether I minded if they pulled up the weeds in the yard. There are plenty of *kārelā* plants, but they are being choked by the weeds. He thought it might disturb my mood as I looked into the yard. No, I like a garden.

When will I be able to look into the garden where Rādhā and Her *sakhīs* wait? Who can arrange that for me?

A big question is whether my love for writing is holding me back in spiritual life. I have already explained it. In the liberated form in Vraja, you might be writing, but only if a *sakhī* taught you the art, for pleasing Rādhā. So how to get from here to there? There are things a preacher and *sādhaka* does here which he (she) won't do in the spiritual world—but they are proper for now. Many of the *madhyama-adhikārī's* activities are like that. Śrīla Prabhupāda purchased buildings, induced us to distribute books, managed, but his motivation was the pure motivation of an *uttama-bhakta*. He worked only to please his spiritual master and Kṛṣṇa. For someone like Śrīla Prabhupāda to stop some activities and start others as he goes from this world to Vraja, is simple. But for lesser servants, some of the things we do here are attachments which have to be given up or purified.

I have to admit that it is not always best to violently or artificially deny yourself something you love. I am hoping one day my gurus in their *sādhaka* forms and even in their *sakhī* forms, will teach me and I will eagerly comply (as Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes in his evolution to serving as a *kiṅkarī*.)

For the immediate present, I walk the road I am on, happy at what I can do. "I am fallen, shelterless, bewildered, poor, addicted to wicked deeds, and very far from the lotus feet of Śrī Rādhā. How can I attain the land of Vṛndāvana? I do not know.

"I pray that Śrī Vṛndāvana will accept me even though I am pathetic, wicked-hearted, and ill-behaved" (*Vm, Śataka* 10.15–16).

He condemns himself in such strong words. I tend to think my faults are petty. I don't face the depth of my faults. No one else can tell me; I won't hear it. I want decent self-esteem. Don't tell me I am a louse, lower than a worm in stool. I will accept that I am fallen in my own way, in a literary expression of my own devising. Not from a Godbrother's mouth. I would take personal criticism from a guru only if I was convinced he knew me and understood what I was going through, that he had taken the time to understand—or knew instantly by a divine insight which convinced me. These are my conditions, although a disciple is not supposed to have any conditions on his surrender.

I am saying "I am capable of love and surrender, but I need to be touched. I cannot do it just because it is the authorized way." *Rāgānugā* means spontaneous. But is it wrong to think like this? "Kṛṣṇa and *rasika-guru,* you please be spontaneous and friendly to me in order for me to know this stage where there is only greedy love. How can I know it on my own?"

We are inspired to see a senior devotee working hard at selfless preaching and management of the institution. Now I am asking for another example: an example of a devotee who loves me, of a devotee who loves the holy name and the *līlā* of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Certainly Śrīla Prabhupāda and Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja and the *rasika-ācāryas* can give me this—

by stating it here I am making myself more aware of what I want from them. These statements are tentative, groping . . . I have to talk this way. Not that everything I say is pat and already figured out.

•

11:15 A.M., roof

I have written thousands of pages beginning with *Pilgrimage,* but almost no one can read them. It is too confidential. But I would like to let a few more in on it. Then we can be closer friends. One fear is that when they hear of Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja, they will want to go to Mathurā and hear from him directly. Or they will want to accompany me. I would have to explain to them that he shouldn't be taxed; I only go twice a week. They would also have to accept that Madhu goes with me and not be envious of that. In other words, I would like them to learn Mahārāja's teachings through me, and that is why I am writing. I don't need to rush it; gradually some will become qualified or agreeable to the terms I request. Maybe during this visit, I can let a few more in on it.

They need to have some greed for Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa topics. Rāma-rāya dāsa has already shown that. And they must be safe-keepers of a secret. And balanced, so they don't become *sahajiyās,* etc.

•

Down this path come ordinary, typical people of Vraja. It is nice how religious or *sādhu* garb is so

informal here, not like the Catholic Church uniform for priests. On the other hand, it is a wild mixture of hodge-podge in the name of *sādhus, sanātana-dharma* and Hinduism. Thank God, Śrīla Prabhupāda has made it clear to us.

•

The *gurukula* room and rampart is visible, shiny in sunlight, framed by blooming trees in the Oriental Institute field. Three women are squatting in the low bushes of the field, gathering grass, working harder than many men could.

•

In Lord Caitanya's travels to Vṛndāvana, he met an ecstatic *brāhmaṇa* at Mathurā. Lord Caitanya and the *brāhmaṇa* danced and chanted together in spontaneous bliss. Then Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu inquired from him, "Where did you get this opulence of *prema?*" The *brāhmaṇa* replied that he was a disciple of Śrī Mādhavendra Purī. When He heard this, Lord Caitanya offered obeisances at the *brāhmaṇa's* feet. The *brāhmaṇa* offered obeisances to Lord Caitanya and said that he could tell that Lord Caitanya must also have a relationship with Mādhavendra Purī. "This kind of ecstatic love can be experienced only when one has a relationship with Mādhavendra Purī. Without him, even a scent of such transcendental ecstatic love is impossible" (*C.c., Madhya* 17.173).

There is a sweet application of this today. Certain devotees meet from time to time and share a confidential relationship with a special devotee. After staying in Mathurā and discussing with the *brāhmaṇa,* Lord Caitanya proceeded to visit the twelve forests of Vṛndāvana.

•

Every day around this time, I hear a *kīrtana* leader singing Hare Kṛṣṇa tunes familiar to ISKCON. It is coming from the town of Vṛndāvana. I guess he is leading a group of ISKCON devotees on *nāgarsaṅkīrtana* with a megaphone. Or maybe not. We don't own the *kīrtana* tunes we sing.

•

I am leaning on the crutches of the saints' mercy. Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī is getting me through this writing *yajña* in Vṛndāvana. Without his guidance, how could I keep going forward over such difficult terrain? I can only comprehend a tiny fraction of what he is saying. But he is dealing with a subject that is my own—appreciation for Vṛndāvana even if you are fallen. Many of his verse are for *siddhas,* those who can partake in the unmanifested *līlā* of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa which is going on eternally in Vraja. But he also talks frequently of the liberality of Śrī Vṛndāvana to bless and embrace anyone who takes shelter in this place—even if that person doesn't know how to take shelter and lacks love and purity. Vṛndāvana is magnanimous. All I can finally say is,

"At least I am here in body and I like it and want it to like me." To this much Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī says, "Fine! *Sādhu! Sādhu!* . . . Welcome to Vṛndāvana. But why do you want to leave?"

When he goes over my head, that is also good, holding up the hope—indicating the reality that some rare souls know Kṛṣṇa every moment. "When walking, talking, standing, sleeping, or breathing in Vṛndāvana forest, will I directly see the fair and dark splendrous couple trembling with transcendental amorous passion?" (*Vm, Śataka* 10.19).

He prays that the Yugala-kiśora may appear before him in the forest of Vṛndāvana. I don't even dare pray for that—but I am glad he does. I pray to be able to appreciate his prayers and to listen to them and to become addicted to them.

"When will I become completely charmed by Śrī Rādhā's transcendental form and qualities? When will the graceful dancer of devotional service to Śrī Rādhā's lotus feet enter my heart?" (*Vm, Śataka* 10.36).

When the conjugal verses are too rich for my dull, jaundiced mind, then I console myself with Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī's constant advice to "Stay in Vṛndāvana." Don't go elsewhere even in your mind. Stay here, even if your level of appreciation is extremely neophyte.

"I am filled with great faults. I do not possess even the slightest trace of virtue. Alas! It is not proper for the merciful devotees to even glance upon me. Again and again, I have committed inexcus-

able offenses to you. Still, O Vṛndāvana, you are like my mother and I am like your son. Please do not abandon me.

" . . . Even when dreaming, I never worship the feet of Lord Hari or His devotees . . . I have no shelter. O Vṛndāvana, you are very glorious because you are so tolerant, affectionate, and virtuous. Please protect me" (*Vm, Śataka* 10.96–97).

•

You are not on your own. You are protected. But you want to admit your individuality and even celebrate it. Become qualified to serve Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. May They recognize you one day, maybe in many future lives. Then you will forget this mundane personality of yours. You will forget all the pain and illusion. Your sins will be eradicated and you won't be tempted to commit them. You will spit at the thought of sex enjoyment and then you won't even think of it at all.

I hope we are fortunate enough to see Mahārāja tomorrow. As soon as we get to the Keśavajī Māṭha, we will know by glancing whether his shoes are there or not. If his shoes are there, then we at least know we haven't missed him and there is a good chance we will be able to see him. Even if by chance we cannot see him, I will be able to leave the little essay he asked me to write—a summation of his explanation on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.21.7.

•

3:30 P.M.

" . . . hearing is more important than directly studying or perceiving. . . . This process is called *śrauta-paṇṭhā,* or the acquirement of knowledge by hearing from authorities. . . . It is not necessary for one to be a highly polished literary man to receive knowledge; to receive perfect knowledge from a perfect person, one must be expert in hearing" (*C.c., Ādi* 16.52, purport).

Staring at the wall outside the barred window. Seeing over the wall to a tree and another brick wall. This is called hitting up against a brick wall. Another brick wall is the conception of lust between man and woman. It looms up when I come too close to the *kuñja-līlā* of Rādhā and Her lover. I am not a *mañjarī* who can see everything and maintain a pure service mood. I am knocked away and told to go on practicing until I can come up to the standard of pure hearing without material conceptions.

Thrown outside the range of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa-*līlā,* I sit on the road and notice donkeys passing and the color of the sky and clouds. I am reminded of Kṛṣṇa again, so I start again in the direction from which I was just rejected. I sing a song from far away. The birds and animals of Vṛndāvana attract my senses and they seem to speak about that from which I am barred. My mind is so bad that I cannot focus on the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. The black and white gulls set up a cry and circle overhead as if mirroring my distress.

I do not want to be self-centered in Vṛndāvana, so I turn to Kṛṣṇa the cowherd boy, and I pray to Vṛndāvana to absorb all my badness and make me into a servant who can hear pure topics.

•

4:10 P.M., roof

Cows nearby. They haven't eaten grass in this exact spot. They pick out what they can among the low bushes. The heron is with them. Cows are part of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. He tends them and sometimes lets them go on their own. He sometimes leaves them in the care of the boys while He goes to Rādhā-kuṇḍa.

•

A devotee asked Mahārāja how we can think of Vraja-*līlā* with an inner mood when we are "running around."

He said, "No, it will not be. Calm and quiet. The mind very peaceful."

"But what can we do when we have so many duties here and there?"

He said, "Gradually, not all at once. Otherwise, all will be upset."

We have to learn how to cheat, as the *gopīs* cheated their husbands. That is, practice and maintain a *bhāva* for *rāgānugā* prayers, but don't let others know you are doing it. One has to hide the heart from those who have no greed.

We have many books, but reading them is not enough. Yet—can we pray at all? Can we think

within? Can we even practice what great souls do spontaneously?

At least we can practice *vairāgya.* And give up the parts of *vaidhī-bhakti* that are not favorable. But go slowly or you will fall into the trap of *kāma.* If you speak at all of these things, do it carefully. Keep your *bhāva* a secret. No one should be able to smell it on your person.

•

That goes for me too in my "closet" writings. Write in a code so no one knows? Hide the books away? If the topic comes up, avoid it? Then how to live? "Learn how to cheat."

But I have no *bhāva* to begin with. There is no practice I can turn to. Anyway, tonight we will read again, the "Lament in the Form of a Handful of Flowers." That will teach us how to pray if we can do it nicely.

•

A larger herd of bony-ribbed white cows on a back road—they keep such a slow pace without the lumbering side-sway of fat Western cows. Walking in a file straight ahead, intelligently. They do not have the frightened, outraged look of beef cows. But they are wilder, too serious for playful jokes and petting as they move along in the heat. They are ascetics.

"When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu passed through Vṛndāvana, herds of grazing cows saw Him pass, and immediately surrounding Him, began to moo very loudly.

"Seeing the herds approach Him, the Lord was stunned with waves of ecstatic love (*premera taraṅge*). The cows then began to lick His body in great affection.

"Becoming pacified, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu began to caress the cows, and the cows, being unable to give up His company, went with Him" (*C.c., Madhya* 17.194–96).

The cows recognized their old friend, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the cowherd boy who called them by name. They would not give milk in the morning until He came into the *gośala.* They surrounded Him as they entered the forest in the morning, and they come back with Him in the evening, raising clouds of dust which settled on Śrī Kṛṣṇa's body as He walked and played His flute.

These things are not symbolic—cows and flutes and cowherd boys and forests. It is real. Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā as the center of Vṛndāvana, the forest and Yamunā and Govardhana Hill, Rādhā-kuṇḍa and the surrounding *kuñjas* of the *sakhīs,* the times throughout the day when Kṛṣṇa performs His *līlā,* His pure devotees in this world who meditate throughout the day on what Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are doing just now . . .

•

"O mother Vṛndāvana, O mother overflowing with love, please place on your lap this mischievous child who has been playing in the dirt, mercifully forgive His offenses, wipe the dust from him, feed him the breast milk of transcendental love for

your Master and Mistress, and give him all protection" (*Vm, Śataka* 11.1).

Bow down—I am confined and don't know how to pray or whom to pray to. Is God my father or is He Rādhā's lover? Will He accept my "ritual" for offering *prasādam?* I no longer crave ritual per se, but I am still unable to pray from the heart. I want to do things in a *rasika* way, but don't know how yet. So even in a simple thing like offering my food to Śrīla Prabhupāda for him to offer in *parampará* to Kṛṣṇa, my emotions are unclear. Who will serve Rādhā Kṛṣṇa's remnants? Do I have any connection with that?

In *rāgānugā,* even practice requires the expertise and knowledge and greed. If there is no greed, not even shadow greed, then there is only *bhakti* by rules. Where are you? Are you willing to shake up the orderly sense of prayer and ritual which you have been following? Be careful. Inquire and get guidance how to continue your *vaidhī-bhakti* yet make it more favorable for going to the next stage. Nothing has to be abandoned, especially in your *śravaṇaṁ-kīrtanam.* Offer your food as you always have, but pray to your spiritual master to teach you more. And consult with Godbrothers who know. Everything cannot be turned into *mādhurya* immediately. It takes time.

"O Goddess Kātyāyanī, please allow us to attain Kṛṣṇa, the son of Mahārāja Nanda as our husband. That is our desire."

By offering you foodstuffs, Śrīla Prabhupāda, I ask you to offer it in *parampará* to Kṛṣṇa. He will accept

the *bhakti*, and then when we eat, it will be divine remnants. I don't know how these things happen, but I have faith. Please guide this ignorant fool. I need to know a simple *bhāva* for offering. I want to be freed from the ritual of just saying a prayer and then eating out of sense gratification. I want to give Kṛṣṇa His food and then honor His remnants, but all I can do is say, "Please, Śrīla Prabhupāda, take my prayer and do the needful. I don't know *tattva* or *rasa*, I don't feel *rati* or *ruci*, so I bow my head before you, O master who preaches all over the universe, O Gurudeva who is dear to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the pastimes of Vṛndāvana. Please connect your fallen servant to your lotus feet."

•

6:32 P.M.

I've decided to share *Pilgrimage* with three more disciples who are here in Vṛndāvana. One thing I read today encouraged me in this direction. "A student and disciple has the right to ask the guru about any confidential service, and it is the duty of the guru to explain these confidential matters to his disciple." (*Bhāg.* 10.12.43)

I'll make several conditions: (1) They should not go directly to see Mahārāja; (2) they should not expect to accompany me when I go to see him; (3) they should not be envious of Madhu for going with me; and (4) they should keep it confidential. In other words, I want to give them this special gift, but on the condition that they receive Mahārāja's

instructions through me. It's nice for me to be able to give more in this way.

I'm shy to write anything about disciples. The words "my disciples" seem almost offensive. That's because no one should think himself a guru. He should see himself as a servant of the disciples. Therefore, to talk of "my disciples" sounds puffed-up. I care for them, minister to them, *serve* them, and that is one of my main services to Śrīla Prabhupāda. As for a more congenial word to describe them, I sometimes say "those devotees whom I am serving as guide." But that's too long. Even with awkward phraseology, I will try talking of this area of my life—even "my life" seems impertinent for some reason. I should say "my life dedicated to Prabhupāda."

Madhu and I started reading *Vilāpa-kusumāñjali* tonight. The commentary says every verse was composed of Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's tears. I confessed to Madhu how I can't observe Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's conjugal pastimes in the mood of a *mañjarī*. Madhu then gave a nice expression of it. He said the *mañjarī* is pleased to see Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa embracing after overcoming so many difficulties in Their meeting. The crux of being a maidservant is to have your happiness in someone else's happiness. Madhu said he sees this in Baladeva, who finds his happiness in the happiness of his spiritual master. So this is groundwork for what we'll need to enter *mañjarī bhāva*.

Vilāpa-kusumāñjali will help us. We're not going to imagine our own *mañjarī*-role, but come closer to

Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī (Rati-mañjarī). He has so generously told us his heart and thus "preached" *mañjarī-bhāva*. Caitanya Mahāprabhu also preached it in a confidential way, as the ultimate goal for *jīvas*. No other *sampradāya* teaches this goal; it is Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's special mercy. (I was attracted by the statement that Rūpa and Raghunātha Gosvāmīs wrote their deepest books at the end of their manifest existence, putting into them all that they wanted to say. It gave me hope for the future. The struggle I am now describing doesn't have to be the last word. I can't expect to go *so* far, but something.)

The electricity is back on for the time being. I heard a loudspeaker with loud feedback. I thought, "I'll write about this." It has its place in my writing along with the *gopīs' bhāva*. I want to keep close to the simple events as they occur in our life at the Sant Colony. Faithfulness to this story seems to me to be a kind of humility. I think it is conducive to pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I can't always see the connection to these daily events and the scriptural truths, but I trust it is there. Live as best you can and report some of it, including the failures and successes—whatever happens. Baladeva says I'll have to come to Vṛndāvana more often. This third week of a writing retreat comes to an end

Chapter Four (August 30–September 5)

August 30, 1992, 1:00 A.M.

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is such a nice thing that even when material troubles come, you can turn to Kṛṣṇa for solace. No one should be deprived of it. But out of our minute free will, we may deny our own Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We are all under the grips of the powerful material nature. No one is excused, just as a small child is not excused if he touches fire. Human life is for getting out of the grips of that powerful, punishing material nature.

Kṛṣṇa is our friend, and He desires that we come back to Him eternally in bliss and knowledge. This is the outline of our delusion as well as the rescue offered by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. His help comes through His authorized agents, His pure devotees. I am taking shelter of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, who is very dear to Kṛṣṇa on this earth. But how far will I be able to give up my material connections and desires in this one lifetime, and how completely will I be able to develop my dormant love of God? If I don't complete this mission in one life, I'll have to come back and be born again, with great risk, to complete my work in future lives. In any case, I am assured I won't fall back into less than human species, and won't lose whatever Kṛṣṇa consciousness I have gained.

Real liberation is to realize these facts and to attain the loving service attitude toward Kṛṣṇa and His devotees. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura prays, *tādera caraṇa-sebi-bhakta-sane bās, janame janame hoy ei abhilāṣ,* let me be born life after life to lovingly serve the Vaiṣṇavas. Śrīla Prabhupāda teaches that the life of *bhakti* requires compassion to others—by preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the fallen souls. This preaching work will gain us favor with the Lord, who will grant us His association.

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Now learning more what it actually means to love Kṛṣṇa. It is done in one of five *rasas* or mellows. The topmost is to approach Kṛṣṇa as the lover of Rādhārāṇī. Within that *mādhurya-rasa,* the sweetest service is to be the maidservant of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī (never to act as Her rival.)

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Today I plan to go to Mathurā. I also want to give two devotees copies of *Pilgrimage.* And I want to write Kṛṣṇa conscious *siddhānta,* with the influence of living in the *dhāma* .

Although Mahārāja says the translations we use of *rasika* poetry have very little *bhāva* in them, I will look at another verse of *Veṇu-gīta,* praying that some of his devotional ghee will rub off on me.

