

*Can a White Man Be a Haribol?*

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Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

Persons interested in the subject matter of this book are invited to correspond with our secretary, c/o GN Press Inc., P.O. Box 445, La Crosse, Fl 32658.

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## Introduction

It's important to me to both write without pretension and to discuss Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Is it possible to make a pretentious presentation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness? Sure, if I am trying to show off my learning (a Vallabhācārya's pride) instead of glorifying Kṛṣṇa, or if I speak of Kṛṣṇa without real faith, impersonally, or from way beyond my realization.

Then can you understand why I like sentences that describe things I can perceive with my senses in the moment? St. Augustine said that such perceptions, made free of past or present associations, provide "presages of the Divine." By living with our sense perceptions in present-time, even if what we see is not absolute, we can find ourselves pointed to the Absolute—if that's where we wish to go. Kṛṣṇa hints at this when He describes in *Bhagavad-gītā* all the things in this world that are manifestations of His potency. Of course, Kṛṣṇa lists only the most prominent features; His opulences are unlimited. The nonpretentious can appreciate weather, lakes, flowers—whatever—as part of Him and learn to become fixed in remembrance of Him.

And of ourselves. We don't want to become nonentities in our relationship with Kṛṣṇa but to exchange with Kṛṣṇa in loving ways. For now, our sense perceptions may remind us that we feel the ache of cold in our fingers or that we are tired, and of course, we know such sensations are not the final truth. They are not sensations felt by the soul. Still, they touch us, help us open our hearts, and help us seek for and pray to the Divine.

Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābāji was the epitome of the nonpretentious. He recognized fakers among so-called *tapasvīs*, but he never became one. Instead he tasted the mood of separation from Kṛṣṇa even as He went blind, wandered naked along the bank of the river, ate Ganges mud, chanted the holy name in his deep voice, and sometimes let out sounds of disgust. He never claimed

anything. Those who are pretentious make claims, explicit or implicit, to distinction, importance, dignity, or excellence. They are, as the dictionary says, “too affectedly grand; ostentatious.” One who is nonpretentious simply lives. A nonpretentious devotee simply lives in Kṛṣṇa through whatever he is at the moment. Poetry is meant to capture that state.

A point about the demands particular art forms make on readers, listeners, viewers—haiku, for example: To read haiku properly, a reader needs to actively participate in it and thus help to create the poem’s effect, aided by his own imagination. Otherwise, those seventeen syllables remain a fragment of prose. When a reader can’t get inside a haiku, he suspects that the poem is a bluff and that the author is playing in pseudo profundities. We don’t want to be bluffed. Therefore, most people prefer writing that appears straightforward.

We may face similar blocks when we view visual art, especially paintings that are primitive or distorted. Even abstract or nonrepresentational paintings can give us trouble. We may feel they demand too much participation, something we don’t necessarily want to give, because our participation in art may leave us feeling vulnerable.

For that matter, the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness gives us trouble. It demands that we accept Vedic axioms as truth. If we don’t, we are left with a handful of myths and Hindu beliefs about transmigration of the soul. When it comes down to it, it’s not enough to hear convincing analogies that explain transmigration as universal truth; we have to accept the axiomatic authority of the *Vedas*.

What am I demanding of readers of this book? That they agree to the mix of Vedic truth, honest expression, and the perceptions of a conditioned soul. I ask readers to accept, axiomatically, my sincerity in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and to trust both the process in which I am engaged and me. If you can meet that demand, if you can enter my “mix,” then I hope through it that you will learn

to enter your own, to face it, and to find within it your most personal ways to offer yourself to Kṛṣṇa. Poetry is not discursive or linear, and it doesn't always guarantee a clear storyline, but it contains the mood of steering the mind and heart toward Kṛṣṇa. It can leave us free enough to become ourselves.

You will notice some poems having the phrase "Alternative Take" after the title. In improvisation, there is no rewriting. Rather, if an artist wants to improve the work, he or she simply does it again. The improvisational poems in this book were mainly written at the same time I was writing *Every Day, Just Write*, Volume 14 and subsequent volumes. In the spirit of improvisation, I wrote certain poems more than once and thought of them as separate "takes." That is acknowledged here by the words "Alternative Take."



## Well, You Needn't (Alternative Take)

Head foggy. Foggy, bump, the funk, the monk.  
Serious swinging we hear  
the Word—exquisite  
Kṛṣṇa we ride the waves  
of sound not to gain  
knowledge  
for material pleasure,  
because that's sense grat and  
we'll have to come back next life,  
entangled  
thinking more of ourselves  
than it's worth. We  
seek the solo virtuoso sound  
plain and humble  
the one that speaks to Prabhupāda  
a monologue of surrender  
that faces slam-bang reality  
without avoidance.  
One that actually *sees*.  
Emily wanted Surprise.  
I feel the thrill of taking the same walk  
down the same lanes  
day after day  
not feeling I need to chase my mind  
to a new place  
as if these lanes

are out of chestnuts.

Kṛṣṇa, I lived through the days  
of throwing myself at passers-by, begging  
them to take Your BTG.  
They laughed at me as if I were absurd  
but even then I was alone  
keeping the beat of love  
for You  
alive in my heart, the chords, the rhythms  
of a hope to surrender.

## *Soft Illusions (Alternative Take)*

---

Music means mood and a mood  
is to be entered  
whether

    slow blues  
    or otherwise  
music for old time's sake.

It makes you sad enough,  
because times are sad  
    and rawky  
        rawky  
    raucous rawky.

Didn't you see the  
    leaves piled in sad  
    piles of red-yellow wet stuff  
    and that there was no way  
    it could be  
    otherwise?

Only Vṛndāvana is transcendental to all this  
but when a cow dies there or  
a pig squeals in pain  
a *sādhū* is carried to the river  
or horny toads are caught by  
    ISKCON guards

while dogs hitch along with crooked  
parts

the overall sweetness—

I don't know.

Vṛndāvana is Kṛṣṇa's land and it has been stripped  
of soft illusions that would tempt us  
to misunderstand.

Instead we stay at the Guesthouse,  
our minds screaming sometimes  
screams wanting to go  
to find a place of peace where we can sing  
Auld Lang Syne—type songs  
and live closer to those soft illusions  
where we think we know the way.

## *Two Dogs*

I went down the hill where I knew  
a dog waited. I can't tell the whole thing,  
but the tape recorder was in my pocket,  
black wires dangled from the earphones  
in my ears. A small white dog ran out  
and threatened to bite my ankles, but I wasn't  
afraid—I was wearing rubber boots.  
A bigger black dog barked and lunged against its  
chain, but still I was not afraid  
those black wires dangling  
protected me. I mean,  
the voice of Prabhupāda  
in my ears.

After that first dog uproar the road grew quiet  
a dirt and pebble lane that winds  
through the Italian hills even in cold mid-April.

## *Rhythms of Prayer*

---

Before I move into another frame of mind,  
now, while the rhythms of prayer still vibrate,  
let me stand here alone and intone  
Sanskrit, the words of delirious-sober saints  
who know eternal service  
so that I too can be uplifted beyond worldly cares,  
or cares for the lines on my forehead already etched  
but that have nothing to do with my heart  
or its hopes  
to hear the rhythms of Kṛṣṇa's poet-dancing  
words, to know His mood, to  
love Him with abandon.  
O Holy Name! In vain I tried to enjoy this life  
and I have simply been cursed.  
How could I have known those memories would bar me  
from *rasa* in Vṛndāvana?

## *A Kṛṣṇa Conscious Person Should Do More*

---

Stafford:

“After the chores are done I tune  
and strum. Nobody hears, nobody cares,  
and the stars go on.”

