

Volume Two

IṢṬA-GOṢṬHĪ

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

I would like to thank the following friends and disciples who have helped produce and print this book: Prāṇadā dāsī, Varuṇa dāsa, Navadvīpa dasa, Parjana Mahārāja dāsa, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa dasa, Ṭhākura Haridāsa dāsa, and Bhaktin Kristen.

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Printed in the United States of America

Limited Edition: 1,000 copies

ISBN 0-911233-43-1

Persons interested in the subject matter of this book may correspond with Madhavendra Puri dāsa, or directly with the author, care of Gita-nagari Press, P. O. Box 12380, Philadelphia, PA 19119.

Illustrations on the cover and appearing with *Nimāi dāsa and the Mouse* by Trivikrama dāsa. Cover design by Kim Molner.

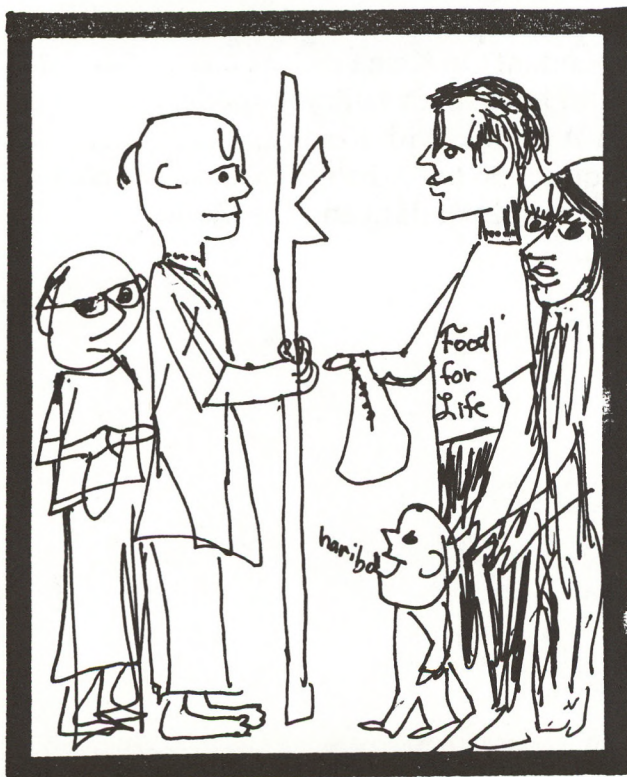
"Please accept my blessings. I am in receipt of a copy of your last Ista-Gosthi dated January 27th, and I am very much satisfied with your replies on the questions made in the Ista-Gosthi. The meeting is called 'Ista-Gosthi' and not 'Ista-Goshi.' "

—Letter to Satsvarūpa from Prabhupāda
25 February, 1968

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CHOOSE YOUR ĀŚRAMA AND FIGHT—
BUT NOT WITH EACH OTHER

What is the difference between living inside or outside the temple? One says, "Living in the temple means you are more renounced, more of a preacher." But another says, "Living in the temple means you don't earn your own living. So you avoid the realities of life and never test your own faith."

"To live outside the temple," one says, "is to bloop from spiritual life. It means getting caught up in the ways of maya, admiring the *karmis* because they appear more competent than devotees who live in the temples. By living outside the temple you eventually view spiritual commitment as fanatical, and you resent that you surrendered to Kṛṣṇa 'too much.'"

But someone else says, "Living outside the temple is a *varṇāśrama* adjustment to one's psychophysical nature. It's good preaching to see that Vaiṣṇavas can succeed in a normal life."

One gets confused by so many interpretations. But this much should be clear: Whether one is situated outside or inside a temple is not the ultimate test—either of spiritual life or material well-being. One way is not necessarily better than the other. In either case, one has to assert his faith in Kṛṣṇa and oppose the lure of *māyā*. In either case, all your endeavors will be considered useless (*śrama eva hi kevalam*), unless they satisfy the Supreme Lord.

Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the example that a crocodile fights better in the water whereas an elephant fights better on the land. We should stand where we feel the most natural strength.

The soldiers in this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement must always possess physical strength, enthusiasm and sensual power. To keep themselves fit, they must therefore place themselves in a normal condition of life. What constitutes a normal condition will not be the same for everyone, and therefore there are divisions of *varṇāśrama*—*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra*, *brahmācārī*, *grhastha*, *vānaprastha*, and *sannyāsa*. . . . That one has been found to be very weak in one place does not mean that he should stop fighting the crocodile of *māyā*. If *sannyāsa* is not suitable, one may enter the *grhastha-āśrama* and fight *māyā* with great strength.

—S. Bhāg. 8.2.30, purport

But just because I feel rightly situated, I should not be arrogant. Judging everyone by one's own position (*atmanam-manyate-jagat*) is foolishness. If I think that only my group is right, how can I develop compassion for all living beings?

Does a *brahmācārī* know the difficulties of raising a family? Has he ever experienced how raising a family can actually make one dear to Kṛṣṇa? And does the householder know just what it's like to maintain a temple with little means of support, in a society which will not spend for service to Kṛṣṇa?

Anyone who honestly assesses his own position, will feel humiliated at his own lack of love for the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This will help him

to overcome the self-righteous attitude. And as we become humbly convinced that we are working in the best situation for ourselves, we will feel less need to be self-defensive. Maybe then we can begin to enjoy each other's company and cooperate to usher in the era of *Bhāgavata-dharma*.



THE BHĀGAVATAM TRIUMPH

While visiting Boston ISKCON recently, I was asked to speak in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class on this verse:

Dhruva Mahārāja saw two very beautiful associates of Lord Viṣṇu in the plane (which had just come down from the sky). They had four hands and a blackish bodily luster, they were very youthful, and their eyes were just like reddish lotus flowers. They held clubs in their hands, and they were dressed in very attractive garments with helmets and were decorated with necklaces, bracelets and earrings.

—*S. Bhāg.* 4.12.20

Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport was short: "So the two uncommon personalities who descended from the airplane came directly from Viṣṇuloka, the planet where Lord Viṣṇu lives." Doubts rushed forward in my mind. How can we believe this? No one has ever seen four-armed men! This is like those claims by people who say they have seen UFOs and visitors from outer space. As uneasiness began to seize me, I calmed my mind and asked myself these questions:

Do I believe this?

Within I answered: Yes.

Then, how do I believe it?

On higher authority.

Do I know it?

Yes.

Can I explain it to others?

Yes.

Can I convince some others?

Yes.

Despite my victorious inner dialogue, I remained still less than a hundred percent convinced. And I didn't want to lifelessly conform to speak the "party line." So I worried—why couldn't they have given me an easier verse, like the practices of *bhakti-yoga* in which I wouldn't have to directly confront and defy the materialistic experience? Why couldn't I get a verse like a list of good qualities, tolerance, mercy and so on? But then, I would have also had doubts with a devotional verse like that since I have so little realization of saintly qualities. In any case, speaking on the *Bhāgavatam* is not easy, and it is certainly not a task for a speculator. Whatever the verse and purport states, you have to speak the *paramparā*. So I got ready to do it.

As I prepared myself, the doubts proved not so formidable. We accept that airplanes come from Viṣṇuloka because the Vedic *śāstra* says so and it is axiomatic. Science and mental speculation cannot know this, nor can they refute it. Just because we don't see four-handed men is no disproof; there are many realities that we never see. To judge the whole material universes and the existence of the spiritual worlds based on our own experience is "frog philosophy."

Many good arguments, as I have heard from Śrīla Prabhupāda, came readily to mind. "Yes," I thought, "you can speak honestly and at the same time uphold the *paramparā* in class. When sitting on the *vyāsāsana* you will become a better defender of Vedic knowledge (*sruti*) than when you write in your diary or in your own thoughts which tend to allow more play of doubt. Don't worry—you'll be able to give the class."

And so it worked. As soon as I finished reading the purport, I began, "The materialistic mind balks at this description of persons coming down in a spiritual plane to visit the earth." As I spoke, I fought the doubts and dismantled them with the weapons of knowledge, logic, humanity and humor. As I half-listened to what I was saying, it didn't sound dogmatic but intelligent, even scientific and urbane. It's the atheists who are bluffing dogmatically! After blasting through the shell of materialistic doubts, I was able to enter the *Bhāgavatam* and churn the nectar of spirituality, for which we are anxious to hear.

Afterwards, I felt jolly. Then my only danger was pride: "I spoke well."

CROWS AND SWANS

With no deliberate effort on my part to avoid them, I have not read newspapers in the last five months or so. I have been too busy with Kṛṣṇa conscious activities, trying to read and write, preach and travel. When occasionally I became aware that I was not reading the daily news, I considered whether this was irresponsible—not to be tuned in to other's sufferings and the political events which externally shape our lives. Of course, I hear things from others. I know at least who is President of the United States, I heard of the earthquake in Armenia, the explosion of the Pan Am jet and many other things. But I didn't follow up on what I heard in conversations by reading the daily newspapers.

I don't think it's irresponsible. What is reported daily is often very repetitious, and is produced by writers whose viewpoint is very limited and motivated. It's not just "the news" you get when you read a so-called factual report: you get a whole set of prejudices and the complete omission of transcendental knowledge. Without the insight of transcendental writing, the story of yesterday's events is meaningless and merely deadens the human sensibility with tons of depressing proof that we are living in the age of Kali.

One time in India, a devotee entered Śrīla Prabhupāda's room with a daily newspaper, since at that

time Prabhupāda was occasionally hearing from it. "What's the news?" Prabhupāda asked. "What are the rascals saying? Newspaper means all the statements of rascals."

But today I spent forty minutes with a copy of *The San Juan Star* for January 19th, 1989. Am I better for it? It helped me to realize that my life is sheltered in many ways, and that I am "not doing anything" about the race riots in Miami. Seeing a picture of four muscular men handcuffed and arrested for looting, I became aware of my own physical frailty and the need for police protection. But I didn't read a single mention of God or God consciousness in the paper. There were no direct references, and not even indirect ones. Just to be sure of this, I went through the paper for a second time. Instead of finding God, I stumbled for a second time on the story of thirty year old Patrick Purdy, who shot ten rounds from an assault rifle into a California schoolyard, killing five children and injuring thirty, and then shot himself dead. It's not the newspaper's fault that these things happen. And one might say that it's not the journalist's responsibility to moralize on events or to attempt to explain them. As Patrick Purdy's grandmother said, "It is just horrible. I don't understand why and I probably won't ever know why."

Why are one out of five expectant mothers in inner city Boston using cocaine? Why is deposed President Marcos dying? Why did South Africa President Botha suffer a mild stroke? Why did eighty-four year old Salvador Dali get a heart attack? Maybe it's too

much to expect daily explanations of all these things, but explanations are available in the *sāstra*. Therefore, if we read the *sāstra* wherein all the causes and effects (karma) are explained, and where we are offered ultimate relief from all misery, aren't we doing ourselves a better favor than by gorging on unexplained "news" from all over the world? And isn't distribution of *sāstra* a better service than the distribution of newspapers?

Śrīla Prabhupāda noticed how those who read news-papers soon throw them away—an indication of the journal's value. If one is fortunate to get a copy of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and to realize its value even a little bit, he will not throw it away but treasure it, and read it throughout his life.

But as we say in America, "It's a free country,"—you can read whatever you like. So there will always be people inclined to different kinds of reading:

Those words which do not describe the glories of the Lord, who alone can sanctify the atmosphere of the whole universe, are considered by saintly persons to be like unto a place of pilgrimage for crows. Since the all-perfect persons are inhabitants of the transcendental abode, they do not derive any pleasure there.

—S. Bhāg. 1.5.10

As Prabhupāda writes in his purport to this "swans and crows" verse of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*:

Spiritually advanced men who are compared to the swans do not take pleasure in such dead literatures, which are sources of pleasure for men who are spiritually dead. . . . Social literary men, scientists, mundane

poets, theoretical philosophers and politicians who are completely absorbed in the material advancement of sense pleasure are all dolls of the material energy. They take pleasure in a place where rejected subject matters are thrown. According to Svāmī Śrīdhara, this is the pleasure of prostitute hunters.

I'll probably never entirely stop reading the newspapers. After all, newspapers keep us in touch with the real world. Or do they?

WHO SAYS WE SHOULD PRAY?

Devotees whose tongues are decorated always with prayers to Lord Kṛṣṇa are always given respect even by the great saintly persons and sages, and such devotees are actually worshipable by the demigods.

—*Skanda Purāṇa*

By prayer I mean a crying out within the *japa* and within other services. It may be articulated in words like “please accept me,” “please engage me in Your service,” or as Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura prays, “When will this devotee be blessed by obtaining Your mercy?”, “Please make me Your beloved servant.”

Or we can enter prayer by feelingly reciting prayers found in the scriptures, especially the *Śikṣāṣṭaka*. And sometimes we don’t have to pray exactly in words.

To feel the need to turn to Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda and converse with them, and to deliberately take time out to do it, is what I have been calling prayer.

But does Kṛṣṇa want us to do this? Did Prabhupāda do it? Did Prabhupāda want us to do it? Where do they say to do it?

Lord Kṛṣṇa says it in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, “Engage your mind always in thinking of Me, offer obeisances and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me.” Śrīla Prabhupāda says it in *Rāja Vidyā*, “In the execution of devotional service one has to submit to Kṛṣṇa whatever distress or

confidential problem he has. He should say, 'Kṛṣṇa, I am suffering in this way.'"

But someone says, "Aren't you just picking out quotes in a motivated way to substantiate prayer?" No, prayer is a mainstream activity in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. For example, if you were to compile sections from the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that are literally and entirely prayers, you would collect a large percentage of the total *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

Arjuna prays to Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Uddhava prays to Kṛṣṇa in the *Uddhava-gītā*. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja prays and praises Lord Caitanya and the devotees throughout *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*: "Praying at the lotus feet of Śrī Rūpa and Ragunātha. . . " Akrūra, Gajendra, Dhruva, Prahlāda, Ajāmila, Lord Brahmā, Lord Śiva, Bhīṣmadeva—all qualified *mahā-janas* and devotees make strong, sincere, imploring, glorifying prayers to the Lord.