"When the rivers hear the flute-song of Kṛṣṇa, their minds begin to desire Him, and thus the flow

of their currents is broken and their waters are agitated, moving around in whirlpools. Then with the arms of their waves, the rivers embrace Murāri's lotus feet and, holding on to them, present offerings of lotus flowers" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.15).

This is poetry. It's a beautiful way of saying that Kṛṣṇa's flute-song attracts not only the *gopīs* and cowherd boys and animals of Vraja, but the rivers. We usually think of a river as a non-living entity, a mass of water acting under physical laws. But there is life everywhere (*sarva-gataḥ*) even in the material world. In the spiritual world the river is a liberated person serving in the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa to enhance His pleasure. Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* play in the Yamunā after the *rāsa* dance and she relieves Their fatigue. They have water fights in her waters and enjoy the cool breeze on her banks. Yamunā-devī is an intimate participant in *kṛṣṇa-līlā*. It is not surprising, therefore, that her waters become ecstatic upon hearing the song of Kṛṣṇa's flute.

If even the rivers feel and show conjugal attraction to Kṛṣṇa, then why should the *gopīs* be criticized for their intense desire to serve Him in this way? This is why the *gopīs* praise the rivers for embracing Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet and offering Him flowers. They are glad for their sister, the river Yamunā. The *gopīs* know Lord Hari is hankering to play with them, therefore they want to go to Him so He can be happy. Anyone who criticizes the *gopīs*, or wants to reprimand them and hold them back, is interfering in the Lord's pastimes. Ultimately, nothing

can stop the powerful flow of the river of *gopīs* to the ocean of Murāri.

"Dear Lord, please break my attachment to my kinsmen and other attachments, and let my love for You flow like the Ganges flowing to the sea."

May You please allow us to hear Your flute, or to see a particle of Your attractive pastimes? Please allow a drop of the nectar of Your holy names, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, to fall into our ears and relieve our desert-like hearts.

O Lord, You may be thinking, "I can easily award you this love, but it may be difficult for you. Are you prepared for the waves of anxiety this love produces? You say you like to read the poetry of Raghunātha Gosvāmī, but are you prepared to grieve like him when for even a moment your vision of My pastimes is obstructed? You see, if love for Me develops, it will wreak havoc on the life of routine and complacent religious duty. I am not certain you are ready for this."

If You think like that, Lord, that I am not ready and that I may never be ready, what can I say? I wasn't ready or eager for devotional service when You sent His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Śrīla Prabhupāda to rescue me and others in New York City. Still, he came, as You desired. I wasn't qualified then, but You enabled me to break the tight bonds that were holding me—addiction to intoxicants and illicit sex. You placed me firmly in the service of Śrīla Prabhupāda where I will always remain. If You could do that, why not allow me the further leap into spontaneous love? By serving in

Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement, I was able to please You. So if I can taste the nectar of Your service in Vraja, that will also be pleasing to You.

I want to taste the nectar so I can become like a maddened bee and remain always in the lotus of Your confidential pastimes. O Lord, I do not know anything, but the spiritual masters who guide me are enticing me toward the goal. I am not happy to be chanting and hearing without feeling the ecstasy of attraction for You. I am ashamed that this is my condition. I beg You to please relieve me of that shame.

Dear Lord, if there are obstacles to be removed before You will grant me this request, then I further request that You show me those obstacles and teach me to surmount them. Give me the courage and intelligence to overcome a weak heart.

If You think I require more time to ripen before You will find me an enjoyable and attractive servant in Your pastimes, then I only ask to be allowed to associate in this world with devotees who have a deep affection for Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. Please allow me to serve those devotees life after life and to learn from them how to return to Her lotus feet.

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The rivers in Vraja flow to Kṛṣṇa in response to His flute-song. The *gopīs* see this wonderful phenomenon and they understand its meaning. The *gopīs* are the topmost *rasika* devotees; everywhere they look, they see *rasa*. They want to run to Kṛṣṇa with

the same force as the Yamunā. In fact their force is even greater. Seeing the swirling Yamunā placing lotus flowers at Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet increases their own *bhāva*. The whirlpools and waves of the river mirror their own desires and agitation. They want to run to Him and be embraced by Him.

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Time to chant. Please help me, Lord Nityānanda. Please allow me to chant without offenses.

•

6:00 A.M.

I want to be true to my experience and therefore I complain: too many flies, loud neighbors, a dry mind that can't taste nectar. Is that my experience? Who will want to hear that? I myself don't like it, slapping at my face, hearing a female pop singer broadcast through the neighborhood. I say I like beautiful skies and painted clouds at sunrise . . .

But there's a deeper experience. You mean Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana? Yes, and the way to find Them. The tolerant acceptance of my experience, without complaint (or even if I complain, but at least accept everything) . . . Does it mean I have to accept my poor *japa?* All I can do is pray—pray for improvement, pray to find the essence, pray and pray.

Here comes the sun: all glories to the brilliant sun! The sun gets its effulgence from the original energy, Rādhikā. The word AUM mean Kṛṣṇa, Rā-

dhā, and the *jīva*. Everything emanates from Them. So chant to Sūrya if you like, but know where he gets his energy.

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"Displaying all His wonderful and limitless potencies, within your boundaries Lord Kṛṣṇa enjoyed transcendental pastimes with Śrī Rādhikā. O Vṛndāvana, why do you neglect me?

O Vṛndāvana, if I am not able to attain the nectar in you, whose glories have no limit, and who are flooded with splendid transcendental nectar, then I should spend millions of lifetimes performing austerities to attain it" (*Vm, Śataka* 11.8–9).

As a vacationer I recite these verses of ultimate commitment to Vṛndāvana-*dhāma*. I may imply that I think as Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī does, but it's not true. I can't make a lover's complaint to Vṛndāvana-*dhāma*, "Why do you neglect me?" My relationship isn't deep enough for that. But I would like to be able to attain it. I cannot say I'm prepared to spend millions of lifetimes of austerities to attain residence in Vṛndāvana and the service of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and yet . . . I voice my ineligibility and a hope that I can one day reside here.

"Be silent. Do nothing. Remain under a tree in Vṛndāvana forest. Shedding tears, your cheeks resting in your hands and the hairs of your body erect with ecstatic love, gaze in trance on the beautiful transcendental pastimes of Śrī Rādhikā" (*Vm, Śataka* 11.15).

That is the ultimate in *bhajana*. The outside world sees a rejected person, sitting and doing nothing. As we hear it, we admonish ourselves, "Don't imitate!" Yet here it is—the purpose and standard of residence in Vraja.

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The flies have gotten under the net, but maybe there are less than if I had no net. The sun is doing its business. Cleared of the horizon's hold, it burns relentlessly in a pale blue sky.

The path toward the ISKCON *gurukula* is empty now. It's also the symbol of a path. I see it as my path. We will meet so many people along the way, have so many incomplete exchanges, and feel that another chance human relationship remains incomplete. In the end, we will be left only with the path, and sometimes we will walk it alone, sometimes with friends, and sometimes with a crowd.

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Toady Baladeva will go on *parikrama* from 6 A.M. to 6 P.M. with Mahānidhi Swami and a few *brahmacārīs*. Baladeva cooked potatoes and *bindi* early this morning so they will have something to eat as they go from Govardhana to Nandagrām to Varṣāṇa. We had no electricity, so he stirred his wok full of *bindi* by candlelight, holding a small flashlight in his mouth to light up the wok. I talked with him about my indigestion and my decision to give Ananta dāsa *Pilgrimage*.

Now it's 6:30 A.M. In two hours or so, Madhu and I will start out on our own pilgrimage, praying for a meeting in Mathurā.

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Vṛndāvana-*dhāma* actively participates in *kṛṣṇa-līlā* and Kṛṣṇa thanks her for it. Vṛndāvana deepens the bond of love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The forest supplies flowers which Kṛṣṇa picks and offers to Rādhā as a garland. When She kisses Kṛṣṇa for this gift, He declares that He has become the submissive servant of Vṛndāvana, who gave Him flowers for His Queen.

Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī prays, "I am very foolish and unintelligent. I know only what one should never know. You are all very learned and intelligent. I simply pray that my body may become decorated with the dust of Śrī Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 11.37).

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There's a new ink stain on my sleeve—"Wear it proudly."

Vṛndāvana, this is my last week of full-time writing. I bow to you again and again. Thank you for letting me write here. If I have offended you, I am sorry. I want to roll in your dust and submit my so-called cleverness to your infinitely greater wisdom and nectar and mystery. I sing of that which is unattainable to me. Me and the raven, me and the sparrow, me and the frog. Even the flies in this precinct are trying to tell me something—all my

fun is spoiled by having a body of flesh and blood. I'm not this body. I'm a servant of God. My master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, said I could come here.

•

9:30 A.M.

We're in the temple room of the Keśavajī Gaudiya Math waiting to see Mahārāja. Our *rickshaw* driver and his friend are also here, taking *darśana* of the Deities and cooling off from the madness of the streets. We came early, out of anxiety, and have to wait. Navīna has seen us, but is in no hurry to acknowledge us. After five more minutes, we will sit on the wall outside Mahārāja's room, dropping a broader hint that we expect to see him.

I'm a little dazed, sweaty, not sure what to ask. I've got my writing homework all typed out for him. And I can ask him to speak on another verse. We let three days pass since we were last here.

Rādhā wears a pleated red dress, Kṛṣṇa a pale peach cloth with silver trim. I took time to read the *Veṇu-gīta* verses. I'm reporting it in my notepad. Life is fearful and therefore I write. Life is varied and interesting and therefore I write. I write so it won't get lost and forgotten. The meetings with Mahārāja have especially lasting value. (To understand Brother Lawrence of "The Presence of God" or St. Seraphim of Russia, all we have is what was written down by guests and visitors.)

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10:08 A.M. in rickshaw

Navīna said Mahārāja is ill. "The cardiologist said when he feels tired, he should rest all day. So please come back tomorrow." That was all. I gave Navīna my essay.

In the rickshaw I said, "I'll have to think whether I'll actually come tomorrow. I get tired coming to Mathurā. I write better on a day when we don't go to Mathurā."

Madhu said, "Look at it this way—if you don't see Mahārāja, what will you write?"

•

11:25 A.M.

When Madhu made that remark, it jolted me. I thought to answer, "If I don't see Mahārāja, what will I write? Well, there's plenty. I can write what Prabhupāda taught. I can write the things I see . . . the donkeys . . . "

It made me feel the poverty of my position. Unless I get new nectar from a visit to Mathurā, or a new tape (and I have heard all the tapes I have), what will I have to say?

My life is valuable according to what I do with it. Same with writing. My value has increased by coming in contact with Mahārāja. By the process of hearing and repeating, my writing is becoming *rasika*. But I need to keep hearing.

Realizing my need, we will try to see Mahārāja again tomorrow. Even to get into the rickshaw and make the attempt is meaningful. Kṛṣṇa sees we are willing to undergo trouble to reach *rāgānugā-bhakti*.

It must be the season—yellow, silky, trumpet-shaped flowers here and there on the road. They are so pretty. At first I thought someone must have dropped them by accident. But then I saw a few on that dirty street you pass through in town . . . pick them up and use them for worship? But they have already fallen and closed their blooms.

I get a headache just from the sheer quantity of shops and people—so many children, so many men sitting and talking on the benches, drab shop owners waiting for customers. The heat, the number of bumps in the road—it's always a heavy trip.

•

12:45 P.M.

Not everything I write is good. Oh, I expect people to read so much. If I don't go to see Mahārāja twice a week, I'll have nothing to say. No, don't think like that. Even if you never go to see him again, you could go on. You could go on remembering what you have already heard—Mahārāja has given you the outline by which you can pursue the path into *rāgānugā.*

If you couldn't see Mahārāja again, you would *have* to go on like that. It would be unfortunate; you wouldn't advance as quickly, but Kṛṣṇa would make some arrangement for you. He can reveal *rāgānugā* in your heart. He can cause attraction to Raghunātha Gosvāmī. So have that confidence that a sincere heart must go on.

I will see Mahārāja again. And I will see Śrīla Prabhupāda again. Will I also see Lord Kṛṣṇa and

Rādhā and their friends in Vṛndāvana? *Not* being able to see Them increases my appetite.

And the poverty?—"Unless you see him, what will you write?" I say I see through the eyes of the gurus—I'm not without them, even if one or two days go by before we return to Mathurā. Even if we go to Mathurā and are turned away.

I have a headache. Navadvīpa dāsa was just in here talking despite my pains. It made me think of our own visit to Mathurā to see Mahārāja, even though he was sick. This day shows me that I'm not in control. Prabhupāda, thank you for everything—for writing your books, for creating the fortune of many nice devotees, for all the places you have given us to worship. Thank you for showing us that the whole world is a preaching field for those who are compassionate. Please bring me to your lotus feet. If I can't see you, I can't write. Therefore I must see you with eyes of devotion.

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3:00 P.M.

Madhu says I gave *Pilgrimage* to Ananta just at the right time. Ananta spoke to Madhu. Ananta asked, "If he [I] says he doesn't have a taste, then how am I supposed to get a taste? Should I look somewhere else?" Ananta wouldn't ask me that question. It's not considered polite. But Madhu told him to go ahead and write his doubts to me, even if some of them are answered by *Pilgrimage*.

Madhu said to me, "That's what you get for writing honestly."

Could I bluff them and keep them distant? A spiritual master who writes of donkeys from a roof and says, "I have no taste."

I could be defensive and say, "What do you mean by taste? What taste are you looking for? (Lemon? Strawberry? Banana?) Why do you think I have no taste? What did I write, where? Why did you take it in that way?"

It's a challenge. "Actually, I have a taste just like Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura. Any great devotee says, 'I have no taste of love of God.' It's a kind of ecstasy. So you shouldn't have doubted. Or at least you should have felt confident to ask me first so that I could explain it."

Or I could stick to realism. "No taste means no taste. If you don't like it, too bad. But go elsewhere at your own risk."

And I take the risk when I tell my truth. You see, Lord, I told You . . . if You don't give me a little taste of the nectar, they're going to doubt me and then they'll be in trouble. I don't think You want that.

Maybe Kṛṣṇa feels I should be exposed. If this guy wants to talk whatever comes to his mind and he tells the world he's got jaundice and hepatitis and inattention in *japa* and lusty dreams, then why shouldn't they doubt him?

Is it better to be quiet? Or better to cut a profile as a competent devotee with no problems, ever?

Let them ask me what I mean when I say I can't see Rādhā-Śyāma on the horizon. But I don't want to write with someone looking over my shoulder. Let attention be focused on your truth and striving

and begging and receiving what comes in Vṛndāvana.

•

3:40 P.M., roof

When Lord Caitanya chanted in Vṛndāvana, the does and bucks came and licked His body and accompanied Him on the path. Peacocks began to dance in front of Him. The trees and creepers became jubilant and "fell down at the lotus feet of the Lord and greeted Him with various presentations as if they were friends" (*C.c., Madhya* 17.201).

Lord Caitanya responded to the love of His friends. He began to embrace each tree and creeper as they offered their fruits and flowers as if in meditation. Lord Caitanya said loudly, "Chant Kṛṣṇa!" and all moving and nonmoving creatures began to vibrate Hare Kṛṣṇa, as if they were echoing the deep sound of Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Then a male and female parrot flew onto His hand and began to chant the glories of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī says Ananta-śeṣa couldn't describe all that Lord Caitanya did in one day in Vṛndāvana, even if Ananta chanted it for thousands of years with his thousands of mouths.

By comparison, what can I expect to say in one day? There is no comparison. You can't compare a drop of water with the fathomless ocean. If I claim to be even a drop, then I place myself on the level of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī. So there is no comparison.

But the fluffy bold birds are flying in a flurry above the beams. And when the *vrajavāsī* cows start moving in the fields, I become excited and want to

stop whatever I am doing and point them out: "Look! It's just like what we hear in Kṛṣṇa's pastimes!"

•

Have faith in the narration of Lord Caitanya in Vṛndāvana. He is Kṛṣṇa returning to Vṛndāvana. The question arises in my mind: "How were those *jīvas* different than the *jīvas* we see in Vṛndāvana today in the forms of cows and trees? If Kṛṣṇa or Kṛṣṇa Caitanya came here today, would they recognize Him?" Don't ask, just hear. Vṛndāvana even recognizes *me*, what to speak of Lord Caitanya. "Even though the entire world considers me a madman possessed by a ghost, and even though I am like a worm or an insect within her boundaries, the forest of Vṛndāvana still accepts me" (*Vm*, *Śataka* 11.39).

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It's blazing sunlight. The roof is hot to the touch of my bare feet. The birds and squirrels don't even seem to know I'm up here, as they sing and peck around me in my net-tent. A batch of goats walk ahead of their herder in the field. The donkeys bray occasionally. The bull with loose folds of skin under his chin and a big hump on his back walks forward like a supreme court justice, followed by his white cows and an attending heron. The cows nod their heads as they walk. Is the path a footpath for people or cows? "Sītā-Rāma! Sītā-Rāma!" The amplified singer is emoting with devotion, a

strange mood it seems to me, in Vraja's forest. I've got my stick propped against the desk, just in case a monkey comes. Dome-tops of temples among the treetops.

Small boys can take care of many cows and bring them home. When a large white male donkey hee-haws and tries attacking a young female, the little boy gently intervenes and chases the big one away. The little ones graze quietly under a tree and the big one forgets his agitation and wanders off.

A woman passing by with a bundle balanced on her head. She can carry it and still walk with a graceful dance step. Śrīla Prabhupāda compared this to a *sādhaka's* ability to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa with attention even while engaged in other tasks in the world. It can be done, some seem born with the skill and others . . . even when they stop all else, still can't stop to hear the holy name.

•

"Filled with wonderful bliss by seeing the transcendental pastimes of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, the forest of Vṛndāvana has now decked itself in beautiful blue and yellow garments of *indīvara* and *campaka* flowers and a garland of excited bumblebees" (*Vm, Śataka* 11.51).

Is this Vṛndāvana that we see? Is it the unmanifested Vraja? What is the relation between the two? Have we not already discussed this? Have you forgotten? Can you understand even if I give you the answer? Is the answer "both"? "Yes"? "No"?

This Vṛndāvana is not that Vṛndāvana, and yet it *is* for one who has eyes (meaning one whose mind is not in America, but at the lotus feet of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa). This Vṛndāvana is "Vṛndāvana." Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī says, "Śrī Vṛndāvana is everything I have searched for in this world."

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Tomorrow we will definitely go back to Mathurā. The towers of the Keśavajī temple are clean and freshly painted, situated right in the midst of Mathurā madness. The front entrance is crowded with carts selling juice and fruits, travel bags marked "Bush. USA of class" and portraits of Indira Gandhi. A Muslim squats in front of the big engine he's repairing next to a *jalebi* shop doing brisk business. Then we see four little girls crossing a black puddle of sewage and a camel with all four legs soaked in the black filth. Then a boy leading a goat and a crowd gathered to witness some event or other . . . We always escape into the temple as quickly as we can.

•

5:25 P.M. Hallway chair

Pleasant rain. Monsoon season is almost over. The lightning in the monsoon cloud is sometimes compared to Rādhā on the chest of Śyāma. But when Tulasī-mañjarī saw Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa embrace, she spat on this metaphor as inadequate.

I used to think the open hallway was my place, but now I realize it belongs to the frogs of assorted sizes and colors who find their way in here.

Across the road from us, three men stand in the doorway of the old brick building, looking at the rain as I am doing. It's gentle, filled with relief from the day's heat.

"Sītā-Rāma! Sītā-Rāma!" That *āśrama* must have electricity, although we have been without it all day. Baladeva should be returning soon from his all-day *parikrama.*

The body seeks relief. The flowers and plants seek relief. The rain symbolizes the tangible relief. For so long we have sweltered and dried up and could not escape the burning sun. Now a gentle rain at end of day. This may be a metaphor of what it will be like when the rain of blissful, tearful chanting of Harer Nāma finally descends on the harried practitioner.