A Kṛṣṇa conscious person should do more,  
I keep telling myself,  
but as a troubled someone said, “I am  
what I am and I have no choice  
but to work with that.”

It is not enough  
to write even grand poems  
about waterfalls

and even when I read, after  
each verse and purport I seem to ask,  
“Is that all? So what?”

But I keep going, not expecting something sensational  
to happen to *me*, but  
just to see myself seeking that Kṛṣṇa  
who wears the garland His beloved gave Him  
and who holds His yellow garment forward  
to beg forgiveness, singling His Rādhā  
out from the rest.

She stared at Him and did not drop Her eyes  
in shame, but loved Him through Her glance.

Even in deep snow I want to feel the presence of Deities  
golden within the temple  
to remember the kingdom of God.  
Devotees want to know whether they should  
stay home with old mothers or marry or  
enter the passionate world of business and I  
just don't know don't  
know anything but this: we should all  
enter the world—whatever world—where  
praise of Kṛṣṇa is possible  
from deep within the heart

and even if we're not free  
of designations, are rough or ungrateful,  
not Hindu enough or educated,  
we should enter a world that reminds us  
that absolute truth lies beyond  
all lies and the soul is free to know it.

I'm tired and my mind  
wants to make a beautiful poem  
wants to write without caring  
if I'm qualified, not forced  
but cutting through  
to that still voice that  
prays what it means.

I want to go back to Godhead.

A Kṛṣṇa conscious person should at least  
do that.

## *Pray for Hope*

Play while you can,  
the man wears pants,  
his brow conceals the  
words he jumped over to  
avoid blasphemy or mud. That  
brow belies the facts of his life.

Steer to Kṛṣṇa and straight truth  
like oatmeal on honey  
and the heavy words  
of your spiritual master.  
Bananas and almonds for breakfast  
while you strive to know the truth  
and pray for spiritual dreams.

After answering letters: a girl  
at Bryn Mawr wants to become a devotee.  
A man who changed from white to saffron  
thinks he should go back to white  
especially during the full moon.  
A hermit girl has trouble living with devotees  
(I told her that spiritual life  
doesn't mean she has to become a spiritual butterfly).  
A girl in a depressed temple finds solace  
in feeding *prasādam* to animals in a park.  
A man in Guyana converts his wife and child

and attends the temple while a Guyanese  
man in the Bronx can't  
find work, although he's been looking  
for two years.

I don't know what I can do  
the mind and truck spilling gravel  
on frozen roads but pray for hope.

## *It's a Sad Story If You Hear It That Way*

---

This is just a story—another—of devotional service and how it occurred to me while writing. I am a fictional character; I made me up as I went along. This is an artist's rendering of devotional service.

“Okay,” says Critic, “I’ll sit in the front row and watch the performance.”

But it’s not like that—a performance, I mean. Anyway, once upon a time I was reading Prahlaḍa’s prayers and came upon a passage that stated that *bhakti* was the only way. Prabhupāda even said, “This has to be understood.” Would we be embarrassed to be practicing another “Only Way” religion?

I had to think about that.

Because I am not my body, and that’s truth, but my emotions tell me I am, or they at least are quite willing to *pretend* I am—prefer it, I mean.

I woke, reluctant, at midnight, even though that’s my scheduled time to evoke. But when the clock went off I was in the middle of a dream about limited warfare. In the dream, the government heads were pleased that only five men were killed when they were hit with the artillery. What was *that* about?

I tried to submerge those thoughts or worries while I read what Prahlaḍa had to say.

That's the story, and it's ongoing. Sometimes I wish people understood me better, but I'm grateful for what they do understand. At least they know I'm a student of *bhakti*, that I know that Kṛṣṇa is God and God

is Kṛṣṇa.

I know that there's no point aiming for ten or twenty kinds of liberation

that I should aim only for *bhakti*.

And so I do I

do.

We should be sensitive to a man's offering when it comes from the heart. (Critic guffaws.)

"No," I tell him, "Eat cake/ be proud/ chant mantras

and no, I'm not satisfied with this take

and neither can I tell my story all the way to the end.

I can't speed the movie forward or backward, but I can add humor, pull on my pants—and read until I die.

This isn't much of a story. To make it really interesting but not so true, I could fictionalize the ending: our hero goes back to Godhead, or our hero takes another birth.

I'd have to make that part up, since it's not yet over in real life.

O night, magic versus truth the

voice of Prahlāda rings in my ears  
and makes this timid man scratch out a poem  
before he has to end.

It's a sad story  
if you hear it that way.

But *everyone's* story is more or less sad  
because it's not finished  
and we tend to stop listening  
in the middle.

## *Soul Revival*

Soul revival—hope  
love offered to guru and Kṛṣṇa. This  
love I want to feel. *For the Lord.*  
That's the purpose of liturgy—group prayer meant to drive  
you to  
private. Even secular men can pray if they allow themselves  
to feel.

“Can a white man be a Haribol?”  
That's what the kid—black Guyanese—asked the world  
taunting from his black nation  
riding on a ferryboat. He saw  
a whitey tired out.  
That Jesse Jackson said, “We  
picked cotton for you  
and now we will run the country for you!”  
What do *I* say?

Ball and groove, I'm  
listening, feeling deep in my soul,  
daring  
to be awake to  
return to something so precious and  
I want to be contagious.  
O Kṛṣṇa, my heart is warmed at this instant in my life  
how You go over that sweet tune.

## *Don't Retire Now*

---

What is clever? What is  
acceptable anger?  
What is right for me? What  
will look good? Can I make  
a joke? Am I entitled?  
Should I be ashamed? (Of America?)  
Should I preach like Nārada Muni  
and declare it a mirage?  
Where is God? Which page and chapter of  
*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*?  
What is the Bible? The Koran?  
(Did you ever read them?)  
What do you know?

Can you put these questions aside  
and tell what you saw  
and felt  
a slice? Two cats, one  
black, one black-white  
sitting peacefully and close together  
on a morning patio—don't tell me  
it's a lie because I saw  
it. And barking dogs. The small  
one knows exactly how far it can go  
and when to back down.  
We can learn a lot by watching dogs.

Hidden away in a heart, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī  
leans on his hand and Rūpa Gosvāmī chants *japa* under  
a *ṇadamba* tree.

Rādhā and Śyāma look my way  
and yours, the gurus in *paramparā*  
in Bengali colors so rich  
seeing them is like entering  
a rice field at full flood.  
Prabhupāda in his rocking chair,  
pausing, protects me.

I want his shelter I  
need  
his shelter. I'm getting  
old.

Too much youthful energy bewilders me,  
bores me. A pond with minnows in it.

O Prabhupāda, you didn't leave us to grow old  
under the clouds. You wanted us to do as you did,  
to travel by planes even if it was bad for our health  
and to use our life's blood to serve others  
to be truly *anyābhilaṣita-śūnyam*.

Come on, old man,  
come down from the mountain

and remember Prabhupāda  
who came down from Goloka.  
Don't retire now.

## *Women of the Veil (Alternative Take)*

---

Stopwatch—I use one to time my rounds, not  
really seeking speed but I race a round, then  
forget it.

I go my way.

No more time—I gave up so much  
for Kṛṣṇa in all things. Irony now  
that my life is so quiet despite the dissonance of art.

Read Merton and the phrase,  
“Women of the Veil.”

What does it mean? Nuns or just the opposite?

It means lonely notes here and  
there and me happy it’s mid-October  
so I can feel grateful for a day  
like no other.

Prabhupāda, what does it take to sustain  
this Kṛṣṇa conscious life?

Look at those young men with outlooks different from mine.  
Are they showing off or are they simply friends, their  
intellects and bodies and futures and parents all still to be  
contended with?