And Śrīla Prabhupāda too. Especially at the crucial time, when he was traveling on the Jaladuta to America, and when he arrived at the pier in Boston, he prayed to Lord Kṛṣṇa. We cannot know the mind of the *ācārya*, but Prabhupāda has told us that he prayed for protection against *māyā*, and prayed to the Lord to protect the devotees. In 1967, Prabhupāda suggested that we pray for this health, and later he said that those prayers saved his life. And Prabhupāda prayed to the Deities of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, promising to build Them a beautiful temple in Bombay; and he asked the Lord to please take care of Himself in Australia.

Under Prabhupāda's direction, we pray to Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva for protection of ISKCON.

So why doubt it?

"Well how do we pray? What do we say?"

If you don't know how to pray, read prayers by great devotees. But to pray on one's own is also necessary. We can start by admitting before Lord Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda our lack of surrender. Admit you are afraid that Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda may demand of you something that you don't want to do. If we don't reach down to the roots of our fears like that, what do we think we are doing when we say we are praying? If we're complacent, what power can our cry have? While admitting our weakness, we may ask the Lord to give us the faith and strength to do what He wants. Even a beginning attempt will be significant, and persistence will be rewarded.

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Found Poem of Śrīla Prabhupāda

LORD BUDDHA'S MISSION

Lord Buddha taught *ahimsa*
 because He saw the whole human race
 was going to hell by animal killing.
 "Let me stop them," He thought,
 "so that in the future,
 they may become sober."

He was compassionate
 for both the humans and the animals
 so He had to deny
 the existence of the soul
 because their brains could not tolerate such things.
 He did not say anything
 about the soul or God.
 He did say,
 "If I pinch you, you feel pain,
 so why should you give pain to others?
 Never mind that he has no soul."

"You say the animals have no soul,
 but, still he's feeling pain,
 when you kill him.
 Just as you feel pain."

When Lord Buddha appeared
they were killing on the sanction of the Vedas.
But He did not accept
animal-killing even in sacrifice,
because He was so kind:
that is Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

—London, August 1973

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AS IF

I think that His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura is always seeing my activities and guiding me within my heart by his words. As it is said in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *tene brahma hṛdā ya ādi-kavaye*. Spiritual inspiration comes from within the heart, wherein the Supreme Personality of Godhead, in His Paramātmā feature, is always sitting with all His devotees and associates.

—“Concluding Words” to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*

This means that Śrīla Prabhupāda is in our hearts along with the Supersoul. They both can see our activities and guide us by their words.

“I infer that ‘I have written’ is a false understanding, for my body is like a wooden doll.” So writes Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. He says that he writes on the mercy of great authorities, including Lord Caitanya and Madana-mohana.

I am trying to move my false ego out of the way. I have not done it yet. “As If” is not the pure soul and Supersoul speaking together; it is not the eternal *śiṣyā* conversing with his spiritual master beyond the barriers of time and space. But it is an attempt to clear the way to hear Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa.

Dialogue #1

My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, my dear Śrīla Prabhupāda, please accept my humble obeisances.

This is my attempt to pray to you inwardly. I wish to turn to you, and look upon you.

I think of you together—the Supreme Personality of Godhead, worshipable Kṛṣṇa, and the pure devotee who is worshiping Kṛṣṇa, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda.

The purpose of this writing is to ask you to reveal yourself to me. We pray like that—*jagannāthah svāmī nayana-patha-gāmī bhavatu me*: O Lord of the Universe, kindly be visible unto me.

But I am afraid you will ask “too much” of me.

Please allow me to make this prayer sincerely.

Let me use my writing to pray and talk to the Lord.

I do not claim to write down what He says. But then why should I write down what I think and imagine He wants? Because if it is done sincerely, knowing well that what I write is not pure Kṛṣṇa, but my understanding of Him from *śāstra*, etc., maybe it will be acceptable.

As if Śrīla Prabhupāda: You foolish boy, Satsvarūpa. It is right that you are living in the temple. Now I want to see what you will do. Read my books and do menial service. But you are too restless (as I wrote to the boy, Sharma), therefore unfit for “chanting absolutely.” Do active service, don’t act as a rascal.

Why are you asking Kṛṣṇa to speak to you? Is my teaching not sufficient?

SDG: Yes, it is Prabhupāda. I want to be obedient. I wish to follow you always. And now in your actual separation from us, I wish to be guided from within so I can understand how to apply your *vāṇī* to myself and how to submit, to conquer *māyā* and my weakness.

I crave assurances of your love, and of your presence in my heart, and the presence of He whom you teach us to surrender to, the Lord in the heart.

As if the Lord in the heart: From Me comes your memory, and forgetfulness and knowledge. I am revealed in *sāstra*: if you will read it carefully, everything is there. Read it in prime time each day. Pray to hear. Pray to be submissive. I will speak to you continually if you want it. If you will become an active pure servant, and a servant of my servant, your Śrīla Prabhupāda, then everything is there.

SDG: Please teach me to love, please engage me in Your service. Please still the other voices of needs within me. I am helpless alone. I beg for the Holy Name and the true submissive attitude which does not demand "conversation-response" but prays always.

Please also accept this writing attempt to purify. I do want to hear from You even if my prayer and ability to receive is not pure.

As if Śrī Kṛṣṇa: As they approach me, I reciprocate.

MEDITATION ON KṚṢṆA

I therefore meditate on Him, Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who is eternally existent in the transcendental abode, which is forever free from the illusory representations of the material world. I meditate upon Him, for He is the Absolute Truth.

—S. Bhāg. 1.1.1

We may think of meditation as just sitting silently. But even while engaging our physical senses in active service for Kṛṣṇa we can (when the intellect is not fully engaged otherwise) think of Kṛṣṇa. For example, while one is sweeping the floor of the temple, or operating his car or computer, he can pray to Kṛṣṇa or meditate on different *sāstric* verses.

The word meditation has become spoiled by Transcendental Meditation and the idea of impersonal, silent meditation. But it's good to meditate on the personal form of Kṛṣṇa. Prabhupāda used to say that we should meditate on the Deity: "Close your eyes and think of how He looked in the morning; what clothes He was wearing, how His lotus feet looked, and how the garland was resting on His shoulders." These are acts of meditation. When Rāmānanda Rāya was asked by Lord Caitanya what is the perfection of meditation, he didn't reply, "Oh we don't meditate, we're bhaktas." He immediately said, "Yes, meditation on the lotus feet of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa." And we

should also meditate how to serve that Lord. In the *Nectar of Devotion* we read:

In some of the Puranas the evidence is given that if someone is simply meditating on devotional activities, he has achieved the desired result and has seen face to face the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Here the story is told of a *brāhmaṇa* in South India who worshiped the Lord in his mind. Thus we can understand that things offered by the devotees, even in meditation, are accepted by the Lord and they can help one achieve the desired result.

Kṛṣṇa is known as *bhava-grahī-janārdana*; he takes the essence of a devotee's offering. He accepts your good intentions. Even when you could not produce the material goods, at least you wanted to and you thought of offering it to the Lord. That thinking has a potency, and counts in Kṛṣṇa's estimation. Therefore it is never unimportant to have a good thought and to remember Kṛṣṇa in any situation.

From the *Kṛṣṇa* book:

We have to meditate on Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. That is real meditation. . . . By such meditation Kṛṣṇa would feel very much satisfied, and similarly we will also feel transcendently pleased and satisfied if we utilize the Brāhma-muhūrta period to meditate on Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. . . . There is no difference between meditating on the eternal forms of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and chanting the *mahā-mantra*, Hare Kṛṣṇa.

CALLING OUT TO ŚRĪLA PRABHUPĀDA

O Śrīla Prabhupāda, who expands himself into the life of whoever wants to approach him, just like the Supersoul who can enter the hearts of all;

O Prabhupāda, who wrote in his purports the symptoms of *jagat-guru*, and whose followers and readers can prove that Prabhupāda himself fulfills those qualifications by his actions in personally establishing Kṛṣṇa consciousness worldwide;

O Prabhupāda, who said that Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura could have personally spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness worldwide, but he left it to be done by a Vaiṣṇava in the future, and who said that we should also continue as rays of paramparā and distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness;

O Prabhupāda, who was in our vision as an elderly pure devotee *sannyāsī*, according to Kṛṣṇa's plan; O Prabhupāda, who therefore became our spiritual father and who said, "Before, I had a few sons and daughters and maintained them with much difficulty. But I left that family and now I have hundreds of children who are rendering better service than my other family—so this is happiness given to me by Kṛṣṇa;"

O Prabhupāda, who told us, I am your real father, the other father is ephemeral, and therefore we were able to come out of our middle-class homes and

accept your love and lie down happily on the bare floor in the storefront.

O Śrīla Prabhupāda, who desires only that we love Lord Kṛṣṇa—"Save your love for God"—and by loving Kṛṣṇa we can then love all beings as His parts and parcels; But Prabhupāda, we find it much easier to love and express our thanks to you, because you gave us Kṛṣṇa's love and without you we do not know Lord Kṛṣṇa.

O Prabhupāda, who is pained to see his sons and daughters fall again into *māyā*; who keeps the light on in his room so that we can come back to him; who has given us something that we will never lose, and which can save us at the time of death;

O Prabhupāda, great teacher in the knowledge of the soul and love of God, please accept our humble obeisances and give us menial service in your Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement!

O Prabhupāda, let us praise you with growing appreciation; let us not ask of you or seek to take from you, but serve you in gratitude; let us hear from you, so that both you and we will enjoy transcendental bliss in *sravanam-kirtanam*;

O Prabhupāda, we pray to you for courage, because even in little things our hearts quake; we often cannot cooperate with your sons and daughters, and the demons' attacks depress us, and we find ourselves drifting away from association with devotees, and away from dependence on Kṛṣṇa, and out of the fire of preaching—please bring us back. We want to come

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back, but we need more help, we need your presence more, a little more like it was when you were here....

O Prabhupāda, as Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sang to Gopinātha, so we sing to you, "You are the wisest person. Please think of a way that we may be delivered."

ANSWERING THE SKEPTICS

After I lectured recently to a class of philosophy students, an articulate young man raised his doubts.

He said, "I can't see the difference between what you say and what the atheist says. My question is the one raised by David Hume when he said, 'How do you mystics, who maintain the absolute incomprehensibility of the Deity, differ from skeptics and atheists who assert that the first cause is unknown and unintelligible?'"

I replied that the Absolute Truth is not absolutely incomprehensible. He is often defined in a negative way, because the non-devotional mentality cannot find Him in the material world, yet He is knowable to some extent, through devotional service. Atheists claim that God cannot be known by human beings, and therefore there is no God. The theists state that God is so inconceivably great, He cannot be known by us unless He reveals Himself. And even then we can never know Him in full.

My reply didn't silence the skeptical student. He said, "I don't know if you're aware of what Immanuel Kant had to say about this. He said that all these arguments for the existence of God are illusory. Their defect is that they're attempts to understand or justify the existence of God based on phenomena that we encounter in space and time. But if you give an example within space and time—such as the argument that

a creation requires a creator—and then extend it to realities lying beyond these phenomena, then it is contradictory. What do you have to say to that?"

I replied, "The basis of your doubt, or Kant's, is that the Supreme Being is beyond the grasp of our finite minds. We also say that. But that doesn't prove Him non-existent. You must investigate all methods of knowledge, before you say that God can never be understood. We Kṛṣṇa conscious theists respect the logical natural theistic explanations of God, such as the argument that the intelligence of the universal creation suggests there must be a superior intelligence or Designer. But these explanations are only partial. The ultimate knowledge of God is by revelation, through scripture and from persons who are realized in God consciousness."

Our classroom discussion did not go much beyond this, but later I began to think more about the problems raised by the skeptics. It seems that Hume, Kant, and their agnostic successors often reject an idea of God which is inadequate. They seem to think of Him as either a meddler who sometimes makes miracles happen, or as some very, very distant Deity who has no connection with people or the universe. Fortunately, this is not the "God" we learn of in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

As the atheist's concept of God is defective, so is their idea of knowledge of God. The Supreme Being is not an object that can be studied like an ordinary fact or object. Kṛṣṇa is called *Adhokṣaja*; He actively resists any attempt to measure Him. Therefore any valid

approach to knowledge of Kṛṣṇa must involve communion with Him. In a similar way, we can't understand our next door neighbor if we only treat him as an object to be studied. We have to enter into a relationship with him, and then he might allow himself to be known to us.

Talk of philosophical skepticism also reminds us of Prabhupāda's reply, when Ravīndra Svarūpa dāsa asked him, "What is the best way to deal with skepticism?"

Prabhupada replied, "Skepticism—rascalism. We are not going to deal with rascalism. We are going to deal with sense. . . . They are so disappointed, they think everything is false. . . . Is not that skepticism? What is that skepticism?"

Ravīndra Svarūpa: "Disappointment, that's all."

Prabhupāda: "So why should one be disappointed? We say that you should come to the spiritual platform and you will be happy." Prabhupāda then described the blissful pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa with the *gopīs* and *gopas* in Vṛndāvana. Kṛṣṇa wants us to join with Him in that happiness, said Prabhupāda, and he added: "Is that all right?" In reply, the voices of many devotees answered "Yes!" There was no disappointment or skepticism in Prabhupāda's presence.

LETTER FROM A DISCIPLE AND REPLY

Inquiry:

My dear spiritual master,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda. I recently read the following statement in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and had some question about it:

(In the purport to *Ādi-līlā*, 7.72 Prabhupāda quotes Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura as follows): "One can become perfectly successful in the mission of his life if he acts exactly according to the words he hears from the mouth of his spiritual master." Śrīla Prabhupāda then writes: "Only fools give up the service of the spiritual master and think themselves advanced in spiritual knowledge. . . . If a disciple thinks himself more advanced than the spiritual master, and gives up his orders and acts independently he checks his own spiritual progress. Every disciple must consider himself completely unaware of the science of Kṛṣṇa and must always be ready to carry out the orders of the spiritual master to become competent in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. A disciple always remains a fool before his spiritual master."