Concentric circles in the puddle. I would like to see the rain stay for awhile, all night if it likes. It is so cleansing and relaxing, being soaked up by the earth. But it is already slowing. Passersby walk slowly past. No one runs to get out of this rain. It's an *abhiśekha*—and now it's over. The birds sound grateful.

•

6:50 P.M.

It's raining again, heavily, deliciously, with thunder. The Rādhā lightning strike shines in the Śyāma-blue clouds.

I am chanting extra *japa* in the front hallway. Nothing else needs to be said tonight. I am still

glowing after reading *Vilāpa-kusumāñjali,* the first two verses. It became too dark to read. Rati-mañjarī opens with prayers to her *mañjarī-guru,* Rūpa-mañjarī, in a joking, intimate mood. Those pastimes stay in my mind.

No one else ever taught me such things as this in any birth on any planet. I treasure them and want to protect them. They are gifts from my spiritual master.

The waterfalls coming down from the roof, step by step down the stairway, running into the hall, mixing with rain blowing in from the door. Thunder rumbles and someone sings a *bhajana.*

•

August 31, 12:55 A.M.

I peeked at some letters that arrived separately yesterday. Should they get married even though there is a twenty-year age difference? I hesitate to give my opinion. You take a factor like age difference and use it to argue for your less objective inclinations—"I don't want him to marry you because . . . " And this is what I think of no matter how early I rise. And before that, I dreamt of an imaginary devotee couple who were preaching about starting a farm in New England.

Now I've sprayed my face with water and I want to talk of Kṛṣṇa apart from all this. It's not wrong if in Vṛndāvana we leave *varṇāśrama* and marriage behind. Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī says we should leave them behind altogether. Prahlāda Mahārāja

says leaving household life is "the best thing" he learned in school (he learned it from Nārada). For a *sannyāsī* it's a "must."

•

"In the company of Balarāma and the cowherd boys, Lord Kṛṣṇa is continually vibrating His flute as He herds all the animals of Vraja, even under the full heat of the summer season. Seeing this, the cloud in the sky has expanded himself out of love. He is rising high and constructing out of his own body, with its multitude of flower-like droplets, an umbrella for the sake of his friend" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.16).

God plays in His creation and the creation plays back with Him, affectionately. Try to see this in your mind. Your mind is made for this. But you have misused your mind, so now it is the *cañcalā* agent, going here and there in search of sense gratification. In this mood, your mind doesn't see value in considering Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* in the forest of Vraja. It wants to eat up the creation, even though it is tiny and powerless. It fights for survival, not knowing that it can never gain control. It has the wrong values and tastes in a way that can never bring satisfaction. But you can change that. The *yogīs* work hard to bring the mind under the control of the higher self. They meditate on Parambrahman and experience supreme bliss and the release from birth and death. By contrast, a mind that dwells on the body and the false ego can never find peace.

Someone may ask, "But even if someone manages to transcend, that doesn't mean the cruel world disappears. Won't a *yogī* die if he doesn't carefully use his mind for survival?" The answer is that he lives simply, perhaps eating only air, but ultimately he lets the body go. The soul can survive without the gross body. The eternal soul goes to Brahman, or better yet, the devoted soul goes to serve Lord Kṛṣṇa in *sat-svarūpa.*

Let me think of Kṛṣṇa playing His flute-song, as described by the Vraja *gopīs.* Enter their mood. Their *bhāva* is not neutral, but filled with intense desire to please Kṛṣṇa in a conjugal mood. We can learn how to be greedy bumblebees intoxicated with honey. Kṛṣṇa is searching for the *gopīs'* love like a drunkard. We can't understand it if we try to relate it to this world. It's not like that. Yet whatever we see here comes from the original all-pure.

Kṛṣṇa is playing His flute and the *gopīs* are overwhelmed with love for Him. They want to go to Him, yet there are many obstacles. They talk among themselves of their love for Kṛṣṇa. At first they couldn't speak due to their emotions. They are not alone in this—whoever hears Kṛṣṇa's flute or sees Him playing, feels ecstasy. The clouds are giving Kṛṣṇa shelter out of love. Everyone in Vṛndāvana wants to serve Him. Why not me too?

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This is my prayer-application. Śrīla Prabhupāda used this word to describe how 16,000 princesses got

Kṛṣṇa as their husband. They were captured by the demon Bhaumāsura, but they made their "prayer application" to Kṛṣṇa requesting Him to save them and marry them.

I have filled out applications for jobs, licenses, and visas, and now I am applying for love of Kṛṣṇa. I hope He will have time to read my application and consider me favorably. When Śrīla Prabhupāda left India in 1965, he made an application to the Bank of India to get their permission to leave. At first their agent said no, because Swamijī didn't have an institutional patron in America. But Śrīla Prabhupāda insisted that his file be passed to a superior for reconsideration. The superior came and told Prabhupāda, "Don't worry, Swamijī. I have passed your case."

We wait. We are not qualified. But the saints are kind. Even if someone "up there" wants to turn me down, my spiritual masters will not reject me. Maybe they will decide favorably, but postpone the fulfillment of the application. I sit here and chant and wait.

We call *rāgānugā* "spontaneous"; that means intimate love. The *rāgānugā-bhakta* wants *mādhurya-līlā* with the Lord, beyond the *aiśvarya* worship of Kṛṣṇa and His associates in Dvārakā or Mathurā. But we can also *practice* to attain this intimate love by hearing. Hear about those eternal souls who serve Kṛṣṇa in Vraja. Focus on service to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Lord Caitanya said, "There is no worship of Kṛṣṇa better than that of the *gopīs* of Vraja." Follow them.

And He also said, "As Kṛṣṇa is worshipable, so His Vṛndāvana is worshipable."

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Please, therefore, give up fear and the search for sense gratification. That will come of its own accord. Take shelter of the lotus feet of fearless Nanda-nandana. As Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says in the last verse of *Saṅkalpa-kalpa-drumaḥ*, dear mind and self, please take shelter in the *gopī-mañjarī-bhāva*—please do it. Ask help from the *rāgātmikā* devotees. Ask help and cooperation from your own self. All this is included in your prayer application.

Sometimes application forms state, "Give further information on the back page. If more space is required, attach additional pages." I am attaching hundreds of pages, making my case. But sometimes what I write can be held against me. Still, it is my testimony. What I write is evidence that I am not properly engaged in this material world in a material body. I want to come back. I love Kṛṣṇa. I am afraid to live in His material energy any longer without Him. I have been writing my experiences and I present it all for His consideration, or for the review of His secretaries who read such things. Please consider my case.

And not just me, but I write for others too. I am applying for all of us. My spiritual master made me an agent on behalf of so many other *jīvas*. Please

consider all aspiring *bhaktas* who want to attain the lotus feet of the Lord.

•

5:55 A.M.

Our neighbor has his grass pointing East, and as I came up to the roof, he was bowing down in that direction. I prefer to get under my net. Thousands of people are worshiping in Vṛndāvana this morning and every morning.

Except the crows—they don't seem to be worshiping. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the animals we see nowadays in Vṛndāvana may be fallen *gosvāmīs* and *yogīs*. They committed serious *aparādhas* while living in Vṛndāvana in their last life and now they are being punished with animal bodies in Vṛndāvana. After this life they will be liberated. It is a great opportunity, therefore, for these animals. But Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "Why waste a lifetime in that way?"

Six more days for this writing if you count today. I'm riding a wave of productivity and I hope it will roll to the end of the week.

•

Mahārāja said I am fortunate to have so much time for *bhajana*. He wishes me well. A devotee in the West said my *bhajana* is a privilege paid for by less fortunate devotees, so I should not abandon them. I turn to *bhajana* with a sense of duty, to use my time well. It requires that I find a sincere center in myself and pray my thanks and worship of my

spiritual master who has brought me here. I want to worship the accessible *dhāma* as well as the unmanifest pastimes in the *dhāma*.

"'This is a wonderful vine of lightning flashes. It is not Rādhā. And this is a monsoon cloud. It is not the prince of the cowherders.' Happily speaking these contrary words in the presence of the two Deities of transcendental *līlā* in the cottage of flowering vines, a certain *gopī* friend pleased Śrīmatī Rādhikā" (*Vm, Śataka* 11.67).

•

An incandescent pink ball is rising. A low building blocks the sun from my view, but gradually the sun mounts the sky and I see it, orange and blazing, through the haze. The sun god worships Rādhā in Vṛndāvana. That is how he has become so bright. *Oṁ bhūr bhuvaḥ* . . . May we enter that meditation on the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa which are most brilliant and taught by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu *(ujjvala-rasa)*.

Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī says he sits in the assembly of devotees and hears Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa-*līlā*. "Should I ever do anything else?" He advises us to call out: "O Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa" and meet Them as They happily enjoy pastimes in Vraja. He says, "I myself have personally seen one person as splendid as gold and another wonderfully blissful, dark-complexioned person more dear to me than life" (*Vm, Śataka* 11.79). People may say Vṛndāvana is just a forest, But Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī sees it as the

external manifestation of the sweet love Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa bear for each other. One who is fortunate worships Śrī Rādhikā's lotus feet and lives in Vṛndāvana, even today.

"Because the offense of not being perfectly satisfied to live here has sprouted, many persons, even though they live for a long time in Vṛndāvana, which is the most charming auspicious place for a devotee, remain unable to directly see the sweet nectar of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's transcendental *līlā*" (*Vm, Śataka* 11.90).

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The sun ball is burning as bright as butter and is so dazzling that it has lost its neat circular outline. It is going to be a good day.

Whatever falls into the salt water ocean becomes salty. Everyone in Vṛndāvana can receive Śrī Rādhikā's glance. The rain falls and the oyster grows a pearl. If we persist, everything will start to remind us of the charming Govinda.

•

I hear devotees and birds with punctuated "Morse code" signals, insistent parrots and others. They wake us up. They each speak in their own demanding voice.

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9:38 A.M., Keśavajī Gaudiya Math

Here we are again, waiting to ask our questions. One question is whether we can do *rāgānugā-sādhana* in Western places—retreats, rural hideouts, etc. It's a practical question and I want his personal opinion.

Another question: I heard him say that Lord Caitanya's Navadvīpa-*līlā* is more important than His Nīlācala-*līlā*. But I thought Lord Caitanya's separation from Kṛṣṇa in the mood of Rādhā (as in the Gambhīrā) was topmost.

Another question: what kind of *rāgānugā bhajana* can we practice in our present condition?

We're waiting. The rickshaw driver got here at top speed. Only when we hit the city did we slow down amid the water buffaloes, cows, and traffic of every description.

Rādhā wears gold today, Kṛṣṇa green-blue. Their crowns are golden. A few young *brahmacārīs* in yellow sitting and conversing in the temple room. An older man in saffron sits alone, stringing a red rose garland.

In a few days I will be meeting again with God-brothers. I'm intent on preserving this slice of my life. We crave completeness, a successful voyage without interruption—art can give us that. We can call it illusion, but it can be used in Kṛṣṇa's service.

•

We had to sit for quite a while on the wall before Mahārāja saw us. It was hot and gradually the sun-

light started hitting the place we were sitting. We kept moving to the right until there was nowhere else to go to avoid the sun. Finally Navīna opened the doors and we met with Mahārāja. Navīna warned us that although Mahārāja had recovered from yesterday's illness, he was still tired. He said we shouldn't stay for more than a few moments.

When I entered the room, Mahārāja said that I looked lean and thin. He said something about Vṛndāvana drawing on me. I said, "Yes, it is melting me down."

I inquired about his health. He said that he had rested in bed all day yesterday and now he felt better. I told him I didn't want to take up much time, so I wouldn't ask him to speak on the *Veṇu-gīta*. At this meeting, right from the beginning, there was a sweet friendly feeling and it lasted throughout.

I glanced around the room and somehow Mahārāja must have read my mind. He said, "I got your letter and I have read it." He was referring to the little essay I wrote, "A *rasika* explanation of a verse from the *Veṇu-gīta*."

He picked up the essay and turned to the second page, to a sentence which he had underlined in red. The sentence said, "But it actually means that Balarāma has gone ahead of Kṛṣṇa to the forest." Mahārāja explained that Balarāma was not very far ahead as my sentence seemed to imply, but rather, the two of Them were walking in single file. Balarāma was only a few steps ahead. This was far enough for Kṛṣṇa to glance at the *gopīs* and for the *gopīs* to glance at Kṛṣṇa without being hindered by

Balarāma's presence. He said I should change the impression I gave that Balarāma had "gone ahead into the forest." I was pleased that he had read it so carefully and made this correction. Better the attentive correction than no red underlining at all!

On page three he had underlined the word "offspring" in the sentence, "Therefore, *vrajeśa-sutayor* may refer to the offspring of these two kings." He asked what offspring meant. I said it means children. The offspring or children of Nanda Mahārāja and Vṛṣabhānu Mahārāja are Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. This was not incorrect, but the word "offspring" was strange to Mahārāja. Again, I was happy that he had read it carefully. He said other than these things, the essay was fine. Therefore, I will distribute it to some of my Godbrothers.

I then asked a question: "One devotee told you that he was reading *rasa-śāstras* and you said, 'It is not just by reading books. You have to practice *bhajana.*' Can you explain more what kind of *rāgānugā-bhajana* we are capable of in our present condition?"

Mahārāja said that we can pray to Giri Govardhana, to Yamunā . . . He mentioned Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's *Vraja-vilāsa-stava.* I was about to say, "But that's *reading.* What other practices?" Mahārāja said that I could learn these verses and chant them or sing them.

It dawned on me that he was referring to prayer and to a personal recitation of prayer. He said I could pray to some of the special deities, like Vṛndā-devī and the goddesses and special persons of Vṛndāvana. I should pray to Vṛndāvana, Govar-

dhana, Yamunā, and so on. Pray for their blessings. I was glad to hear this because it's what I have been trying to do in the writing.

Mahārāja also specifically said writing. I said, "So writing itself is *bhajana*?" Yes, he said. Everything can be put or expressed in writing as a *bhajana. Hari-bol!* Mahārāja then mentioned some books that are valuable for *rāgānugā-bhajana.* But aside from reading, he gave hints by saying we could utter prayers and write.

The first thing he said in answer to my question was, "You can practice according to your *adhikārī.*" This means according to your qualification. That sentence is a little cryptic and he filled it in by the other remarks. But I want to think of that sentence by itself, "It depends on your *adhikārī.*" Whatever I can do will be good for me. For the highest standard of *rāgānugā-bhajana,* we see the great *ācāryas* who are always thinking of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa or singing or calling out to Them or writing books . . .

I then asked a question that went something like this: "Our Śrīla Prabhupāda has proved that Kṛṣṇa consciousness can be practiced in Western places—in big cities like New York or London. He told us that those places are no longer in the West or in the material world when we practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness there in the temple. But this was mostly for *vaidhī-bhakti*—distributing books and worshiping in the temples. Is it also possible to practice *rāgānugā-bhajana* in the West?"

Mahārāja said at once, "Yes, it can be done." He then began to describe a balanced program of Kṛṣṇa

consciousness. He said that preaching should always continue. He said his Guru Mahārāja preached and our Prabhupāda preached. I added, "You also do." Yes, he said, I give a class in the evening. So as our *gurudeva* has given us Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we should extend it to others.

Mahārāja said that he preaches on "What is religion." He said we should also preach on the *tattva* given by Jīva Gosvāmī as well as philosophical subjects both basic and advanced. But we should know that the summit is *rāgānugā-bhakti*. He said that all the *ācāryas*—Viśvanātha Cakravartī, Rūpa Gosvāmī, and so on, covered all subjects.

"So we should not avoid the preaching and practice only *rāgānugā-bhajana*?"

Mahārāja affirmed that we should tend to every corner of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

I wanted to ask Mahārāja about going to quiet places in order to practice *rāgānugā* in the West, but I didn't know how to phrase it. I said something like: "I do preaching in the cities, and preach and preach. But then sometimes I like to go to a quiet place to do *rāgānugā-bhajana*."

Mahārāja approved, "Yes, do it like that." But he affirmed that by preaching, I will please my guru, and in this way, I will get the blessing to actually advance in *rāgānugā*. His words inspired me to take up preaching and also to continue to find time for reading and chanting on *rasika* topics. Nothing should be neglected. Especially now that we have had the summit of Kṛṣṇa consciousness defined for us, we should pursue it.

Mahārāja also said that our preaching will naturally become more *rāgānugā*. I said that this was true and that those ISKCON persons who visit Mahārāja actually preach with more *rāgānugā* feeling. What I meant was not that they necessarily talk more about the *gopīs* than they did before; rather they preach on *vaidhī-bhakti* subjects, just as Mahārāja said that he does and his Guru Mahārāja and our Prabhupāda did. But there is a potency coming through now which comes from the *rāgānugā* inspiration we are receiving.

At this point, Mahārāja changed the topic and said there are two kinds of persons in ISKCON—some are afraid of ISKCON devotees going to see Mahārāja and some want to go see him.

I said that there may be some who think like that, but actually all ISKCON devotees really know that Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja is a good friend of our society. He said it is true that he is a very good friend. He said he doesn't want to do anything that will disturb ISKCON devotees.

After this, Mahārāja showed me a letter he had received from a GBC man. It asked advice in the case of an elderly *sannyāsī* who has been initiated by an ISKCON guru. The question now arises whether this elderly Indian *sannyāsī* can accept disciples of his own. Or is it proper etiquette to not accept disciples in the presence of his own spiritual master? Mahārāja asked my opinion. I don't remember if I answered, but he then decided it was a matter for our GBC. He said he should not give private advice to a person on this matter, but the GBC can solve it

themselves. If the GBC would like to consult him, then he could give some suggestions. Then they can decide on their own. I volunteered to write up his statements, get it typed, and then he could sign it as his response to the GBC man who wrote the letter. He accepted my proposal and I am happy to do the service.

Navīna came in and out of the room a few times and I didn't want to disobey his request that we cut the meeting short. So we ended after about twenty-five minutes. I had more questions and Mahārāja said I could come back after a couple of days. As I was leaving the room, he asked me when I would come back. I said the day after tomorrow at ten? "Better to make it 10:30," he said. He then asked how Bhūrijana and Dhanurdhāra Swami were. I said they were both very busy.

"Are you also busy?" he asked.

"Yes, I keep busy," I said, "but I must come here also." He smiled when I said this, ending the meeting.

Outside the room I asked Navīna Kṛṣṇa how to properly address the letter to be written by Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja. Madhumaṅgala told me later that while I was talking with Navīna, Mahārāja spoke to Madhu. He said, "Where is your Gurudeva?"

Madhu replied that I was talking with Navīna. Mahārāja said he wanted to see me again.

I went back inside and sat on the chair by his bed. He told me that a few *brahmacārīs* in yellow dress had come to his *mandira* today. They were devotees from ISKCON Bombay who had gone to Krishna-

Balaram Mandir, desiring to stay there and serve. Apparently, the authorities there told them that they could not stay and asked them to leave at once. The boys had come to Mahārāja seeking solace. Mahārāja asked me what to do. I said that the ultimate authorities in this matter were Bhūrijana and Dhanurdhāra Swami.

Mahārāja said that in his opinion, the boys should be not told to leave abruptly. They should be allowed to stay at Krishna-Balaram Mandir for some days while things are nicely explained to them. He said that he would keep them here at his *mandira* for a few days until he got further word from me about what ISKCON would do. I said I would find out and bring him news in a couple of days.

He said he has two disciples who are working in ISKCON, one in Bombay and one in another place. He said that it's fine with him that they are serving there and that there should be no feeling of separateness between our movement and his movement. So he hoped that this matter with the boys from Bombay would be settled. Otherwise, they might wander off and be taken by *sahajiyās*.

Now I have two small assignments from Mahārāja and valuable instructions to assimilate about the balance between preaching duties and *rāgānugā bhajana*. He also told me to read *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu-bindu*, by Viśvanātha Cakravartī and bring any questions to him. He taught from this book last year, but unfortunately, I had forgotten about it. He

also said we can continue to discuss the verses of the *Veṇu-gīta*.

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As we drove to Mathurā and back, there was the usual rapid-fire bombardment of sights and sounds. I want to record a few things here that somehow seemed worth saving.