## Lucky

I was lucky to get in at the beginning.

Swami was there and I liked it. I had a bass fiddle and left it at the front of the store. They sold it.

I gave away stuff and entered the door naked, you could say, but covered.

Now I'm better? I'm hurrying this up while we don't make pancakes but simple porridge.

O disciples—you belong to God and Swami. *I can only help you in my simple way to tell you God—Hare Kṛṣṇa chanting is good.*

## *Offering of Blue*

---

I want Kṛṣṇa to be pleased with  
a blue offering—  
I mean  
I showed it to a prof  
who was a *sannyāsi* but he only  
furrowed his brow not quite sure  
what I was getting at. I saw  
I didn't want to share my secret so openly.

But I told another friend  
that friends are like this—  
protect one another's solitude (Rilke).

Gone are the days when I would  
go all out, diving headlong into lyrical  
romance, romancing lyrics,  
not containing anything  
reducing anything  
over the moon  
in love,  
love  
love with genius  
poetic  
such love was grand.

Remembering running off the "Sara News"

late at night on the mimeograph machine  
all alone, the phonograph playing  
“Chasin’ the Trane”—  
me breaking apart, meeting  
chaos  
and the end of it.

The end.  
Kṛṣṇa, Lord of all blue things,  
please accept my offering of solitude.

## *Body and Soul*

---

“Body and Soul” is a favorite tune of jazzmen. Hawkins played it, they say, and it was never the same. Well, here I am, prepared to do the work of my master and get deep into my heart. Our feelings tend to be so delicate they barely stand looking at.

A piano alone can make us forget all our troubles. We can put  
aside the pain

and listen. Every guy who plays like this in a bar,  
while people drink amid the noise and trash  
and try to ease the day’s grind—we can put down *that* piano  
playing,

but it functions to bring ease to the suffering.

We call them demons or fools

then turn to our own distractions.

Moonlight. The love affair of a devotee with God. Dear Lord,

You are so close to us Your

music fills our blood and

pounds through our veins

and even when we forget You

we can hear the source of our lives

beating inside us.

## *Too Young to Be Steady*

---

They said we were too young to be steady  
in Kṛṣṇa consciousness—fanatics they considered us  
and that may have been true  
but they were wrong about the other part—that we  
wouldn't be steady and that we were too  
young.

Oh, we *were* foolish and  
too young to know better  
or what to expect from ourselves our  
Movement  
our ideals  
those tall orders we received  
and worshiped from our beautiful  
brown-skinned mentor from India.

We told him we would serve him forever,  
and perhaps we still will—we promised, after all,  
to give up everything for him  
and what's ours was his, what's his, ours.  
We would sound off the Kṛṣṇa conscious cannon  
in millions of cities—whatever  
he wanted  
us  
to do.

Our youth was our asset. He promised us that we'd attain  
the love supreme.

Of course, our youth prevented us from knowing about Black Panthers  
and panes of glass broken in our faces  
and the fear. We didn't know  
ISKCON would lose its potency  
when it seemed so potential.

We're older and wiser now, still  
blessed by guru, going steady  
with a master who loved us then and  
loves us more now  
that we have faltered and gone wrong  
but not left him.

## *Dear Friends*

---

I'm writing this letter to you while leaning back on a rock, my rubber rain gear keeping me dry even in this cold, wet bog land in Ireland. It's late October, and I'm in the hills of this poor, rural country. Nobody around for miles but the sheep. The ferns and other bushes are now brown, but the grass in Ireland is always green. It's 7:30 in the morning, and the sky has lost most of its grayness.

I have chanted sixteen rounds so far today, and I'm sitting here, wondering what it is I would like to say. I always have to think about whether or not to communicate when I'm out here, because thinking of speaking always creates a tension between wanting to communicate and the desire to enter a deeper communion with Kṛṣṇa alone. Although I feel this tension constantly, I know myself well enough to say that no matter how alone I am, sooner or later I will want to retrieve something from my experience and share it with others. Because that's what Prabhupada wanted of me—of all of us. We are preachers. Therefore, if I share the benefits of solitude for a contemplative Kṛṣṇa conscious life, I am reconciled as a preacher.

As I write, I see three sheep walking down the hill into the valley below. I can't hear them, but I see their innocent white bodies moving down a path into another pasture. It's somehow a beautiful sight. Kṛṣṇa's creation bears a resemblance to Himself in a sense, and to our original home in Goloka Vṛndāvana. Rosy clouds remind us of Goloka, and birds here make us think of birds there.

The only thing missing in this world is the revelation of Kṛṣṇa and the transformation that comes about in everything when He is directly present. If it were Kṛṣṇa walking down that path barefoot, playing His flute, with boys running on all sides and calves and cows gamboling, I wouldn't be sitting here leaning against a stone. I would run to join Him, to serve Him. If I could see Him, it would mean I was completely purified and not some lone philosopher. Everything in this world speaks to us about the necessity to become fully Kṛṣṇa conscious. This world lives in separation from Kṛṣṇa.

## *A Piece of India (Alternative Take)*

I'm writing in the *gośāla* to the beat of  
cows being wildly milked  
their calves tied nearby, my senses  
capture a piece of India,  
Vraja—we call it the Kṛṣṇa conscious fountain of youth—  
but when I really do remember Vṛndāvana, being there  
I mean, I remember that perfume salesman begging me for  
baksheesh  
and a mouse coming out from behind my dictionary. I  
lit my candle anyway.

Why did I turn down that devotee?

I couldn't trust him.

Why did I say I have a headache?

Because it always seemed to be true.

O rural pen, I no longer want to run down hallways of  
a sterile life. I want to have courage to live and  
paint even from a poor house  
because artists aren't supposed to be afraid  
of anything. I nurse my head in private  
then trip down the stairs holding my *daṇḍa*  
behind a face showing surprise that I didn't go for a swim  
in the Yamunā.  
They said I gave an all right class, but anyone could have done it.  
That's the truth of me in Vṛndāvana.

Now calm down and confess. I sat quiet and  
coughed a little the slightest  
disturbance I noted with a Geiger counter  
and cried tears for the earnest poet of private  
Kārttika and prayed to never venture  
into an Irish town but always to live  
on my own with a few devotees  
on Kṛṣṇa's brown earth that land  
He lifted and where *bhajan*as play  
again and again.

## *The Source of Mercy*

---

The rain was delicious as it  
splashed in my face, so much so  
that I stopped walking and let it  
refresh me. I looked down the empty road, saw  
gray clouds weighing down the hill  
and enjoyed it—enjoyed my wet, rain-resistant  
coat and pants, the sound of my boots  
on wet gravel, and later, the  
coming inside for tea  
and the prayers of Narottama.

The fact is I often can't read, can't relate  
to the flowery language of translated Bengali,  
have no relationship with Narottama's spiritual  
yearnings, but  
still he is the source, through Prabhupāda,  
of all the expression I could ever wish  
to make. That's why the best part of the walk  
wasn't the rain or the fresh-opened foxgloves  
but the thoughts and prayers the rain induced  
of the Lord and my spiritual master.

I begged Prabhupāda and Narottama for mercy,  
prayed aloud the *guru-gāyatrī*, the  
*sannyāsa-mantra*, resolved  
to repeat mantras and prayers

and to never forget the source of mercy  
in my life. I never want to divorce myself  
from that, or forget the hankering that comes  
when I remember, and I only wish  
I could pray as I'd like to.

## *Holy Kārttika (Alternative Take)*

---

Holy Kārttika so sashay  
onto a dance floor with a pretty girl. Oh no, step on her  
toes—too many shattered romances I wonder  
how anyone survives.