I was trying to relate to this statement in our world of ISKCON where there now seems to be encouragement that one should find his own niche in

devotional service according to one's *varna* and *āśrama*. I have been to college and have some worldly experience. I have been around the movement long enough to know what I want to do to serve Kṛṣṇa and I don't seem to have any problem preaching. I don't feel particularly helpless and I don't want to waste your time asking a bunch of "foolish" questions. But it seems from this passage that I quoted that I might be in deep trouble with my mentality. You don't seem inclined to tell us what to do with our lives anyway, so how can we resolve this problem? I am afraid that if I just remain a fool and wait for something to happen, "it" never will.

Your servant,

A reply:

Dear Prabhu,

Please accept Śrīla Prabhupāda's blessings from me. Your question is interesting and thoughtful. You honestly admit that you don't actually feel helpless, and yet Prabhupāda seems to recommend helplessness in the purport you quoted. On the other hand, Prabhupāda has also written that a Vaiṣṇava is not a fool or an incompetent person. So there may appear to be a contradiction between confidence and the requirement to also feel helpless (or even hopeless).

You are mistaken if you think that your worldly experience or college career makes you ultimately a

competent person. Really, what was your worldly experience? Perhaps you learnt how to get around in the world, how to win friends and influence people, how to make money, how to look out for yourself, how not to be cheated and so on. But this ability to survive among fellow materialists is a limited conception for surviving in this worldly struggle. Besides, the most shrewd persons also had to die under one sword or another, as the sword of time kills one and all.

Prabhupāda used to give the example that even a competent swimmer can only survive for a limited time in the vast ocean. There is actually an ocean of birth and death. I assume that you know this, since you also state that you consider yourself competent in terms of Kṛṣṇa conscious preaching. You are perhaps also in illusion when you say that you know your way around the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. To know how to superficially please a temple authority and get room and board in an ISKCON center or to know the slogans and pass words like, "Jai," "Haribol," or "Please accept my humble obeisances, Prabhu," "Jai Prabhupāda," as a means to get what you want—this is not real knowledge of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is the inconceivable river of love of God and distributing love of God which comes down from Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu through Śrīla Prabhupāda. It manifests as the ISKCON movement or the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement in this world, and

that movement has its external and internal aspects. Do you really know everything about the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement? You sound like you have the "Indian disease," by which Hindus think "I know everything about Kṛṣṇa."

I think that if you consider it more deeply, you will discover that your so-called material competence, as well as your knowledge of how to "deal with" ISKCON, is superficial.

There is nothing wrong with trying to find your niche in devotional service according to your *varṇa* and *āśrama*. And it is good if you have confidence and you are not afraid to preach. With a confident attitude, you can become a valuable devotee in one capacity or another. But your big mistake is that you don't consider yourself "completely unaware of the science of Kṛṣṇa" and "a fool" before your spiritual master.

You also state that your spiritual master doesn't seem to be inclined to give you relevant instructions for how to lead your life. But as a spiritual master, he is not supposed to supply you information about prospects on the stock exchange, or when to conceive a child in marriage, and other material affairs. If you are so confident and competent, then get your act together on your own in those areas. But then, with a straw in your teeth, approach your spiritual master and say, "My dear Guru Mahārāja, my life is running out, and I have not developed any spontaneous

desire to serve Kṛṣṇa. Although I have been moving around in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement for quite a few years, I really have not learned how to respect the Vaiṣṇavas and how to develop a taste for pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Neither do I actually know anything about the spiritual identity of the spiritual master, or my own relationship to him as spirit soul. And yet I am puffed up. Please instruct me."

Who were more competent persons in the world than Sanātana and Rūpa Gosvāmīs? They were almost on the level of prime ministers in India. But when they approached Lord Caitanya with straws in their mouths, their words of humility were so moving that Lord Caitanya said, "The humility of these two brothers could even melt stone. Because I was very pleased with their behavior, I told them, 'Although you are both very exalted, you consider yourselves inferior, and because of this, Kṛṣṇa will very soon deliver you!' " Similarly, Ragunātha Gosvāmī was the son of a multi-millionaire, and was himself competent in diplomatic dealings. But he considered all this worthless, and begged Lord Nityānanda that he could be delivered from his so-called competent existence. By Lord Nityānanda's blessings, Ragunātha became Ragunātha Gosvāmī, and set the example of renunciation among all the disciples of Lord Caitanya. Even the King of Orissa, Mahārāja Pratāparudra, realized that his influence and opulence were ultimately of no use for delivering him from nescience. And so he took up a broom to clean the road for Lord Jagannātha's Rath chariot, and because

nescience. And so he took up a broom to clean the road for Lord Jagannātha's Rath chariot, and because of this humble service Lord Caitanya was pleased with him and embraced him.

We should never be puffed up by material power. Our material power is a result of our past good activities and is transient. At any moment all of your competence can be finished; so you should never be proud of it. Be humble and meek, consider yourself lower than a piece of straw. Because of this attitude, devotees—even those who have good material qualifications—get the Lord's favor and are eligible to return home, back to Godhead.

For myself, I don't think I am so competent to guide you. I am also in the helpless position. But if we open ourselves to the instructions of Śrīla Prabhupāda, our ever well-wisher, then he will guide us by his expert competence.

I hope that these words are of some help. Do not think that I am disinclined to tell you what to do with your life. As you inquire, I will try my best to assist you.

Yours in the service of Prabhupāda,

PRAYER AND INTERRUPTION BY A COW

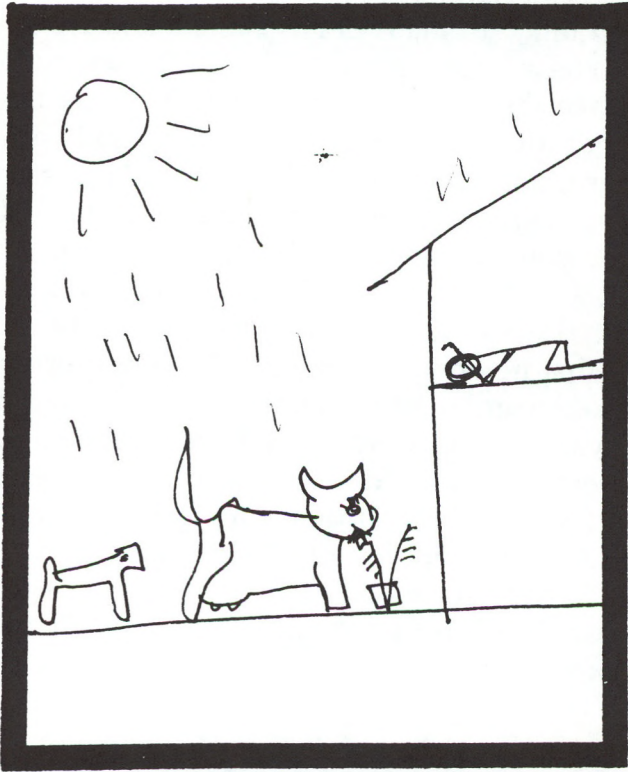
My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, You are my Father;
Although I mostly know You
from what I have read and heard
in *śāstra* and from Prabhupāda,
what I know is congenial
and satisfying to the mind.
I want to know You more.
I want to serve You
with the right motivation,
in stronger faith.

Please have mercy;
grant me Kṛṣṇa consciousness,
let me do better.

(This prayer was interrupted
by the neighbor's cow
with two calves
coming for the second time
to knock over our outdoor plants
and to chew at the potted palms.
I went out and chased her.
Now she stands in the rain
a few feet away,
licking her brown calf

while both calves suck at her teats.
Such peaceful, dumb animals
should never be killed.
I don't even want to chase them
far away.)

—Puerto Rico, January 1989



CALLING OUT TO KṚṢṆA: A DIALOGUE

"What if you just feel too dry to call out for mercy? I mean, some people are just naturally emotional and can throw themselves into that kind of mood. But my father taught me to be a man, like John Wayne. I'm more stolid. I don't cry or shed tears hardly ever. So maybe that's why I can't cry out to Kṛṣṇa inside to help me in my service."

That's all right, but your stoicism should not bring you to think, "Kṛṣṇa is in His Goloka and He doesn't want to hear from the likes of me. I'll be self-sufficient and make the best of things here." No, you have to reach out for Him. But if by a stoic or manly attitude you mean that you want to fight on the Lord's behalf, and you don't want to ask Him to do your own service for you, that's good. That's like Arjuna on the chariot with Kṛṣṇa. When Arjuna was convinced that he should fight, he took the arrows out of his quiver so fast that no one could see anything but torrents of missiles streaming at the enemy striking them dead. How was he so powerful? By Kṛṣṇa's grace. But he put every ounce of his own effort into it. He was merged with Kṛṣṇa so that you couldn't see a gap where Arjuna's will left off and Kṛṣṇa's began. The two wills had become one.

"Alas, but I am no Arjuna. Not even fit to be a waterboy on the battlefield."

If you really think like that, then you have extra reason for calling out. You have to ask Kṛṣṇa, "Please help me."

"Yes, but if I do call out and Kṛṣṇa helps me, then I am very prone to pride. As soon as Kṛṣṇa offers me a little hope I swell up with pride and I want to announce (at least to myself), 'Look, I am favored, I am blessed!' And besides that, I am so unsure and weak that I need the help of guru and Kṛṣṇa at every step. I can't go forward unless they assure me that they are with me."

You know they are with you. They are always with you, but you don't realize it yet. So go forward on faith. You have honestly admitted that you are surrounded by disqualifications. And yet, I think you are completely assured of the competence of your guides. Therefore you just have to "hang in there." Not that much is required of you. Just think favorably of Kṛṣṇa and desire to help others in Kṛṣṇa consciousness within the context of your limited life. Be an honest devotee and preacher, according to your capacity.

BECOMING FORTUNATE

When Lord Caitanya first met the Māyāvādī *sannyāsīs* in Varanasi, they were impressed by His influence and humility. With His first words He told them how He chanted the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra under the order of His spiritual master and had attained symptoms of Kṛṣṇa-*prema*. The Māyāvādīs said, "Dear Caitanya Mahāprabhu, what You have said is all true. Only one who is favored by Fortune attains love of Godhead"

—(Cc. *Adi*, 7.100).

Commenting on this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that one must be very fortunate to even begin Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This is also the meaning of the important verse, *brahmāṇḍa brahmite kona bhāgyavān jiva/ guru-kṛṣṇa-prasāde pāya bhakti-latā-bīja* (Cc. *Madhya*, 19.151).

Yet there is a great difference between a beginner in *bhakti* and one who actually attains Kṛṣṇa-*prema* as Lord Caitanya did. Describing the beginner who meets a bona fide spiritual master and starts to understand Kṛṣṇa, Śrīla Prabhupāda uses the word "fortunate;" and for one who attains love of God (*prema*), he uses the word "very fortunate." "One whose love of Godhead (Kṛṣṇa-*prema*) is awakened and who thus becomes a devotee of the inconceivable Supreme Personality of Godhead is to be considered to be extremely fortunate."

Even the Māyāvādīs admitted that it is not easy for one to become Kṛṣṇa conscious. A devotee familiar with the rudiments of Kṛṣṇa conscious life should always “count his blessings” and be very thankful. It is not an ordinary opportunity that he has been given. His feeling of fortune should not be arrogant. He should not think, “I am in a very rare percentage of fortunate humanity and therefore I am better than all other persons. I am certainly better than all sinful people, and even other religionists are actually like animals compared to me. Indeed, I am very exalted.”

Although it may seem contradictory, a devotee thinks of himself as simultaneously fortunate and unfortunate. We are fortunate to have attained the human birth, but unfortunate that we are still living within the fallen material species. We are fortunate to have come into contact with guru and Kṛṣṇa (and that is their causeless mercy on us) but we are still unfortunate (doubly unfortunate!) because we do not show the proper honor, submission, and loving service to the Lord and His pure devotee.

The devotee in Kṛṣṇa consciousness should be very serious, and always take shelter of his protectors, guru and Kṛṣṇa, and be aware that his good fortune has been given to him to develop.

Furthermore, we shouldn't be hateful towards those who are less fortunate. That would be a sure way to lose our fortune. Our fortune is not like a stock of money that we can protect with armed guards. The *bhakti-latā-bīja* (seed of devotional service) is a grace bestowed upon us or awakened within us.

We can increase our own “stock” by always thinking ourselves unworthy, and at the same time always acting very responsibly by serving the spiritual master and helping others to become more fortunate.

An example of a highly fortunate person who considered himself unfortunate, was Sanātana Gosvāmī when he first met Lord Caitanya in Vārāṇasī. Certainly he was extremely fortunate to receive the special attention and embraces of Lord Caitanya. But Sanātana’s mood was not puffed up:

I was born in a low family, and my associates are all low-class men. I myself am fallen and am the lowest of men. Indeed, I have passed my whole life fallen in the well of sinful materialism.

I do not know what is beneficial for me and what is detrimental. Nonetheless, in ordinary dealings people consider me a learned scholar, and I am also thinking of myself as such.

Out of Your causeless mercy, You have delivered me from the materialistic path. Now, by the same causeless mercy, please tell me what my duty is.

—Cc. *Madhya*, 20.99-101

14

AS IF
Dialogue #2

My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, my dear Śrīla Prabhupāda, on this "day of Lord Hari" I ask You to please accept me and please engage me in the service of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra with numerical strength of Ekādaśī vow. I know it is not sheer numbers that impresses or pleases You, but devotion. My hope is to gain more conviction that the Names of God are God Himself. Usually my mind is distracted when chanting on this day but the volume itself turns to surrender unto the simple process of chanting with the tongue and hearing. O Supreme Lord, O spiritual master, do You approve, do You accept this devotional service?

As if Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes I approve your Ekādaśī-*vrata*. I have written that in *Nectar of Devotion*.

SDG: Sometimes they say you don't, because you didn't teach it to us when you were here. But you did write it in your books.

As if Śrīla Prabhupāda: I did not emphasize it over regular preaching duties. My Guru Mahārāja emphasized preaching, and service as foremost. But if you can do it, this increased chanting and fasting is nice. The chanting is our life and soul.

