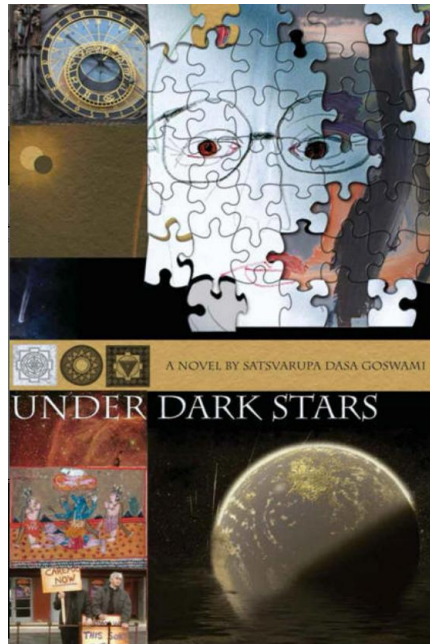


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Written in 2003 while in the process of rebuilding following an emotional and physical crisis and published in 2009, *Under Dark Stars* is a literary accomplishment of tremendous significance when considering the evolution of Satsvarupa Maharaja’s body of work. As he describes it, this is a novel without a plot but which nonetheless tells a complex story of a constellation of characters each finding their way through the challenges of life as part of larger narrative of the spiritual quest.

I have been eager to promote this work at this time because in the midst of publishing Satsvarupa Maharaja’s experimental writing in the *Every Day, Just Write* retrospective, this is the perfect moment to re-introduce a similarly experimental text. This is a story that is told through a narrative expressed in a variety of genres, such that Satsvarupa Maharaja himself has described this book as a “genre-bender” and indeed it is! This is a demanding work that calls for several readings precisely to navigate the intertwined themes and modes of expression. With a number of copies still available, now is an excellent time to undertake this literary adventure within a text that is both exuberant and contemplative, a text that calls for serious reflection and joyful hand-clapping.

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Free Write Journal #107

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Free Writes

A Decade at Viraha Bhavan

We moved here ten years ago on July 4th, 2010. Saci Suta had bought a house and gave it to me for my use for as long as I live. We have an ashram of four devotees, me, Baladeva, Baladeva from Trinidad and Krsna dasi, his wife. (Saci Suta provided a small house for Baladeva and Krsna dasi also. Their place is five doors away, so it's really part of the same ashram. They spend much of their time here. Bala cooks breakfast and lunch, and Krsna dasi is a world-class *pujari* taking care of many Deities on two altars at the house.)

My literary output has increased, and we are taking advantage of technology in the 21st century. Ishvara Govinda of SDGLegacy.com has put all my books online, and they can be downloaded free of charge and read in that format. I am working closely with Rev. John Endler. We are picking vintage writings from the past and producing books on demand. I produce a *Free Write Journal* weekly, and it goes out to many readers. In the *Journal* I write from the present and also post excerpts from books I have written over the decades (and free writing too).

Bala has been expert at organizing festivals, inviting devotees to come here twice a year and meet with me at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall. Covid-19 has temporarily put a stop to that, but we hope to eventually resume the meetings. They are very important to me. I have been speaking on some Zoom appearances. In my condition, I am not traveling now but making myself available through the books and weekly journal.

So that's what it's been like for the past ten years. I am peaceful and content to live this way at Viraha Bhavan. One doctor remarked that I am fortunate in that my personal interests, writing and reading, are compatible to an enforced sedentary life, with lameness and COPD (Chronic

Obstructive Pulmonary Disease).

Health Report

My health is declining, and I can walk only with great difficulty. Recently I've been feeling exhausted and have lost my stamina to do my daily exercise regimen. I run out of breath, and I feel pain when I try to do them. I used to do three or four sets of repetitions, exercising different muscles. Then I came down to none. Yesterday I began doing at least one: sitting in a stiff chair and doing at least ten or twelve stand-ups. I will keep this and try to increase. But it is a long way back to normal strength.

Many of my doctor's appointments were cancelled earlier because of the pandemic. But now they're all coming at once. I went for my annual eye examination. The eye doctor has been telling me for years that I have cataracts but they are "not so bad." But yesterday, on examination, he told me I had to get them taken out. He couldn't give me an appointment for consultation until October 30, but we will try to get that moved up.

On September 3rd I have an appointment that had been cancelled twice with the pulmonologist, Dr. Garcia. I have COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder). My breath is very short, and I'm not able to do my full daily exercise program. I hope she will give me some new direction.

On September 8th, I have an appointment with the urologist, Dr. Subudhi. It's an annual checkup, and I've been having some issues with my urination.

On September 26 I go for an echocardiogram to see if there's some relationship to the heart and my chronic tiredness. In fact, the other appointments are for the same thing (trying to diagnose the exhaustion). On September 29th I will go back to see the cardiologist and get the results of the echocardiogram, which shows how the valves and blood flow are working.

It's a busy period of doctor visits and a hassle, but I want to get these things checked out. I want to improve my active service without being so exhausted.

Early Morning “Rabbits”

Every early morning, Baladeva and I brainstorm to come up with two “rabbits from a hat,” (subject matters to write about) as the beginning of the day’s Free Write Journal. Sometimes we draw a blank, and I do free writing in a series of balloons or “clusters.”

When I go to the doctor’s, everyone is wearing a mask. Even the pizza place has a big statue of a cook twirling a pizza and wearing a mask. ISKCON is carrying on despite COVID with Zoom lecturers, and adapting to COVID by finding new, creative ways to distribute Prabhupada’s books in greater numbers. I rarely go out of the house, so when I do, it’s a kind of shock to see everyone wearing masks. I feel a little afraid to go into the places where there are signs, “Face masks mandatory at all times,” and “Everyone must keep a six-foot distance.” But I chant the Hare Krsna mantra to myself, the ultimate panacea.

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I received word that a dear friend has contracted COVID-19. He’ll find out in the next ten days how serious it is. He’s in his seventies and working full-time. His three grownup children have moved out and have houses of their own. Despite his work and disease, he’s holding preaching programs every day on Zoom and keeping excellent *sadhana* habits. I will make intercessionary prayers for his improved health. But I cannot make decisions for his life choices (such as whether he should retire). He is very dear to me, and I would like to see him in a less-stressful condition.