E. B. White once told how he couldn't dance  
but held his girl nervously, sweatily, his dream girl  
with the pimples, him feckless  
the romance mostly in his mind.

I suffered through that too—those high school dances  
with bands playing romantic music  
crepe paper sagging from the ceiling—  
but I've told it all before.

And how Trane and yours truly  
discovered all the romance of material life  
celebrated joy of matter but got lost and thought  
to pray to God  
because God so loved the world  
He gave us Himself as Lord Caitanya  
gave us Śrīla Prabhupāda  
gave us chanting beads to take us beyond  
all dance floors in this world—a love  
supreme.

Trane had an amazing lip a

horn of plenty  
and he evolved  
both style and theology into a driving force  
of formless art and love  
of God.  
He played his evolution for nightclub audiences,  
all of whom were suffering.  
“I want to talk about you,” he said.

O Kṛṣṇa, with or without rhythm we all Godbrothers  
ask to be honestly committed  
admitted in an age where prayer is hard  
and we pray not to be left behind.  
We pray to not stand alone before You but  
connected to our Prabhupāda  
and one another.

## *I Am a Spider Man*

---

I'm a writer  
but willing to sacrifice  
product for process  
to go beyond the usual concerns  
by examining them minutely  
looking for a deeper self and life itself  
searching *śāstra* and  
the holy name.  
I no longer seem capable of sustained efforts  
no theses burning to be born  
no novels no  
form. I'm  
simply seeking  
Kṛṣṇa.

I am a spider a  
spider man, and  
living in a world of safety valves  
and Kṛṣṇa conscious contexts,  
I let my heart soar like a blues horn  
or pulse like a drum  
my life energy beating time  
as I turn to prayer  
even as I chant.

## *Hearing on a Walk*

---

Cold and so tired walking I have  
to stop a dozen times. You'd think I  
had been on an all-day trek. I could  
lie down and fall asleep on the road or  
on this page—just curl up and be gone.

But I made a promise to hear Prabhupāda speak  
and several rabbits just interrupted their breakfast  
to escape and *bhakti* is rare.  
I don't have it, only selfishness and lust.  
How can I sleep?

Let me walk into the mist-filled woods  
and clearly hear his voice, the kitchen pot  
banging outside. He's speaking about  
Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmi lying down  
on the bank of Rādhā-kuṇḍa and crying.

## *Wishing to Be with Prabhupāda*

---

Prabhupāda, I think of you in Vṛndāvana  
those days when we prayed you'd be all right  
and you were  
because you were with Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.  
I wrote you letters after I left India  
many unsent  
to thank you for nourishing me  
my allegiance to you to  
ISKCON  
but it's time I went to bed.

Prabhupāda, I know you are all right now  
with the previous *ācāryas* in your *nitya-līlā*.  
Did you see me looking at the *Maverick Poets* anthology,  
seeing how poets talk?  
Take it like a farmer in ISKCON looking  
at an almanac.  
But I don't need it.  
I need you.

Prabhupāda, you let me type for you and  
I thought I was sincere.  
Now I know better and truly wish  
I could become plain and grateful  
enough to join you  
in Kṛṣṇa's world. Please, Prabhupāda,

help me cast off everything but the vision of you  
chanting *japa*, pacing,  
alone with your Kṛṣṇa.

## *Doing What I Want*

---

1

*Jāmuna-jīvana, keli-parāyaṇa,  
mānasa-candra-caḥora.*

These words describe Kṛṣṇa,  
the life of Yamunā, the *gopīs*'  
only moon. It's beautiful,  
but it's not through Sanskrit that I can know  
this Lover and His Beloved, dark  
Śyāmasundara and His beautiful Gaurāṅgi.  
When Prabhupāda sings I feel his  
feeling—I mean I know he knows  
and I listen to his tune  
with more heart.

2

Cassette tapes spilling onto the floor, Prabhupāda  
lecturing. It seems he will never stop  
nor I hearing him  
and Kṛṣṇa becomes truth again,  
handed over, part  
of me.

## *Kṛṣṇa Changed the Melody*

---

Just read that material life is miserable and material attempts to mitigate it fail. If we're smart and stuck with thorns, we'll use other thorns to remove them.

Nice walk in a park. They're happy to hear it.

The clear divine profound sound of a horn

to which they can dance if

they want, although the idea is to hear

with the heart.

"They say the intelligence—

or something else—

is the soul," but what

can they know? Let it go.

The abrupt dropping of a bomb

by the drums

that want to improvise.

In a moment of truth

my head and yours, my

hands and your hands—our

pains unite and dissolve as we sit and look out

at a gray island sky, fog, rain

and Kṛṣṇa is suddenly there.

Will we find our own voices again

after that? My song grows more complicated

as we become a sacrifice we always wanted to make

anyway.

I'm on an island and there are no chestnuts yet,  
no snow

although it's autumn and the ladies and old men  
are becoming as crinkled as leaves.

I feel the rain in the soles of my feet  
but this world is spinning past me fast the  
Navy already long past even gone  
and a father who pushed me in. I was vulnerable  
but what can you expect  
when Celine is your guru?

Or Genet? No hope but to be blind.

Kṛṣṇa changed the melody and although I was sad,  
angry, lost, serious

I heard His freedom song  
and now see blackbirds landing on the grass  
gray-hooded ravens  
and can feel love.

## *Should, Should, Should*

---

This *sādhū* goes public with his  
private thoughts  
anomalies exposed.  
He knows that either we have to say,  
“We should, we  
should,  
because our leaders  
are perfect  
and we believe everything  
perfectly”  
or some other sickness  
or we have to be  
who we are  
and pray from there.

## *Softly, As in a Morning Pre-Sunrise*

---

There's a way to enter the  
fragrance before dawn arrives  
to enter mystery and to improvise  
a response.

It takes training  
and the willingness to bring any story  
to its natural conclusion: the meeting  
with your master  
as if all roads really do lead to Rome  
where a Pope stands on his balcony  
and blesses the crowds regardless.  
We have wasted so much time  
joyriding, poor boy  
    spilling fluids  
and life  
    into temporary moments  
irreligious, imperfect.

Today is my master's disappearance.  
I should be mourning but I am not I'm  
singing instead like a rose bedewed  
in predawn softness  
    in a room with curtains closed  
after a peaceful night at Inis Rath  
sensing the fragrance of spiritual life  
its power

the life lived by one  
who can do nothing without his master  
and who relishes the quiet of morning before sunrise  
even today.

## *Lasting Grace*

---

Sound preserved—music and words.  
Prahlaḍa teaches us what's to come. We could  
waste our time on any variety of things if we put  
our minds to it. But I know what it feels like to let go  
on my trip to the shore of eternal gain.  
Still the question: Why didn't I do more?

But let go of lament—hold the beads and sing.  
What other novelty and lasting grace?  
I barricade myself against my failures and chant.

## *Me and the Devas*

---

There's rarely time for writing between poems—my  
self demands more reading time.  
It's like he's saying, "What good  
will your three-minute speech do?" If I read one page  
of Prabhupāda's books  
I can become perfect.

Janmāṣṭamī is less than a month away.  
I read the prayers the demigods spoke  
to Kṛṣṇa in the womb.  
The demigods sometimes prayed to Kṛṣṇa  
on His way home from the pastures. He was  
always polite, but His parents felt the anxiety  
of His delayed return.

I suddenly thought I knew better prayers  
than these, as if I were better than them.  
Does Kṛṣṇa trust *me* to run the universe?  
Do *I* serve the Divine Couple as well as the sun-god?  
Can *I* glorify Vraja as Lord Brahmā can?  
How rare is *bhakti*.