On our way in, I saw a cow nosing its way into a travel bag that someone had left on a motor scooter. The cow was actually opening the pack and getting into whatever was in it. Then on the way back, I saw another cow stealing grass from a horse-drawn cart. These carts have a space underneath where they store grass to feed the horse. This cart was unattended and a cow was pulling the grass out from under it.

Westerners sometimes talk about the cows in the city streets of India. They think it is a sign of neglect. They say that if India is supposed to protect cows, why are so many starving animals roaming the streets? But when you come to India and see how the humans are struggling in the cities, it doesn't seem that the cows are at a particular disadvantage. The human can't give the cow some extraordinary preference over the humans. If the humans are struggling to get by, then the cows are partners in the same poor existence.

Prabhupāda used to say that outsiders advertise the starving and dying people of India, but he never saw them himself. The people may be skinny and the cows too, but they are getting by.

I also saw a big white-and-tan goat sitting complacently on a rope cot. These cots are for humans beings, but the goat was acting like he owned it. Although you repeatedly see certain things, they can still be amazing. Today we saw a big fat water buffalo, soaking wet, walking down the street with a young boy behind it and another in front of it. The buffalo cow seemed to have a special value—she had big udders and was being attended by two boys. Buffalo cows are grotesque. They look like big rubber boats.

We also saw *sādhus*, ladies, merchants, *śūdras*, Muslims—so many sights and sounds flashing by that it's bewildering to even remember them all. It's good to be back in our quiet *āśrama* with a quiet day ahead and then another, and a promised visit to Mahārāja in Mathurā.

•

3:10 P.M.

Hints of what's ahead: they ask me what time of day my seminar will be and how many students will I allow in the class? They said last year my *sannyāsī* Godbrother's class was filled and people were standing in the hall and looking in the windows. I think, "Will I also have a standing-room-only overflow?"

I said I would have weekly disciple meetings. I daydream: when disciples come, where will I sit? Will I allow someone to fan me? Would Mahārāja allow that with his disciples? These thoughts signal the end of this simple retreat. For preaching, you

can accept honor and inconvenience and give up your free time. Be busy for others.

When Mahārāja asked me if I am busy, I said, "Yes!" I am, not busy with meetings, classes, *parikramas*, or letter-answering. I'm busy going to the roof. Going from one writing table to another. Busy being quiet and alone and evoking, bit by bit, the simplest experience of living at the Sant Colony in Vṛndāvana. That will come to an end in less than a week and I'll be back to looking like a more regular ISKCON member again.

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Kṛṣṇa holds His flute, Balarāma leans His left hand on Kṛṣṇa's shoulder. I'm trying to find a copy of *Vraja-vilāsa-stava*. I read it before, the hundred or so verses describing *rāgātmikā* devotees who love Kṛṣṇa. Do you think just by touching this book everything will be different within a few days? Mahārāja mentions a book and we run to it—Tenth Canto, *Vilāpa-kusumāñjali*—and hope the pure devotee who wrote it can bring us into his *samādhi*.

Mahārāja said if you abandon preaching, you go to ruin. Our holy master wanted us to work for the benefit of others. Out of the thousands of persons we try to reach in our preaching, maybe a few will be interested in serious devotional service, and a few of them may develop greed for *rāgānugā*. There is no doubt that it's important to preach.

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4:00 P.M., roof

"Eager to claim this body and house as my own, I am very pathetic. Pleased by worship from the people, I am pathetic. Blossoming with happiness to hear a few words of faint praise, I am pathetic. Even though in my hand rests the eternally splendid fruit named Vṛndāvana, which even goddess Lakṣmī and the great demigod Śiva cannot attain, I still refuse to taste it" (*Vm, Śataka* 12.12)

I am pathetic. I can't enter Vṛndāvana. Beg for blessings to enter. Ask Vṛndāvana to accept you. Beg to accept Vṛndāvana.

I was going to say, "Accept Vṛndāvana as-it-is," but I'm not qualified to do that. Actual Vraja means Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa sporting on a swing, in the river, at a game of dice . . . When I say Vṛndāvana as-it-is I translate it into, "Vṛndāvana, even as you perceive it in your extremely limited way. The place where day after night there is no electricity; the place where my body is always sweaty and the bath water is brown and salty."

Don't deny your good fortune in the name of modesty or the cynical habit of chopping down all good things. Don't cut down this auspicious young tree of shadow greed.

"Take me to Vṛndāvana. I will pass my entire life there placing myself at the feet of the great souls who are the crest jewels of all saints, and from whose mouths flow the nectar stream of the sweet transcendental pastimes of the dear lover of Śrī Rādhā" (*Vm, Śataka,* 12.55).

I heard Śrīla Prabhupāda speaking on a tape from 1966, his voice straining to be heard above intruders at the open door. He calls out, "Please don't disturb! Don't disturb!" But they keep disturbing.

"These boys, where do they come from? They are disturbing." In his lecture he says peace is good, but in this world, fighting is sometimes inevitable. "Just like we are experiencing. We are not harming anyone, but some come and disturb us. The world is like that." Why did Śrīla Prabhupāda leave Vṛndāvana to go to New York City? He was duty-bound. He had a message for us. In spite of all inconveniences, he came to New York City. Don't forget it.

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Birds don't see me under the net. One myna and a rarer, blue-headed bird with a dirty-white chest and blue wings sit on the stone wall. The myna imitates sounds. I write.

•

Here is a verse from *Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta* that catalogues the poet's disqualifications. He means it. But despite all his lackings, he will take shelter in Vṛndāvana. Some wonder why spiritual persons still have so many faults. They prefer to go to *sādhus* who claim to have a deep taste for *rasa*. But the fact is, a holy man sees his own faults; he's good at that. It saves him at death. He takes shelter of the all-forgiving Lord. At least those *sādhakas* who still

have faults need to admit them. Those who are completely pure admit faults they don't have. They are trying to teach others.

"I, who am a great palatial mansion where the most painful sufferings of hell reside, who am arrogant, deceptive, and shameless, who am bitten by the serpent named woman, who am not peaceful, who, deep in my heart, have love neither for Lord Mādhava nor His devotees, who am dull and stunted, who have no power to understand the land of Vṛndāvana . . . who is not firmly situated in celibacy, whose host of sins make it difficult for me to obtain the mercy of saintly persons, and who have no other shelter, shall now take shelter of Śrī Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 12.67–8).

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When Lord Caitanya wandered in the forests of Vṛndāvana, a male and female parrot appeared on a tree and began to speak. They spoke with intense *rasa*, the male praising Kṛṣṇa and the female praising Rādhā. When the Lord saw the bluish necks of the peacocks, His remembrance of Kṛṣṇa awakened and He fell to the ground in ecstatic love. Balabhadra, the Lord's servant, sprinkled Him with water, began fanning Him, and chanted the holy names. The Lord then gained outer consciousness and began rolling on the ground. He then ordered His friends, *"Bol! Bol!"* and they chanted Kṛṣṇa's names. The Lord's friends became anxious to protect Him because He was in uncontrollable ecstasy

from one moment to the next. This is Vṛndāvana-as-it-is, experienced by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

"When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu was elsewhere, the very name of Vṛndāvana was sufficient to increase His ecstatic love. Now, when He was actually traveling in the Vṛndāvana forest, His mind was absorbed in great ecstatic love day and night. He ate and bathed simply out of habit" (*C.c., Madhya* 17.228–9).

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī says it is impossible to fully describe Lord Caitanya's ecstatic manifestations while He walked through the forests of Vṛndāvana. We read it today and store it somewhere in our empty hearts for future reference. Don't say I have no taste. I have very little taste. Lord Caitanya has all taste. But what does it matter who I am? Let us hear together of Lord Caitanya and Raghunātha Gosvāmī and those great saints to whom Vṛndāvana revealed all her secrets. They are our solace.

Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī says the great souls who drink the nectar flowing in Vṛndāvana, have left us. "Now we are dead and can associate only with their names." He says they who became overwhelmed with *prema* when they saw the *guñja* berries in Vṛndāvana, "who muddied the ground with their tears . . . have abandoned the world in Kali-yuga and attained Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet. Now we are left only with persons like ourselves. Now our hearts have become withered dry and we are no longer able to maintain our lives" (*Vm, Śataka* 12.59–61).

7:00 P.M.

Mahārāja hinted that I might help him answer his mail. At least he gave me one letter today. I thanked him for it and said I like to do service like this for him. I would like to do more. He replied, "I have so many letters." When we go back Wednesday, I plan to ask him if I can do secretarial duty. "I did this many times for my Guru Mahārāja. He would tell me the points and I would compose the letter. I was not qualified to do so many services, but I was good at writing letters. If you like, I can do any letters you get that require a reply in English." See what he says.

I gave out two copies of *Pilgrimage*. My writing is for my disciples even more than for my Godbrothers and Godsisters. I need to give them the best instructions I'm capable of—at least to those who inquire and who are serious devotees.

•

7:20 P.M.

The way the electricity goes mostly off and occasionally on here is a joke. It just surged on, so I'm sitting here writing. But I called out to Madhu, "Now don't get attached! We could be plunged at any moment back into the all-night darkness and no electric fans." That's been the norm.

I want to end today's writing with a "good night." Kiss your mother and give your father a good night hug. Your father is *gurudeva* and your mother the *Vedas* according to one analogy. Goodnight to

friends, brothers, sisters. Let me also play father and say goodnight to my children.

I am a child going in the darkness and saying, "Goodnight, please protect me. Thank You for this day. If You desire, I'll live for tomorrow. O Energy of the Lord, O Lord, please engage me in Your service." The crickets are cricketing, the ants are wandering over the white bolster pillows, the frogs are chirruping on the gray cement outside. The night is wild outside these walls. Good night to all the Vṛndāvana people lying down on their wooden and rope cots or on their floors or on the earth.

•

September 1, 1:00 A.M.

I was wide awake at 11:30 P.M. with a mind full of clear ideas. Now I'm groggy.

"O Lord Kṛṣṇa, please give me the nectarean potion of pure love for You, which will make me strong and heroic enough to resist all the enemies and constantly engage in Your devotional service without deviation.

"By tasting a single drop of the memory of the transcendental nectar ocean of the sweetness of the Divine Couple, my heart has become restless. I bow down before the land and people of Vraja. I yearn to see my two Masters" (*Vraja-vilāsa-stava*, text 3).

•

I am not up to writing transcendental literature this morning. Only a few memos. The writing retreat is over.

I was going to promise to do something nice and Kṛṣṇa conscious. Now I forget what it was. Pure devotional service—why is it so elusive? What was the nice idea I had at 11 o'clock last night?

•

Last year Mahārāja was teaching *Mādhurya-kādambinī*. He said a devotee must be someone who has felt affection before he was a devotee. If a person has never felt attachment or love or anything, then when he takes to spiritual life in earnest, he will probably become a Māyāvādī. One who has loved can convert that love to love of God. He shouldn't be too attached, or he won't be able to give up whatever he is attached to, but neither should he be so detached from the world that he feels nothing. Madhu mentioned this yesterday, and how a love for Nature could be converted by seeing Kṛṣṇa there. My ears perked up when he said that.

I remember in Coleridge's "Rime of The Ancient Mariner," how the mariner felt love for the fish in the ocean and at that moment the curse for killing the albatross was lifted. It may seem like a distraction that when I go to praise Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vraja, I keep seeing the birds and squirrels. They come near me. I like to watch their antics. And the cows and the trees and the sun and sky. Heat over

the land . . . rain in monsoon clouds—all the friendly or neutral aspects of the *dhāma* are real to me. They also seem more immediate than the ultimate goal, love for the Yugala-Kiśora. Nature in Vṛndāvana keeps my mind steady (and my pen hand moving) so that I can keep the ultimate vision within range. A squirrel with a striped back may take me to the feet of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa because these are creatures of the *dhāma.*

The *rasika* poets describe the great devotees who please Kṛṣṇa in eternal Vraja-*līlā.* The creatures I see today are not so great, yet they live in the *dhāma* and have a God-given soul. They live here, and they are better than ordinary squirrels and birds. Life in this climate is difficult, and they have to avoid the usual predators. But they are guaranteed to be close to the transcendental goal.

"Even today, affectionate Lord Kṛṣṇa enjoys the very sweet nectar of transcendental pastimes there, herding the cows with His brother and His many dear friends. A wonderful sweetness becomes manifest in the hearts of those who understand the nectar of this place. Of Vraja, which is more dear even than the city of Mathurā, I take shelter" (*Vraja-vilāsa-stava,* text 6).

We laugh when we say Mahārāja lives in Mathurā ("Kaṁsa-pura") and we ISKCON persons live in Vṛndāvana. To us, these places appear in their external features. Mathurā is a city and Vṛndāvana a busy town. Both seem crowded and noisy. Vṛndāvana is more the seat of Kṛṣṇa-worship, yet filled with vendors. When you see the line-up of rick-

shaws and drivers in front of Krishna-Balaram Mandir, it doesn't fill your heart with the sweetness Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī describes. So who lives in Vraja? Do I? It depends on your *bhāva*.

I'm not complaining. Rather, I'm saying even the squirrels and the sunrise can be part of my life as I live and breathe and write in Vṛndāvana, at least in some sense. All glories to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

•

"The aborigine women of the Vṛndāvana area become disturbed by lust when they see the grass marked with reddish *kuṅkuma* powder. Endowed with the color of Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet, this powder originally decorated the breasts of His beloveds, and when the Pulinda women smear it on their faces and breasts, they give up all their anxiety" *(Bhāg.* 10.21.17).

Rādhārāṇī felt transcendental envy for these Pulinda women. She saw that although they cannot meet Kṛṣṇa intimately, they have such enthusiastic love for Him that just by seeing the *kuṅkuma* on the grass, they fell in love with Kṛṣṇa and lost all material lust. That *kuṅkuma* had been on the *gopīs'* breasts. When Kṛṣṇa put His feet on their breasts, the *kuṅkuma* smeared onto the bottoms of His feet. When He walked home from the *kuñja* at dawn, the dew on the grass washed some of the *kuṅkuma* off His feet. This is the *kuṅkuma* that the Pulindis rubbed all over their bodies. How fortunate those Pulindis are to have such eagerness. They were

satisfied by the touch of the dust from Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet.

" . . . looking toward Kṛṣṇa playing His flute, [the aborigine women] saw the reddish *kuṅkuma* on the ground and immediately took it and smeared it over their faces and breasts. In this way, they became fully satisfied, although they were not satisfied when their lovers touched their breasts. All material lusty desires can be immediately satisfied if one comes in contact with Kṛṣṇa consciousness" (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 1, Chap. 21, p. 150).

The glory of the Pulindis is that they spontaneously took that *kuṅkuma*. It was their greatest chance to embrace Kṛṣṇa and they greedily took the opportunity. Never mind that it wasn't the physical embrace of Kṛṣṇa's arms or chest. They knew the powder had touched His feet in a conjugal relationship and this was enough to act on at once. As Rādhā saw this, we may also see the hint. Grab at any sign of Kṛṣṇa's presence and rub it to your eyes and mouth and chest and feel happy and relieved that you have attained the Supreme lover.

The Pulindis knew they weren't qualified for *vilāsa-līlā*. They had to take whatever they could get. Once Śrīla Prabhupāda put a *gulābjāmum* on Tamāl Krishna dāsa's plate, but the devotee next to him reached over and took it. Śrīla Prabhupāda smiled to see the fun. Beg, borrow, or become a dacoit, but get the mercy.

What is the equivalent of the red *kuṅkuma* powder for us today? And what in us will compare to the spontaneous love of the Pulindi women? Al-

most any aspect of Vraja will suffice—its ground, the cry of its peacock, the chance to render some service to the *dhāma* and its residents—especially its devotees—and our own enthusiasm? We have to act on whatever we find within ourselves.

The faint flame, the lean and thin greed . . . Surely something is there. "I worship Vṛndāvana forest, which is delightful with the scent of Their lotus feet." Pray for faith because the chance to love Them could come to you today.

•

When I notice a frog on my pillow, I am startled and my heart jumps. Is this fear? Such a lively emotion! Can't you transform it into Kṛṣṇa consciousness?

•

5:58 A.M., roof

As I write, a monkey jumps on our roof. Action! My adrenaline flows. I wish Baladeva or Madhu were here to chase him away. He's up on the *paṇḍāl* beams over my head. I rap the stick sharply on the cement and he responds, but then reconsiders. He jumps back a foot or so and then decides to go about his business and not leave right away. The friendly sparrows are also up there with their light-footed hops. But the monkey is like a Śaraṇāgati bear—go away! I'm not going make a big effort to search him out and chase him. Not worth it. I came up here to write.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his Tenth Canto purports that sometimes people find the monkeys of Vṛndāvana to be a nuisance. But Kṛṣṇa distributed butter to the monkeys, showing us that all food is God's mercy and everyone is entitled to a share. I'm not so generous and I don't regard these monkeys as the "celebrated monkeys of Vṛndāvana" who take butter from Kṛṣṇa's hand.

The sun is orange only for a little while. It's beautiful. Then it rises higher and turns to a hot white-yellow. You can watch the transformation moment by moment.

"O Śrī Vṛndāvana, may your splendid handsomeness, which is increased by the two rivaling handsomenesses of the young forms of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, who . . . are enjoying a festival of amorous pastimes, arouse spiritual desires within me" (*Vm, Śataka* 12.79).

(The sun is blazing now and the neighbor has increased the tempo of his prayers—his tongue is almost tripping over the Sanskrit as he ends each line in "aha.")

Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī states that his heart doesn't consider anything, except Vṛndāvana, to be real or important. He also says his desires are difficult to fulfill, but he prays to the dust of Vṛndāvana to fulfill his wish to do direct service for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. That's my goal too. But it's so far away that I can't claim it is part of my heart. I don't dream of it. I don't tremble with joy because of it. I don't feel miserable when the vision is removed from my attention. I don't jump to my feet when I see it

again, as I do when the monkey (or even a frog) reappears on the pathway of my eyes. I'm pathetic.

You ask for the moon, but then don't show any ambition to attain it. They laugh. Yet Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī has written his prayers for folks like me. We can ask for what we don't deserve and depend on Vṛndāvana to be merciful. But to make a prayer like his is not as easy as it seems. It appears to be a list of disqualifications and a statement of hope that Vṛndāvana will be liberal and overlook everything. It only works when we have great faith in the power of Vṛndāvana. I pray for that. I have already filled out one application, but I am here to go on writing them again and again.

"O forest of Vṛndāvana, it is not proper for you to ignore me, who has fallen into the blind well of hellish life and who has now taken shelter of you. In the three worlds no one else is willing to protect me, whose intelligence has been destroyed by a host of sins, who disobeys all the orders of the Supreme Lord and who, although he thinks himself very intelligent, is in reality the greatest of fools" (*Vm, Śataka* 12.91).

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10:15 A.M.

Looking through *Vraja-vilāsa-stava,* I got some taste for Kṛṣṇa. But you can't just keep reading it like you would read "Life" magazine. You have to read it a little at a time, and give it time to touch you. A little at a time.

More letters come and I put them, unopened, into the sack. This is a quiet day.

Hare Kṛṣṇa *kīrtana* is drifting from the town. This is muggy weather. Was that thunder I heard? Will we get some rain? If it comes, why not go out and stand in it, it's so nice.

•

11:05 A.M.

"As long as there is no deep faith in the land of Vṛndāvana, the mercy of Śrī Rādhā's feet does not appear" (*Vm, Śataka* 13.2).

After his two solid days on *parikrama* with Mahānidhi Swami, Baladeva said, "I know there are many lifetimes of Kṛṣṇa conscious fun just in going around to these places. There are so many places, and pastimes and books about them and devotees living and visiting there and they are all potent. It's an active spiritual life. So when I'm ready, Vṛndāvana is waiting."

"If one hears the singing of the birds of Vṛndāvana, then what is the use to him of all the *Vedas?* If one recites the names of the trees and other living entities in Vṛndāvana, then what is the use to him of a host of prayers and mantras? (*Vm, Śataka* 13.13).

That blue-topped bird is back today at the end of the bamboo beam. I'm glad they like to perch here. He turns his head almost completely around like an owl, looking all around, his body and feathers trembling in the breeze. Even if it doesn't rain, there is relief in the air.