John Endler Visits

John brought me two manuscripts to be proofread. One is *Kaleidoscope* stream-of-consciousness poems. The other manuscript he gave me is *Forgetting the Audience: Writing Sessions at Castlegregory, Ireland, 1993*. I haven't read this in a while. I remember I wrote it on legal pads and sent them to my typist Lilamrta dasi. There's a book by Robert Graves called *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*. I attempted to forget the reader and just write what came to my mind without agenda. The book was a turning point for me. After *Forgetting the Audience*, I wrote more freely and without constraints and expectations about structure and form. It was a liberating experience. Writing quickly for hours a day, letting my hand keep moving and not thinking so much of the results. But because I am a devotee, a disciple of Srila Prabhupada, I tried to steer to Krsna.

John also presented to me his plans for distribution of my books. He wants to place ads in the *Free Write Journal* telling of different specific titles available and inviting readers to order them by mail-order. This is an appropriate way to distribute books during the COVID shutdown of much public contact. John is excited about it, and I will occasionally remind readers of the *Free Write Journal* about his advertisements for books.

Jazz Renunciation

I'm proofreading my book *Kaleidoscope*. It contains frequent references to listening to jazz. The musicians' names are mentioned, like Sonny Rollins, Miles Davis, etc. The book was written in 1993 when I was avidly listening to the music, as I had been for many years. But in the summer of 2018 I decided that it was improper for me, as a practicing Vaisnava, to listen to the music. So I made a vow to stop. I sent my large collection of CDs to my jazz-guitarist disciple Sankirtana dasa in Dallas. I decided not to omit the musical references in my poems but leave them as authentic testimonies of who I was in 1993. (I even listened to jazz while writing my poems, so the music

influenced the poetry.) My vow to stop listening to the music was a big commitment and change in my life. I thought it was risky to keep on listening to the music as I moved into old age and close to death. In my last days and hours, I want to be listening to Prabhupada's *bhajan*s and not John Coltrane's music.

Brahma-vimohana-lila

Bhurijana Prabhu told of Brahma's bewilderment to see both the boys he had kidnapped, who were still lying down in the cave, and the boys who were Krsna-expanded and playing with Him. Krsna then showed that the boys He had expanded into were actually Visnu forms and they were innumerable. Brahma realized he had made a great mistake in trying to challenge Krsna's potency. He was humbled and recognized his master.

Krsna then assumed His single form as a small cowherd boy, but now Brahma understood that this was the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He trembled, made obeisances, and began to make prayers in a faltering voice. Brahma prayed in forty verses, and they are beautiful and progressively surcharged with devotion and philosophical wisdom. But Lord Krsna remained indifferent to the prayers of Brahma. He made no comments. Even the Vaisnava *acaryas* do not comment much on the prayers of Brahma. Kavi-karnapura just writes, "And Brahma made beautiful prayers," without going into them. Some commentators don't even mention the prayers. The Madhva *sampradaya* doesn't even describe this *Brahma-vimohana-lila* because it is too embarrassing to their *sampradaya* head, Lord Brahma. Lord Brahma, at the end of his prayers, begs entry into Vrndavana. He prays to be born as something like grass so that the Vrajavasis can step on his head. But then he realizes he has no place in Vrndavana, and he excuses himself and returns to Brahmaloaka.

Update on Out-Loud Reading

Twice a day we have out-loud readings at mealtimes. Devotees who aren't in our house speak up from remote locations and are amplified into our room with their reading. We are hearing of the *gotras* or seminal family lines of *ksatriyas* and *brahmanas* prior to the appearance of Krsna. It was tedious to go through the many, many names of sons born to fathers. It was always mentioned that the men were the seed-giving fathers, and the women were like containers for taking care of the growing children. Prabhupada said that his family *gotra* was in the dynasty of Gautama. When he received initiation from Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, he entered the Acyuta-gotra, or the eternal line of devotees coming down from the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He told us that we, his students, were in the Acyuta-gotra too. Sometimes he said that we were yogis in our past lives. But he made it clear that he had picked us up from the most fallen conditions before we linked with him.

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Now we have just come to the point where Kamsa hears an unembodied voice from the sky telling him he is a fool because the eighth child of his sister Devaki will kill him. As the worst of demons, Kamsa immediately grabs the hair of Devaki and takes up his sword to kill her. Her husband Vasudeva is astonished and speaks to Kamsa with convincing, pacifying words. He tells Kamsa he will ruin his reputation if he kills his sister on the occasion of her marriage. Then Vasudeva gives a long discourse on the Vedic conception of death. He says death is inevitable, and Kamsa should not be afraid of it. As a person changes bodies in this lifetime from childhood to boyhood to youth, etc., so at the end the body is given up and a new one is awarded according to one's activities.

Kamsa is too much of a demon to heed these words. Vasudeva then changes his tack and speaks to save the life of Devaki. He tells Kamsa that he has nothing to fear from Devaki but from the eighth child born from her. He says that if there are children born, Vasudeva will bring them to

Kamsa to do what he wants. Kamsa is convinced of this argument because he values the word of honor of Vasudeva. After a year, a child is born to Devaki and Vasudeva. Vasudeva takes the baby and brings him to Kamsa. Kamsa is astonished that Vasudeva has kept his word. He tells Vasudeva that he has nothing to fear from this first child, and he gives him back. Vasudeva doesn't trust Kamsa's word, but he takes the child back. Then Narada comes to visit Kamsa. Narada wants to accelerate the descent of Krsna as soon as possible. He tells Kamsa that any child born could be Krsna, and that demigods are being born in the Yadu dynasty, and that Krsna will appear. Kamsa becomes alert and afraid of his death. He imprisons Devaki and Vasudeva behind iron bars, and he proceeds to kill the children they give birth to one after another.