SDG: And, Śrīla Prabhupāda, are my prayers I make during the day, all right?

As if Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes, prayers, *vandanam*. Now go to the temples and serve the devotees. There

is so much work to be done. Not that Kṛṣṇa needs our help, but He wants to see how sincere you are. I never slowed down my efforts. Pray to Kṛṣṇa to keep your spirit of enthusiasm until the end of life. There should be no question of retirement. You are still a relatively young man. I have given you all the best thing, devotional service. You should share it with others, even if it's a struggle. The struggle is also not ordinary; it is *tapo divyam*. In this way you will please Kṛṣṇa and show your sincerity and He will be pleased to reveal Himself, to guide you, talk with you. This is how you become empowered—by taking my words in cent percent faith and carrying it out to the best of your ability.

SDG: Thank you Prabhupāda, thank You Lord Kṛṣṇa. Please allow me to serve the devotees and the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Let me dedicate my Ekādaśī vow in that way, not 'licking up' Kṛṣṇa, but praying to become your missionary worker. Please strengthen me. I pray to You by increasing the numbers today. Let me realize this *saṅkīrtana yajña* so I can tell others to do it.

As if Lord Kṛṣṇa: Yes, I am the chanting of the Holy Names. This is the best way to know Me. Learn to serve the Name Form of the Lord. Of all forms, this is most merciful.

15

A LETTER TO THOMAS MERTON

January 1989

Dear Father Thomas Merton,

It is the twentieth anniversary of your death and a new diary of yours has just been published. People are taking the occasion to praise you, and your books are selling well. I wanted to write to you also. Please allow me to introduce myself.

I am a disciple of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda who I think you also know as the Founder-Acarya of the Kṛṣṇa Consciousness Movement. In 1966 you wrote a foreword to Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda's translation and commentary, and this appeared in the first edition of *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*.

From the ecumenical point of view, the connection between us is your interest in Eastern spirituality. I am also interested in Catholic spirituality, or more accurately, in the universality of spiritual experience. But particularly, I have noted your interest in the Vaiṣṇava authors, as well as in Śaṅkarācārya. I hope I am not presumptuous to share some thoughts with you.

Aside from theological considerations, I feel akin to you in a number of personal ways. Your own spiritual life was inextricably connected to your vocation as a writer. Your main writing was autobiographical,

and your journals are perhaps your best loved works. You have presented your Church's doctrines, but with an individual point of view, which laymen have been able to understand and appreciate. You also came to your religious vocation by a conversion from materialistic life, at the age of thirty-three. After your conversion, you dedicated your life as a celibate monk. You wrote poetry, and especially in your published diaries, you honestly revealed your doubts, and your discontents with some of the institutionalism of your Church. . . . While I don't compare myself to such a renowned monk as yourself, on all these ways, I have similar interests and commitments.

My main service to my spiritual master is writing, and I mostly write in the same genres that you have chosen. I am also in the renounced order of life. I am an American who was picked up from a sordid life by my spiritual master in 1966, when I was 26 years old, living on the Lower East Side of New York.

I have enjoyed some of your diaries and other books. Most recently, I read *A Vow of Conversation*, and was intrigued at your growing need for inwardness, which is something that has also intrigued me.

I will try not to be preachy, but I feel confident I can share some reflections with you without offending your own devotion to Lord Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church. My spiritual master was a great preacher, a follower of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu,

who is described in the Vedic literatures as a direct incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Lord Caitanya and His followers were very compassionate and always desired to give Kṛṣṇa consciousness to people. So all the followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda (A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami) are also, according to their individual capacity, interested in preaching the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

If this letter of mine results in further exchanges between us, I can write more at length. But if I have only one chance to speak to you, I would like to bring to your notice the jewel of *bhakti* which is present in the teachings of Lord Caitanya, and which is also elaborated in the translations and purports of Vaiṣṇava literature by his Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. I think you will agree that the goal of religion is beyond petitioning God for material well-being, and it is also beyond the selfish desire only for one's personal salvation. Lord Caitanya taught that all religious endeavor can be discussed in three stages: 1) awakening to our relationship with God (*sambhanda*), 2.) engaging in activities of that relationship, namely devotional service, and 3.) the final goal, which is *prema-bhakti*, pure love of God. This pure love of God is beyond meditation on the impersonal aspects of the Absolute Truth.

I noted in your *Asian Journal*, that when you were traveling in India, you read Vaiṣṇava authors such as Rāmānuja, and Bengali Vaiṣṇava poets like Chandi-

dāsa, but you seemed to be more interested in Śaṅkara. At least you transcribed more portions of his works into your diary. I also read a scholarly study, *Thomas Merton and Eastern Religions*, wherein the author said that you had more attraction for impersonal monism than for Vaiṣṇavism. The author of that study was also surprised that you leaned more towards Śaṅkara, since *bhakti* with its ultimate realization of love of God as a conjugal union between the lover and beloved, is similar to the "bridal mysticism" which is taught by St. John of the Cross and other Catholic mystics. I also was surprised, because I understood the ultimate Christian realization to be love of God through Jesus Christ—and not through an impersonal conclusion whereby one "merges" into Christ and loses individual identity. Further indication that you may be in this impersonal mood, is your absorption in Zen Buddhism and meditation, which was for you more serious study than your investigations of Indian *bhakti*, or even Śaṅkara.

According to Lord Caitanya, who taught the exact same thing as Lord Kṛṣṇa taught in *Bhagavad-gītā*, the impersonal aspect of the Absolute Truth, as revealed in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, has three aspects: all pervading impersonal Brahman, localized Viṣṇu (which is known as "God in the heart," realized by the *yogīs*) and the personal aspect, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Personality of Godhead. They are all different aspects of the one Absolute Truth, but the highest form is the Personality of Godhead. The science of Kṛṣṇa is a vast subject, and something I can hardly broach in this first

subject, and something I can hardly broach in this first letter to you. But when I read your *Asian Journal*, I so much wished to convey this to you, and also since I have developed a friendly feeling for you by reading your diaries, I cannot refrain from suggesting it to you. You were always an open thinker, ready to see God consciousness even in the conscientious thinking of atheists like Sartre. So surely you will be able to see the richness of pure theism in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, as given in the Vedic literatures. I don't know if this letter of mine can reach you or whether it is just a theoretical exercise—but I do sincerely wish I could communicate Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* to "the late" Thomas Merton, wherever he may be.

If you get a chance, look into the teachings of Lord Caitanya, especially as given by His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. I am sure you won't be sorry.

One final point: I was moved to read of your increasing tendency for solitude and meditation. In this regard also, Lord Caitanya has given sound advice to those who have a yearning to escape the noise of this material world and to completely surrender to God. He has prescribed that in this age the best method is to chant the Holy Names of God. The process of contemplation or meditation, which was pioneered and fully developed in Vedic culture, really belongs to a past millennia, when people had very long life duration and a capacity to meditate which we do not have. You yourself experienced the frustration and inability to continuously practice meditation while living in the

to continuously practice meditation while living in the twentieth century. So Lord Caitanya has kindly given us the method of chanting God's names, either individually in the prayer-like *japa*, or in loud, melodious singing of *kīrtana* for the benefit of other people. Even 5,000 years ago when Lord Kṛṣṇa personally taught yoga meditation to His disciple, Arjuna, Arjuna said it seemed unendurable and too difficult to practice because of the wanderings of the mind. In reply, Lord Kṛṣṇa assured Arjuna that he was actually the topmost meditator, because he had developed loving attraction to the Supreme Lord. In the present age, it is hardly possible to practice prolonged secluded meditation, and therefore the chanting of God's names, according to the authorized names of God that one finds in his religion, is the best means for attaining love of God.

I hope this letter has been of some interest to you, and if we exchange any further, I am at your service. May you be well and advancing in love of God wherever you are,

Yours sincerely,

16

EKĀDĀŚI DIARY

By Ekādaśī noon, chanting is oh-so-mechanical. I think, "This is at least a virtue: that I don't give up." But if I could have my way, what would I want from chanting? I wouldn't want to "bliss out." Would I like tears, some moisture to end the parch-cracking drought? Not tears of self pity, but in regret for all I am doing wrong.

When Prabhupāda visited Mexico in 1975, a devotee asked him, "We don't know how we can increase our desire for chanting." Prabhupāda replied: "By performing *saṅkīrtana*. Just like if a man drinks, and if he drinks and drinks, then he becomes a drunkard. Drink more and more and you become a drunkard." I like this example very much. We are big drinkers on Ekādaśī. After a few sips we don't notice any effect. But a few more rounds and we feel a bit tipsy. More drinking and by evening we are "in our cups." A mere sixteen rounds seems to leave us too sober. When we increase, more, more, more, it's bound to make us "inebriated." If only we could become daily drunkards.

6:00 P.M.:

All-day chanting keeps you occupied so that you can't do much nonsense. But it also makes you sad because all day you chant emptily. But at least you

face yourself: I am empty of love of God.

Now life is simple as it should be. Everything evolves around getting your quota done. You can't even worry whether you are doing it well; just do it. If you would resolve to chant that much everyday there wouldn't be much time for gathering food or arranging shelter. You would make some temporary arrangement and concentrate on eternity. If you counted the names of God and did nothing else then nothing else would be necessary.

At least one day every two weeks you rise to a higher level, a more rarified existence—a hint of what could be.

8:30 P.M.:

The quota is done. A pious man says his prayers and goes to bed, but we are staying up all night, calmly controlling the urges to eat and sleep. The senses are subdued by training.

This reminds me of the chaste wife, Savitri. By the power of her chastity, she made the sun stand and not go down. Similarly, by the force of our vows (and by the mercy of the Holy Name), we stay up patiently all night while the tyrants of eating and sleeping sit waiting.

Midnight:

It is hard to oppose or deny the body's demands. But whatever the body does, it gets used to it.

Staying up with a group of devotees increases my

appreciation for *sadhu-sanga*. Our best friends are brought together by our spiritual master.

Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda,

Please save me from the association of nondevotees, no matter how sophisticated they may appear, and no matter what promises they may seem to offer me. And if I sometimes become tired with my God-brothers, let me tolerate that.

At least tonight I am convinced that the way that you have given us in ISKCON is the best way back to Godhead.

12:00 A.M.—2:00 A.M.:

We went outside walking to stay awake. For awhile I was thinking, "I don't want to chant." That was the message sent out by my brain. But I chanted and gradually the opposition disappeared.

The moon was bright and large, oblong. Seeing the moon above the bare branches of one tree reminded me of my youth when I would call out to the tree and the moon and the night and to myself, "O Lost!" But now we call to God, "Please accept me!"

Stumbling in the dark while walking over the uneven earth. Help me Lord, to pray again.

3:00 A.M.:

The sound of a truck changing gears and straining up the hill. A cow mooing. Listening to *Caitanya-*

caritāmṛta on a tape. We have lost our old selves and gained our better selves in *kīrtana*. Four of us is better than being alone in the cause of praising Kṛṣṇa. The pains of body and mind are still there, but we helped each other to sing; and we stayed up all night.

Log it: *Ekādaśī-vrata* completed.

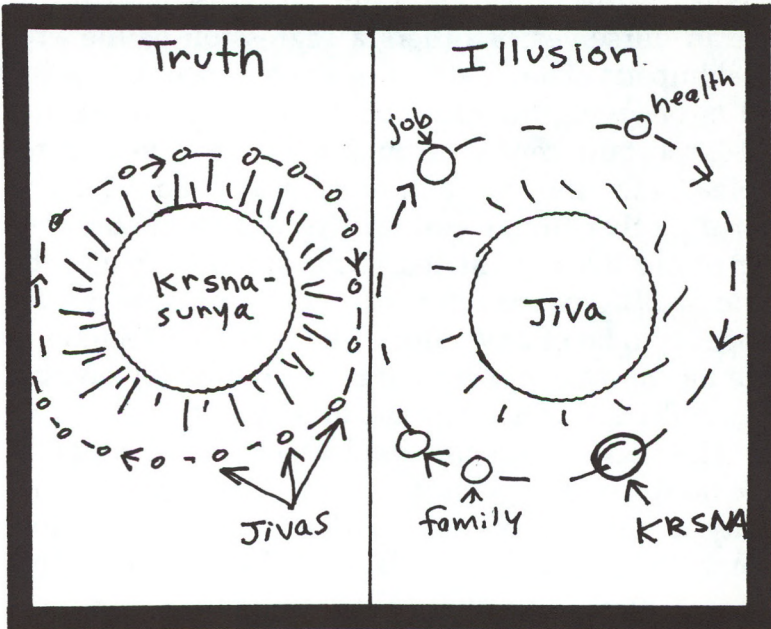
The morning after Ekādaśī :

Prabhupāda said, "Drink more and more and you become a drunkard, similarly chant more and more and you become—perfect chanter." But the day after *Ekādaśī* does not produce a hangover. It is just the opposite: we are prepared to chant a large number of rounds. We are eager to do work. The brain is clear for deciding in favor of more Kṛṣṇa consciousness (especially before eating).

17

*KRSNA IS NOT ANOTHER THING,
BUT THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING*

Coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness is like a Copernican revolution to the consciousness. Before Copernicus, Western humankind believed the theory of the astronomer Ptolemy, that the earth was the center of the universe. Copernicus "discovered" (what is also in



the Vedas) that the sun is central, and the earth is one of the many planets revolving around the sun. Similarly, until we came into contact with Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings, God was for us, at best, one of many "things" in our life. But Prabhupāda convinced us that Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is the center of all existence, and therefore we should do everything for Him. *Yat karoṣi yad aśnāsi*: "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer or give away, and whatever austerities you perform—do that, O son of Kuntī, as an offering to Me" (Bg. 9.27). This is the only way that Kṛṣṇa consciousness can be seriously pursued; not as a hobby.