A squirrel is chirping loudly and running on the wall. What's he afraid of? No one is chasing him, but he's chirping like a bird. A dozen or so goats

walk the path in the direction of ISKCON. Little ones run to catch up. Two boys in short pants walk behind them. The goats are wandering out into the field, so the boys run after them and yell until they turn back.

I don't know what I feel for. *Na dhanam, na janam, na sundarim.* I don't want money or a beautiful wife or the pleasure of beautiful (mundane) poetry or followers. Then what do you want? Please don't say, "I only want to say a few bold fluffy birds have arrived on the roof." Say, "I only want Your causeless devotional service life after life." Yet Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī says if I recite the bird's names, it's like praying. They peck at the ropes, they hop on the canvas roof. They are all over the place. And blue-headed-rough-breast has been sitting on the same perch for twenty-five minutes.

"Fools think the moving and nonmoving creatures in blissful, spiritual Vṛndāvana are conditioned souls bound by the modes of nature. We say they are worshipable for everyone and they are the two sources of the nectar treasure of pure devotional service to Śrī Rādhā-Muralīdhara" (*Vm, Śataka* 13.22).

Are these verses exaggerated to enthuse neophytes? It would be offensive to think so. Are these statements understandable only to liberated souls? I don't know. I want to think like the *sādhus* think, although I have no realization and there are no commentaries to unlock their inner meanings for me. I take them for what they are. If I can appreciate Vṛndāvana's trees and creatures, it will be a great

gain for me and an asset in approaching Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa.

"Continually gazing at the intense sweetness of Vṛndāvana, Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa smile and laugh with unrestrained happiness . . . and They melodiously sing the names of Vṛndāvana saying, 'Beautiful Vṛndāvana,' 'All glories to Vṛndāvana,' and 'O Vṛndāvana!' What cannot be obtained by they whose tongues speak in this way?" (*Vm, Śataka* 13.18).

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Madhu is pumping water downstairs. Thunder keeps on rumbling. The breeze is a relief. "Again and again cry out, 'O Queen of Vṛndāvana's blossoming groves, I am lost. Please have mercy on me!' Pushed by love, three times a day bow down in the direction of Śrī Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 13.36).

•

In the East there's a ragged, dark, gray-blue cloud. Looks like rain, although the sky is otherwise clear. Yes, there's the thunder and the first few polka dot raindrops.

It doesn't take long to inundate the roof. All it takes is a good breeze. Downstairs, they are probably wondering how I am. The roof is already shimmering. My little area is still dry, but I can breathe in the freshness of the rain.

The parrots recite Rādhārāṇī's glories every day, and then the *mañjarīs* recite Rādhikā's *virut* poem

glorifying Vṛndāvana. When Kṛṣṇa hears it, He becomes overwhelmed with bliss and love. May my mind meditate on Vṛndāvana.

The breeze is up and I'm starting to get wet. What a relief. I would love to see Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in a Vraja rain shower. The fields across the street are filled with puddles. Monsoon rain works fast. The sides of the net are collapsing on me because they are so wet. I guess I should go downstairs.

Bell rings for 12:00 noon at Krishna-Balaram Mandir. The foot path is a running stream.

•

4 P.M., roof

The rain has stopped. Plenty of bird song. The path is open and people are walking it again. I hear a flutist and the 4 P.M. bell at Krishna-Balaram Mandir. How much life can you express? Writing is a test of power. At least let me keep going.

Back to Lord Caitanya's visit to Vṛndāvana. The Lord pleased all living entities as He traveled in Vṛndāvana, and He was pleased to see all the residents. In Ariṣṭagrām He asked the people, "Where is Rādhā-kuṇḍa?" but no one knew. So Lord Caitanya discovered the small pond in a field. People were astonished to see Him lovingly bathing in two ponds in a paddy field. He prayed, "Of all *gopīs*, Rādhārāṇī is dearmost. Similarly, the lake known as Rādhā-kuṇḍa is very dear to the Lord because it is very dear to Śrīmatī Rādhikā." He offered these and other prayers to Rādhā-kuṇḍa and became overwhelmed with *prema*, recalling the pastimes of

Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa performed at Rādhā-kuṇḍa. Lord Caitanya also collected some mud from Rādhā-kuṇḍa. Then He went to Govardhana.

All glories to Lord Caitanya's most intimate visit to Śrī Vṛndāvana. I also want to go to these places and remember Lord Caitanya's visit there. Of all Vraja pilgrims, He was the best. He is the combined form of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa coming to relish His own *līlā*.

•

The white-haired man I call Vālmīki is out distributing something in the bushes. Here and there a stray white cow is wandering in the field. A *bhajana* is broadcast from the Sītā-Rāma *mandira*. It is a peaceful afternoon.

Living in India is survival. I don't have malaria yet; I don't have a hundred mosquito bites; devotees don't hate me. I'm doing all right. I'm not committing some terrible obvious *aparādha*.

Oh no? What about *japa*?

Well, Śrīla Prabhupāda said (in *Perfect Questions Perfect Answers*)...

Nevermind your excuses, but because you think in terms of survival, you don't get too hard on yourself. You assume you are fallen and unable to see Vṛndāvana. You don't whip yourself about it.

Bray! Bray! You poor fool, donkey. I am not you. I am a follower of Śrīla Prabhupāda. The seminar lecture I outlined today was "Jet-age *Parivrājikācārya*." Prabhupāda was emphasizing "work now, *samādhi* later" at this point in his preaching. Śrīla

Prabhupāda had a pure motive and got tremendous results.

A *sannyāsī* Godbrother wants to remain in Vṛndāvana and do *bhajana*. He says in nine years from now, he'll go out and preach. Even now, he's preaching by writing books. But he gets flack from people who want to see him out lecturing and preaching. I don't know exactly where I fit in. Some *bhajana*, some preaching. We are looking for realization and taste. A person who has firm faith and some experience of the nectar of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa can preach most effectively. Hype and emphasis on organizational activities won't keep us happy in the long run. We need to be happy.

As I write, a loud, passionate dialogue is being broadcast. Sounds like a re-run of a drama I heard. If I hear the villain's "Ha! Ha! Ha!" I'll recognize it. Give me the birds instead. Why do these *āśramas* share their own brand of nectar so loudly?

"May the sweet . . . stream of conversation flowing from the moon of the mouths of Śrī Rādhā-Muralīdhara and flooding the beautiful forest of Vṛndāvana day and night, intoxicate the bumblebees of my ears and heart" (*Vm, Śataka* 13.32).

Sometimes internal devotees are advised to become "like one asleep to the external world" and to plunge into *kṛṣṇa-smaraṇam* in their hearts. What are they remembering? Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in the *kuñjas* of Vraja. But how can I ignore the outer world? I lie here, with my skin and senses and sensitive mind. Besides, when I turn within, there's no reservoir of *prema*, no power to pay atten-

tion. Pathetic, pathetic, as Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī would say. I am pathetic, but I beg for residence in Vṛndāvana.

Kali-yuga limitations are pathetic, but they have to be realistically accounted for. In a '66 lecture on yoga, Śrīla Prabhupāda said that times have changed so much. The first condition for yoga practice is that one should go alone to a secluded, sanctified place. But that's impossible in this age. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that even he (a *sannyāsī*) had come from a big city in India (he mentioned, "Calcutta or Bombay") to New York City, the world's biggest city. Times are different.

Two little sparrows chasing one another. They came so close to this net that I heard the whirring of their wings. Look up and see their gray and white necks. And a white gull winging in the distance. Distant white cows on a back road, trotting briskly. Times have changed, but Vṛndāvana is eternal.

The world is full of troubles. Its promised happiness in the form of beautiful women, food, drink, and fame is all illusion, a hoax. We have to die. Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī concludes that we should go at once to Vṛndāvana. These prolonged visits in the *dhāma* are for building up attraction. It seems possible that we could live here permanently, but not yet. Preaching obligations continue outside Vṛndāvana, and I still have the desire to go here and there. I think it's essential to please Śrīla Prabhupāda in that way and when my Godbrothers say I should go preach, I take it as a *sannyāsī's*

dharma. I'm not ready to leave everything and take shelter in Vṛndāvana.

People criticize me for staying here for four months of one year. And I am being radical by living alone for four weeks. Who knows what this lifetime holds for me? At least I am learning that Vṛndāvana is not a foreign place. It is home. Whether I ever get the opportunity to reside here full-time is up to the will of Rādhārāṇī.

"Why are you so slow to taste the transcendental bliss of living in Vṛndāvana? . . . O intelligent reader, if you have no desire to awaken the material benefits that sleep in your hand, then with a peaceful heart reside day and night in Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 13.48–9).

•

5:20 P.M.

I just received three pictures as a gift. I put them on a shelf in my room. One is a picture of Gaura-Nitāi, one of Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma, and one of Rādhā-Śyāma. Another Godbrother wrote me a note and ended it, "How is life treating you over there?" It's fine, I can tell him. But of course I won't tell him I write three or four hours a day. I'm too shy to say that. They'll ask, "Oh, what are you writing?" And they will expect me to say, "A book on *varṇāśrama*" or, "a book on how to improve chanting and devotee relationships." I can't tell them what it's really like. But I'm a writer so I'm writing about life in Vṛndāvana.

I say I'm shy to speak about my writing. That may be best. When a woman gives up her shyness, it

creates havoc. Similarly, if I talk too much about what I am doing, it will steal energy from the creative process. And I might start to think more about fame. Better to be shy and reticent. Drop the subject and get on to something else.

Again and again a heavy brass bell rings for a neighborhood *ārati*. I'm happy I have been grafted onto "Indian" religious culture. But by Śrīla Prabhupāda's expertise I don't think of myself as a Hindu monk; not at all.

Kṛṣṇa is leaning against Mother Yaśodā from behind. He's leaning on Her shoulder and handing her an empty cup. She's gesturing with her finger as if to say, "Wait a minute, darling. I have to churn this milk." But Kṛṣṇa wants her attention now—and He has it.

•

September 2, 1:05 A.M.

"Of all the devotees, this Govardhana Hill is the best! O my friends, this hill supplies Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, along with Their calves, cows and cowherd friends, with all kinds of necessities—water for drinking, very soft grass, caves, fruits, flowers, and vegetables. In this way the hill offers respects to the Lord. Being touched by the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, Govardhana Hill appears very jubilant" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.18)

The *gopīs* are talking to one another. Here, Govardhana's service to Kṛṣṇa is seen from the *rasika* point of view. Sometimes Govardhana is worshiped by *bhaktas* as Kṛṣṇa Himself, but those who are

gopī-ānugatya, (following the *gopīs* in their worship of Kṛṣṇa), regard Govardhana as *hari-dāsa-varyaḥ,* the best servant of Hari. That doesn't mean the *gopīs* think less of Govardhana. They glorify Govardhana for its many excellent and intimate services to Kṛṣṇa. As in their praise of the flute, the *gopīs* feel transcendental envy toward Govardhana because Kṛṣṇa is in such intimate contact with Govardhana. He walks upon the Hill with His lotus feet.

The caves of Govardhana are secret meeting places for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's amorous pastimes. On Govardhana, the *dāna-keli* pastimes of collecting taxes from the *gopīs* takes place. There is no end to the pleasure Giri-Govardhana is supplying to Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. Raghunātha Gosvāmī has offered prayers for blessings and residence near Govardhana Hill.

•

I want to ask Baladeva to cook simpler. So much fried food is hard to digest. We invited a God-brother for lunch next week and he wrote, "Yes, but please cook a little simpler so it will be easier on my stomach." Devotees who eat to live (not those who live to eat) know this and live in order to stay healthy in Vṛndāvana. Gratify the senses simply and be naturally austere if you want to serve here. The body of a *bhakta* isn't meant for luxurious sense gratification. In Vṛndāvana it's especially out of place.

Starting in 1966, Śrīla Prabhupāda was telling us that we should prepare food not for ourselves, but

for Kṛṣṇa. When cooking, the hands should be clean, food should not be tasted, etc. Then it is actually prepared and offered to Kṛṣṇa, not ourselves. But Kṛṣṇa is so kind that He accepts our offerings yet leaves them for us. After Kṛṣṇa is finished, we can honor the *prasādam*. This is how a devotee satisfies his senses.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "What is the difficulty? There is no difficulty at all." Yet even today I see it as a spiritual difficulty, to eat what devotees give to me by first offering it to Śrīla Prabhupāda. It's not difficult to say a few prayers and then eat—but it is difficult to say those prayers with *bhakti*. It is difficult to put Kṛṣṇa first and then to accept everything as the remnants of the Lord. We want remnants, blessed food, blessed everything—but can we wait and accept it after making a sincere offering? Do we have faith that Kṛṣṇa is taking what we give to Him?

Anyway, we'll ask Baladeva to cook more simply, if possible, although he relishes cooking elaborately for others. He cooks devotionally, but we still can't digest all that ghee.

•

As Mahārāja said, Vṛndāvana is drawing on me. Please go on drawing from me, Vṛndāvana-*dhāma*. Take from me. Make me your servant.

•

"Charming and handsome Lord Kṛṣṇa enjoys transcendental pastimes on the summit of Govardhana Hill, the king of mountains. There He is splendidly manifest, eternally enjoying the pleasures of a transcendental king. With great love and devotion I worship Govardhana Hill, where Lord Kṛṣṇa enjoys transcendental pastimes" (*Vraja-vilāsa-stava*, text 76).

I plan to go to Govardhana. I hope to remember Govardhana at the end of life. Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted to go on Govardhana *parikrama* in his last days. Pure devotees do this in an internal mood, seeing themselves participating in service to Kṛṣṇa and His friends within the actual *līlā* of eternal Vraja. For me now, my prayers come from a distance. I bow in the direction of Govardhana.

•

"I pray that the heroic devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the enemy of Agha, may defeat my captors and cut the ropes that bind me."

That is my actual position—I am unable to perform steady and undeviating devotional service, although it is my aspiration. Others expect me to be strong enough to help them, but I am unable to even help myself. So I pray for help: O Lord, O Energy of the Lord, please engage me in Your service.

•

I said from the beginning that I didn't want to be the enjoyer of *bhajana,* of Mahārāja, enjoyer of Vṛndāvana, enjoyer of the sunset, enjoyer of fruits and vegetables and evenings. The word *bhakta* means one who surrenders in love to Kṛṣṇa and Rādhikā. A *bhakta* has given up the crazy attempt to enjoy this material world.

•

3:56 A.M., roof

This morning there is a white mist, not nearby, but on the horizon. There is a faint pink and a faint blue, but nothing distinct. Downstairs in that first light from the sky, I saw the mosquito net around the cot. It looked inviting but I fought it off. I was editing and the lights went out, so I turned on my battery lantern. Then *I* went out, unconscious. Then awake and editing, then out . . .

My energy ebbs and flows like the electric currents in this house. The bell is ringing for 6:00 A.M. The birds are up. Nothing misty or drowsy about them.

(I aim to go further than this, but on my own I can't seem to reach the transcendental agenda. Go to Vṛndāvana's saints.)

"Friend, do not stay for even a moment to hear the names of these fallen men. Simply run to Śrīmatī Rādhikā's forest groves" (*Vm, Śataka* 13.55).

"'O King and Queen of my life, if You wish to enjoy pastimes, here is a grove of *kadamba* trees in Vṛndāvana forest. When will You be kind to us?' With these words spoken by a *gopī* friend, and with

words of 'Come quickly! Come!' and with smiles and laughter, the curtain concealing Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa is opened. May that curtain protect us" (*Vm, Śataka* 13.76).

I'm not ready to join the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I'm what is called an unripe mango. Śrīla Prabhupāda assured us that we were not stones or potatoes, not *karmīs* or *jñānīs* or *yogīs*. You are *bhaktas,* he said, or you are trying to be. *Bhakti* is all mangoes, but some *bhaktas* are ripe and some unripe.

The sparrows are bursting with energy as they flit round the beams. Despite the mist an orange sun is rising, although it's partly covered. A new beauty emerging round. "Out of fear of Bhagavān the sun rises."

•

"Digest, digest," I tell my innards, and they grump back, "Eat less, eat less." But I can't starve. Everyone can see how skinny I am.

A bird raises its foot and scratches its head. One coos. The crow caws. Others whistle. The *mayūrs* (peacocks) call from the fields. The sun ball is now clear of that low building, round and orange in the rare moment before it turns to fire. Make your wish now as the moment passes: may I worship Govinda and transcend the lethargic and troublesome body. May I relate to others without regret and anxiety, being myself and trying to serve devotees and the Lord.

Yes, I'll take you to Mathurā. You look dull right now, but I'm not worried. I know you can rise to the occasion.

I wrote the letter he asked me to write. Today I will read it to him and have him sign it. Then I will ask him to explain a verse of *Veṇu-gīta*. I may also bring a copy of *Vraja-vilāsa-stava* and say, "But they are not all focused on *mādhurya-līlā*. I thought those were the best."

Sometimes you need to praise and approach all *vrajavāsīs* and beg their mercy. That will allow you to approach Rādhikā's *sakhīs*. That would be a good question to ask. I could mention Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's essay on Vraja *parikrama* and tell him how hard it was to understand. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura says we can't see Vraja without surrendering to the vision of the *sādhus*. He even says, "The land is not spiritual." He says God has left the *dhāmas* in Kali-yuga. Everything depends on the *sādhus* to manifest the *aprakṛta-dhāma*. I wonder what Mahārāja will respond.

Loving God is not a process of denial but of affirmation. The sunrise is part of God's artistry. The eternal adventure is to respond to Kṛṣṇa's call, "Come home."

"Cut the great ropes of misplaced hope, leave the poison forest of sense gratification, and fly, O bird of my heart, to the nectar forest of Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 14.3).

•

I was thinking this morning of Prabhupāda's Vṛndāvana poem: "All that is left is a list of names." My mother rejected me; my father too. It is all a fruitless glory. No wife, sister, material career, few friends. Even my position as initiating guru and author—what are these? Their essence is only service to others. Without that essence, they are illusions, meaningless. It's funny, actually.

•

12:15 noon

We were able to see Mahārāja on time. He was sitting on a bed and doing some kind of Sanskrit or Hindi editing with a young man. They finished up and then he gave me his attention. I showed him the letter I had written on his behalf. He asked me to read it aloud.

I began by saying that if there were any mistakes, I could correct them and do it over.

He smiled and said, "Perhaps there will not be any mistakes."

I read it and he liked it. He signed the letter and gave it back to me to mail. He said he has so many letters like this and I again volunteered to do some secretarial work for him. He said he spends so much time answering mail and talking with people who come to see him. He said he recently finished a batch of English letters, but when he had more, he would ask me to help.

Navīna came in and poured Mahārāja a cup of water. Mahārāja said, "And much of my time is taken up by him giving me water to drink." Navīna

laughed and humbly protested that Mahārāja had only had a small amount of water to drink so far today. Mahārāja continued to joke however, and said that Navīna takes a great amount of his time by asking him to drink water.

I didn't know what to expect next, but Mahārāja said we should begin right away to use our time. I liked him saying that because it meant he wanted us to get into the discussion on the *Veṇu-gīta*. I had my book and he got out his Tenth Canto and we proceeded.

We began with verse eight. He went over the Sanskrit words and the English and slowly began to reconstruct the meaning of it. There weren't too many new points from Viśvanātha Cakravartī's commentary for this one. Mahārāja said that there wasn't much additional information here. I said that it was a similar verse to the previous one.

In this verse, Kṛṣṇa is described as beautiful. Mahārāja said that *rāgānugā-bhakti* means to think of Kṛṣṇa in the way the *gopīs* think of Him. Whatever is described here—Kṛṣṇa's charming dress and the details of the flower garlands—should be meditated on. He said that Kṛṣṇa wears a flower over one ear as a sign of His love for the *gopīs*. He is also glancing at the *gopīs*.

"According to the verse," I said, "it does not appear that Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma know the *gopīs* are seeing Them. But from what you say, Kṛṣṇa is acting in a way that is pleasing to the *gopīs*."