Krsna appears in the prison of Kamsa, revealing Himself to Vasudeva and Devaki. Vasudeva is astonished to see that his child is four-armed and equipped with all the symbols of Visnu. He is effulgent, decorated with ornaments and fine dress. Vasudeva immediately recognizes Him as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He makes ecstatic prayers in awe and reverence of the Supreme Lord, who has appeared as his son. By the presence of Krsna, he becomes fearless and states that Krsna has come to uphold religious principles, protect the devotees and annihilate the miscreants. When Devaki prays, she is more in the maternal mood and expresses her fear that Kamsa may come at any moment and try to kill Krsna, her eighth child as predicted by the omen. She asks Krsna to take a form of a normal child so that Kamsa will not see Him as Visnu. Krsna speaks to her and tells her how in two previous births in different millenniums He appeared as her son, and now He has come for the third time and He will bring her back home, back to Godhead. He orders His parents to bring Him to Gokula and place Him as a child just born to Yasoda, and take her infant girl child who has just been born to her. Krsna then turns Himself into a normal baby child. By the influence of Yogamaya, then Krsna causes all the guards to fall into deep sleep. He opens the locks on the prison doors and releases Vasudeva from his shackles. Vasudeva takes the child and goes to Gokula, where he replaces Krsna with the baby girl child born to Yasoda. He then

returns to the prison and puts the shackles on himself so that no one will know all that has happened. Soon the baby child cries, and the guards run to Kamsa and tell him the baby has been born. Kamsa rushes to the maternity room and grabs the baby child and tries to smash her against the stone floor. But she slips out of his hand and rises into the sky, where she appears as Durgadevi, the energy of Krsna in the material world. She speaks to Kamsa and says he is a fool. He cannot hurt her; the one he wants to kill has already been born somewhere else. She asks him to stop persecuting Vasudeva and Devaki. Kamsa is shocked and becomes repentant for all the sins he has committed. He releases his sister and brother-in-law from their shackles and begs their forgiveness. They forgive him, and Kamsa returns to his palace. But there his demoniac assistants advise him that he should not be complacent or forgiving. He should kill all the children that had been born in the area within ten days, and he should persecute the *brahmanas* and cows. Kamsa, who is always a demon at heart, agrees with his ministers and orders them to carry out their plan.

Random Looks at Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (11th Ed.)

grave (n.) : an excavation for burial of a body: a burial place.

: DEATH

Burial of the body is one way to dispose of a dead person. In other cultures, cremation is the standard. Final destination of the dead. Another practice of some sects is to throw the body in a remote place to be eaten by predators. When Socrates was asked how he wanted to be gravied, he said, "First you catch me, and then you can put me in the grave." He understood that the real self was not the body but the eternal self.

fine (adj.) : delicate, subtle or sensitive in quality, perception or discrimination

: superior in kind, quality or appearance

: EXCELLENT [A fine job]

: ALL RIGHT [That's fine with me.]

Everything is just fine in the spiritual world. There is no anxiety in Vaikuntha. Krsna is fully satisfied and always blissful, He is “just fine.” The beauty of Krsna’s *gopis* is that they are very fine in all their features and qualities. With Krsna and His *parisads*, everything is very well and all right.

innumerable (adj.): too many to be numbered.

: COUNTLESS

: very many

It is said that when Krsna came out of His house in the morning, He was joined by innumerable cows and cowherd boys. This cannot be calculated by material space and logic. Krsna can do anything and everything. When people doubt that Krsna can marry 16,108 wives, we refer them to the fact that Krsna is inconceivable and capable of doing anything. 16,108 wives is just a small number compared to the innumerable number of persons whom Krsna could marry or accommodate in separate palaces and by separate expansions. Jiva Gosvami writes unless one accepts the principle of inconceivability, he cannot understand the Absolute Truth, Krsna. The *jivas*, the living entities, are innumerable. But the liberated souls in the spiritual world are even greater in number than the conditioned souls in the material world. Krsna is omnipotent, and so it is not difficult for Him to create or do innumerable things. It is said that Ananta Sesa has been trying to enumerate the qualities of Krsna with His thousands of mouths for millions of years, but he has not been able to come to the end of Krsna’s innumerable qualities.

harbinger (n.) : one that pioneers or initiates a major change: PRECURSOR
: one that presages or foreshadows what is to come

Lord Caitanya was the harbinger of the *sankirtana-yajna* as the only sacrifice possible in the Age of Kali. He started and brought about the major change that in the Age of Kali, one could attain liberation and love of God (*krsna-prema*) simply by the chanting of the Hare Krsna mantra. It is said that for the next 10,000 years the *sankirtana* movement can grow into a golden age.

Journal and Poems Book 2 (July-December 1985)

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“O Street preaching center, Washington, D.C.

8:45 P.M.

“Old folks home across the street, old lady out front leaning on metal support; two gay guys walking by talking loudly, one holding two drinks; cars fill all the parking spots—I’m finally back to a scene of preaching to nondevotees.

“Girijadhava introduced me to the guests, and I spoke on the verse about changing garments, changing bodies. On the altar were small Deities of Radha-Krsna. The audience was about 50% Black, about 50% women and 50% nondevotees. Everyone had feasted on *prasadam* before I came.

“I stressed the temporal nature of material life and human life’s real purpose—to reach the ultimate next life in the spiritual world.

“The first question after the lecture came from a young man who has started hearing about Krsna because his girlfriend is a regular visitor to the center: ‘Is

charitableness a form of God consciousness, which is the higher nature of humans, distinguishing them from animals?’

“Yes,’ I said, ‘but it has to be guided to the highest charity, helping others with spiritual knowledge.’

“Next question was from Sababu, a regular visitor with many strands of beads and a knit hat around his Afro: ‘I heard a speaker say demigods desire to be born as humans. Please explain.’ I said they want to take part in Lord Caitanya’s *sankirtana*.

“The next question was a challenge from Jim, a gray-haired street person who sometimes quotes Lao-Tsu and is usually skeptical: ‘What about our brothers and sisters who are less cognizant?’ He mentioned Buddhas who came back and who helped others to get salvation. He seemed to think we lacked this in our theology. I told him of Prahlada Maharaja’s prayer. We not only have the sentiment to help others, but we have the actual goods to deliver them to Krsna consciousness.

“Next question (Sababu again): ‘I heard that the Vedas say Buddha is God. I’m a student of comparative religion, and Buddhism and Krsna consciousness seem philosophically diametrically opposed. How come?’ I explained that God or His servant teach differently according to time, persons and place.

“I felt the urge to actually bring those present in the room to Krsna consciousness. More important than my own feeling, I repeated Srila Prabhupada’s message and thus presented before them the matchless gift of Krsna consciousness. It will save them at the time of death. They should take it up seriously. They should not be allured by those who teach pursuit of temporary enjoyment. The *maha-mantra* is most powerful. All that I shared with them is true and can deliver them.

“Now I look out at a noisy city street, men and women talking, cars moving, and

I'm supposed to rest. Thank you, Srila Prabhupada, for bringing me here and letting me speak a little. I know this is only the beginning.”