These thoughts come out in poems and I dump  
the images onto the page like apples out of a bag.  
Still, the truth is simple.

## *Report from Puri*

---

Here goes the picture off a label from  
some kind of pink toilet paper,  
and some pink toilet paper itself,  
Indian kind, and a piece of this drab yellow room,  
a paint flake from the ceiling, an Idaho potato  
from India, a form from the GBC for me to sign  
asserting that I mean well and am standing on  
the ISKCON rampart doing night watch,  
ready to defend against all comers.  
O devotees, I'm okay, still chanting,  
my heart still beating that slow, steady beat.

### Location

The bird lands and pecks  
on the square in Alfonso  
Delhi Howrah Station

dizzy mind of dream  
lost was it  
a hawk or a crow  
landing on the monument  
or was it  
my head?

I had better straighten out if I  
want to go back to Godhead—free  
of siren sounds of all types especially  
the kind you hear when it's raining  
in India and

traffic noise

although for some Godbrothers such sounds

are the spiritual world what  
with the opportunity to  
pack a stadium with 400,000 people—  
an audience worth preaching too!

Location: Inis Rath,  
water up to the neck here but  
no rats or mice,  
a simple cabin

on New Year's eve  
or Gītā-nāgarī cabin on Halloween  
the memories that hold  
and always a new book coming out  
then going to that house in Puerto Rico  
where live the savage dogs and rough  
Puerto Rican natives and I think I am almost  
nowhere.

Location: a well—it seems that location  
points my way, brings dissonance to life  
usually  
where I find the pain and joy of writing  
for my master—who has been rough and gentle  
both, a rose and a thunderbolt  
or the rain and the sun  
but who gave me new life  
and saved me.

## *Fantasies (Alternative Take)*

---

Pain to go with the rainy day. Late afternoon.  
Head just now freeing itself from the mist. A  
ragged afternoon. I rest.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, please appear  
on my page, Lord of all. What word  
do I know to call You?

Seeking through mental-spiritual space  
memories of other ragged afternoons  
New York City or elsewhere  
thinking about the truth in the *Upaniṣads*  
and what was a guy like me  
*doing* in a place like that? Am I  
still there?

Alone in my room. Still seeking on my own  
terms, feeling the beat of old drums  
or maybe it's my heart beating  
against my ribs—my chest  
is so cold.

Fantasized I was a Franciscan monk or a Buddhist barefoot,  
an Emily nut worshipping the God of the *Upaniṣads*.  
I showed him the Dhammapadam and  
he said, “Baka-waka”—he made fun of me, that Murray.  
Didn't like my searching.

Now I face pain almost daily  
with a mighty Friend, although I still back out  
and opt for pills so I can serve.  
Rhinegold radicals write titles  
that cover ISKCON's realities—we're not here  
or there (Vraja) but living through  
spring, it's raining, and  
autumn is not so far behind.  
My head is full of colors.  
I feel like a fakir with one reed  
blowing in a tower. My poverty is almost intolerable  
like in poor India where  
vast chaos throws you down  
and spits you out  
and people's dark faces inquire, "Who  
do you think you are?" You respond with a *sādhū* persona,  
which is all you know, then beg to be taken to ISKCON.

## *Crossing the Sea*

---

Look out and cross the ocean you  
better go forward old man  
it's not becoming to move so frenetic  
creaky limbs  
bent forward.

Leaving the house I see Jayānanda  
sitting alone on cement—no  
playmates  
not even  
a coat. Sand castles  
molded in pails—his father  
will be back tonight.

I am too fraught with pain  
to enjoy the fresh air  
but see the pits and bloody feathers  
of an escaped bird.

I'm raspy.  
Sorry. Not perfect, not  
me.

Like Jayānanda, I'm no  
unrecorded, unsung hero  
of *bhakti*.

I suppose I'll go back to Godhead  
eventually.

## *I Survived*

---

Ice-cold Pepsi Cola—none in  
my room or even on my list  
of desirable things.

I like Hiliter pens and *śāstras*,  
pleasant surprises arriving in packages  
from America. I like strong, headache-free  
days to serve (despite myself)  
and for nerve and verve and  
words that flow  
so far they end up in poems.

I like sassafras, saffron, and hing,  
cardamom, and Dr. Bronner's soap:  
"All one! All one! Dilute!"

I can easily spin out lists and  
litanies, the profane and the holy,  
to take me beyond the intellectual or  
even mindless—a Kerouac list or a Ginsburg imitation  
of "holy, holy, holy"—to crawl past  
romanticized memories  
forgetting the bad or the good  
and ending always the same: I  
survived.

Prabhupāda taught me to  
move over to love, to love

service, and to abandon old ties  
and lonely apartments filled with  
smelly cats,  
death stalking me always  
with such an unfriendly demeanor.

## *Old Man's Stay-back Party*

---

Dusk. Facing the lake.  
Good times on a bus or  
subway  
all illusion.  
Blood—even amphetamine  
I took to go to work  
but youth ended  
two loves crashed—the love of  
bohemian youth died and  
I began to look ahead  
to a narrower path  
Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa—where  
is my offering?

Even as I write the devotees are in Cork  
town  
about to begin  
a Hare Kṛṣṇa festival.

But I'm a stay-back man.

Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa—I'm no  
crow or even  
parrot I can  
sing  
by Your grace.

I'm a stay-back man, old but not drunk  
like Li Po looking up to the wavering moon  
not thinking of girls I once knew  
or distant and starving  
lost, O lost

but listening  
for Your voice and  
celebrating that  
                    at an old man's party  
as I make my last requests  
again and again  
on my walk to the shed.  
O Kṛṣṇa this boy  
wants to come home  
to You.

## *Country Life vs. City Life*

---

City life I don't want  
unless He sends me there to preach.  
Rural pen. Same old place he sinks down like leaves in autumn  
as good as the city in variety, I don't regret lack of passion  
I can move my hand slow or fast  
a dog, a quay, hunters, magpie  
pianos they don't have  
electric light or shops here  
                    and girls walking by in their shapes  
and philes and killers—of  
course they can come out here too.

But city life ain't for me. The coming-down calm of my day  
rainy or sad,  
the fields, the weather  
God,  
God,  
            a place to read scriptures.

The opposite in a city  
more madness  
                    more sincere people  
looking for a chance  
                                *any* chance  
so we should be there to give it  
in a film a

plate of *prasādam*

a festival

some hope

Oh, but I like the

peninsula at rest

when I'm best clear of pain.

## *You and Me*

---

We Kṛṣṇaites line up  
and are searched.

We turn out to be as real as  
anyone else.

## *Lantern Shadows*

---

Down to earth.  
I am led by a reliable guide  
on the treacherous path  
through matter.

We gathered to read but  
picked up an unreliable book.  
That happens sometimes.  
You don't trust the author.  
Then a letter arrived from Europe  
and the lights went out.  
The generator revved into life across the  
field but already we had arranged for lantern shadows  
to fall across the page and to turn to Kṛṣṇa  
in His names. We have  
nothing to gain but devotion.

## *The Critics Say*

---

This is the new man after taking himself off  
woodshedding all these hours  
these years practicing  
ready to burst out of his old mold.  
The critics say he's struggling  
with his new concept,  
the critics say, with their sharp eyes  
and sharper tongues.  
The critics say, "What *are* you doing?!"

Incredulous devotees say they don't know but  
each has to find their own way  
discover a clear-bodied sound an  
open life for Kṛṣṇa  
to awaken the heart  
not crazy.

## Prayer for Understanding

I have a better idea now that my little words  
are those of a conditioned soul.