Even though we have many duties to perform, as did Arjuna, we have to dedicate all acts in service to Kṛṣṇa: "Think of Me and fight." It is disconcerting to see in ourselves or others a regression to the pre-Prabhupāda state. If after Copernicus, people persisted in believing the old model—that the earth is the all-important center around which everything revolves, then they were in illusion. And so we are in *māyā* if other things besides Kṛṣṇa, become the center of our lives. As stated in the second verse of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam catur sloki*, "O Brahmā, whatever appears to be of any value, if it is without relation to Me has no reality. Know it is as My illusory energy, that reflection which appears to be in darkness."

How does this regression happen? One example is the hard working *grhastha*. Certainly his occupational duty is his way of serving Kṛṣṇa. But the trouble comes when the demands of daily work push his

spiritual consciousness into one of many mental cubby holes. Fortunately, Prabhupāda has given us the remedy: hold fast to your chanting of sixteen daily rounds of *japa*. Prabhupāda used to say, "Can't you spare at least two or three hours a day out of the twenty-four to give to Kṛṣṇa?" If we say we cannot, that claim is itself proof that we have reverted to the Ptolemaic universal view. When that happens, then even the life-saving *japa* quota becomes a "thing" that we have to somehow fit into our daily schedule. The schedule comes first. Our life governs our Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

We have to reverse that perspective. It can be done without radical external changes in our living situation such as job, place of residence and so on. But a change of consciousness is required. Either our hunger for Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the sun around which we organize everything in our life, or else Kṛṣṇa becomes one object among others orbiting in the crowded sky of our life.

Association with devotees and at least minimal reading of Prabhupāda's books will help us. Even if we can only dedicate two and a half hours to the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, if it is prayerful *japa* it will set the tone for the whole day. Then, even as we drive the car and deal with work and family problems, the Kṛṣṇa-sun will be in the center. And that is Reality. With the right viewpoint we will be able to turn toward the Kṛṣṇa-sūrya at all times during the day, no matter how busy we are. We will remember Who is sustain-

ing us, and what is the purpose of our life—and not feel like a log being swept helplessly down a rapids.

The answer to our time-shortage is not to ask, “Is it possible to chant only four rounds a day?” That plea to reduce chanting comes when we think that our *japa* quota is somehow in opposition to our needs, our concern for others, our maintenance responsibilities and so on. But Prabhupāda did not ask us to make a choice between Kṛṣṇa and other necessities. We do have to decide between Kṛṣṇa and so many nonsense things, *prajalpa*, and other time-wasters.

We need to understand our need to turn to Kṛṣṇa. We can help ourselves by approaching Lord Kṛṣṇa and His devotees and asking, “Please help me understand my complete dependence on the Lord.” When we begin to glimpse the truth, we will turn to the *japa* not as a bothersome duty, but realizing that these are the most real moments of our life. If we chant His holy names in the morning, with intense expectation of contact with Kṛṣṇa, then we will not lose too much of this contact during the rest of the day. But we have to go to Kṛṣṇa in a humble mood, begging for the Holy Name and allowing the mercy of the Holy Name to work upon us.

18

SHARING PRAYERS

N. Prabhu gave the morning lecture on the disappearance day of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. He mentioned that Śrīla Prabhupāda once said we may pray to Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī on this day. Later I spoke to N. Prabhu, "I know it's a very personal thing, but I wanted to ask you about prayer."

I had already suspected N. of practicing prayer. I remembered from previous conversations with him how he would say things like "Lord Jagannātha is protecting us," or "I had prayed to Lord Jagannātha."

"When do you pray?" I asked.

N. said, "I recite verses to the Deities just before greeting the Deities and I repeat Lord Brahmā's prayer to Lord Kṛṣṇa, 'My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, please accept me as a subordinate servant whose little mistake and impudence might be excused.'"

N. and I admitted to each other that we are always asking Lord Kṛṣṇa for benedictions. But—we assured each other—even great devotees whose prayers are recorded in the *Bhāgavatam* often approach the Lord with petitions. The *Bhāgavatam* prayers are ideal: eloquent and philosophical praises of the Lord, with a personal petition humbly added at the end.

N. Prabhu said that he also prays to Lord Nṛsimhadeva and Śrīla Prabhupāda before he begins his frequent travels, requesting their protection. One day, on the occasion of Lord Balarāma's appearance, he

said that he had been feeling some agitation in his mind, and so he decided to make a daily prayer for spiritual strength unto Lord Balarāma: "My dear Lord Balarāma, You are the Lord of immeasurable strength and You are very kind to Your devotees. . . ."

N. Prabhu said, "It wasn't that instantly I felt a difference like when Popeye takes spinach and suddenly gets big muscles. But eventually I noticed as I prayed my mental and sensual agitation went away."

N. said he also noticed a change when he prayed on behalf of his wife for her ability to cope with her many personal problems. He also regularly recites prayers to the Holy Names, as recommended in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *niṣṛtta-tarsair*. . . , and a prayer by Rūpa Gosvāmī.

"I think it's bonafide," N. said humbly. "It's *van-danam*."

I was happy to find another praying man. Taking his advice, I attempted to pray on the occasion of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's disappearance day. I prayed to Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī to please bless me with the strength to be very strict in keeping the philosophical conclusions of Lord Caitanya's philosophy. By Prabhupāda's grace, such a great scholar and pure devotee has agreed to become my *param-guru*. How kind he is! I prayed to him, "Please don't kick me away from Śrīla Prabhupāda's lotus feet although I don't deserve to be there. Allow me to practice the austerities befitting a *sannyāsī*. And please allow me to eventually understand the nature of loving

service to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, of which you, and Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda are the perfect emblems. And—thank you for the association of devotees like N. Prabhu, who encourage me in prayer.”

19

LETTER EXCHANGE:

“WHY DOES GOD PUNISH SINNERS?”

Inquiry:

I have not found yet answers to my questions. The facts are that I became offensive to Kṛṣṇa because I developed a resentful spirit, finding it difficult to perform austerities and also after reading the description of the infernal planets in the Fifth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. I was shocked and my critical spirit broke out. My questions were: Why do the conditioned soul have to suffer so much (why does our Supreme Father chastise us so much?) I thought that it was not fair to blame the conditioned souls to be so fallen, since the source of their imperfections was the cause of all causes, the Supreme Lord. Then my offensive spirit led me to doubt everything. But it made me

feel so miserable that I stopped by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, (which took the form of my husband's steadiness and kindness). I understood that my speculation led to nowhere but suffering and that my frustration was due to lust. Better to surrender even blindly to elevated souls, to follow the authorized process of the *ācāryas*. I told my husband, "I prefer to remain stupid but to go back to Godhead than to break my head to try to understand the inconceivable by mental speculation." What is the use of suffering (hell or in the womb of the mother) if one forgets everything afterwards?

Please excuse my bad English.

Your servant,

Bhaktin Catherine

Reply:

Dear Prabhu,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

It is a sign of your kind-heartedness that you do not like to hear that the spirit souls have to suffer so much, as it is described in the Fifth Canto.

If you have actually reached the conclusion which you state in your letter, which is to simply accept the *ācāryas* and the *sāstra* rather than "break your head trying to understand the inconceivable by mental speculation," then you already have the best solution.

Of course, it is not wrong to feel sorry for the living beings. But rather than just lament, or worse, to blame the Lord for their sufferings, one can try to actually help other living beings. When Mahārāja Parīkṣit heard of the sufferings of the living entities, his response was similar to yours. He asked Śukadeva Gosvāmī (at the beginning of the Sixth Canto), "Is there any way the living beings can be saved?" Śukadeva Gosvāmī replied that by pure devotional service all the inebrieties could be removed. Although we cannot understand everything about sinful activities and their reactions, if we actually feel compassion, we should try to help those who are headed for sufferings by giving them Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

As for the punishments, they are not caused by Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa's desire is that everyone be free of all suffering; and He continues to offer that relief. The punishments are due to the material nature and to the living entities themselves.

Generally, most sane and civil people will agree that there should be some kind of corrective agency in society. Otherwise, we would be defenseless against the rogues and rascals who plunder, kill, rape, destroy, and so on. So there are corrective agencies like police. (Sometimes the police are also corrupt, but that is a different thing.) In the management of the universe, which is filled with many miscreants, there is also a corrective agency known as Māyā or Yamarāja, and so miscreant souls are punished in this life and the next under the law of karma. None of it is

desired by the Lord, who constantly offers us all a chance to go back to home, back to Godhead.

You ask what is the sense of suffering if we forget afterwards? For unintelligent persons, the threat of future suffering may move them to improve themselves. This is not the motivation for going back to Godhead, but it at least may prevent me from acting in the worst way. Even if I forget that I was punished previously for wrong acts, I may learn that I will suffer in the future from my present misbehavior. We see people suffering now, and we hear from Vedic literature how people do suffer in the next life, so this observation may make us hesitate to do wrongs and have to suffer in the future. Don't be doubtful of the *śāstras*. It is useless.

Hope this meets you in good health.

Yours in the service of Prabhupāda,

SRI KṚṢṆA, A COMPLETE CONCEPT OF GOD

Life has become so secular that many people now make no mention at all of God in their ordinary activities. Even believers can hardly explain what they mean by God. One important reason for the diminishing of faith is that the concept of God, as explained by scriptures and theologians, is often inadequate. But the concept of God in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is *om pūrṇam*, complete and satisfying.

One example of theistic inadequacy is when God is presented in a one-sided way. Sometimes a theologian or scripture stresses that God is transcendental to the world, but doesn't give us much hope that He is also very much within the world. (The extreme view that God only exists as the Creator who is now completely detached from the world, is called Deism. The other extreme view, that "God" is only found within things of the world, is pantheism.) Another one-sided version of the Deity is that He is all powerful, but without a human-like compassion for suffering.

Another problem: Some think that if God is personal, then He must be a fallible person and therefore not worthy of our worship. But how can a sincere religious quest be satisfied by a Deity who is impersonal and completely beyond us?

Lord Caitanya's teachings of *acintya-bhedābheda tattva* (God as inconceivably, simultaneously one and yet different from His creation), is the culmination of

centuries of Vaiṣṇava thought. In describing Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Caitanya and His followers draw from the essence of all the Vedic scriptures, especially from the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. And thus we learn of the Supreme Personality of Godhead who is “two-sided,” or complete. He is greater than the greatest (as Maha-Viṣṇu), and He is smaller than the smallest (as the Supersoul). Similarly, He is completely transcendental to the material world and the modes of nature, and yet by His energies (which are non-different than Him) He exists within every particle of matter.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa is simultaneously a person, and yet He is not a person in any limited sense. According to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, His personality is neither anthropomorphic nor mythical, and yet he possesses very personal and attractive characteristics. By His all-attractive qualities, Lord Kṛṣṇa is very approachable and lovable. And yet the lovable or intimate nature of Kṛṣṇa, does not detract from His inconceivable greatness as the source of all the material and spiritual worlds.

Lord Brahmā, the most learned person in the universe, partially appreciated the completeness of Kṛṣṇa in his prayers in the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*:

. . . You are very affectionate toward Your devotees. In spite of Your affection for me, I cannot estimate the potency of your bodily activities. . . . If I cannot estimate the spiritual potency of Your childlike

body, then what can I understand about Your transcendental pastimes?

Lord Brahmā goes on to say that the inconceivable Supreme Personality of Godhead cannot be understood by any kind of speculation, but only by hearing about Him from authorized scriptures and from realized devotees. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī has also informed us that unless we accept the inconceivable potency of God, it is not possible for us to understand Him at all.

As stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, anyone who can understand a little of the transcendental pastimes, appearance and disappearance of the Lord, becomes immediately eligible to enter the kingdom of God after quitting the material body.

As we go on hearing and appreciating the complete nature of the science of God, we also understand better why Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted this knowledge distributed. In an age when God has become mostly irrelevant or the vague Deity of ill-informed believers, descriptions of Lord Kṛṣṇa as the complete Personality of Godhead, create victory for the cause of pure theism.

21

AS IF

Dialogue #3

My dear Lords, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda, I approach you, it seems, one day at a time. I wake from mostly ignorant dreams, and I begin by your grace, and by the will you have endowed me with, to turn again to you. My entrapment is still there, a subtle body within a gross body within the material world. But the way to you is open. This morning I felt physically more tired and didn't want to rise. But I did. Thus we surrender in day by day portions. It is not wrong or senseless repetition that I ask you again today, please guide me. Make me aware I am not an independent reality but a dependent creature. But to know this with truth I have to face the fearful facts. Therefore I request you to assure me of your protection.

As if Śrīla Prabhupāda: All your requests are granted. You remember I said to you that the work you do is not just to be done mechanically? You were turning in the typing work, and you held yourself back from the first initiation. But I said, "If you love me, then I will love you." Think that over. You have not learned everything from me. I can still teach you in a personal way. You are seeking other teachers for their *śikṣā*.

That is also allowed as long as they confer what is taught by me and Lord Kṛṣṇa. But I can continue to teach you.

SDG: I do not doubt it. But I am covered in ignorance, just as I felt this morning on struggling to rise from bed. I am similarly struggling to come to you through my misconceptions. And *māyā*, the Lord's illusory energy, is very powerful and always ready to enslave me if I don't eagerly take my place in working as your servant, working to free myself—hoping one day, if not today, to actually enter pure devotional service.

How could I dare aspire that my full surrender could be as soon as today or in this lifetime! I am so far away. Please allow me to connect in some small way, just as we can contact a far away star by looking at it. Let me place myself as an atom at your lotus feet. Please guide me again, Śrīla Prabhupāda, to serve Lord Kṛṣṇa.

As if Śrīla Prabhupāda: Go on hearing and chanting. Read my books. Chant. Go join the devotees and serve with them. Fill up each day in this way.

Found Poem of Śrīla Prabhupāda
THE INDIAN DISEASE

In India they are surprised
 that these young men from the West
 have become so much aloof
 from material activity.
 That is not surprising
 because *bhaja vāsudevam*:
 They have taken to the shelter of Vāsudeva.
 If you do also,
 you shall become,
 but you are not inclined.
 In India, we have Vāsudeva,
 but we think we know everything about it:
 "O Hare Kṛṣṇa, this is it,
 what can you teach, we know everything."
 This is the Indian disease.