Mahārāja explained that the *gopīs* are not with Kṛṣṇa while they speak these verses. They are at

home and Kṛṣṇa has gone to the forest. The *gopīs* are remembering Him. They can see His pastimes in the forest just by looking into their own hearts. He said this was the essence of *rāgānugā bhakti:* as the *gopīs* think of Kṛṣṇa while He's in another place, we should follow their mood, hear what they have to say, and think about it.

Looking at Viśvanātha Cakravartī's purport, Mahārāja spoke a dialogue between several *gopīs*. One *gopī* says that they cannot go after Kṛṣṇa in the forest because their relatives will abuse them if they attempt it. Another *gopī* says, "No, let's go forward and give up our shame. When we actually go forward, then whatever happens will be dictated by Kṛṣṇa and His flute. We don't have to worry what to do, it will all be done by our attraction to Kṛṣṇa."

Another *gopī* says that it will be all right for them to go because Balarāma, who is just like a father to them, is also present along with all the cowherd boys. If Kṛṣṇa was alone, then they could be criticized. Another *gopī* says that when they go, they can peek through the branches of the bushes to watch Kṛṣṇa in His pastimes secretly. "We will come close and watch how He's pouring the nectar into the flute and how He is dancing."

Mahārāja then went on to text nine. This verse describes the good fortune of the flute because he is able to taste the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's lips. Mahārāja said that the flute is fearless in taking that nectar, which actually belongs to the *gopīs*. (At one point I asked Mahārāja whether the *gopīs'* talk was madness on

their part, or imagination. He said it is not imagination, but "in their hearts.")

Later I rephrased the question and asked whether the *gopīs'* opinion about the flute was their own point of view or whether it was objective. In other words, the *gopīs* say that the flute is defiant and independent. Is this just their point of view? He said the whole thing is their *mahā-bhāva*. Their descriptions of the flute's relatives shedding tears of joy are all coming from the *bhāva* of the *gopīs*.

Mahārāja also said that the *gopīs* are not deliberately choosing their words. They are not even speaking coherently. Their *bhāva* is overwhelming them and they are speaking like madwomen. When he said this, I got a new insight into this whole section and in general, into *gopīs'* speeches in other parts of the *Bhāgavatam*. So many times the *gopīs* speak about Kṛṣṇa's beauty and how the different creatures respond to Him. All of it is coming as uncontrollable ecstasy in *mādhurya-rasa*. This in itself is the most important point. We do not have to question whether their speeches are "real" or "objective." It is the point of view of those in *mahā-bhāva*.

I also asked Mahārāja to affirm what I thought, that whatever the *gopīs* say we accept as *tattva* or truth. We accept their conclusions on everything. Yes, he said, this is true. We follow their truth. Therefore we simply have to study the *gopīs'* statements and not take them as exaggeration or imagination. We shouldn't think we are superior to

the *gopīs*. They are not ordinary women and their emotions are not the emotions of ordinary women.

Mahārāja then said, *"Bās."* It was enough after about thirty minutes. He said it was "hard labor" for him to speak in English, although it's easy to speak in Hindi or Bengali. I thanked him for what he had given us during this meeting and told him that without his explanations, we weren't understanding anything. He told me to go home and reread the *Veṇu-gīta*.

While he talked, a few of his followers gathered—the young woman who wears white and the older lady. Navīna-Kṛṣṇa was also present. At one point, Mahārāja made another joke at Navīna's expense. I forget exactly what they were talking about, but it was some practical exchange about Navīna's duties. Mahārāja made a joke in Hindi and then asked me if I knew what it meant. He said there is a Hindi expression that a *paṇḍita* is qualified in everything and yet he is a fool. Navīna is like that. He said one time Navīna was looking for his "napkin" [top cloth]. He was looking everywhere but couldn't find it. Then Mahārāja asked him, "What is that on your head?" And there it was, Navīna's cloth on his own head. In this way, the *paṇḍita* is a fool. That story reminded me of Prabhupāda calling me Sir Isaac Newton.

We left grateful and a little further in our understanding of how to actually approach the inner meanings of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

•

3:35 P.M.

The heat today is sapping my energy. Three more days of this writing *vrata*, Thursday, Friday (Rādhāṣṭamī), and Saturday. We have no trips planned for those three days.

"The grass, bushes, insects, and other creatures in Vraja are all very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa. They assist the Lord in His pastimes. They are full of transcendental bliss. Again and again the scriptures recount the earnest request of Brahmā and others to reside in Vraja. For those reasons I bow down to offer my respects to all the creatures who reside in Vraja" (*Vraja-vilāsa-stava*, text 102).

For devotees like Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, this earthly Vraja is not much different than the Vraja in the spiritual world. It's we dullards who can't see Kṛṣṇa here *or* there, either in the holy name, the temple Deity, or in the scriptures. Neither can we go to the spiritual world until we become purified. What is the use of so many questions about this Vraja and that Vraja? First develop the eyes of devotion, the ability to hear with deep faith, and then all Vraja will be revealed as Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's playground. From his point of view, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī states, "Even if the residents of Vraja appear to be ordinary, and even if they fill my ears with useless gossip, I pray that I may remain among them, eternally residing here in Vraja" (*Vraja-vilāsa-stava*, text 105).

•

Just give me these last three days to finish this book.

•

3:55 P.M.

The main reason I don't go more often to Mathurā is that I don't want to tax Mahārāja. He says people are stealing his time (and Navīna is stealing his time by offering him drinking water so many times a day). But another reason I don't go more often is that he is not always available. He knows the principle of "familiarity breeds contempt." A few days' separation builds our appetite. We are not expert tasters of *rasa;* we cannot go on tasting *rasa* constantly. Although we desperately need his association to remember the meaning of *rāgānugā,* we can't capture it all at once.

•

Today Baladeva cooked *kichari* and no sweets, to help me overcome indigestion. Life is treating me well. This is a special atmosphere and I'm trying not to spoil it. I don't have any profound personal realizations or breakthroughs, but when someone said I have no taste I replied, "That's not true." I'm trying to write. I get close to the birds so they can teach me something about life in Vraja. They are my teachers too.

•

At the village known as Govardhana, Lord Caitanya saw the Harideva Deity and began to dance with love. Lord Caitanya didn't want to climb on Govardhana Hill, yet He desired to see the Deity of Gopāla-rāya who is situated there. On the pretext of a Mohammedan invasion, Gopāla-rāya came down the Hill to the house of a *brāhmaṇa* where His worship was conducted secretly. Lord Caitanya saw Him there. While seeing the Deity during a three-day period, Lord Caitanya recited this verse: "May the left arm of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, whose eyes are like the petals of a lotus flower, always protect you. With His left arm He raised Govardhana Hill as if it were a toy."

•

I remember being in Vṛndāvana before but not much—mostly I came as a GBC member or part of an ISKCON group. We did everything together. A guide took our group on *parikrama* and yelled *kṛṣṇa-līlā* over the megaphone. A group organizer collected our passports and went to Delhi to confirm our plane tickets. We all flew Air India together and traveled in buses together, ate together, and fought together. It's different now. We are all on our own, yet we are working to cooperate for Śrīla Prabhupāda.

This is my first experience living outside ISKCON's walls. Soon I'll be back on campus and people will ask how I am and I will ask how they are and everything will feel familiar.

I can't remember sweating so much at this time of day. I wipe my face periodically. It's not such a hardship, but it's like melting. I melt and wipe away the wetness then melt some more. The page is wet wherever I rest my hand.

•

"I pray that my mind may become a singing bumblebee in the dust of Śrī Rādhikā's feet in the land of Vṛndāvana, where Lord Kṛṣṇa eternally enjoys transcendental pastimes" (*Vm, Śataka* 14.14).

Kṛṣṇa sways from side to side, drunk from the liquor of the fruits and flowers of Vraja. He twirls a lotus flower in His hand. This indicates that His heart is twirling in love for Rādhā. The blue *karṇikāra* flower over one ear is also His proclamation of love for the *gopīs*. Even in this world, a young man who wears a flower over his ear looks like a lover. Kṛṣṇa is the original youthful lover, millions of times more handsome than the most handsome. He is compared to the best actor or dancer appearing at the beginning of a drama. He wears many beautiful varieties of flowers in His garlands.

The *gopīs* become mad to see Him. They want to run after Him and kiss and embrace Him. They overcome their shame and go ahead. It's not in their power to stop. When they talk about the fortune of the flute, it is coming from their ecstasy in *mahā-bhāva*.

The meaning of Vraja is to see from the viewpoint of the *gopīs*.

"He who takes Vṛndāvana very seriously is taken seriously by all the demigods. He who takes Vṛndāvana lightly becomes as insignificant as a blade of grass" (*Vm, Śataka* 14.17).

To wonder, "What will I do for months in Vṛndāvana" means not to take Vṛndāvana seriously. Vṛndāvana is for spiritual practice. It is home. "He who takes Vṛndāvana lightly becomes as insignificant as a blade of grass."

"O Śrī Vṛndāvana . . . I think an insignificant dog who lives in your realm to be fortunate" (*Vm, Śataka* 14.21).

•

The trees near this house look like children's renditions—straight trunks with a green ball of leaves on top. I haven't studied their leaves, but I have been grateful for their shade.

•

September 3, 1:14 A.M.

I wrote a note to my editor: "Please rescue the good writing from this book by editing out what is unnecessary, too rambling, etc." She will be able to spot how to improve it so that it turns into interesting blocks of reading. I wish her well with this book. The material repeats itself (as life does), but that doesn't mean it has to be boring.

•

Mahārāja has taught us how to relish the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* or any *rasika* literature. He told us to see Kṛṣṇa's beauty in the way the *gopīs* see it. Kṛṣṇa is the perfect *nayaka*. He has all the qualities of a *nayaka—dhīra-lalita, dhīrodatta,* etc. He is so beautiful and He walks like a drunken elephant who is still thirsty for the *gopīs' prema*. He is begging for their love and they are mad after Him. Read the verses in that mood. The *gopīs* speak from their *mahā-bhāva*. The *uttama-adhikārīs* hear and enter that mood.

I think we can at least develop a preference for this over all other spiritual instructions and *līlās*. We can know, "This is what gives Kṛṣṇa the most pleasure," and allow our taste to develop in that direction.

I have been reading the *gopīs'* description of how all living entities in Vraja respond to the flute. Now I understand better that those are not "objective" portraits, but the visions of the *gopīs*. They express their envy of the deer for their ability to freely express their love for Kṛṣṇa. This subjective portrait is infinitely more valuable than any other description of the effect of Kṛṣṇa's flute-song. Who could describe it better than the *gopīs,* who are themselves overwhelmed with *kṛṣṇa-prema?* Kṛṣṇa's flute awakens *bhāva* in all living entities, but only the *gopīs* experience *mahā-bhāva*. Their words can move a dead stone. *Gopyaḥ kim ācārad ayaṁ kuśalaṁ sma veṇur:* "My dear *gopīs,* what auspicious activities must the flute have performed—*dāmodar-ādhara-sudhām api gopīkānam*—to enjoy the nectar of

Kṛṣṇa's lips (which is owned by the *gopīs*)?" (*Bhāg.* 10.21.9).

Objectively, we can wonder whether this bamboo flute is anything more than a dry stick. But what would be the value of that question? The *gopīs* are not asking it. They are seeing the flute as imbued with the conjugal mood. They are seeing it as a male who is stealing the *gopīs'* property—the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's lips. We do not read these verses for information, but to understand *rasa.* We are meant to understand the *gopīs'* love.

Kṛṣṇa is never separated from His flute. He always has it either in His hand or tucked in His belt. He even sleeps with His flute. Therefore, the *gopīs* desire to become the flute in a future birth. As *gopīs,* they are restricted from being with Kṛṣṇa in so many ways, but the flute is always touching Kṛṣṇa's body, and especially His lips.

The flute defies them. The flute catches the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's lips and, not being able to contain it, overflows in the form of musical vibration. When the *gopīs* hear the sound of the flute, their hearts change and they become immersed in divine love. But the flute challenges them: "Yes, I am here taking the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's lips and I will continue to do so. I am not saving any for you! You can come and claim your own property, otherwise I will drink it all."

When I heard Mahārāja explain this a few *rasika* questions came to mind (a good sign—it means that I am beginning to understand the nature of *rasa*). But I also thought of questions which tended

toward the intellectual, perhaps tinged with doubt. They also need to be asked if they arise because we have to be firmly fixed in *tattva*. When we have full faith in the guru, we can ask apparently foolish questions. He may see that we are foolish, but he will save us from doubt.

Here is one question: "How does Viśvanātha Cakravartī know of the *līlā* as he does, which elaborates and intensifies whatever Śukadeva says?" Actually I wanted to have Mahārāja confirm my guess—that as the *gopīs* are speaking from the stage of *mahā-bhāva*, Viśvanātha Cakravartī is also. He is not presenting intellectual arguments based on Sanskrit grammar in order to support the cause of *mādhurya-rasa*. But like the *gopīs*, his "interpretations" on the *līlās* are coming to him from his own *mahā-bhāva* ecstasy. We don't need to keep asking, "Did those *līlās* he describes actually happen? How did he know what Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa were thinking?" You might as well ask, "Why are the *gopīs* envious of the flute? Shouldn't they be more charitable and equipoised?" Rather than ask or argue, we seek to enter their *bhāva*, if possible.

Did I think yesterday that Mahārāja wasn't giving any commentary on verse eight that was as sensational as what he gave in the previous verse? That was a silly thought. Just the fact that he allowed me to see what I can't feel on my own—the *gopīs'* emotional state—means he sprinkled me with a rare nectar that can awaken a *gopī*-nature. What he gave is very rare and unattainable except by hearing from him with faith. Śrīla Prabhupāda is

pleased that I hear these teachings; he prepared me for this. And now he wants to see me develop it and keep it sacred. He wants me to gratefully accept it (rubbing it on my eyes and chest as the Pulindis rub Kṛṣṇa's foot dust on their own faces and breasts) and thus become a more fit devotee to practice and preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The *gopīs* say the flute's parents and ancestors are happy that their child has become so successful. The bamboo tree on the bank of the river is shedding tears of happiness. Other trees are also considered forefathers and relatives of the bamboo flute, along with the river who cries happy tears in the form of lotus flowers. The flute is outrageously defiant, stealing all the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's lips for himself.

Now we can know better why the *gopīs* are so urgent to run to Kṛṣṇa when they hear Him play His flute. They want to stop this defiant, outrageous monopoly of the flute. They want the nectar for themselves and they lament that they are so unfortunate because there are so many obstacles on their path. Thus, they talk among themselves and bring Kṛṣṇa pleasure. He sees and feels their unmatched love for Him.

In the BBT commentary to this verse, they say that Sanātana Gosvāmī has an alternative opinion as to why the trees are shedding tears. He says they are not jubilant but unhappy that they cannot play with Kṛṣṇa as the flute does. "The trees are actually just like intelligent persons who suffer when they cannot obtain the goal of life. Thus the trees are

crying because they cannot get the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's lips."

I don't cry for the nectar of Harer Nāma. I *should* cry for it, but I am too busy thinking of my own well-being. I am looking for peace, not torment, just like a *śānta-rasa* hermit.

•

Last night I had one of those recurring dreams of being a frustrated student at Harvard University. I was a student there, but failing, so I would probably have to drop out. Why do I keep dreaming this? Was I actually a Harvard student in a past life who flunked out? In this life I can't remember thinking about this. I couldn't even hope to go to Harvard since my parents had no money and my high school grades were too average. But perhaps in an unconscious way, I harbored a strong desire to be a member of the most prestigious university in America. I mention it now because I wonder if there is a possible connection between this hankering and frustration to be a good student at Harvard and my desire to taste the nectar of the holy name. But if there is a connection, why don't I cry for Kṛṣṇa's mercy rather than have these recurring dreams? Wanting to chant with *bhāva* doesn't enter into these dreams. If only I could convert the energy and imagery of the Harvard dreams (and my U.S. Navy dreams) into restlessness at my failure to obtain the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's lips. The trees in Vraja are crying for lack of it; the *gopīs* are crying that they are

obstructed from it—and a piece of bamboo flute is enjoying it all for himself.

I shouldn't be so afraid to feel uncomfortable or restless due to love. It's actually blissful. It is not the same as material misery. Śrīla Prabhupāda explained that the six Gosvāmīs gave up all comforts of aristocratic life and lived as mendicants in *kaupins*, under trees in Vṛndāvana. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that usually, if any aristocratic person suddenly takes to renounced life, it is very painful and he may die from the sudden austerity. But the six Gosvāmīs were blissful because they were always tasting the *gopīs'* love for Kṛṣṇa (*gopī-bhāva*). Therefore don't think a disruption in your peaceful *sādhaka's* routine—because of unrestrained anxiety at not attaining Kṛṣṇa—will be bad for you. Be at least willing to allow feeling to enter your life, if it ever happens.

•

6:00 A.M., roof

Govinda Kavirāja says, "I have locked my outside door and have opened my inner door [reaching to his *mañjarī-svarūpa*]. Worldly people cannot understand this ecstasy."

But in Vṛndāvana, I look out even with my present senses and see something of the Yamunā and Govardhana. If my intentions are not malicious, and I am guided by scripture, then I may hear and see and touch and taste and smell in a different way. So I live simply and think, "Underneath it all, despite my faults, I am in contact with the earth and air in Kṛṣṇa's playground."

"Even today, affectionate Lord Kṛṣṇa enjoys the very sweet nectar of transcendental pastimes there, herding the cows with His brother and His many dear friends. A wonderful sweetness becomes manifest in the hearts of they who understand the nectar of this place. Of Vraja, which is more dear even than the city of Mathurā, I take shelter" (*Vraja-vilāsa-stava*, text 6).

•

These days, we are deep into Kali-yuga 1992, and yet we have a long way to go—10,000 years during which Kṛṣṇa consciousness can flourish on the earth. But Kali-yuga is already bad. Already the predictions written in the Twelfth Canto of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* are being fulfilled. But it's not hopeless. Lord Caitanya's moon is rising. Śrīla Prabhupāda's ISKCON is growing.

•

I have been fatigued all morning, measuring out my strength and making small, deliberate movements to conserve energy. Walking up the flight of steps to this roof was a strain. I even felt taxed when I crawled under this mosquito net. It is a relief to sit in this chair. If I am careful, I will be able to make it through the day without getting a headache. It makes me want to relish a few verses rather than doing intense reading.

Two doves have arrived. Early in the morning, everyone at Nandagrām arrives at Kṛṣṇa's house, while a few of the devotees go to His bed to wake Him. They want Him to go to the *gośala* and help with the milking of cows. Kṛṣṇa is the Prince of Vraja. His cows and calves won't give milk until they see their beloved friend, Govinda.

Is it possible that there won't be any sunrise today? "This *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is as brilliant as the sun, and it has arisen . . ." Is it possible that the sky will remain blue-cloudy all day? Already there have been lightning flashes in the clouds. I was up here chanting *japa*. I heard a *shenai* and *tablas* playing and it set me off on a train of thought about John Coltrane's music and a tape Suhotra dāsa recorded of *shenai* in Māyāpur which he titled, "Live at the Gate!" It sounded to us like modern jazz.

During *brahma-muhūrta* this morning, that *shenai* was distracting my already unconcentrated mind. I paced back and forth and sometimes sat on the cot. "I'm awake, I'm awake, and by moving I'll avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. I can't hope for much more than this." I also thought of Mahārāja and guessed how I would be able to see him even when more devotees start arriving for Kārttika. I thought about those Godbrothers. I pushed on to complete the quota—eight rounds, nine rounds, do one more before you go down, go for ten . . .

Every once in a while I feel a light sprinkle on my forearms. I see four school children in their short-pants uniforms with knee socks and back packs. It's 6:25 and no sign of the sun.

The pink-necked doves are "kissing" each other. I hear but cannot see the parrots. These healthy green trees in the field are fully blessed by this year's prolonged monsoon. I'm glad I witnessed so much rain.

•

"Let me surrender to the saintly devotees who reside in Vṛndāvana, the very secret and wonderfully sweet transcendental abode mercifully appearing in this world, although in reality, it is far from both this material world and the spiritual realm of Vaikuṇṭha" (*Vm, Śataka* 14.32).