Rūpa Gosvāmī speaks from direct  
knowledge of how beautiful Rādhā is  
how beautiful Kṛṣṇa. I am simply  
a parrot with a small contribution to make.  
Because I cannot follow  
the description of how the souls originate  
in *taṭastha-śakti*. What does it mean  
to be eternal?

What were we doing before we decided  
to come into this material world?  
Who can help us understand?  
The *ācārya* sometimes uses branches  
to point to the moon.

Who can understand the Atlantic Ocean  
or a drop of it or a  
seagull's flight? Who can fly like  
a gannet low over the waves?  
Can you splash foam upwards on the  
rocks like the inanimate sea?  
Kṛṣṇa knows, knows it *all*,  
does it all.

I pray to understand *bhakti*, and  
as far as all its technical categories  
no one says I have to know  
as long as I am in love  
with Rādhā  
and Kṛṣṇa.  
But I'm not—not yet.  
So let me pray to Prabhupāda  
for that gift that  
treasure  
he wanted so badly to deliver.

As I write this, Kirtana-rasa is  
standing at the edge of the meadow,  
fingering his beads, chanting,  
looking out at the ocean.  
Madhu is somewhere in the house.  
I'm getting this down before it's too late  
or I forget, before darkness settles around me  
like a blanket.  
I pray to You,  
Lord of all,  
please let me understand Your sweetness.  
Let me serve those who love You best.  
Please give me that understanding.

## *Come Dawn and the Mahā-mantra*

---

Walking in predawn on a lonely road and suddenly  
I feel a light behind me. I think quickly  
it's the first glint of a car's headlights and turn,  
but there's no car.

But I'm now facing east and  
above that hill no yellow ball or even  
hint of red but a more general lighting  
has appeared, as if the stage director is  
slowly turning up the lights.

It's rare to catch Him in the act  
rare to be caught in the exact drama of it,  
but somehow this morning  
I got lucky.

Can the holy name dawn in me like that,  
sneaking up unawares, a feeling more than  
a physical perception, a sudden willingness  
to hear brought to bear on the soul,  
a hope and a heart to live in the mantras  
with no desire for any other kind of meditation  
or yoga  
or God?

## *Poets Have to Write*

---

Life is brief and poets have to write  
even when they dream of picking up  
cigar butts from the gutter while  
black women and fat politicians stand by  
and approve. Perhaps  
it was a sign that I should pick up the trash  
of my *anarthas* and throw them out  
or perhaps it is just another  
dream-riddle.

## *Music Accompanied Me (Alternative Take)*

---

Thinking of Lord Caitanya walking in Puri—I  
mean, going south  
alone.

Miles in Vṛndāvana? Bhāgavata dāsa said,  
“The *dhāma* varieties unfold like Miles’ solos.” He means that  
new tunes  
are always being revealed  
and that the blues there are gutsy and  
part of life  
although life is sublime and above  
Miles’ version of the blues.  
We hear the Vṛndāvana blues in goodness.  
I preserve and reserve  
the right to say so. Yes,  
it’s so.

O devotees, we sing the song of self of  
our battleships and destroyers  
their escorts gray  
with white lettering  
parked in our mental Navy yards.  
Sad it was and sad it will be these  
low hours when our delicate and corrupt selves  
have boarded such ships, our desires intact, our hearts  
broken.  
Rilke said it’s good for poets to enter the difficult.

Is it good for devotees too?  
Music accompanied me aboard Navy ships,  
accompanies me now even in Vṛndāvana if  
only in spirit and metaphor, speaking of  
aloneness, secret hopes.

“My *māyā* is Irish music,” a devotee told me, and another,  
“My *māyā* is my mother.”

“Even while practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness,”  
he said, “I engage in illicit sex.”

“I eat porn.”

He means corn—Crackerjack

“But hey, mate, I don’t *cultivate* it!”

I do none of the above but  
accept the dry  
which is just as sad.

## *Sādhus of Gītā-nāgarī*

---

Wish I were walking in green meadows but  
I'm not. I'm alone thinking of avant-garde  
and traditions  
and the difference between either and  
telling the truth.

Life is simple. They bought me  
a bottle of Fancy unsweetened apple juice  
I placed it on the windowsill and see birds  
through it, birds with red-mottled heads  
house finches, I'm told.

It's abominable not to go for pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness but  
to loiter in lower regions, exploring the modes.  
My heart aches for Vṛndāvana. Why have I come here?  
I look at a photo album my hosts have left out,  
“*Sādhus* of Gītā-nāgarī”—doesn't show me anywhere  
although I lived here once.

The other day on my walk, I saw a sign, “No Trespassing”  
on a little lot  
some guy probably knows he's in the Gītā-nāgarī neighborhood  
and doesn't want any weird guys walking dazed  
on his land, holding their beads and chanting to the skies  
or petting his cows.

## *Love Is All*

---

Now here's the thing we are  
logically concerned the Swami  
will let the musicians in  
and the cooks  
                    the surrendered have to  
show only their passes at  
the Door.

    Fear? Obedience? Love?  
    *Love* is all, he said.  
Can they play with the Father?  
    Yes—that's love  
the father has become a horse.

Seek truth, breaking ties with  
falsity. What are you?  
A vagrant backyard dog a  
rubber band bass I am here and gone we  
are all so brief.  
So seek truth  
don't throw away  
access to his love  
but live in Kṛṣṇa consciousness  
because the impure don't reign in heaven  
(it's not allowed)  
and love is all there is left.

## *Telling It Straight*

---

This guy played—was it in the 1950s?—and  
so many things were happening in the world I  
you moved in, then out of the Navy  
Elvis dropped off and  
I don't really have to explain it all  
only that some power in me died and another  
was given, I joined  
the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement  
that fluid process that captured me  
so long ago. Things have changed so much  
from those days—devotees dying, growing old and fat,  
some still in pristine condition, pressing the strings  
down on *tambouras* as if they were guitars  
and by God's grace surviving.

I thwarted the tower guest room in Spain because  
we all ISKCON transients  
die take  
*tulasī* and Ganges water  
on our way out.  
We hope we're going to the spiritual world  
but are not always sure  
we have what it takes.  
There's no faster wailer than a man about to die  
but God outwails us all.  
Take a turn, my Lord

sweet and hard and all  
heart we know  
there is no one else but You.

*Sādhu* sitting in sunken garden  
Yama-toṭa in Puri but all the white guys  
had to leave. Mosquito-bitten we retreated  
back to our hotels to speak American into one another's  
ears, telling how Lord Caitanya  
once fell into the ocean and  
a fisherman caught Him, but His heart  
was with the *gopīs*  
and we told it straight  
then faded out with the sun.

## Quiet Now

Quiet now, the maestro is playing. I mean the Lord of  
mind and emotions, Yadunandana, meeting the *gopīs*  
in Dvārakā although  
the *gopīs* wanted Him back in Vṛndāvana.  
Where was their playful Kṛṣṇa with  
yellow *dhotī*, free-dancing poet-musician  
with beautiful flute,  
the Lord of their hearts?

Prabhupāda went to Him,  
not demanding, but with self revealed,  
setting the tone  
and now  
it's quiet. I'm on the verge  
of another sixteen rounds—every  
twenty-four hours  
I get that chance.

Fingering the beads is a humble art,  
the work of a craftsman it takes  
a craftsman's ear  
and depends on no one else  
these red beads passing through my hands,  
this process.

7:00 P.M.

---

I want to write something tonight my own.  
I say I don't care how good it comes out and  
I don't care if it gets published  
but that's a half-truth. The other half is  
I can't face up to the future.  
Still, I have left behind for better or worse  
the cares and calculations of rhyme, meter,  
structure—all rules—  
because I'm tired of them.