And when the Indians go West
 and see these boys and girls
 in the cities on *saṅkīrtana*,
 the Indian people say,
 "Oh we know everything about it.
 We have come here to learn
 how to eat meat, and to drink wine."
Bhaja vāsudeva is not much appealing,
 but this is the only way
 out of entanglement.

—S. Bhāg. 3.26.26, Bombay 1/3/75

23

CALLING OUT TO ŚRĪLA PRABHUPĀDA

O Prabhupāda, you are the saintly person guiding the lives of thousands of devotees in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement and you will continue to be the central person because of your Bhaktivedanta purports and your unexcelled achievements as a preacher and pure devotee;

O Prabhupāda, who sometimes appears very dimly in the memory, because our Kali-yuga brains are so limited, and who is therefore a Narada Muni of the modern age, available in retrieval systems like books, *murtis* of exact likeness, and taped lectures, movies and photos—in which we find you strongly present;

O Prabhupāda, we request you to please walk into our dreams just as you were in life, and give us the hint that we will meet with you again in the spiritual world;

O Prabhupāda, you are the early morning Bhāgavata writer, the witty commentator, the blasting attacker of demons who misinterpret the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and the enjoyer of a simple meal of Kṛṣṇa-*prasādam*;

O Lord Kṛṣṇa, please reveal Prabhupāda to our minds in many ways throughout the day and night, and let Him appear in our speech; and as we scan a page of a letter or essay that we have written, let the name “Prabhupāda” appear a few times on each page

along with “Kṛṣṇa” and “Caitanya,” thus assuring literary excellence and substance to our writings;

O Prabhupāda, whom we forget, please let us remember that Śrī Kṛṣṇa will reveal Himself to us only when we please his pure devotee;

O Prabhupāda, who sits at the end of the *kīrtana* hall facing Rādhā-Govinda, and who smiles as the devotees promenade towards the Deity and then turn and promenade towards him;

O Prabhupāda, who pulls the devotees through tough times, as when he told us to expect stiff resistance to the *saṅkīrtana* movement from those people who are like hogs, dogs, camels and asses, and who warned us not to expect anything auspicious from nondevotees, even if they be scholars or altruists;

O Prabhupāda, whom we neglect and offend, but who takes us back as a kind father accepting his children who commit many mistakes;

O Prabhupāda, who is the topmost theologian not because he invents new theories of God, but because he stays faithful to the conclusion of the richest theology of devotion, and who is never a mere theorizer but who asks everyone to directly surrender to God, and who explains why, by pointing out the foolishness of materialism, and the many attractive qualities of the Personality of Godhead;

O Prabhupāda, you are very close to Kṛṣṇa, but I am very far from Him. Kindly tell us again how we also are actually close to Kṛṣṇa because He is within our hearts; please remind us of these eternal truths, and never give up on us, despite our persistent faults.

24

PRAISE

When we praise Lord Kṛṣṇa, it doesn't increase His glories because He is already infinitely glorious. He is called *ānandāmbuddhi vardanam*: an ever increasing ocean of bliss. His praises are sung by liberated devotees who are much more expert than we are. But when we join in His praises by hearing from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and by speaking what little we have realized, it is we who benefit. The part and parcel of the Lord breathes new life as he connects with the Whole.

And when we direct our God-praise into the world, others benefit. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that not everyone can become Kṛṣṇa conscious. (So the materialist doesn't have to worry, "If everyone becomes a devotee, how will the world go on?") But if we give someone Kṛṣṇa's message, it is the best way for us to attract the favorable attention of the Lord.

So let us praise—with *karatālas* and *mṛdaṅga* and voice. With pen and paper; with produced books. With a satisfied, sincere life in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, a testimony to the glory of God. And by praising the pure devotee, Śrīla Prabhupāda (who like Kṛṣṇa, doesn't "need" our praise).

We praise as personal witnesses: "I have heard of Kṛṣṇa's sweetness and mercy and greatness. In His original form He is completely beyond the material world and He plays and dances in ecstatic love with

His confidential devotees—In His mercy form, especially as Lord Caitanya, He wants us all to join Him. I have received that mercy from His pure devotee. As for His greatness, all the worlds are managed by His expansions and directors, and no one can understand the full scope of His energies.”

When we praise, we come into conflict with various materialists, egoists, hedonists, atheists and religious sectarians who want to limit God to only one form of revelation. They don't like *kīrtana*: “No more Hare Kṛṣṇa/while Rome burns.” They don't understand. So we seek the association of those who love *kīrtana*, and we praise Kṛṣṇa in their company, for our personal strength and solidarity. And we congregate in order to spread the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Those who know, at least to some extent, the sufferings caused by fruitive acts, cannot encourage others to become entangled in karma. So even though some people do not like to hear the praises of Godhead, the devotees cannot remain silent. “This *saṅkīrtana* movement is the prime benediction for humanity at large because it spreads the rays of the benediction moon.”

25

THOUGHTS BEFORE AND AFTER
A SUNDAY FEAST LECTURE

Before:

Do I have any desire to actually communicate Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the guests tonight? My reply is, "Yes, I'm sure I do." Then, when you sit to face them, pray to Kṛṣṇa to please help you. Your job is to deliver the message of *Bhagavad-gītā*, like a postal peon. Your desire to do it and your enthusiasm will lead you to intuitive methods for holding their attention.

Lecture advice:

Don't think you have to give all the arguments for the existence of God and then all the counter-arguments and then a defense against those counter-arguments. And don't waste time with too many public speaking gimmicks and jokes as proofs of your liberal-mindedness. Just be who you are, a postal peon in a cotton *dhoti*. Plunge into the *Bhagavad-gītā* and the Bhaktivedanta purport, and speak in surrender.

After:

I think it went all right. At first everything seemed so familiar (even though I don't know the people in

this city). It was so typical, young boys with the fashionable hair cuts, young married couples who practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness at home, and older people like me, “gracefully aging” but a little tired out. I got the impression that I was experiencing a *déjà vu* of all humanity. But I snapped out of it when the *kīrtana* warmed up. In other words, it was my mental concoction. . . .

When I entered the lecture, I felt the juices flow. I told them that material life is *dukhālayam aśāśvatam*, and we have to surrender to Kṛṣṇa. Make it a priority in your life. The lecture was supposed to be no more than thirty minutes, but the questions ran over.

Someone asked, “Is it possible to be a bachelor in Kṛṣṇa consciousness?” “Yes,” I replied, “but not a bachelor-daddy.”

Someone asked, “I saw you ten years ago in New York and you said that one can use anything in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, even missiles. Can you explain that?” I replied, “It’s in Prabhupāda’s books. And here’s the picture of Arjuna shooting missiles for Kṛṣṇa. But one can’t do such things whimsically and claim it’s for Kṛṣṇa.”

Someone asked, “When there is creation, do the souls already have karma before they enter?” After answering, I asked them to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness on their own.

As I urged them to be more serious, I realized my own shortages in surrender and Vaiṣṇava learning—but I felt happy to admit it, and happy in the shelter of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Please, Śrīla Prabhupāda, forgive my errant ways, my lack of fire and boldness. . . . Please, Lord Kṛṣṇa, bless the Sunday feasts in ISKCON and the people who attend them. Please accept the offering of *purīs*, rice, *sabjīs*, sweets and nectar drinks. Let everyone enjoy a feast and receive Your absolute mercy. Let us serve you eternally.

26

A LETTER TO ŚRĪLA PRABHUPĀDA

Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda,

Please accept my humble obeisances at your lotus feet.

The years have separated us and I have tried to remain your disciple. But I have grown and changed in some ways of my own. I am far away from those simple, happy days when we boys first shaved our heads, and bought our golden turtle-necked jerseys on Orchard Street. Do you remember us dancing before you in the storefront, praising the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa? May we return to that stage of being child-like—and bold enough to reject all Western culture? Will we be able again to do whatever you asked? O Prabhupāda, right now I am a bit tired of the effort.

But why so much lamentation and weakness? We did not see that in you. Your memories of your Guru

Mahārāja were lively; you wrote, "Although according to material vision His Divine Grace Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Prabhupāda passed away from this material world on the last day of December, 1936, I still consider His Divine Grace to be always present with me by his *vāñī*, his words."

You stated in your "Concluding Words" to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, "Physical presence is sometimes appreciable and sometimes not, but *vāñī* continues to exist eternally. Therefore we must take advantage of the *vāñī*, not the physical presence."

I cannot match your dedication to your Guru Mahārāja. But I should not be envious of you as the ideal disciple. You wrote, "I think that His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura is always seeing my activities and guiding me within my heart by his words. As it is said in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *tene brahma hṛdā ya ādi-kavaye*. Spiritual inspiration comes from within the heart, wherein the Supreme Personality of Godhead in His Paramātmā feature is always sitting with all His devotees and associates." Your statement is clear: Just as the Lord is living within our hearts, and we can come to relate with Him as our dearest friend, so you are also always present with us. It cannot be understood materially, but it is spiritual reality.

Your meditation on your Guru Mahārāja was inspirational and very practical. You always wanted to please him, and he blessed you because of your full faith in serving him. You worked for him. Thus you are able to say, "Certainly if His Divine Grace were

physically present at this time, it would have been a great occasion for jubilation, but even though he is not physically present, I am confident that he is very pleased by this work."

If I were more convinced of your presence I would behave better as your *śiṣyā*. Now I have a plan to increase my meditation on you, to help me surrender to your mission—your ISKCON, and your devotees. I want to be a teacher of "Prabhupāda Appreciation." I want to open the various treasure-stores of your association such as your purports and lectures and share them with others. I want to remind them of your activities and sometimes analyze (but not in a dry, academic way) your life and teachings.

This is one idea, and there are many others. I want to use every moment in rendering you service. And yet, as I stated in the beginning of this letter, Śrīla Prabhupāda, I am weak and tired, slow and bad. For me to return to a jumping-jack mood of surrender seems impossible. For me it is impossible, but for you and Lord Kṛṣṇa everything is possible. Therefore I hope: if I make the attempt it will still be possible for me to do your will.

Your fallen, foolish servant,

BHAKTIVEDANTA:
THE UNION OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

We often gain a new appreciation for Kṛṣṇa consciousness by observing someone struggling to understand a concept which is perfectly expressed in Vedic knowledge. I found this recently, while reading a book on theology, *In Search of Deity*; an essay in dialectical theism, by John Macquarrie. Macquarrie was discussing the tendency for the religious and philosophical forms of theism to come into conflict:

“Although the strongly personalist and even anthropomorphic language serves to keep before the worshiper that sense of affinity with the Divine Being which we have seen to be essential to belief in God and which is the business of religion to encourage and enhance, reflective members of the religious community have looked for ways of expressing theism that would be more satisfying intellectually. In general, they have tried to move away from images to concepts and to express theism as a philosophical doctrine.”

But as Macquarrie points out, “It is not easy to see how the religious and philosophical forms of theism can be integrated. . . . Attempts to prove the divine existence may only sow doubts rather than providing certitude. The whole enterprise may seem to have become a theoretical matter and to be cut off from the practical business of living. . . .” While reading

this I thought how well this integration of devotion and intellect has been achieved in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Śrīla Prabhupāda was well aware of the possible dilemma. He used to say, "philosophy without religion is dry mental speculation. And religion without philosophy is sentimental or fanaticism."

The perfect synthesis is revealed in the very name bestowed on our founder-*ācārya*, *bhakti-vedānta*.

Bhakti is the religion of divine ecstasy and emotional love of God. It is stated in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, "Certainly that heart is steel-framed which, in spite of one's chanting the holy name of the Lord with concentration, does not change when ecstasy takes place, tears fill the eyes and the hairs stand on end" (*S. Bhāg.* 2.3.24). This is also revealed in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, when Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja relates how Lord Caitanya was instructed in ecstasy by his spiritual master Īśvara Purī. Īśvara Purī said, "When one actually develops love of Godhead, he naturally sometimes cries, sometimes laughs, sometimes chants and sometimes runs here and there just like a madman . . . these are various natural symptoms of ecstatic love of Godhead, which cause a devotee to dance and float in an ocean of transcendental bliss while chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra" (*Cc. Adi*, 7.88-90).

The object of a devotee's bliss is Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Through *bhakti* a devotee enters into a personal, living relationship with Kṛṣṇa, either as friend, parent or lover. And even in the beginning stages, the devotee is able to

see God personally in His Deity form within the temple.

Some people misunderstand the symptoms of advanced devotees to be sentimental displays. There is also a class of sentimental devotees who take everything very cheaply, and never wish to study the philosophy of *Vedānta-sūtra* and the *Purāṇas*. This sentimental version of *bhakti*, however, is not the real thing. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

"Thus it is to be understood that a Vaiṣṇava should be completely conversant with Vedānta philosophy, yet he should not think that studying Vedānta is all in all and therefore be unattached to the chanting of the holy name. A devotee must know the importance of simultaneously understanding Vedānta philosophy and chanting the holy names."

There is no shortage of philosophical inquiry in the Vaiṣṇava *sāṃpradāyas*. The great philosophers such as Mādhva and Rāmanūja, Lord Caitanya and His disciples such as Jīva Gosvāmī, Rūpa and Sanātana, testify to this. Any serious student of theology or philosophy who studies these great masters, cannot come away with the opinion that there is any lack of intellectual conceptualization among the genuine Vaiṣṇavas. But this intellectualism is never dry, speculative or leading to an impersonal conclusion. It is based on the truths given in the Vedas by the original philosopher-saints, especially Śrīla Vyāsadeva, the literary incarnation of God who compiled all the Vedas. Vaiṣṇava theology is never one man's specu-

lation but the expansion of an unbroken disciplic succession.

It is therefore the responsibility of everyone who takes seriously to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, to prepare himself by simultaneously following the paths of *bhakti* and *Vedānta*. We can not imitate the displays of ecstatic emotion of the advanced devotee, and neither can we expect to master the dialectics of *Vedānta*, on a par with Madhvācārya and other intellectual giants. Nevertheless, by reading the Bhaktivedanta purports, and by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa (alone and in the company of devotees) any human being can develop his dormant love of God, and can become learned in the science of God.