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p. 173

“WALKING AND HEARING

“While walking, I was feeling good about the hygienic nature of the walk in the open fresh air at Gita-nagari. I was also hearing Srila Prabhupada through the earphones of the tape recorder. Lecturing on the *Sri Isopanisad* mantras, he said that those who are after protection of the body are culturing nescience. Real knowledge is of the self. At first I thought I might be in *maya* for my health consciousness and walking. But I recalled how Srila Prabhupada answered every letter to his disciples with the phrase, ‘Hope this meets you in good health.’

I am walking to get health for prolonged active service. I must never forget that. Otherwise—*sa eva go karah*: if I think the self is this bag of material elements, or if I think I can sustain bodily life, I am no better than an ass. The body is going its course to decay and ruin, and nothing can stop that.

Srila Prabhupada quoted from the *Garga Upanisad*. There, in a conversation between a learned husband and his wife, the question is raised whether by spiritual practice one can avoid the miseries of the body. The answer is that the miseries of old age and death cannot be avoided. *But one who dies knowing the self is a brahmana.*

“Walking and hearing is a good combination.”

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p. 181

“November 2

“We went out in falling rain, sky growing dark by 5:00 now. It’s fun to see the mallards fly a short distance and land heavily on their webbed feet. They are completely tame here, fed by hand.

“I keep on making plans—travel in the month of December, to Boston, to Philadelphia, back here to Potomac and then Gita-nagari. At any moment my plans for improved health, for return to service, may be interrupted.

“In the immediate situation, some people are criticizing me, and I am criticizing some people, all in the course of trying to manage men and money in our ISKCON. So life goes on and evening comes at an earlier hour, sometimes it rains and sometimes the sun is out. But at a certain point, one’s life is stopped. And then we go on to another body, either in the material world or in the spiritual world. As we leave this world we may go, one by one, to join with Srila Prabhupada.

“PRABHUPADA GURU PUJA

“I remember the first times we offered *guru puja* to Prabhupada in Bombay, 1974—mild weather, after morning walks on Juhu Beach. He sat upon the crudely-built seat, and a devotee offered *arati* articles while another held up a hand-written sign, ‘*Sri-guru-carana-padma . . .*’

“All glories to Srila Prabhupada,
may we sing your praises till our last hours,
and then may we rejoin you

in the next world as your servants
 gaining strength each moment.
 Like the *brahmacari* students of old
 we go out to collect alms for you,
 coming back at night
 to drink milk and lie on the floor.

“May we always worship you as the topmost swanlike guru
 without envy to take your place.
 May you shine on us always
 your light of *divya-jnana*.”

“Give us sight, we are blind;
 give us strength, we are very weak;
 give us resolution, we are flickering;
 give us purity, we are envious and bad.”

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p. 263

“Dr. Sharma came over at predawn, exclaiming that the snowfall is craziness. It is the first time that he had seen it, and his initial encounter involved hazards in car driving. By the time our meeting was over, when I opened the curtain, it was a picturesque dawn.

“The sky is gray but reflects added snow light. The temperature is above freezing, the full creek flowing, reflecting shadows of the trees and that familiar hue, gray-brown, olive drab. Dr. Sharma saw it all with a child’s first sight: ‘Oh, they are

like falling flowers! Look, everything is so light! How long will those squirrels survive? And look, the water!’ He was looking at something I have seen many times. He will also get used to it, diminishing in his wonder, just as he will get used to the hazards of driving a car in the snow. What we really want is not child-vision nor adult-vision but Krsna-vision. Then when we see the snow-laden tree, we won’t see a winter tree, but we’ll see Krsna.

“That’s what Prabhupada said: ‘When you see the tree, you see Krsna.’ Poet Basho said, ‘If you want to know the pine, then go to the pine.’ But we say, ‘Chant and hear about Krsna, and if you want to know the pine, then approach the pine as a devotee of He who has made all the trees, plants, creatures and elements in the universe. Approach the wonders of this world as a devotee of He who is the source of all wonders, of all worlds. ‘But what need is there, Arjuna, for all this detailed knowledge? With a single fragment of Myself I pervade and support this entire universe.’ (Bg. 10.42)”

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p. 285

“When I came upon Bhakta Ray and Bhakta Ralph, they were digging holes for a large shelter. This is so the men and oxen can work in any weather.

“Ray said he was telling Ralph different stories from the just-published *Journal and Poems*. He said he was telling about the "mama-tejas" fish and the retarded cow called ‘Dumb-dumb.’ They made me think that these descriptions are likeable to the devotees and at the same time Krsna conscious.

“ . . . In several letters that he has written to me over the years, Ray has expressed himself well, sometimes about his fallen condition, but also about the danger and degradation of material life.

“ . . . As we spoke in the woods, we heard several hunters’ shots ring around us, and Ray laughingly feigned as if the shots were coming nearby over our heads. Ray said that on the first day of the hunting season, three men were shot dead by each other, five wounded, and two died of heart attack. He also said that he personally chased two hunters off our property just yesterday.

“We need bold, strong fighters like Ray, if only he can become a controller of the senses, a qualified devotee, and he seems to be well on his way to that.

“Bhakta Ralph, who just came from Florida, is very young in spiritual life, but he has a hearty liking for going out into the woods and working with the oxen. His motivation seems to be entirely spiritual, with a willingness to take whatever service is assigned to him. He wants to surrender to his spiritual master and go back to Godhead; that is why he likes to go into the woods and chop wood—for Krsna. And that is why I want to write books, not to become a famous author, but to supply more subject matter for Ray and Ralph, as they talk in the rest moments while cutting Krsna’s trees in the forest.”

My Search Through Books

p. 140

“I have a visual memory of walking the deck of the U.S.S. Saratoga at night while she was in port, and thinking thoughts from Soren Kierkegaard. The reality of the ship became a mere background while I became absorbed in philosophy and grew sick in spirit. Was Kierkegaard's spirit sick? Was I sick? Or was sickness and

despair the human condition? One of his chapters was titled, ‘The Universality of This Sickness, Despair.’ Even the mention of the words and concepts of Soren Kierkegaard was enough to drive me inward and melancholy. Despair. Sin. Guilt. Dread. Anxiety. Absurd.