I read Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, my  
grandfather, who spoke of his name  
as a *mañjarī*, his service in Vraja,  
then said it was a dream he  
wants only to stay in his special *bhajana* place  
in Navadvīpa to think of  
Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa there.

It's 7 P.M. in Wicklow and  
there are no scorcher summers here.  
I warm my feet in socks and sit on a rug,  
glancing out the window at  
rural Ireland  
the wind tearing against this small house

and I think of him  
how he sees how Rādhā

exactly places Her hand  
on Śyāma's shoulder and how  
They look at one another from  
the corners of Their eyes  
and I wonder, as the wind rages  
outside, what it is I want.

## *Poems Are*

---

A devotee wrote in a letter that *Begging  
for the Nectar*  
was difficult to read  
because I was so hard on myself.  
What hope did it leave her?  
She almost quit reading, then saw  
that I felt better toward the end  
and we both persisted.  
She said she liked the poems best—  
they contained my heart.

Well, that's nice. Poems are  
lines with double meanings, art, symbols  
undefinable music  
composed of everything I see and hear—a  
baby chair in the backyard, broken now, and  
in the high grass a broken stove, wooden shingles,  
a spade, a plastic barrel,  
and me murmuring Kṛṣṇa's name  
almost inaudibly  
at odd moments, the sound so delicate  
between mind and heart,  
the words in a holy book.

## *"I Remember April" (Alternative Take)*

---

They were playing "I Remember April"  
next door to the temple in T'dad  
it's a fast piece and I felt myself race  
with it, this  
forbidden music.

At least it was better than the usual  
frumpy reggae, poor man's rock  
they play in the jute fields while wielding  
saber-toothed sickles, hammers. Stumbling  
I say, "Hey, Rafas!" and they all laugh

look at me and stop working.  
They know it's fast but I'm breathless  
so they laugh again and sit down  
to look at the  
crazy man.

I recognize the tune and then it's gone  
like the splash of a frog  
and I think of April and all the fluctuations  
and punctuations—the flies-fads-tads  
mosquitoes  
while Madhu applies white cream  
and laughs.

“April” was played with a trumpet I don’t  
know whose rendition, something between  
Bach’s and no man’s but someone was out there  
playing it again and again  
over the fence.

I was reading Prahlāda but suddenly remembered  
Paris, once, while I was in the Navy,  
trying to get high but unsuccessful  
and sitting on a bench under a row  
of trees

wishing for liberation, *the*  
Liberation, and I found Kṛṣṇa  
later and I do remember Aprils  
spent chanting.

## *Coming Home*

---

When I have to go uphill  
I walk in a crouch and imagine I'm smaller  
than I am. I poke my cane into the earth for support  
and breathe hard.

Saw an owl—or a large bird I couldn't quite make out  
flying away into the gray dawn from over the stone  
bridge as soon as I arrived. Neither of us  
were afraid of the rough waterfall throwing  
spray. I was not afraid  
to pray or be myself  
because Kṛṣṇa was present in the creek-sound  
and I could see through the green branches  
while the water coursed over the rocks  
green with moss.

## *Odd Moments: Meeting a One-Horned Goat*

---

This advice isn't everything,

but it's important:

Listen to others and don't

think yourself the only

one, the most special,

sensitive soul

ever created.

Because even special souls

have odd moments

such as the time I met a bearded goat

in the woods—all he needed to fulfill the cliché

was a pipe pressed to his lips

like an old Irish leprechaun.

He had only one horn

and perhaps that made him less dangerous

but goats have been known to rush people.

Was I safe because I was a special, sensitive

soul?

And what about the rabbits

gamboling across pastures? What

is their defense against the sleek-running

fox?

## *Each One Doing His/ Her Own Thing Together*

---

Now I know they have their  
own ways of learning  
I'm happy to clear my head  
and say  
                                alone or with a group

we work together each doing  
his own thing  
like in a Kṛṣṇa conscious community  
shared ethos the binding force  
to make us a family.

Although we live each in our world I  
walked to the quay, still speaking  
to the gathering  
walking my way at  
my speed—what did I think,  
that I was some guru with whom  
everyone had to agree?

Someone quoted Kierkegaard: "If  
I win all men to God but lose myself then all  
is lost!" Prabhupāda said if we win ourselves  
but save no one else . . . then?

Cat on wall, deer in front yard

sharing a world  
and me—do I share a world with these people  
walking me to the quay?  
I say I want to be alone because  
I don't help the sun to rise but only want to  
celebrate as it soars over the trees.

The sun, after all, is special in these gray parts.  
Boats cross the water and I continue to speak  
to those attending,  
gems of *jñāna*  
in payment for my lunch.

Out of affection for her they baked her a cake—  
it was her birthday—but  
the first guy who entered blew the surprise,  
“Is there a party here?”  
They ate the cake and left.

Large, limpid eyes, don't be sad  
we *are* a family, and then a child entered  
crying. What had been done to her?  
I tried to speak about Prabhupāda's disappearance  
of joy and sorrow mixed, of what we feel in our  
collective world when the child entered  
bringing in the reality of a different *śloka*.

## *No Funny Valentine (Alternative Take)*

He knows his ego is going to be  
caressed by a man he can't trust.  
That man says the softest, sweetest things  
he's a familiar friend, a  
funny person, not so pretty  
but  
    that's the whole point.

Kṛṣṇa is perfect He's no  
funny Valentine  
but luscious beauty in the *gopīs'* eyes,  
always joking with Them and smoothing  
their feelings with His ocean-deep words.

I am a bear He is  
saying this in a new way.

I will not go to the altar of grief  
because I plan to do my best, I  
couldn't—couldn't make the mark  
    even though I spoke honest  
and what Swami taught.

    I came out in the rain but  
could only give bear hugs  
devotee hugs like a child  
then go back into my wilderness cabin

to grow up some more,  
cold in the early morning,  
and worship Kṛṣṇa.

## *Resolve to Write*

### 1

Misty around the bend, walking  
over snail trails, listening  
to Prabhupāda encourage us. We  
have served him and he is willing  
to lift us up.

I am a writer, although Prabhupāda doesn't  
mention this service—I know I should write  
for those in the West who have discovered Kṛṣṇa  
and who want to know  
more. I plan and pray, hope  
and write, don't hide behind  
amazing deeds I have never performed,  
no fiction but what is.

I feel resolve, and walking down  
the snaking hills, the mist  
so heavy, a group of dogs  
misses me. At the very bottom  
the usual white mutt runs out  
all bluff and  
blocks my way, backing down  
as I approach, stick in hand.  
Then the Dobermans rush forward,  
chained, ineffectual.

2

Resolve is interesting because  
no one can keep you from it  
except yourself.

## *Those Days Are Over*

---

Lead me on Lord of the Flies. It's Sunday and we should be  
in Church

here we are instead at the train station  
reading our agnostic book.

No, those days are over. I read Prahlāda  
teaching his friends.

And I walked in the rain. O head vise, don't visit me.

The way is the way  
bang and wail it's the same—  
the worms come out wiggling  
will cry in any season and  
will bang on any day  
and play and play we know that way.

So I was tellin' this guy Words come from God/ I'm sure glad  
I'm not in jail, prison, Navy ship, barracks, factory, or schoolroom,  
but if you've got to go then spread the little remaining gold  
juice time in ways  
to befit a monk's cause—help others wherever they are  
to become devotees.

I stay at center and assure others that's the rap, you see?  
Any pause of boredom comes  
and let it go away it will  
like a trill.

Yesterday—you can forget it I suppose, drag it  
up, sad or lethargic

but Kṛṣṇa asked you to shake it off and so you did.  
I think a slow and aimless trumpet sound is like  
wandering when you walk  
trying to let nature  
or what?  
lead the way—the head  
will do its thing but  
what about the heart?