It would be nice to have an authorized *ṭīkā* for that verse. He seems to say the Vṛndāvana we see with our *sādhaka* vision is not the *aprakṛta-dhāma* that is within Goloka, far beyond the material universes and the Vaikuṇṭhas. Yet the Vraja where we live now is worshipable. Saintly devotees living here reveal these truths to us, building our faith in the dust of Vṛndāvana and in the eternal abode beyond our present touch. I am reconciled to this understanding and will patiently wait until more is revealed in my heart from *bhajana*.

Let me call it love for now, if you don't mind. I love this place. Looking at a picture of Kṛṣṇa here is different than when I look at pictures in the West. You accept the *vrajavāsī* devotional art more readily, and see its innocent sweetness. You don't consider the faults. In this picture, Rādhā has Her two arms around Kṛṣṇa's neck. Her left hand holds the flute, Her right hand rests on His chest. She is decorated

with jeweled bracelets and necklaces and They both wear ornate crowns. She holds the flute to His mouth. They are cheek to cheek.

From this roof I can see the footpath. "Rādhārāṇī *kī jaya.*" The amplified *āśrama* is starting their child-like morning tune, accompanied by the gong. I keep sitting up trying to get comfortable in this chair. I hardly noticed, but my time is gone. Time for breakfast. Still no sunrise.

My idea is that I will be down-to-earth yet worshipful. At least I won't make wild claims for myself: "O wretched heart, from where have you gotten these hundreds of feigned symptoms of ecstatic love, as real as a host of flowers imagined to float in the sky?" (*Vm, Śataka* 14.41).

•

11:05 A.M.

Winding down the writing retreat. An eye ache today prevents me from going up to the roof for a vigorous writing session. I am just wanting to be plain and honest.

I have frequently quoted scripture on Vṛndāvana. One point of view is that you can't see spirit. You can't see *mahā-prasādam,* can't see the spirit soul, and although you see a statue, you can't see the *sat-cit-ānanda arcā-vigraha.* Similarly, you can't see Vṛndāvana. *Māyā* cheats the neophyte into thinking *mahā-prasādam* has gone bad. He thinks the *sat-cit-ānanda* guru has died. He thinks the Deity is broken. My little catalogue of birds and cows—is this just *māyā* cheating me into thinking I am

writing about Vṛndāvana? No, the *ācāryas* encourage us to see the *dhāma* as the abode of the Lord, even today. It's the replica of Goloka in this world.

When Śrīla Prabhupāda writes of Vṛndāvana, he mostly means the way it was when Kṛṣṇa appeared on earth with His entourage. But Śrīla Prabhupāda says the place remains like Kṛṣṇa's special estate—just as a prime minister has a country estate he visits. Whenever Kṛṣṇa comes to this world (once in a day of Brahmā), His *dhāma* descends with Him—and this Vṛndāvana is where it happens. Therefore, devotees stay here, near Govardhana and the Yamunā and Rādhā-kuṇḍa. It has become externally degraded, but internally it is unaffected by Kali-yuga. I have some idea of the theology of the *dhāma*, and a little realization of it. But I feel sure that a favorable inclination to the *dhāma* is not material but will nurture my spiritual life.

One of the signs of "steady ecstasy" mentioned in *Nectar of Devotion*, is "Attraction to living in a place where Kṛṣṇa has His pastimes." Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "A pure devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa resides in the district of Mathurā or Vṛndāvana and visits all the places where Kṛṣṇa's pastimes were performed. . . . Actually, if someone goes to Vṛndāvana, he will immediately feel separation from Kṛṣṇa, who performed such nice activities when He was present there" *(The Nectar of Devotion*, p.139).

Rather than debunk these statements, I am supporting them. That's not naive; it's *śraddhā*. But I should always be aware that my attraction is a tiny shadow of real love for Vṛndāvana. Śrīla Prabhu-

pāda writes, " . . . shadow attachment or *parā* attachment can develop if one associates with a pure devotee or visits holy places like Vṛndāvana or Mathurā, and if an ordinary man develops such attachment for Kṛṣṇa and fortunately performs devotional activities in the association of pure devotees, he can rise to the platform of pure devotional service" (*The Nectar of Devotion*, p.140).

Another evidence by Śrīla Prabhupāda: "This feeling about Mathurā-maṇḍala and Vṛndāvana described by Rūpa Gosvāmī can actually be felt even by nondevotees. The places in the eighty-four-square-mile district of Mathurā are so beautifully situated on the banks of the river Yamunā that anyone who goes there will never want to return to this material world. These statements by Rūpa Gosvāmī are factually realized descriptions of Mathurā and Vṛndāvana. All these qualities prove that Mathurā and Vṛndāvana are situated transcendentally. Otherwise, there is no possibility of invoking our transcendental sentiments in these places. Such transcendental feelings are aroused immediately and without fail after one arrives in Mathurā or Vṛndāvana" (*The Nectar of Devotion* , p.111).

•

5:30 P.M.

Eye pain. I am trying to relax, but ultimately, my health is in the hands of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhārāṇī. Besides, what can I expect when I have a material body?

Tomorrow is Rādhāṣṭamī. The program will be long—two *maṅgala-āratis,* Deity greeting, *guru-pūjā,* a special, long *kīrtana,* class at 8, readings in honor of Śrīmatī Rādhikā at 9, an *abhiśekha* at 11:30, a noon *ārati,* and a feast. I'll attend up to the first class and then come back here. I just can't hold up so long at these programs. We will read from Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī's (Rati-mañjarī's) poems about Rādhā. That is the point of view I want to hear. If you love Rādhā's service, you have to give up the world. You have to be ready for waves of *bhāva* because Rādhā's life is not peaceful like that of Kṛṣṇa's wives. She has to meet the Lord in secret, overcoming dangers and difficulties. On a dark-moon night, She goes out to meet Kṛṣṇa, led by Rati-mañjarī, although She can't even see the path.

Do you want a service that is full of pain when you witness Rādhikā's separation from Kṛṣṇa? Yes, I am praying for this. I am praying to become qualified to serve the Queen of the *mañjarīs* in bold, loving service.

•

September 4, 1:12 A.M., Rādhāṣṭamī

Yesterday I quoted a verse by Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī about feigned ecstatic symptoms. He said they were like flowers in the sky. No poses. Keep breaking through pretense.

This is the first year I have been fortunate enough to be in Vṛndāvana on Rādhāṣṭamī. I cannot prove whatever love I have for Her by filling these pages with verses glorifying Her. Nothing artificial.

But I don't want to be silent or neglectful either. Nothing artificial means no feigned symptoms, no pretense. It doesn't prove anything about your heart to record verses in this book.

Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī laments out of love-in-separation from Rādhā. He wants to be Her maidservant. If for a moment he loses the vision of Her pastimes, he feels great pain. "O Goddess! This person has died from the bites of the black snake of separation from You. Please revive me with the medicinal lac that is smeared on Your lotus feet!" (*Vilāpa-kusumāñjali*, text 9).

When will he get the vision again? When, even in a dream, will She beautify his head by touching it with the dust of Her feet? Each prayer by Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī refers to pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in which he participated as Rati-mañjarī. We have heard many of these from Mahārāja, and now we read them.

"Ever since Rūpa-mañjarī filled my eyes with light in the land of Vraja, I have desired to see the red lac on Your lotus feet!" (*Vilāpa-kusumāñjali*, text 14).

Let that verse be ours too. Ever since Śrīla Prabhupāda told us about Rādhā, and ever since Mahārāja told us of Rūpa- and Rati-mañjarīs, our eyes have been opened . . .

She is the best devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa because She loves Him the most. And we may serve Her directly by serving Her *kiṅkarīs*. This is the highest goal for devotees of Lord Caitanya. It grants the

most intimate service in love of God that is possible for the liberated spirit soul.

All glories to Rādhā. I pray not to become an offender today. By the grace of my spiritual master, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, I was initiated into Harer Nāma on this day twenty-six years ago. May I humbly celebrate my own birthday as well by remembering it within myself and giving thanks. It is an honor to be spiritually born on the appearance day of Śrīmatī Rādhikā. It gives me the hint that I should be going in the direction of Her service. "O Rādhe! When my eyes saw Your pond, which is filled with sweet water, lotus flowers, and beautifully humming bees, I got the desire to taste the nectar of Your service!" (*Vilāpa-kusumāñjali*, text 15).

•

Even when we think of *gopī-bhāva* or read of the *gopīs'* love for Kṛṣṇa (as in the *Veṇu-gīta*), we want to know "Where is Rādhā? What does She think and feel?" We want to be in tune with Her desires.

She is compassionate to Her devotees. When Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī was suffering in separation from Her, soaking the bank of Rādhā-kuṇḍa with his tears, Śrīmatī appeared before him. With a voice filled with affection She said, "Tulasī! Why do you want to see Me alone?"

Raghunātha replied, "O Svāminī! Ever since I met Rūpa-mañjarī who opened my eyes, by Your grace, I have wanted to see the red lac on Your feet."

The guru opens our eyes to the service of Rādhā in the spiritual word. We pray to know him in his spiritual form as a maidservant there and to assist him (*nikuñja-yūno rati-keli-siddhyai*). Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura prays, "When will my master, Lokanātha Gosvāmī, take me along and submit me to Śrī Rūpa-mañjarī's lotus feet?"

Tulasī-(Rati-) mañjarī prays to Rādhā, "I want to admire the red lac on Your lotus feet when it shines on a blackish background (Śyāma's chest). I don't want to see You by Yourself, but with Your Śyāma, if He belongs to You."

•

So no feigned symptoms today, but try to pray: Hare, Hare, Rādhe, Rādhe, please engage me in the service of Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa. Hare Hare, O Rādhā, please take away the dirt, the lust, the old memories. Please take away the obstacles to my seeing You. Please awaken in me the desire to serve my spiritual master (who is your representative) in this life and the next. Let me be the servant of the servant of the servant of those who serve You at Yavāṭ. Let me hear with a pure heart of the *dāsīs* who tend to Rādhā's needs, who live to bring about Her meeting with Śyāma, and who are sad when She is in separation from Him.

Our gurus decry the cheap constant taking of the names, "Rādhe, Rādhe, Rādhe." But on this day, we can all sing Her names with special permission. We pray for a pure heart, and the awareness that the goal is *rādhā-prema*.

I have so many old layers to shed. When I am asleep, I still think I am Steve Guarino. When I am awake, I pray to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. By the mercy of the great souls, my material identity will be dropped and I will be able to re-enter my spiritual consciousness.

•

"The wonderful sacred mantra that Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead chants is the name of His dearmost Rādhārāṇī." (*Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Gannodeśa-dipikā*)

Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "In Vṛndāvana, we find that devotees chant Rādhārāṇī's name more often than Kṛṣṇa's. Wherever we go in Vṛndāvana, we will find devotees chanting '*Jaya* Rādhe.'"

•

I rose late today, and now we have to rush off to Śrīla Prabhupāda's Samādhi-mandir by 4:10 for *ārati*. Then *ārati* in the temple, with *darśana* of Rādhā-Śyāmasundara. Pray, if you can—Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa. Pray for what? That I become sincere enough to serve my spiritual master and to learn the art of serving as a *rādhā-dāsī*. I pray to be able to serve today, to take the lessons required; to enter the spirit of the *sannyāsa-mantra* he conferred on me.

Rūpa Gosvāmī prays, "O Queen of Vṛndāvana, bowing down and rolling about on the Yamunā's

shore, this person, with an agitated heart and a choked voice, appeals to You.

"Even though he has committed offenses, even though he is unqualified . . . please give this person a small particle of Your devotional service.

"Because the fresh butter of Your heart is always melting in the splendor of Your transcendental mercy, it is not proper for You to neglect this anguished person" ("An Appeal," texts 5–7).

•

6:30 A.M., rattan chair

We went to *maṅgala-ārati,* and as the *samādhi* doors opened and I bowed down, Dhanurdhāra Swami handed me the *karatālas.* I led a brisk *"Gurv-āṣṭakam"* without fear of forgetting the words. I thought, "Even if I can't meditate on the meaning of Śrīla Prabhupāda as the representative of Rādhārāṇī, just to be here on this day and sing is helpful." Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā see all.

In the temple room for the second *ārati,* we saw Śrīmatī Rādhikā dressed in pastel colors. Her *sakhīs* wore the same colors. Rādhā held a long garland of orange marigolds for Śyāma. He was wearing a *tulasī* garland. My mind went off, but Her radiance . . . and new shelter . . . make it possible . . . that I can learn one day.

"How are you doing?" he asked in the moments before *maṅgala-ārati.*

"Fine. *Jaya* Rādhe."

When we arrived back here after *maṅgala-ārati* the electricity was out. A mail package forwarded from France contained a few poetry books. Someday, maybe I will write poetry to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Two orange-bordered-eyed mynas arrived—gray bodies, black tails. I jumped to see them. They walked calmly right up to me in this chair while I soaked in their beautiful colors. They suddenly noticed me, chirped in alarm, and flew up the stairs to the roof.

"To appreciate Vṛndāvana, it is necessary to understand the extraordinary excellence of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī's transcendental name, form, qualities, entourage, and paraphernalia."

Look up from the book in Rādhā's land. Don't be sardonic or precocious or hurt or sly or anything like that. I know you can't help it, but I'm saying it anyway. Let the flame live inside you to be *rādhā-dāsī.*

Gone forever boy-girl, man-woman, or any other kind of lusty romance for me. I pray for that freedom. I have it now and don't want to lose it. Let the old dreams wither like weeds pulled up from their roots. Let the newly planted creepers of devotion grow in the light and water of Harer Nāma.

•

Chant another round, don't forget the "Hare" means "O Rādhā," Kṛṣṇa means He attracts Her, and Rāma means He is Her lover.

10:20 A.M.

"Rādhe, Rādhe Govinda-Rādhe . . ." A woman's amplified voice sings these words over and over. We're back after attending the class and seeing Rādhā-Śyāmasundara in a decorated *kuñja* on the altar. A parrot sat on Viśākhā's hand. Someone gave me the lotus which Rādhā had been holding. I gave it to a disciple here and told her to keep it in water all day. We are fasting until noon. While the extra *kīrtana* went on, I went upstairs to Sārvabhauma's guesthouse room (who is visiting from Italy). He massaged my tired feet. We went down to the temple because we heard the lecture was beginning, but then they said, "Not yet." We ducked into Śrīla Prabhupāda's room. No one was there; the electric fans were on. I bowed to Śrīla Prabhupāda and sat before him chanting a pleasant round of *japa.*

In the lecture, the speaker covered many authoritative points about Rādhā as *hlādinī-śakti* and the personification of *mahā-bhāva.* I sat up straight and sometimes leaned back, but was always attentive. He said Rādhā is only mentioned indirectly in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.* One reason is that if you have something valuable, you don't flash it around for everyone to see. You share it with intimate friends who understand your mood.

The *gopīs'* outstanding feature: they find happiness only in the happiness of Kṛṣṇa. Rādhā says if Kṛṣṇa takes pleasure giving Her distress, She considers that distress the best of Her happiness.

He read sixteen ornaments and twelve decorations of Rādhā, and twenty-five qualities and told stories to illustrate them. He ended with the story of how Rādhā was crowned Vṛndāvaneśvarī. At the coronation, Kṛṣṇa took the position of the constable. He also told the story how Jaṭilā locked Rādhā in a room, but She changed clothes with Subala and got out to be with Kṛṣṇa . . .

•

Devotees gave me a long garland made of small white flowers. I walked back here wearing it and talking with Sārvabhauma saying, "I'll visit you in Italy next spring." Then I came in here and rested. Now Baladeva has arrived after being in Delhi for two days. He came in the door with a box so big it took two men to carry it. I hope it doesn't get robbed, whatever it is. Stock your house and then lock and worry.

Today is a day for offering gifts to Rādhā. And promises and requests. I won't attend the *abhiśeka* in the temple, but we will read *Vilāpa-kusumāñjali* over here.

•

11:20 A.M.

I have stopped in the middle of my fourteenth round to come here. Writing is a good opportunity to be honest and fix my attention on Kṛṣṇa conscious aims. The mind is uncontrollable. Chanting requires strong, pure devotion to overcome the mind. I can't do it yet, but I'm persisting and wait-

ing for the Lord's mercy. But writing—it goes slower than the mind, picks out a few words and the mind gets interested in what's being written. The mind submits and intelligence directs. Something like that. Writing is satisfied with less. Even if I can't write pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness, there's a satisfaction in making firm the right commitment. Do you understand what I mean? A "failed" Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is disappointing, but if I write, "I failed to pay attention in *japa*—but I will keep trying," it is somehow more positive.

There's also the hope that it will lead to something more. I am fascinated by writing. When you bow down with the pen, it stays—something to look at later. *Please accept me.* But if you don't do it sincerely, it *looks* phony. Writing provides evidence of my being.

•

2:45 P.M.

Don't commit offenses to the Vaiṣṇavas. Do you know the story from *Bhakti-ratnakāra*?

One day Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī was in a happy mood as he meditated. He saw Rādhā's *sakhīs* dressing and decorating Her. The *sakhīs* wanted Rādhā to know that Kṛṣṇa was watching, so after decorating Her nicely, they held up a mirror for Her to see Herself. Rādhā looked upon the beauty of Her face and then saw the moonlike face of Kṛṣṇa in the mirror. She immediately became embarrassed and perplexed and covered Herself with Her cloth. All the *sakhīs* laughed, and Rūpa Gosvāmī, although appearing to meditate, also laughed.

At that very moment, a Vaiṣṇava came to see Rūpa Gosvāmī. He thought that Rūpa Gosvāmī was laughing at him, so he left at once feeling hurt. He went to Sanātana Gosvāmī and explained to him what had happened. Sanātana explained the real reason for Rūpa Gosvāmī's laughter. At that moment, Rūpa Gosvāmī arrived there. He had realized that someone had approached him because his meditation had suddenly broken. The Vaiṣṇava began apologizing to Rūpa for misunderstanding his ecstatic laughter, and Rūpa apologized for ignoring his guest.

•

4:01 P.M.

Next to last afternoon writing in this book. It's bright hot and I'm up under the *paṇḍāl*. A laborer on the neighbor's roof is moving logs with no protection from the sun except a little turban. From within the Sītā-Rāma Mandir someone is singing out over the blazing meadows.

•

"May the splendor of Vṛndāvana's pastimes, which are eternally filled with the nectar of deep Rādhā's love and eternally worshiped by all other forests, delight my heart" (*Vm, Śataka* 14.85).

What about the training I underwent in Wicklow? I used to go to the calf's shed and find my way down past the immediate distractions to write something that concerned me. Now I can feel the distractions—the *bhajana* singer, the heat, the possi-

bility that the laborer will come to our roof—where are all these distractions *from*? What is the subject you long for?

I'm not sure. Putting together the simple events of the day, "Vālmīki's" daily "Food-for-Life" to the little folks in the bushes, the sight of a lone tan cow slowly walking in . . . but more.

How tough these women laborers are!

On Rādhāṣṭamī, the lecturer said many inspirational things. I could look up some more quotes in the books . . .

•

I forgot to bring the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* up to the roof. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu had to leave Vṛndāvana; He was in so much ecstasy that His *brāhmaṇa* assistant feared for His life. When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu almost capsized a boat in the Yamunā, then they thought He ought to leave. He had countless pastimes in Vṛndāvana. In the morning He would chant *japa* alone at Āmli-talā. In the afternoon, He made Himself available to the *vrajavāsīs* who came to see Him. I always remember that.

•

Cindy Min is now a freshman at Bryn Mawr. I have been reading my mail and what I read enters my *japa*.

•

"Defects in Vṛndāvana are not defects. To see them is ignorance. To see suffering, decay, or other defects in Vṛndāvana is an illusion, a great illusion" (*Vm, Śataka* 14.98).

A lady here with a terminal disease wrote me saying she's too physically weak to leave Vṛndāvana. She thinks she has maybe two more years to live. She asks me how to think of Kṛṣṇa when she is in pain. Maybe I have some secret realization I have gained . . .