“Since that time, I have read more of Kierkegaard, and I now understand that in the Navy I was reading his ‘indirect’ books. In his later writings, he came out more directly as a Christian philosopher. In any case, it is not my purpose now, and neither do I have the ability, to describe his systematic thought.

“In order to actually give comparative literary or philosophical analyses of these thinkers, I would have to study them again. That is not my intention in this book, but mostly to share the impressions that I retain of the days when I was reading my way through life, before meeting Srila Prabhupada. A rigorous analysis of the actual thought of these authors might also prove a valuable study for a Krsna conscious person. But Srila Prabhupada tells us that it is not really necessary.

“Since such a rigorous study is not my intention, I hope that my focus on recalling my impressions will find sympathy with some readers. I know my situation is not that unusual, and that many persons in my generation read the same books and went through the same changes. By going back once again, and recalling the outlines of what we went through, I hope we may achieve a further purification. We have to conclude once and for all that we do not need books of mental speculation, and that the world of art—if it is without Krsna—is another *cul de sac*. And I hope reviewing the memories of our search will increase our gratitude for what we have been given by Srila Prabhupada in the Gaudiya-Vaisnava *sampradaya*.”

Here Is Srila Prabhupada

p. 95

“We are like children trying to remember the spiritual master. In the old Boston temple, sometimes we played a game during *prasadam*. One day it was rainy outside, so I said, ‘Think of something Krsna conscious connected to rain.’

“Someone said, ‘When it rains, Krsna and His friends sit in a cave and have lunch there talking until the rain stops.’

“Another devotee said, ‘Krsna sends the rain at night so it won’t disturb the farmer’s day, but the ungrateful man wakes in the morning and complains that it didn’t rain enough. That’s in the *Krsna* book, “Description of Autumnn.”’

“Isn’t there something about the demigods raining down the benefits that people want?’

“Demigods shower flowers from the sky.’

“Rain is one of the elements, water.’

“Rain comes from *yajna*’

“Playing this game during *prasadam* always left us with a nice feeling for each other. It was better than fighting among ourselves or talking *prajalpa*.

“Let’s play it now. Can you think of anything connected to Prabhupada and rain?

“One time Prabhupada walked outside in the rain without an umbrella. Govinda dasi took the shower curtain off the shower and ran out and covered Srila Prabhupada with it.’

“When it was raining one day at the time he usually took his morning walk, Prabhupada said, “Today we shall take our walk sitting down.” Karandhara drove him around Beverly Hills in the rain while Srila Prabhupada closed his eyes and rested.’

“He walked in the snow in Manhattan in 1965.’

“He told us about Krsna, who held up Govardhana Hill in the rain, and he told us that Krsna went to collect wood for His guru and the rain came.

“He said that ISKCON *sankirtana* in India stopped the drought.

“Did Srila Prabhupada ever say anything about Ireland? It rains here almost all the time.’

“. . . Now we are here preaching on Prabhupada’s behalf. His books are being distributed, his *murti* is being worshiped. So he’s here. He’s here in Ireland, and it is raining.”

The Wild Garden: Collected Writings 1990-1993

p. 89

“Troubled voices and the faces of my disciples come through the mail. One is now more interested in Christian mysticism than in Krsna consciousness: ‘Yes, I am still (and always was) interested in Krsna-GOD-consciousness,’ she says. So Krsna is acceptable to her now in the larger (more nebulous) context of GOD. I myself dallied in Christian ways, so how can I condemn her? Hope she’ll return and one day understand Krsna is even better and sweeter than ‘GOD.’

“Others have trouble following the prohibition against illicit sex. I tell them to look for the higher taste. All things will pass in this world—our quick lives certainly—so maybe the bad habits and deviation of disciples will also pass as they mature with time. But if it also happens that a whole life will rush by without them climbing out of the pit, why did I initiate them? I took a chance. They were sincere at the time, and they promised.

“I took a deep breath in the cold air and felt the sense of life flowing by, not in compartmental units which I manage and control like a clerk, but flowing by beyond control. It is an illusion—time seems to pass slowly as I go through my morning, but then it is gone. Then it is *all gone*. Lesson: do as much as you can every day.”

Entering the Life of Prayer

p. 87

“Thinking of the prayer, ‘My dear Lord Krsna, please have mercy on this sinner,’ and Amala-bhakta is explaining it to me, why it is relevant and profound. I think I miss out because I am still not broken down in my pride. The word ‘sinner’ doesn’t strike a chord within me. ‘Please have mercy’ is also not a cry that comes from my heart and mouth so regularly due to pride and ignorance. You are in the grip of *maya*, you are content with the progress you have already made. You think that you don’t have to cry for mercy. That means you’re out of touch with reality. The fact that it is similar to the Jesus prayer makes you feel odd. I don’t say you have to recite this as a mantra, but say it sometimes if it feels right. Try to understand that it *should* feel right. If not that prayer, then recite something similar to it.

“*O Lord, O energy of the Lord, please engage me in Your service.* That actually has the same meaning as ‘Please have mercy,’ but you have to say it right. Just as when you see the *prasadam* prayer, you have to say it with real feeling and not just sense-gratification for eating. The feeling has to come from a sense of being fallen.

“I have a strong attachment for wellbeing and comfort. I know that the world is dangerous and full of distress, so I try to find a corner of peace. Spiritual life is very helpful in that way; it makes you peaceful against the storms of distress. But that is not enough reason for engaging in spiritual life. Also, if you are so attached to peace,

you may opt for a peace which is actually material in the mode of goodness. Don't be afraid of the struggle known as *tapo-divyam*, which you must undergo to obtain real spiritual service, eternal service to Krsna. The *tapasya* of outward services, which require effort and sacrifice, is very important.”

Visitors

p. 80

“Visitors don't like to be upset by bad talk. Neither do hosts, so both participate in making merry and avoiding unpleasantries.

“Visitors over special observance days make for a coming and going, like a parking lot on a busy day at a resort. ‘I have to go early.’ ‘Can I come early?’ Some had to cancel. Some decided to stay.

“The main program is chanting Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare. Everything else is improvisation. Some talk of Krsna's advent, some talk about the glories of Srila Prabhupada. You can read from a prepared homage. You can read from the book. You can read from your heart in appreciation of Prabhupada, who we knew when he was on the earth. You can speak about Krsna from whatever *bhava* you have, or from the books, mechanically. Gathering of guests enhances the readings. Don't be bored. Most everyone's fasting, but a migraineur doesn't fast.