## *These Daily Walks, These Words*

---

I came upon three swaybacked horses,  
one with a white mark down its forehead,  
but Madhu had cued me: they are  
timid stallions, horses of  
the logging crew.  
They were blocking the left path so  
I took the middle. It began  
to rain.

Can I pray? Kṛṣṇa, sometimes You seem  
so far away. I cannot assume  
that when I use a parrot's prayer  
I have attained You.

When I said this to myself outdoors  
my own words shook me and became  
clear. Suddenly You became dearer  
than I can now recount.

## *Be Here Now*

---

Be here now—this  
place. Don't see wherever  
you are as an awkward junction,  
a mere bridge or time-killing passage  
to somewhere else. This  
is your life in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.  
You have books  
beads the  
Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.  
You might surrender today.

## *At His Bedside*

---

Want to live—wanted to live—that day  
he left, twenty years ago, to  
live for him one hundred percent  
and then die myself.

Can I be my own man yet  
be his?

The routine is all  
the quiet Kṛṣṇa consciousness in my own room  
the old way of remembering  
and chanting, hearing  
Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa—  
the best I can do.  
I sit at his bedside in my memory  
my Godbrothers present but me protected  
from my own fears this time  
my heart walled off and yet not  
to feel the emotions of Prabhupāda leaving me  
finding my own soul.

Now I treasure alone-time  
although I am not yet qualified to serve Vṛndāvana not  
yet, but I see the face of my dear Prabhupāda  
and think of ways to be with him.

Then I go to bed and blank out for  
hours—dredge up a dream  
don't treat it as gospel but  
my hand stops to record it for later  
until I find the meaning of love  
in each moment.

Prabhupāda, a man prayed, I want to  
become a chanter  
and to pay for big words so I can bend them  
to your service.

## *Glossary*

**Abhay**—lit., “fearless”. The name given to Śrīla Prabhupāda at birth.

**Anartha**—unwanted thing; material desire.

**Anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam**—Śrīla Rupa Govāmi’s definition of pure devotional service as being free from any other desire.

**Baksheesh**—tip, donation, or bribe.

**Bhagavad-gītā**—lit., “song of God”. The discourse between Lord Kṛṣṇa and His devotee Arjuna, expounding devotional service as both the principal means and the ultimate end of spiritual perfection.

**Bhajana**—devotional activities; a devotional song.

**Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura**—an *ācārya* in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava disciplic succession; the father of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

**Bhakti**—devotional service to the Supreme Lord.

**BTG**—*Back to Godhead* magazine, the magazine of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement.

**Caitanya (Mahāprabhu)**—lit., “living force”. An incarnation of Kṛṣṇa who appeared in the form of a devotee to teach love of God through the *saṅkīrtana* movement.

**Dāsa**—lit., “servant” (masculine). An appellation that along with a name of Kṛṣṇa or one of His devotees is given to a devotee at the time of initiation.

**Daṇḍa**—a staff carried by *sannyāsīs*.

**Deva**—demigod.

**Dhāma**—abode; the Lord’s place of residence.

**Dhotī**—a garment wrapped on the lower body of men, commonly worn in India.

**Dvārakā**—the city where Kṛṣṇa ruled in His later pastimes as a king.

**Ganges (Gaṅgā)**—a sacred river in India that washed the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu.

**Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī**—the spiritual master of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

**Gaurāṅgī**—the color of molten gold; a name of Rādhārāṇī.

**GBC**—Governing Body Commission, ISKCON’s board of directors.

**Gītā-nāgarī**—a spiritual farm community established by Śrīla Prabhupāda in central Pennsylvania.

**Goloka**—Kṛṣṇaloka, the eternal abode of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Gopī**—a cowherd girl; one of Kṛṣṇa’s most confidential servitors.

**Gośālā**—cowshed.

**Guru-gāyatrī**—a prayer in honor of the spiritual master.

**Haribol**—“Chant the holy name.”

**ISKCON**—acronym for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

**Janmāṣṭamī**—the festival of Kṛṣṇa’s birth.

**Japa**—individual chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra while counting on beads.

**Jñāna**—the process of approaching the Supreme by the cultivation of knowledge.

**Kadamba**—a saffron-colored flower.

**Kārttika**—the Vedic month corresponding to October–November in which Lord Dāmodara is worshiped.

**Kṛṣṇaites**—devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Kṛṣṇa**—the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

**Mahā-mantra**—the great chant for deliverance: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.

**Mānasa-candra-cakora**—a name of Kṛṣṇa that indicates that He is the moon of the minds of the *gopīs*, who are compared to *caḥo-  
ra* birds, which subsist only on moonlight.

**Mañjarī**—an intimate *gopī* maidservant of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

- Māyā**—the external, illusory energy of the Lord, comprising this material world; forgetfulness of one's relationship with Kṛṣṇa.
- Nārada Muni**—a great devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa who travels throughout the spiritual and material worlds singing the Lord's glories and preaching the path of devotional service.
- Narottama (dāsa Ṭhākura)**—a Vaiṣṇava spiritual master in the disciplic succession from Lord Caitanya and writer of many standard Vaiṣṇava hymns.
- Nitya-līlā**—the eternal pastimes of the Lord or His devotees in the spiritual world.
- Paramparā**—the disciplic succession of bona fide spiritual masters.
- Prabhupāda, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami**—founder-*ācārya* of ISKCON and foremost preacher of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the Western world.
- Prahlāda Mahārāja**—a great devotee who was persecuted by his demoniac father but who was protected and saved by Lord Nṛsiṁha.
- Prasādam**—lit., “mercy”. Food that is spiritualized by being offered to Kṛṣṇa and that helps purify the living entity; also referred to as *prasāda*.
- Purī**—Jagannātha Purī, a city in the province of Orissa, India, where the temple of Lord Jagannātha is located.
- Rādhā(rāṇī)**—the eternal consort and spiritual potency of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- Rādhā-kuṇḍa**—the bathing place of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī; it is a sacred pond near Govardhana Hill in Vraja that was created by Rādhārāṇī and Her *gopī* companions.
- Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī**—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.
- Rasa**—the spiritual essence of a personal relationship with the Supreme Lord.
- Rūpa Gosvāmī**—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.
- Sādhū**—a saintly person.
- Sannyāsa-mantra**—a mantra given to a devotee at the time he enters the renounced order of life.

**Sannyāsī**—one in the renounced order of life.

**Śāstra**—revealed scripture.

**Śrīla**—a term of respect given to a spiritual master.

**Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam**—the Bhāgavat Purāṇa, written by Śrīla Vyāsadeva, which specifically points to the path of devotional love of God.

**Śyāma(-sundara)**—a name of Kṛṣṇa meaning “blackish” and “beautiful” (*sundara*).

**Tamboura**—a stringed instrument played in classical Indian music.

**Tapasvī**—one who performs *tapas* (austerities).

**Tatastha-śakti**—the living entity as the marginal potency of the Lord.

**Tulasī**—a great devotee in the form of a plant; her leaves are always offered to the lotus feet of the Lord.

**Upaniṣads**—108 philosophical treatises that appear within the *Vedas*.

**Vedic**—pertaining to a culture in which all aspects of human life are under the guidance of the *Vedas*.

**Vraja**—Vṛndāvana.

**Vṛndāvana**—Kṛṣṇa’s personal abode, where He fully manifests His personal qualities.

**Yadunandana**—a name of Kṛṣṇa indicating that He is the descendant of King Yadu.

**Yama-toṭa**—a sacred garden in Jagannātha Puri.

**Yamunā**—a sacred river in India, which Lord Kṛṣṇa made famous by performing pastimes there.

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