In reviewing the two tendencies of religious and philosophical theism, Macquarrie shows them in tension, and expresses the need for their synthesis:

“Perhaps there will always be a tension between images of God and concepts of God, between religious or biblical or revealed theology and philosophical or natural theology, and perhaps different types of mind will always lean toward the one side or the other, but we would make a mistake if we tried to eliminate either one of them. They belong dialectically together within theological reflection on God.”

This desired union has been given as a gift to all humanity by Lord Caitanya, in the compatible practices of chanting dancing, feasting, and studying the philosophy of *acintya-bedābeda-tattva*.

DEPENDENT ON KRSNA

We do not often think deeply what it means to depend on Kṛṣṇa. We are completely dependent on Him. So it is simply madness of false pride by which we think, "We are doing everything ourselves."

Lord Kṛṣṇa states in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that everything rests on Him just as pearls are strung on a thread. And, "I enter into each planet, and by My energy they stay in orbit." And, "If I did not work, these worlds would perish."

Here are some samples of our dependence: You digest your food by the function of fire in the stomach. But the fire is given to you by a higher power. And you evacuate only when the rectal muscles work. We breathe automatically, the heart beats and the blood circulates without any effort. But if we think about it, there is a permission granted so that these functions may act.

The brain works to build bridges, make bombs, hatch political plots. We operate our car at fast speed without an accident. This is the Supersoul supplying knowledge, memory and forgetfulness.

Therefore merely to function in the world is a miracle performed by the Lord and His material nature. "This material nature is working under My direction."

And when, by our karma or by His inscrutable will, some of these functions break down, then we are

suddenly exposed to how much we are actually dependent on operations that are beyond our control. Take away water, air, or light and everything is gone. Block up the throat a few moments and we are dead.

So we should thank the Supreme Controller for "our daily bread." And yet this world with its wonderful functions, is not our true home. It is all doomed to perish. We are meant for a higher life where there is no breakdown or anxiety. And for attaining that higher life we are certainly dependent on Lord Kṛṣṇa. He supplies the scriptures; He sends the incarnations and pure devotees and spiritual masters. As the Lord in the heart He kindly performs His real blessing by giving us intelligence to come to Him. Devotional service is a voluntary use of our own free will, and yet it is not possible without the Lord's direction.

Then, are we dependent in every step, in every way materially and spiritually? Yes, that is a fact. But if we surrender and cooperate with Kṛṣṇa, He desires to love us and to play with us. Though He's infinitely great, and we are infinitesimally small, Kṛṣṇa likes us to be with Him and sometimes (as in Deity worship or in the intimate *rasas* with the Lord) Kṛṣṇa likes to act as if He is dependent on us. Meditating on these facts of our material and spiritual life, how can we fail to turn to Him and acknowledge our dependence?

Found Poem of Śrīla Prabhupāda

YOU WILL TALK WITH KṚṢṆA

He is ready to talk,
 but you have to be qualified.
Teṣāṁ satata-yuktānām.
 Not that five minutes I meditate
 and the rest of the time I live like cats and dogs.
 You have to mold your life
 so that you always think of Kṛṣṇa.
 You may say,
 "Now I have chanted my sixteen rounds.
 I have finished my business.
 I can do whatever nonsense I like—"
 but Kṛṣṇa says "No."

Satata means twenty-four hours,
 and *yukta* means engaged.
 What for? *Bhajatam*. To serve Kṛṣṇa.
 How? *Prīti-pūrvakam*.
 Not, "Oh, Kṛṣṇa has said to chant.
 All right, then I'll do it."
 No—With love and affection.

If you acquire this,
 then you will talk with Kṛṣṇa
 who is within the heart.

—Cc. *Adi*, 110; April 3, 1975

Introduction to the Second Installment of "A Fable"

From a lecture by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, summer 1966, Bg 3.17-20

"In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa is present in the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. He has no necessity of presenting Himself in the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, but it is for us. Because we are very much anxious to know where the battle is going on. Where fighting is going on? Where detective is working? Where murder is committed? All these literatures attract us very much. If you go in a book shop and ask them, 'supply me one book of *Bhagavad-gītā*,' he will have to find out. But if you ask a bookseller, 'give me some novels,' he will present so many things, because our inclination is like that. We are always anxious to learn these mundane affairs.

"We have no taste for spiritual achievements. That taste we have lost. This is the state of our present existence: forgetfulness. We do not know how our taste should be created. Our taste should be converted from material to spiritual, but that we do not know. Therefore Lord Kṛṣṇa is so kind, that he creates a battlefield for you. Because we are always anxious to learn stories. Therefore we have all these *Purāṇas*. . . .

"Great thinkers, great *rṣis*, sages, are sitting in a secluded place in the forest, not idly. They are always thinking, how people should be benefited. *Lokānāṁ hita kārīṇau, nānā śāstra vicāraṇaika nipuṇau sad dharma*. . . . They are researching all kinds of Vedic literature, how things should be presented to the

people of this age. So that they can take up the matter very seriously and easily make progress. That was their business. Not that they left home, become easy going and take *prasādam* and go on sleeping. No, no, no, they had no time to sleep. They are always thinking *Lokānām hita kārīṇau*. . . . how people should be benefited. As much as the Lord is very much anxious for our benefit, similarly the devotees of the Lord, are equally concerned for the benefit of the public.

“So Lord Kṛṣṇa created this *Mahābhārata*. It is the history of the fighting between two parties—the Kuru and Pāṇḍavas. This *Mahābhārata* was especially made. Just like some expert writer will pick up some historical facts and put it into fiction so as to create more interest. In Bengal there is a famous writer. All his novels are picked up from some historical facts. That makes the fiction very interesting. Similarly the *Mahābhārata* is the history of fighting between two parties that was written especially for *strī-śūdra-dviya-bandhūnām*. . . .

“Because women class and less intelligent class and unworthy sons of *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas* will not be able to understand the original Vedic literature, Therefore it has been presented in a story form with historical facts. So that they could understand. That was the origin of *Mahābhārata*. The Bhagavad-gita is not very high class Vedic literature. It is just the entrance A, B, C, D of Vedic literature. It is written for the common man.”

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A FABLE:
NIMĀI DĀSA AND THE MOUSE

Summary of Chapter 1

In the first installment, a young *brahmacārī*, Nimāi dāsa, was spoken to by a mouse living in the temple. The mouse asked, "Who is Kṛṣṇa?" and Nimāi began to teach him.

Chapter 2

Nimāi had twinges of conscience about the fact that no one knew what he was doing. It made him wonder whether his preaching was bona fide. Of course he knew it was. His relationship with Choṭa dāsa was an unmotivated spiritual friendship. But because it was so unusual it sometimes led Nimāi to speculate. Was he specially empowered? Should he tell others to try it?

The scriptures clearly stated that if one had any doubt, he should approach his spiritual master. Even Lord Caitanya, when He felt ecstatic symptoms of love of God, thought that maybe He was going mad, and so He placed the matter before His spiritual master, Īśvara Purī. Nimāi therefore decided that he should confer with his initiating spiritual master, Śrīla Gurudeva.

Gurudeva lived in his own little house on the temple grounds. He was a senior disciple of Śrīla

Prabhupāda, and he had initiated hundreds of his own disciples in different places of the world. He often traveled, but he was now observing *caturmasya* at the farm, and so it was a good chance for Nimāi to go see him.

It took a few days for Nimāi to get an interview, through his guru's secretary. The last time he had spoken with his Gurudeva, it was concerning a fight between Nimāi and some of the devotees. Nimāi knew that the temple president sometimes complained to Gurudeva about Nimāi, and that was why it took a long time for Nimāi to get initiated—why he hadn't yet received second initiation—even though he had been a devotee for five years. And so their relationship wasn't perfectly harmonious, although Nimāi had an abiding faith that his spiritual master was a genuine link to Prabhupāda and the Gauḍīya-sampradāya.

The spiritual master sat on a cushion behind a low desk, and his disciple, Nimāi dāsa, sat on the floor facing him. Gurudeva was almost fifty years old; Nimāi was half that age, and of course, Nimāi was a much less experienced devotee.

"What did you want to see me about?" asked Gurudeva.

Nimāi opened his mouth, but then looked down at the floor. He realized this wasn't going to be easy. He began to bring it out gradually, so as not to cause a shock of disbelief.

"I have been having some unusual experiences lately," said Nimāi. "I mean, spiritual experiences."

"I see," said Gurudeva. "Do you want to describe them?" Gurudeva had already begun to categorize what Nimāi was saying. As spiritual master, he had now initiated over six hundred disciples. In the course of dealing with these devotees, in person, by letter and in hearing reports from their authorities, Gurudev had already experienced many cases of "unusual spiritual behavior." One of his disciples had been put in prison, and when he was released he told Gurudeva that Lord Caitanya had visited him in his cell and smiled and encouraged him. Another devotee, a young girl, confided in Gurudeva that one day while riding with the other devotees in a van she had suddenly seen the Universal Form of Kṛṣṇa, and after that Kṛṣṇa had appeared before her as a small child with Mother Yaśodā. At first, Gurudeva had been completely cynical to these reports, and he even told one of the devotees that the experience was bogus. But as he dealt with more cases, Gurudeva became cautious. He decided that he should be careful not to commit an offense towards his own disciples, who after all, were devotees of Kṛṣṇa. He didn't want to become a cynical priest, such as he read in the lives of the saints—religious leaders who disbelieve the miraculous visions of devotees who later turn out to be saints. He didn't want to go down in history as another fool and non-believer. So although Gurudeva didn't really have much faith in the visions reported by his disciples, he wanted to play it safe. He had

developed some insight on how to deal with such situations.

"Let me just tell you straight, Gurudeva," said Nimāi. "and you can judge for yourself. I don't want to do anything that's not authorized. A few weeks ago, I said some things about Kṛṣṇa to a little mouse that stays in the attic above the *brahmacārī-āśrama*. And he actually spoke to me."

Gurudeva suddenly felt thirsty. He reached for his silver drinking chalice, and began drinking water the way Prabhupāda did, holding the chalice above his lips and letting it pour into his mouth.

Nimai stared fervently at his spiritual master, waiting for a response.

Gurudeva said, "Go ahead."

"So, since then I've been preaching to this creature, and he actually responds. I know it must sound incredible—and I probably would find it hard to believe if somebody told me. But it's actually true. And also there is some proof in Vedic literatures, like in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, that even creatures like worms and insects, and I suppose mice, can hear the message of Kṛṣṇa from a bona fide—ah. . . can hear the message of Kṛṣṇa, from a devotee."

"What were you about to say just then?" asked Gurudeva. "You were about to say a mouse can receive the message from a bonafide spiritual master?"

"Well I don't think of myself as a spiritual master," said Nimāi. "I am just telling him what I heard from you and in Prabhupāda's books." Since he was not completely sure of himself, Gurudeva decided to just

encourage him. He was also aware that in recent weeks his disciple Nimāi had much improved in his behavior.

"I'll tell you what I think, Nimāi," said Gurudeva. "I think you should keep this to yourself. I can't say for sure exactly what you are experiencing. Sometimes devotees have special experiences, and I think there is even a letter where a devotee said he thought he was having some special reciprocation with the Deity in the temple, and Prabhupāda advised him to keep it to himself. So the main thing I would advise you is to just be very humble and go on with your duties. Don't become too distracted by this special talking. Your main business is to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and to hear Vedic knowledge, and to serve with the devotees." Gurudeva thought of adding, "And if it's some craziness, then it may just pass with time." But he didn't say that. He began instead to advise Nimāi in a general way, not to be puffed up about having special experiences. "If we think we are better than other devotees, we'll be guilty of false pride."

Nimāi dāsa nodded respectfully, taking in the instructions of his spiritual master. In one sense he felt that Gurudeva was avoiding the issue, but then he tried to not question the guru's authority. His Gurudeva no doubt had reasons for speaking in this way, and Nimāi tried to hear what he was saying. "Actually," Nimāi thought, "my spiritual master is hitting on the heart of the situation, by advising me to be humble."

When his meeting with Gurudeva was over, and Nimāi was walking alone back to the temple, he began to feel even better about what the spiritual master had said. Gurudeva had not said that he believed and approved of Nimāi and Choṭa dāsa, and in fact he hadn't even let Nimāi tell much more about it. But the important thing was he didn't forbid it. "So indirectly," Nimāi thought, "he has authorized what I am doing. And he put me in my place by telling me to be humble. He even spotted my mentality of trying to act as a guru towards Choṭa dāsa. I can't be a guru, except maybe something like a *vartma-pradarsaka-guru*." As Nimāi walked on, his thoughts turned to his next meeting with Choṭa dāsa. He would try to be more humble, but at the same time, now that he had consulted with his spiritual master, he would try to be more responsible to take on this work. No one else took it seriously, and perhaps no one else could really understand. "It is somehow Kṛṣṇa's arrangement," Nimāi thought, "that I should do this humble work. Who knows, some time in the future, if I can develop this preaching more, I might convince Gurudeva to take it seriously, and I can even introduce him to Choṭa dāsa." By the time he reached the attic room, Nimāi dāsa was infused with the missionary spirit, and eager to talk about Kṛṣṇa. He shut the door, sat down and called softly toward the crack in the floor, "Choṭa dāsa! Choṭa dāsa!"

The relationship between Nimāi and the mouse was like nectar. In many ways, the mouse was an ideal disciple. Nimāi convinced Choṭa dāsa to bathe twice daily, which was more than Nimāi bathed himself. He also taught the mouse to count a quota (by a method of pushing pieces of straw) for chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Nimāi decided that four rounds daily was sufficient for a start. Nimāi continued to teach from the text of *Bhagavad-gītā*, and he also told whatever stories he could remember about heroes and devotees from the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Nimāi liked to tell Choṭa about little creatures, such as the bird who tried to empty the ocean while looking for its eggs, and the spider who helped Lord Rāmacandra to build a bridge to Lanka. Not only did the mouse learn the rudiments of the Vaiṣṇava philosophy, but he also began to manifest Vaiṣṇava-like traits.