“They lined up for a photograph, husbands and wives. I had an idea how it would look. All the husbands would be taller than their wives. But then someone pushed before the photo and it was all disarrayed. They had to take it again, but it was disarrayed—the men fell down the steps, and they were shorter than their wives. This was interesting to see. The children were odd sizes, some smaller than the

others.

“Gatherings are inevitably family ties. *Brahmacaris* have to accept that and rejoice in the fact that it’s not really family, it’s Vaisnava. The real family is Vaisnava, not little material units. The visiting is with the larger Vaisnava family, Prabhupada’s family.”

Prabhupada Nectar, Volume 3

“PRABHUPADA SAID

“*On Christianity*

“Regarding the Christian Trinity, I believe it is God, the holy ghost, and the son. A person in Krsna consciousness accepts this by the name Visnu, Paramatma and *jiva*. God is a person, the Holy Spirit or Supersoul is a person, and the living entity is also a person. Also Mary is the representation of the energy of God, either as internal energy, Radharani, or as external energy, Durga, the energy of Godhead, can be considered the mother of the living entities. There is no clash between the Bible and the Vedas; simply some people formulate their personal ideas and cause quarreling.

“Nobody can say the Bible is meant for the same class of men as the *Bhagavad-gita*. *Bhagavad-gita* is the ABCs of spiritual knowledge. Beyond that is the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. How great the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* is, nobody can imagine. And beyond that is *Caitanya-caritamrta*. But beginning from the Bible or Koran on up, the principle remains the same. Just like beginning from the pocket dictionary up to the unabridged dictionary.’ (*Letter of April 19, 1968*)”

Shack Notes: Moments While at a Writing Retreat

p. 154

“I am waiting for the moment to surface.

“Our Krsna book group spoke about entering different dimensions of consciousness when we read. Here we are, absorbed in the story of Krsna defeating the serpent Kaliya, and suddenly Maharaja Pariksit asks Sukadeva a question: ‘Why did Kaliya leave his island home, and why was Garuda so antagonistic to him?’ This question did not abruptly break our trance on Krsna’s pastimes. We flowed with it, with Maharaja Pariksit and Sukadeva. We are following Sukadeva, who is guiding us through the whole spiritual journey. When Sukadeva speaks of Krsna in Vrndavana, we are there; and when he speaks of Kaliya fighting Garuda, we are there.

“I joked that it would be nice if after our reading, we stayed stuck in the trance on Krsna’s pastimes and became forgetful of ordinary reality. Unfortunately, there is no real danger of that, but I wouldn’t mind being able to forget sleep once in a while (or a few meals) due to absorption in *krsna-lila*. “The world is too much with us, late and soon/ Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

“Now I am here in the shack relating the scene. Ananta, Baladeva and Rama Raya have vanished back into the house, the *Krsna* book is closed, and I am making bird tracks on the page.”

Japa Walks, Japa Talks

p.18

“Devi-dasi asked me a personal question. She thinks I put a lot of effort into chanting—apparently because I make such a big fuss about it. ‘So I would like to ask

you what inspires you.’

“I don't know if I can call it inspiration, but I have a drive which comes from *sastra* itself that doesn't let me forget the importance of chanting. I find chanting easy. I can't do everything in Krsna consciousness—for example, I find it difficult to live in close association with other people, to manage their problems or their money. I also find it difficult to confront nondevotees in certain preaching situations. But chanting is easy. Even a child can chant.

“What inspires me? Lord Caitanya's mercy inspires me. He has given us such easy access to Him through the holy names. I don't want to turn down the opportunity, even though I don't get immediate good results. I am inspired to put at least some effort into my chanting and remind myself of its prime importance.

“Also, chanting appeals to me in an aesthetic sense. Maybe I was a monk in my past life—at least I aspired to be a man of prayer. It's so beautiful—Prabhupada and the *acaryas* have given us the chance to take our beads in hand and to repeat again and again the *japa* of the holy name. Similarly, the congregational singing of *kirtana* appeals to me. It's so charming and wonderful of Krsna to think of such a process! This chanting movement is such a nice movement, and it's so easily introduced. Therefore, although I don't get the results I hanker for, whenever I think of chanting, it always appeals to me. It's always available to me and easy enough to keep trying. No matter how many times I fail, I never think of abandoning the attempt. I am always ready to try again.”

Writing Sessions

Wicklów Writing Sessions

“Session #17

“9:12 A.M.

“New speaking project, “Memories;” an outline for a talk on chanting Hare Krsna japa, stopped short fearing a headache.

“I just began a new project of speaking into a microphone: ‘Memories.’ I started one on the town Bay Terrace (New York City, USA) . I feel elated. It’s natural to be happy with a new project. But it may also come from the fact that I haven’t felt so elated about the Writing Sessions. I tell myself, ‘Yes, the WS is hard, it’s composting, etc. You can’t expect so much to come right away,’ and so on. But does the lack of shape or usability get me down?

“It shouldn’t. I should be willing to write. But it should not be boring. I go through patches of difficult writing. Hare Krsna.

“Anyway, we can focus on memories without trying to make them into whole anecdotes or vignettes. That seems to be my style. Don’t dwell on something too long. ‘Oh, God, you’re not going to tell us all those awful stories, are you, of learning to play the guitar and teenage vices, stealing records, etc.?’

“I may, I may.

““Are they going to get into the WS and soil these pages?’

“Maybe, but don’t talk like that. What do you mean soil? If it’s your life, you should be willing to admit it.

““Yes, but there are malicious and dirty and self-destructive things one should keep out.’

“You are right. I want to ascend to the place above the modes, to the realm of Haridhama. I know that it exists and I want to get there. But I have to admit it warms my heart to talk of these things. Bhaktivinoda Thakura also spoke of his whole life, and sometimes Srila Prabhupada did too. Even before conversion, the sinner was a soul in a body. And he looks back and is happy. Partly he feels happy because of the relief, the sheer joy of not being in that condition anymore, and perhaps the pleasure of being a survivor.