I told her to use her pain-free time well. Stay in a small place when pain comes and realize that there is nothing you are supposed to do except wait and endure and wait. *Tat te 'nukampām* . . . You really have nothing else you need to be doing but depending on Kṛṣṇa and waiting it out. There is nowhere else to go, nowhere else you are supposed to be . . .

When we are strong enough, Prahlāda said, before the body is embarrassed by dwindling, learn attraction for Kṛṣṇa's name and service.

The lady in yellow is chasing goats, shouts at them like a man, "Hey! hut!" She knows what she's doing with that stick. She chases them and then goes herself and sits deep in the shade of a friendly tree.

Madhu is pumping water on Rādhāṣṭamī. He says he has to make a phone call at the temple but asks me, "Will we have the reading tonight at six?" Yes, yes. That is the focal point of our worship of Rādhā. When I was ill yesterday and couldn't read, he read to me. The first verse he began with moved me because I recalled Mahārāja speaking on it. This

rādhā-bhakti is something different and more moving than other things . . .

"O Queen! With the two bumblebees of the corners of Your eyes, which in the moonlit rendezvous anxiously wander over each direction as if the forest were a jungle of blue lotuses, will You glance upon this person?" (*Vilāpa-kusumāñjali*, text 13).

Rādhā sees blue lotuses (Kṛṣṇa) wherever She looks in the forest. She is Kṛṣṇa-mayī, one whose inside and outside is Kṛṣṇa, or who sees Kṛṣṇa everywhere.

Mahārāja spoke on this verse, but I can't remember what he said now (Kali-yuga brain). I do remember that Rādhā trains to go out on the dark nights by splashing water in Her front yard and walking on it to practice walking in a dark, rainy forest. At home, if She sees a picture of a snake She is afraid, but when She sees a snake while She walks through the forest at night, She covers the jewels on its head and puts Her hand over its mouth, so it won't hiss and give away Her position.

I remember some things, but I forget others. After Mahārāja had spoken on this verse, he said a few days later in Bombay that he was astonished by what had come out of his mouth about this verse.

•

There are no defects in Vṛndāvana. Even I'm not a defect. No decay. I'm just a visitor; I don't qualify as a *vrajavāsī*. That woman with the terminal disease said she hopes to return to eternal Goloka, al-

though she's not qualified. Don't judge her statement with your arrogance or you will be like another braying donkey.

There they are, the pack of foolish asses. I heard about them in 1966 from Swamijī. He said they carry big bundles for the washerman because he supplies them with grass. But they can get grass anywhere.

•

"Please worship Śrī Rādhā who, at first filled with jealous anger by the cruel words of Her friends, and then worshiped by the sweet words Her lover sent through a messenger, now runs to Her lover's place in Vṛndāvana forest" (*Vm, Śataka* 15.5).

•

BRAY! You ass. You and your companion who echoes your call are big fools. That's all I can say. You are asses, and even when you jingle a little bell around your neck as you gracefully trot by, you are still an ass.

•

6:24 P.M.

Rati-mañjarī says, "O Goddess, I shall never pray to You for anything else but the excellent service of Your lotus feet." She doesn't want to be an equal friend like Lalitā or Viśākhā, but a maidservant. Maidservants are the most intimate devotees of Rādhā. *Sakhīs* are often *sama-sneha,* they have equal affection for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, but the *mañjarīs* are

rādhā-snehādika, they have more love for Rādhā. Mahārāja has encouraged us to take up this connection now, even though we don't know our *svarūpa-siddha,* don't have greed, and are still attached to the world and the body. He has introduced us to appreciation of *Vilāpa-kusumāñjali* as the literature *par excellence* (but we need guidance to follow it.) The six Gosvāmīs are all in *mañjarī-bhāva,* although they often write books to encourage all *rasas* with Kṛṣṇa and to establish Vedic evidence that Kṛṣṇa is God. But Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī more than any other stays firmly fixed in the conception of *mañjarī-bhāva—rādhā-dāsī*—and teaches us this way through his poetry.

"Śyāma! Do You know why You're so beautiful? Because Your Priya is here!"

•

I won't copy out more verses here right now. When we want to relish those intimate pastimes, we can go to them directly. I am finishing out my record. Let it be known that I continue to relish *Vilāpa-kusumāñjali.* If we become qualified to hear this "lament" by Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, we can approach the ultimate goal of all goals. Even now, as foolish students, we nevertheless assert, "O Goddess! I shall never pray to You for anything except..."

Please honor these statements, Śrīla Prabhupāda. They are, at present, the hope of a blind man to see; the declaration of a lame man that he shall cross

the mountain; the decision of a dumb man that he shall give an eloquent speech.

•

September 5, 12:53 A.M.

"My dear friends, as Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma pass through the forest with Their cowherd friends, leading their cows, They carry ropes to bind the cows' rear legs at the time of milking. When Lord Kṛṣṇa plays on His flute, the sweet music causes the moving living entities to become stunned and the nonmoving trees to tremble with ecstasy. These things are certainly very wonderful" (*Bhāg.* 10. 21.19).

They are cowherd boys, although not ordinary. They take up the tasks of *vaiśyas*, although They are princes (and although They are both the Supreme Personality of Godhead). The *gopīs* sometimes tease Kṛṣṇa, "You can't play dice with Rādhā. You're just a cowherd boy. You've spent so much time with the cows that You think like them. You're good at cowherding, which takes physical strength, but not for a game which takes brains. Go back to Your cows."

But Kṛṣṇa is never ashamed of His cowherding. In this verse, the *gopīs* are looking at His cowherd activities as one of His all-attractive features. Kṛṣṇa does it in style. The ropes They use are made of yellow cloth with clusters of pearl at both ends. Sometimes They wrap these ropes around their turbans for decoration. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains,

"This rope almost always hung from the shoulders of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. In spite of Their being the Supreme Personality of Godhead, They played exactly like cowherd boys . . . "

Kṛṣṇa is so attractive to the *gopīs* as a cowherd boy that when they see Him in His *kṣatriya* dress as the king of Dvārakā, they don't feel the same ecstasy. They want to take Kṛṣṇa back to Vṛndāvana where He is a *gopa* and they are *gopīs*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda says that the series of verses in the *Veṇu-gīta* show us the perfection of Kṛṣṇa consciousness: "to somehow or other remain engrossed always in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa. The vivid example is always present in the behavior of the *gopīs;* therefore Lord Caitanya declared that no one can worship the Supreme Lord by any method which is better than the method of the *gopīs*" (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 1, Chap. 21, p.151). Why are the *gopīs* cited as the best meditators, even more than the friends or parents of Kṛṣṇa? Why *gopī-bhāva* and not *sakhya-bhāva* or *vātsalya-bhāva*? Because the conjugal love they feel produces the most intense and pure form of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

This is what we aspire for. This is the highest *rasa,* and the most demanding. It leaves nothing for yourself. Nothing is yours, but Kṛṣṇa is everything to you. Kṛṣṇa becomes purchased by the *gopīs'* love. Then should we aspire to become a *gopī*, so that we may meditate on Kṛṣṇa as in these verses? According to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas,* it is not desirable (or possible) to become another Lalitā, Viśākhā, Citrā, or Indulekhā. Other Vaiṣṇava *sam-*

pradāyas may aspire for direct union with Kṛṣṇa as His lover, but Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has taught that it is even better to become a maidservant of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. This is taught most explicitly by Rūpa Gosvāmī's dear disciple, Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī.

All glories to Śrī Rādhikā and Her *sakhīs* and maidservants. All glories to their meditation on Kṛṣṇa playing His flute as He enters the forest of Vṛndāvana. All glories to the two children of the best kings of Vraja, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. All glories to Their exchange of sidelong glances. All glories to Rādhā's maidservants, who are always ready to serve Her and reflect whatever moods or desires She expresses. All glories to the love Śrī Kṛṣṇa feels for the maidservants for their unbreakable loyalty to His dearmost. And all glories to the *rasika* devotees who teach that which should almost never be spoken. We are dependent on their liberal mercy.

(All glories too, to Maya-devī, who protects this knowledge from those who should not be interested in it, from those who are not qualified. All glories also to the many other pure expressions and *rasas* of love God.)

•

All God consciousness is good. Best is worship of Bhagavān without material desires. Our predilection for worshiping Kṛṣṇa in Vraja appears to be our good fortune, and not our qualification in terms of higher knowledge or austerity. Yet we can see why this pure devotional service of Kṛṣṇa in

Vṛndāvana is the best. Lord Brahmā prayed, "No one can actually appreciate the good fortune of these residents of Vṛndāvana . . . they are actually relishing Your presence . . . and enjoying the senses through service to You. I shall therefore consider myself fortunate to be given a chance to take birth in this land of Vṛndāvana in any of my future lives" (*Kṛṣṇa*, Vol. 1, Chap. 14, p. 107).

No other desire but to be associated with Kṛṣṇa. This is the specialty of the pure devotees of Vṛndāvana. They serve Kṛṣṇa, not by following regulative principles, but out of spontaneous love.

•

We have been given a little taste of living in Vṛndāvana by staying in the Sant Colony of eternal Rāman Retī, within safe view of the Krishna-Balaram Mandir. If Kṛṣṇa desires, we may continue to return here for the rest of our lives, then retire here and die. We need not be afraid of death. It is not the end of life. This body is one of many, many we have taken. If it is necessary, we may take birth again to continue our spiritual progress. Let us pray, as Lord Brahmā does, that we may be born in Vṛndāvana to take up spontaneous love for Gopāla-Kṛṣṇa.

In this present lifetime, which cannot last much longer, I hope to become as acquainted as possible with the spontaneous lovers of Kṛṣṇa in Vraja. This is certainly the best place to do it, near Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja, near Rādhā-Śyāmasundara,

and with friends like Dhanurdhāra Swami and Bhūrijana Prabhu. But it requires being "boiled down" of false ego and the desire for prestige. You can't live here if you desire fame.

Our plan is still to come and go from Vṛndāvana, although Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī says it is a kind of madness. But the order of the guru is the supreme principle for pleasing Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Our Gurudeva, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, is certainly a *rasika* Vaiṣṇava, an eternal resident of Vṛndāvana. But he wants us to leave Vṛndāvana to preach the glories of Vrajendra-nandana Kṛṣṇa in every town and village. He wants to see devotees fixed and serving in communities all over the world, bowing down before the *arcā-vigraha.* It gives our spiritual master pleasure to see people in London, Paris, New Māyāpura, Gītā-nāgarī, New York, etc., serving Śrīmatī Rādhikā in the temples. And it pleases him to see his sons grow up and take on this duty which he blissfully and bravely carried out to the end of his own life (even though he started when he was "of retiring age.") How can we ignore his order? For Śrīla Prabhupāda, preaching was not only a duty, but the highest form of spontaneous love and reciprocation with Kṛṣṇa and the residents of Vṛndāvana.

We beg of Śrīla Prabhupāda that we can spend more days in Vṛndāvana in order to increase our Vṛndāvana consciousness. We are not as fixed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness as he was. We need some dust of Vṛndāvana so we can sprinkle it on others

wherever we go. We think he will be pleased with us for doing this. He wanted to bring us to Vṛndāvana. He assured us we would like it here. He was right.

Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda, please allow us to stay here awhile and then go out eagerly to tell everyone about Vrajendra-nandana, Śyāmasundara, Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Give us, we beg, a taste for the nectar of His holy names. Give us the gift of remembering His pastimes while we chant. Make us strong enough to serve boldly and remember Kṛṣṇa wherever we go in our mission as your disciples.

•

5:26 A.M.

Last night Baladeva and the owner of this house signed a contract while standing in front of Their Lordships Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Śyāmasundara at Krishna-Balaram Mandir. It was a contract to purchase this house. Now we hope we don't get cheated. Baladeva tried to bind him with the legal documents. The landlord said, "If you like I will sign the paper, but whether I want to cheat you or not, the outcome is up to Rādhārāṇī."

As I wrote earlier this morning, my commitment is to travel and preach. But I also feel a commitment to come here for *bhajana* and writing. I hope before we leave India (in three months) that I can start some other writing. But I want to think while I'm away that if I can return to Vṛndāvana, there will be plenty to write about. This *āśrama* makes it more attractive to come back, especially if I can

continue to get the grace of the devotees (ISKCON authorities) to do retreats where they only see me once a week.

•

5:59 A.M., roof

Again no sunrise? It's cloudy blue all around with some pink leaking into it. I have a prayer for the sun god. "Seeing Her father worship Sūryadeva out of fear of the nearby Kaṁsa, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, in the secluded place known as Śantanu-kuṇḍa, also earnestly worshiped Sūryadeva to attain a certain youth, whose complexion is as dark as a host of monsoon clouds, as Her chosen husband. I pray that Sūryadeva may protect us" (*Vraja-vilāsa-stava*, text 88).

Crown, raven, cuckoo, dove, sparrow, parrot . . . All are singing around here. It's Vṛndāvana and that deep blue monsoon cloud . . . Maybe the sun can find a way through.

I am grateful for having been allowed to write here. I feel like I have been granted a boon. Up to a certain point, my wishes are granted, but some things are rarer, harder to achieve. It is all by the mercy of guru.

I pray to not forget the things that do come easily, although they are also rare: I have the association of a *rasika-guru* who protects my relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda; I have a residence in Vṛndāvana; I have time and inspiration to write; and for everything in my life that supports the fulfillment of these boons. For all this I am grateful.

As for the still more difficult things—taste in chanting, freedom from attachment to public opinion, and love—I will have to wait. For how long I can't say. "Śrī Rādhā's forest, which cannot be attained by thousands of births of great austerities, mantra-chanting, yoga, and meditation, is attained at once by a head bowed down in respect" (*Vm, Śataka* 15.25).

•

"If you yearn for what is above the material and spiritual worlds, then wholeheartedly love Lord Madana-mohana. Don't live in a crowded city. Live in Vṛndāvana. Offer respects to all living entities there. Never offend them" (*Vm, Śataka* 16.5).

"In the ever-new forest of Vṛndāvana, every day I worship two splendors sweeter than all sweetness, glorious as new gold and sapphires, and Their forms the essence of nectar" (*Vm, Śataka* 16.16).

"In nectar Rādhā's pastime forest, where the moonlight of Her glory delights the *kumuda* lotus flowers or the poet's voices, I yearn to become a flowering vine" (*Vm, Śataka* 16.20).

The poets glorify Rādhā with verses that are pleasing to Her. Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī doesn't say he wants to be one of Her poets, but that he wants to be a flowering vine in Her forest.

•

There is a big calf on the road who looks lost. She is running to join a few cows who are already in the

field. She goes to one of them and moos loudly, then runs to another and another, mooing. Is she looking for her mother? Why is she in distress?

Once, Rādhā saw a calf cut its mouth on some straw. Rādhā felt pained and applied Her own *kuṅkuma* to the calf's mouth to heal it. But this calf is unattended. No one is helping her and no one is hindering her. I think she's lost.

In the meantime, I hear *ārati* bells and the long conversational coos of the doves as they sidestep up and down the *paṇḍāl* beams. They are chatty and imperative like someone trying to get a line overseas from India.

These animals' moods seems to reflect my own. This writing retreat is coming to an end.

•

"I pray that I may joyfully carry on my head the dust of the beautiful feet of the great souls who are supremely renounced, who talk among themselves about the sweet Yugala-kiśora so dear to them, who, shedding tears and their bodily hairs standing erect, speak broken words choked in the ecstasy of love, and who play in the great shoreless nectar ocean of Śrī Vṛndāvana" (*Vm, Śataka* 16.76).

They say even the trees and birds are sages. Some have waited for centuries to take birth in *kṛṣṇa-līlā*. Taking birth as a *mañjarī* at Yavāṭ is the rarest.

•

3:05 P.M., rattan chair

Violet flowers in the unkempt yard. My chair is positioned so I'm hidden from the view of the front gate. When Lalitāmṛta brought lunch in the tiffin, she left the gate open and two dogs ran in as if they were invited for lunch. I chased them out. They jumped over the wall-hurdle like it was nothing. So much for the security of this place. But Baladeva has purchased it and Rādhā-Śyāma were the witnesses.

•

I'm glad this book is ending on a blue cloudy day. It has rained today, and it will probably rain again. The air is fresh and cool.

The pump stands silent sentry duty. The flimsy gate is shut. This is a *paroksavad,* an indirect message. In the Eleventh Canto, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says He likes things that are spoken with an indirect meaning. As I told you, the puddle is getting smaller.

It is said that when Kṛṣṇa returned to Goloka Vṛndāvana, He took all the visible, transcendental beauty back with Him. But He left the Yamunā, Govardhana Hill, and the dust of Vṛndāvana to bless the devotees with *prema-bhakti.* The *purāṇas* predict that the Ganges and the Yamunā will disappear before 25,000 years of Kali-yuga has elapsed. Out of separation from Kṛṣṇa, Govardhana Hill is sinking twelve inches a year. "Dear devotees, please don't delay, but immediately roll in the dust of Vṛndāvana, bathe in Yamunājī, and walk barefoot

around Śrī Giri-Govardhanajī" (*Appreciating Vṛndāvana*, p. 250).

•

Tomorrow we will go to Mathurā to see Mahārāja. We will discuss verse ten of the *Veṇu-gīta*. But I won't be here to write about it afterwards. This writing retreat is over.

Last night when I suddenly felt afraid, I prayed to Kṛṣṇa as God. I didn't pray to Rādhā right away. I'm just developing, just a baby.

"A saintly devotee who, in sweet Vṛndāvana forest, which is flooded by a great ocean of bliss, always joyfully meditates on Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, finds the four goals of life (economic development, sense gratification, piety, and liberation) and the Supreme Lord's own transcendental opulence approach from all directions eager to serve him" (*Vm, Śataka* 16.81).

When I read this I thought, "How can I believe this? Why would all these material benefits come to Vṛndāvana?" This shows I still don't understand Vṛndāvana. Am I still full of doubt after four weeks here? Only the guru can reveal the *dhāma*. Without him, we can't understand anything.

("So how can you be a guru if you need one yourself?" A disciple asked me that just two days ago. Every guru has a guru. Everyone has plenty to learn.)

Let me respond to my own question. "When you have a hundred dollars, all your ten dollar problems are solved." In Vṛndāvana, you will not want

the four goals of material life. Liberation may come with folded hands and beg to serve a devotee's feet. All a devotee's desires are fulfilled in Vṛndāvana. A devotee prays, "Rūpa-mañjarī's lotus feet are my religion, my vows, my everything." A devotee has no more *kāma* because he only wants to serve Kṛṣṇa.

"Parrots and cuckoos singing in its blossoming trees and vines, maddened peacocks dancing on its splendid ground, and its rivers and hills beautiful with splendid jewels, eternal Vṛndāvana forest is overcome with the nectar of Lord Hari" (*Vm, Śataka* 16.85).

I am dull and I can't see it. I am foolish. Where are my love-anointed eyes?

•

This has been a monsoon book.
Blue clouds courtesy of Śyāmasundara.
The names have been changed
to protect the innocent.
But mostly they have not
been changed; I just never
found out their names—
"The grass, bushes, insects,
and other creatures in Vraja
are all dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa."
They are full of bliss.
I bow down to offer my respects
to all the creatures
who reside in Vraja.

It's raining. Once more the field quickly fills up with puddles. Go on living. Go on telling what little you can about the endless mysteries of even simple existence anywhere in God's creation, but especially here—where a crow's caw is overwhelmed by knowledge and knowledge is overwhelmed by sweetness. Although I cannot feel it, we all sense it, so we say, "It's raining. It's stopping. The path is a stream."

"O dear girl whose face is more splendid than a host of moons. Please accept me. My tongue will be tightly bound with the chanting of Your virtues. I wish to stay eternally in this beautiful forest where I may see the loving pastimes of the youthful Divine Couple" (*Vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛta, Śataka* 16.87).

Finally, the sun. It has emerged over a solid mass of clouds. O sun god, I pray to see Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī worshiping you.

Now the sun has slipped behind the dense blue cloudbank. It's like golden Rādhā playing with Her monsoon-blue Śyāma. Śyāma is covering Her golden aura, but I know She will blaze out again, undefeated.