One time, Nimāi had come to the attic in a grumpy mood, after having been teased by one of the devotees. It was easy to get a rise from Nimāi. This was done mostly by the *gurukula* children and teenagers, who called him "Nimāi-fry" and "Nimāi knucklehead." But one day when Choṭa dāsa noticed his instructor's sour demeanor, he asked what was wrong. Nimāi confessed that they had been calling him names.

"Be tolerant," said Choṭa dāsa. "Isn't that what Lord Caitanya said? 'Think yourself lower than the straw in the street, more tolerant than the tree, and in that way you can always chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.'"

Nimāi smiled on hearing the encouraging words from his own pupil. He was not merely a pupil, thought Nimāi, but a friend.

Despite occasional dips in his moods, Nimāi was happier ever since he had begun instructing Choṭa dāsa. Many of the devotees also opened up into more friendly exchanges with Nimāi. While he was chanting merrily in the kitchen one day, Sūrya dāsī glanced at Nimāi in a charming way. Unfortunately, this one glance melted Nimāi dāsa just as butter melts in a hot pan. He at once lost whatever resolve he had about not getting married. And he remembered how much he liked Sūrya dāsī. After that glance, he kept thinking of her, and when he saw her his affection grew. She was so pretty!

Sūrya dāsī was the girl that Nimāi wanted to marry, but he had been turned down by her parents and by the temple president. He never heard for sure what her opinion was. But as soon as she had shown him a friendly glance, he knew that his feeling for her had never changed. She was sixteen years old, recently graduated from the gurukula and now working in the kitchen and also assisting the *pujaris* along with Nimāi. Out of all the girls and women, her *saris* always looked the best; she was most attractive with her clinking bracelets, her youthful body, and especially her smiles.

Then Nimāi had a brilliant idea. He decided to tell Sūrya about Choṭa dāsa. He would bring her to the room and call out Choṭa and have him talk to her! She would really be impressed with Nimāi after that.

She would be amazed and look at him with awe. She was a sensitive person and worthy to be included in the secret. He and she could share it together as their secret, and it would bind them together. Nimāi day-dreamed of Sūrya dāsī looking at him with deep admiration while he asked her if she would marry him. He imagined she replied, "Yes," and then. . . .

When they were alone in the kitchen Nimāi asked her, "Excuse me, Sūrya Prabhu? I wonder if you could come up to the attic room for a minute to look at the Gaura-Nitai Deities there. They could use a little touch-up with paint and I thought you might advise me how to go about it." Sūrya agreed. Nimāi dāsa rationalized that it was all right to take her up to the attic room, because it wasn't really part of the *brahmacārī āśrama*, where women were forbidden. The small attic was not exactly defined. Nimāi slept there because he didn't like staying with some of the other devotees, and some of them also didn't like staying with him. Anyway, Nimāi reasoned that he wasn't going to do anything illicit. It was spiritual to share the wonderful secret with the girl who might become his wife.

As they entered the room, Sūrya dāsī asked, "Where are the Deities?"

"First I want to show you something else," said Nimāi. He bent toward the floor and called, "Choṭa dāsa, Choṭa Prabhu."

The mouse scampered out of its hole and headed directly for Nimāi and Sūrya.



"Eeek!" Sūrya screamed. "A mouse!" and she backed up against the door. The scream aroused Bhīma dāsa who yelled from the *brahmacārī āśrama*, "What's going on up there?" Sūrya dāsī opened the door, revealing herself and Nimāi dāsa standing together. Sūrya felt flustered and in a guilty mood she left Nimāi's company and went back to her designated place.

"What do you think you are doing?" said Bhīma, face to face with Nimāi. "You know women are not allowed up there." Nimāi blushed and slammed the door.

Within a few moments, Nimāi faced Vibhu Prabhu.

"A *brahmacārī* is not supposed to be alone with a woman," said Vibhu. "As if you didn't know." Nimāi hung his head with sullen guilt.

"So, what was your intention? Why did you bring her up there?"

"I just wanted to discuss Kṛṣṇa consciousness with her."

"Don't try it again," said Vibhu. "It's a serious transgression. You better watch your step. I think I know now why they call you 'Nimāi-nonsense.'"

Nimāi was mortified—not so much by the reprimand from the temple authority as from his own inner shame. Now that his brilliant idea had exploded, he saw it for what it was. It was *māyā*! How had he lost his intelligence like that? He still felt that his sentiments for Sūrya dāsī were not wrong, but he had acted so stupidly, out of pride.

Nimāi felt especially bad that he had used Choṭa dāsa to show off before a woman. He coaxed the mouse out once again, and made his prostrated obeisances. As usual, Choṭa was meek and forgiving. “We all make mistakes,” he squeaked.

Nimāi resolved never to act like that again. He would be true and loyal to his friend. He would present Kṛṣṇa and not behave as an ass.

From that day on, Nimāi gave up his ebullient displays of joy. He tried to act sober, grave, and always tolerant. He couldn’t do it, but he tried. It was especially difficult when some of the teenage boys called after him, in sing-song voices,

“Nimāi the gnome
has got a crush on Sūrya,
Nimāi the gnome
has got a crush on a mouse,
Nimāi the gnome
has no home.”

NIMĀI DĀSA AND THE MOUSE

Chapter 3

Nimāi was just finishing up his last round of *japa* before going up for a scheduled meeting with Choṭa dāsa. Even while chanting the Holy Names, his mind had raced ahead, preparing for what he would speak this morning. He decided to instruct Choṭa on the importance of attentive chanting. He would admit, "I am preaching to you, but I am also preaching to myself." Nimāi liked to keep his relationship with Choṭa open and honest. Their friendship continued to amaze him. He never heard, even in scripture, of an ordinary *brahmacārī* conversing with a subhuman creature and instructing him in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. "Why has Kṛṣṇa arranged it so this has happened to me?" Nimāi thought. And sometimes he wondered if it was really very significant. Many devotees were meeting hundreds of humans everyday. Although the humans were like the animals, it was much more significant to preach to the humans. What about the injunction to "Tell everyone you meet about Kṛṣṇa"—did that include subhumans? When Nimāi thought like this, it bewildered and discouraged him, so he usually put it aside. "Even if what I am doing is not so significant," Nimāi thought, "still it's the preaching field assigned to me."

With a humble sense of his mission, Nimāi climbed the stairs to the attic, rehearsing in his mind the lecture that he would deliver in a moment. But his

heart leaped when Butch, the temple cat, suddenly brushed past him, streaking upstairs into the attic. Nimāi was only a few seconds behind the cat, but it was too late. Choṭa had come out from hiding on hearing the sounds of Nimāi's approach, and no sooner did the white tomcat rush into the room than he saw the mouse and pounced upon it. Nimāi saw his beloved friend clawed and then popped into the mouth of the cat. Nimāi shouted and kicked the cat, knocking him against the wall and dislodging the mouse. Butch raised his back and snarled as if to attack Nimāi—who then kicked the cat like a football across the room. With an agonized glance towards Choṭa, Nimai saw that he was dead.

As the *brahmacārīs* were running up the stairs, the tomcat shrieked and streaked past them. Bhīma and several teenage boys entered the room where Nimāi was sobbing. Tears streamed from his eyes as he knelt holding the body of the mouse.

"The cat got the mouse!" said one of the boys.

"Nimāi's pet mouse!"

"Get out of here!" Nimāi yelled.

"Take it easy," said Bhīma.

"Why did you kick Butch?" The teenager who use to be called Kṛṣṇa dāsa, but was now known as Carl, gave Nimāi a shove. "Hey Nimāi, why did you hit Butch?"

With blind grief, Nimāi put the mouse aside and jumped to attack Carl. The two of them locked into wrestling grips and fell to the ground punching. Carl got in a good sock at Nimāi's eye before more men

arrived, including Vibhu dāsa, who separated Nimāi and Carl. Vibhu demanded an explanation, but Nimāi picked up the body of Choṭa and pushed past the others out of the room. He was sobbing like one whose best friend just died.

Gurudeva was reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* when the phone rang. It was Vibhu dāsa.

"Nimāi is on his way down to your cabin right now," said Vibhu. "He just created a big scene in the temple—kicked the cat and had a fight with Carl. He's bawling and won't listen to anyone but you. So you have to talk to him right now."

"All right," said Gurudeva. "Is there any more background you can give me?"

"That's all I know," said Vibhu. "I think Nimāi is not fit to live in the temple. If you want him to stay you can take the responsibility. I mean, he is your disciple."

Gurudeva saw Nimāi dāsa coming down the road, sobbing like a baby. He was carrying a small box. Gurudeva opened the door to receive him.

"Come on, Nimāi. Sit down. Tell me what's the matter." Gurudeva took his usual position facing Nimāi, and slid the box of Kleenex tissues towards his tearful disciple. Nimāi opened the box he was carrying and placed it on Gurudeva's desk. It contained the body of the mouse lying on its back, four feet pointing upwards. Gurudeva was not fond of mice but this was not the time to object to the presence of the corpse. He decided to honor Nimāi's grief and try to

give him solace, just as he would to anyone suffering from the death of a loved one.

"What happened?" asked Gurudeva.

Nimāi bawled, "This is the mouse I told you about! He was called Choṭa. He talked to me for three months. I taught him Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He is a spirit soul as good as me, as good as the other devotees. Better! He was more submissive. No one understands!" Gurudeva coaxed his disciple to take up the Kleenex. Nimāi blew his nose, wiping profuse tears.

Gurudeva came down from his cushion and sat beside Nimāi. He put his arm around him and gradually calmed him.

"I understand," said Gurudeva. "At least I want to understand. I know that you have loved this creature. And from what you told me, you have been feeding it *prasādam* and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa to it. I respect that. A devotee is supposed to honor all creatures." Gurudeva wanted to be sincere. He would have to go beyond formality if he was to give solace to Nimāi, and he wanted to. As far as Nimāi's claim that the mouse could talk, that still seemed pretty crazy. But seeing him so touched by the death of the mouse, was real. It was *bhakti*. Gurudeva had recently been reading that the guru is actually the servant of his disciples. If that was true, then Nimāi was definitely in need of his service and guidance. So Gurudeva wanted to try his best.

But he was also amused at Nimāi's *bhakti*. Nimāi was crying over the death of a mouse as if it was a tragic loss. The mouse was the only "person" Nimāi

could love. That he could love only a mouse was unfortunate, and yet there was no denying that he showed genuine compassion for the mouse.

Nimai nodded and sniffled. Grieved as he was by the loss, Nimāi was also feeling satisfied by his Gurudeva's affection and counsel. He had never sat like this with his spiritual master or seen Gurudeva so personal. Usually theirs was only an official relationship. But now what Gurudeva was saying entered Nimāi's consciousness like light into darkness. "This is guru!" thought Nimāi, "He is saving me." With full trust, Nimāi listened for more. The pain of Choṭa's death hurt his heart, but there was something beyond the pain. Gurudeva was speaking higher knowledge.

Gurudeva said, "On occasions in the *Bhāgavatam* where some person is sad over someone's death, great sages like Nārada give them important counsel. That counsel should be used by us in these times. It's not theoretical talk. Nimāi, the real person whom you loved has received the full benefit of your speaking to him about Kṛṣṇa, and he has gone on. It wasn't just something that the cat did. Everything is arranged by karma and higher providence. 'Those who are wise lament neither for the living nor the dead.'"

"So Nimai, don't be like a foolish cow," Gurudeva tried to physically nudge his disciple into a lighter mood, "who cries and wants to stay by her calf's corpse." They both glanced at the body of the mouse whose mouth was partly open revealing its sharp teeth. But while they were looking, suddenly one of its feet twitched, and it gave a faint sigh.

"Choṭa! Gurudeva, do you hear that. He just said 'Rāma'. He is alive!"

Gurudeva had not heard 'Rāma', but the mouse was alive. Nimāi gently picked him up and began feeling his body. "He appears to just have broken a couple of legs and his body is crushed. But he's coming back to consciousness. He was unconscious." Nimāi was smiling joyfully.

"Just put him back and let him rest," said Gurudeva. He too was excited and concerned to give the mouse a chance to live.

"The best thing is to let him rest," said Gurudeva.

"Wow! Kṛṣṇa's mercy!" While they were talking, Gurudeva's servant entered and asked if he would take his lunch. Gurudeva said yes and that a plate should be brought for Nimāi.

And so the guru and disciple honored *prasādam* together, talking about Kṛṣṇa's mercy and the unusual turns of providence. Choṭa dāsa was breathing slowly and evenly although he could not move. Gurudeva even placed a tiny bit of curd *sabji* on his finger and put it to the mouse's mouth. Choṭa gratefully accepted it.

When he saw that, Nimai almost swooned with bliss. Here was Gurudeva, the most important person in his spiritual life, tending to Choṭa dāsa, who was also a very important person in his life.

Gurudev had caught some of the contagious *bhakti* of Nimāi for Choṭa. He said that they should not bring Choṭa back to the temple, as he would be an easy prey for the cat. Gurudeva suggested that the

mouse could stay at his cabin during its recuperation. Gurudeva was about to leave within a day or so for a three-month tour. Nimāi could come to the cabin once a day to see how the mouse was doing. But it should be kept completely confidential. They would say that Nimāi was looking after the cabin. Nimāi could give the cabin a paint job and that would be his pretext for staying there during the day.

Gurudeva was always conscientious to follow his exact daily schedule. He had been caught up in the emotions of Nimāi and the mouse, but he still had to prosecute his regular duties. So he told Nimāi to take Choṭa dāsa into the next room and find a place where he could stay. Gurudeva then returned to his desk and to the page of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that he had been studying. He read the verse and began making notes in his study book. But it was impossible to remove his mind from what had just occurred.

(To be continued.)

11-11-11

Dear Mr. [Name],
I have the pleasure to inform you that your application for the position of [Position] has been received and is being considered. We are impressed with your qualifications and experience, and we are confident that you will be a valuable addition to our team. We will contact you again once a decision has been reached.

Yours faithfully,
[Signature]
[Name]
[Title]
[Company Name]
[Address]
[City]
[State]
[Zip Code]