“I will pick out a section to speak on next Sunday here in Wicklow. Another section of *Cc.*, maybe those questions asked by the residents of Kulina-grama, even though I did it recently. The brothers Satyaraja and others asked Lord Caitanya and He answers, “What is a Vaisnava?” and the importance of chanting. I could get into the emphasis about chanting Hare Krsna, but what a hypocrite, me talking as if I hold it important in my life. You could read from your own book about it. But no, better just to do it from *Cc.* If I had to draw from my own life, I would say that I start at 1:30 A.M. and sit in the darkness and look out at the skylight at whatever light is coming in, although I would prefer to have a small votive light on the altar. Thus, I would admit to them that it’s okay to try to make the atmosphere as conducive as possible. This is called ‘groundwork for ecstasy.’ Talk about these externals of chanting from your own life. But for the internals, the main challenge before us is to pay attention.

“You could read BVT’s statement about this in relation to inattention and enthusiasm. Chant, chant, chant. It is a pleasure. ‘But I can’t, can’t, can’t,’ says the guy in the cartoon.

“This is the Hare Krsna movement. Chant Hare Krsna on your beads.

“The questions by the people of Kulina-grama also dwell on recognizing Vaisnavas in different categories and honoring them all. Honoring Vaisnavas means anyone who chants the holy names of God. That could include anyone who chants the Jesus Prayer or the names of Allah. But of course, it means particularly a chanter of the Hare Krsna mantra. I’m afraid to say that some of the chanters of the Hare Krsna mantra seem to be demons. When they’re not chanting the Hare Krsna mantra, they’re very destructive to ISKCON. In that case, they’re committing offenses when they chant. We don’t associate with them. But still they are chanters. It might be in fact that we may one day be persecuted or killed by a chanter of Hare Krsna. In Northern Ireland, isn’t it something like that. Both sides are followers of Jesus, and yet if you are Protestant you may be killed by an IRA man or vice versa. I don’t want to get into that controversial groove. I’m writing it here because it came up and also you might want to be prepared for it if someone raised the question.

“That’s another injunction of free-writing. It helps you go over territory so that you’re ready for later exchanges. I just unearthed a snake in the fact that a chanter of Hare Krsna might behave like a demon or an enemy and be more harmful to you than a non-chanter.

“We have the order of the guru who says chanting is very important, and that should be enough for us. All the members of this movement are carrying this out to the best of their ability, and we have to do it also. To hold this as sacred and to attempt it is our duty, and whether we know it or not, the holy names have great potency. It is prescribed that especially in this age there is no other form of worship or *yajna* that is possible. You can see some of those quotes. So, it is important to

look at *sastras* to support the view and not just go on your own gut feelings about whether chanting is important in improving yourself.

“It is a cool day and sunny right now. It’s good enough weather for Madhu to be up working on the van. I have a sweater on, and over that a sweatshirt and a knit hat and two pairs of socks, sitting in the hut. No heat. Heat is the body.

“O Lord, I had to take one pill already to keep working for the cause of the Writing Sessions. It is a life of practice, it is composting. It is the act of kindness to let yourself do something that is possible for you rather than something impossible. Hey, go for it. So, I’m feeling elated by the beginning of a new project of *Memories*. I want to rush in and tell Madhu to get me some memory books such as Maya Angelou’s and Patricia Hempel’s. I thought of Sean O’Casey, but his autobiography is too carefully written in the third person, and so on. I don’t want to remember everything chronologically, nor so carefully either. I want to range from one memory to another. The act of remembering with joy. Every artist does that, and so some go beyond the actual states to imagination. For now, let’s just remember and see where it takes us.

“Doing the speaking of memories in the hut takes away some time and energy from my Writing Sessions. The WS may therefore be a little shorter. All right. One could say I’ve been holding back, reticent, not able to break through with the WS. I don’t know what it is. Partly it’s a commendable seriousness. I don’t feel inclined to play a lot with words. I feel like a grownup asked to do childish things when my own self suggests, ‘Why don’t you try automatic writing or make a list of any words that come to mind?’

“Of course, I’ll do some of that but I’m looking for something else. I’m certainly flailing, and it hasn’t been easy.

“Just now I heard a car dig out. The devotees usually don’t start cars like that, so fast and violent. Maybe it’s a delivery vehicle with the mail pack. That will be a trip.

“So, friend, you have done the *Padayatra*, and I am proud of you. What it is, I don’t know. And I am proud of you for attempting your poems each day now, for working them through a third draft. After a third draft we can file them away for now and look at them later. Hare Krsna Hare Krsna.

“Stand by for the news or the threat, be on guard. The Coast Guard, the State Troopers and the military, the courts are all on guard to tackle the wrongdoers and put them in prison or fine them. They are professions of law and order. Others want to protect the rights of individuals so that in the name of law there is not a tyranny of individual rights. Freedom of religion and freedom of the press are guaranteed by the First Amendment. The Bill of Rights, ten amendments. Then women’s rights got added. The Hare Krsna movement is not mentioned, but we went twice to the Supreme Court and twice lost on technical cases involving our right to distribute books in public or semipublic places. We were not, in these cases, asking for the right to exist but for the right to proselytize, which has always been controversial because of the techniques the devotees use and which the movement itself admits were sometimes cheating. But when our case went to the Supreme Court to ask for relief from the Robin George suit, the case was sent down and in such a way that was favorable for us.

“I certainly identify with the ups and downs and the fortunes of the Hare Krsna movement. If it gets a bad name then when I’m in public with my Hare Krsna

dress and shaven head and *tilaka*, I may be seen as “one of them.” That’s a selfish consideration. Besides that, I desire the aim of the movement to be pushed ahead. If I have any sense of the improvement in the world, it is by spreading of the values of the *sankirtana* movement. Not always in the sense of growing numbers but the sending of roots deeply, and so on. The concept of the congregation is actually coming into place. And devotees are existing in greater numbers outside of the temple and not being considered outcasts just for that reason. Times are changing.

“I don’t have much more time left to make my own pronouncements. Why are you so happy that you could speak a memory of Bay Terrace this morning? It had no KC in it. So, why are you happy?”

“I don’t know. I admit it was life and it touched me. I want to live in those things. And if it keeps going, there will be KC memories also. Some embarrassing ones I’ll have to go through as in writing these Writing Sessions, which have to go through long stretches sometimes before I can break through. So, the speaking memories will be the same. We can share them, and they will be an overall triumph of a person becoming a devotee. This same person who is so blind and insignificant became a devotee by the grace of the spiritual master who came to America. Hare Krsna Hare Krsna.

“Have you stopped drawing pictures? Do you no longer sing the blues? Are you about to execute the best program of reinforcement? Are you just now writing sentences without caring whether they make any sense? And is this one of the important differences between a diary (journal) and a writing practice?”

“Yes, the diary is usually reflection. But no, Tristine Rainer says that the diary can also be automatic writing. It doesn’t have to make sense.

“Destroyers, battleships, the *Ranger*, the carrier, the supercarrier, me in the Atlantic, me in the Med. Oh, please save me from the beds. Please save me from the iniquities I committed. So many books now it will spend your head, you better take shelter in the perfect ones.

“Don’t do forced work that is not a pleasure on this writing retreat. Quit when you don’t want to do it. ‘But I thought we were supposed to keep going by the clock.’

“Yes, that’s true but I did fifteen minutes talking, so now you can only do forty-five minutes of writing. I don’t want to incur another headache.

“Open the window and give us some fresh air.

“I went into Tulasi’s house and recited in Sanskrit and English out loud the beautiful prayers, “O Tulasi, beloved of Krsna, I bow before you again and again...I want to be the maidservant...my only wish...is to swim in the love of Sri Sri Radha and Govinda.” If you say that prayer sincerely every day in her presence, I can see it making a real difference. It is *gopi-bhava*. That means *manjari-bhava*. Kapoor says Rupa Goswami was the first one to use the word *manjari*, and he introduced the *upasana*, that form of worship. It is better even than thinking of oneself as a *gopi*. *Manjaris* get to directly serve Radha. There’s a list given and most of the *acaryas* (followers of Lord Caitanya, Gosvamis) are in the *manjari* identity.

This is more or less common knowledge and could even be called academic or theoretical knowledge taught in the Gaudiya community. SP didn’t teach *manjari-bhava* or *upasana* because it would have been a caricature of real things. *Manjari* is imbued with conjugal sentiment of assisting Radha and Her lover Krsna, seeing Them in the *kunja*, assisting in Their intimate pastimes. So, if you have mundane lust you can’t have anything to do with it. It’s a dangerous game.

“Risk, fear of the next headache. He keeps writing anyway. Well, don’t do that. Quit a little early and take care of yourself. So that you don’t have to take extra pills.

“Okay, but I have been going only a half-hour.’

“Well, that’s okay too.

“Just a little more. The wave causes the ocean to fall down. The devotee prayed, the last person living. Markandeya Rsi made a big mistake asking to see the devastation of the universe. I want to see the back to Godhead. I don’t want to pray for the wrong thing, or it may take millions of eons before you get back on track. Keep this in mind when you read other books.

“(thirty-two minutes, six typed pages, Wicklow)”

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“Session #18

“3:55 A.M., August 2, 1996

“I’m feeling a strong resistance to writing. ‘Why? Don’t even want to discuss it with you.

“You, demander
and you, reader.

“Think of Steve Rosen. What impels *him* to write? And all the others. I know why SP wrote. His desire was to please his spiritual master by spreading KC. He personally felt compassion, wanted to fight against the ignorant, and to establish the

KC movement. He had the most important literature to deliver in the translation with the Bhaktivedanta Purports.

“That’s why he wrote. And he said he loved to do it.

“Rupa Gosvami, Raghunatha dasa Gosvami...

“Resistance I feel is different. You get tired of making a show. And then you get tired of trying to write free of making a show.

“Oh well, maybe you better just quit it and sit in the garden. Just read.

“Can’t do that either. Creating bug got me.

“But yeah, I will read.

“You see, I get headaches, and they also prevent me from pounding out pages at a clip as I was doing, ten typed per hour, ten handwritten per hour. That’s why I thought of sitting and talking and even then, not pushing out as many words as I could speak in a half-hour. You can pause and speak, pause and speak.

“Rent trailers . . .

“I don’t even know anymore why I write this way. Because if you’re going to fill up a page and not stop and daydream over it, you must agree to keep the hand moving. But that means

“trash, subsistence

“recalling Debus in the U.S. Marines and my own dream back in the Navy:

“The ship suddenly approached a Major League baseball stadium while a game was in progress.

“‘Hey look!’ I said, interrupting a conversation. ‘It’s a baseball stadium ahead!’ (Saratoga sailors had joined with those on another ship).

“It was an awesome sight for us on the ship to see the playing field. The audience and players in the stadium were also overcome by our approach. We passed over them like a very serious shadow – they finished the play and then offered respects to the nation’s protectors, the big gray ship darkened the sky and moved over the playing field and then beyond.

“In the morning I was enthusiastic to speak a childhood memory. By afternoon I lost all interest in that. I also felt no drive for the Writing Session. Felt too intimidated by the recurring headaches. To do a WS takes so much energy and you don’t get immediate KC, so I thought, why attempt it? Let it go.

“Where does that leave me? Read some and thought, why don’t I do just straight KC activities like reading *Cc.* and that’s all. That’s what Maharaja Pariksit did at the end of his life. But this is my preaching and we take a risk, stay in touch with the material world and use it for the Lord’s service.

“So he says, but right now he’s not sure what expression to make. Besides, the mail pack may hit today. If you want, you could go fulltime on answering that for at least two days. Maybe that by itself would bring you to a new place and you would feel what you want to do next.

“Chant Hare Krsna, I’ll tell them on Sunday.

“The man he draws is half himself, half serious. A profile of Alfred Hitchcock. Hirschfeld did those caricatures of Hollywood persons, famous for his expert hand – made fun of people’s features. Jimmy Thompson did it too but says, ‘No more.’

“What is it I’m trying to do?

“Stay awake.

“Get peanut butter on my sandwich. Finagle my way into spiritual grace. Be a boy. Recall blintzes in the blintz shop on the Lower East Side and try to claim that memory is spiritual. That wasn’t soon before I met him. Now tell us what it was like to be young and not busted. You still felt free sometimes and treasured your lonely life. But that can’t last long.

“Yes, I’m willing to talk it out in the garden.

“Jaundice is *avidya*. Cure is Hare Krsna mantra. It’s sweet but we taste it as bitter. Be enthusiastic. That’s like saying be in love. You can’t order yourself to be enthusiastic.

“Then at least go to the atmosphere conducive to it.

“Write something people can benefit by.

“Wall Street

“Nixon, prose, Malcom X, days of the 60s. I don’t read news.

“Album

“Now I’m about to stop this, blinking the teary eyes. Catch a little rest before the morning walk.

“(fifteen-twenty minutes, 4 1/2 pages)”