

Free Write Journal #118

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Free Writes

Diwali/ Govardhana Puja

Yesterday was Diwali, the Festival of Lights. Lord Rama kills Ravana, is reunited with Sita and returns in His flower airplane to His capital city of Ayodhya, where the whole population turns out, the whole city lit up with lamps, and the people joyously receiving Their Lordships. All the Hindus observe Diwali by lighting *diyas* (decorated clay candleholders). Families exchange sweets. It is a festival of good over evil, of light over darkness. Our two imported devotees from Trinidad like to observe Diwali in their home country. But this year they cannot go. They miss the grand festivities where everyone paints their house and cleans everything, and the government sponsors a festival area in which ISKCON has its place. It's in the evening, and devotees hold *kirtana* for six hours. It goes on every night for ten nights. For the Vaisnavas, the last day of Diwali observes the pastime of Mother Yasoda binding naughty Krsna to the grinding mortar. At Viraha Bhavan, we lit *diyas* and placed them on the steps of our front porch. In Trinidad there are stages for dancing and cultural programs. In the tropical climate, the people stay out for most of the night observing the lamps and partying. Here at Viraha Bhavan in Stuyvesant Falls, New York, it was too cold to stay for long outdoors—just enough time to light the lamps. In *gurukula* at Krsna-Balaram Mandir in Vrndavana, they light lamps on all the rooftops of the *gurukula* and on the balconies. In Viraha Bhavan we mostly have to observe it in our minds and with a reading from the Ramayana.

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Govardhana Puja was observed at Viraha Bhavan, Stuyvesant Falls, with a restricted

gathering due to COVID-19. The four core members of the ashram were present, plus the three steady Vaisnava guests who come every Sunday to do *seva*. Our regular daily out-loud reading group was tuned in by WhatsApp technology. The daily out-loud readers were able to watch our circumambulation of a Govardhana Hill and our *aratika*. The Hill was a sizeable mound of *halavah* and little signs to indicate holy places in Vraja such as Syama kunda, Radha-kunda, etc. In the reading, we heard three chapters of *govardhana-lila* from the *Krsna* book. The feast was sumptuous, especially the many sweetballs and *halavah* offered to Govardhana Hill. The three guests had to wear masks and eat in a separate room. But later we gathered and discussed *krsna-katha*. Gaura-Nitai and the Jagannatha Deities wore a fresh change of dress, and the altar was decorated by many flowers supplied by Muktavandya. It was not a big crowd with *pujaris* throwing *prasadam* from the altar at the devotees, but we fulfilled the warning in *Krsna* book that says if one doesn't observe Govardhana Puja, he'll be bitten by the snakes on Govardhana Hill and killed. We did our duty, and everyone was pleased.

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Karttika Project

Our *pujari*, Krsna dasi, has been waiting a long time to make a complete renovation of the *pujari* room. Yesterday she got the aid of Lalita-kaisori, and they cleaned out and rearranged the whole space. The *pujari* room has now been made fully usable and accessible. All the clothes of Radha-Govinda are put in separate plastic bags to keep them clean. Big Gaura-Nitai's clothes are also arranged in plastic covers to keep them fresh and clean on hangers. The space is now prepared to observe Karttika festivals like Govardhana-puja and various appearance and disappearance days. Gopastami is also observed during this time.

During this time, Muktavandya will come and bring lots of flowers, which he gets from the flower markets and which he used to sell for many years. Karttika is Radharani's month. It's for

connecting to Vrndavana, meditating on the holy *dhama* if we cannot physically go there. Karttika is an extraordinary month; spiritual purification is multiplied many times for service done during this time. Everyone tries to increase their service to Radha and Krsna and make extra advancement. It's a time for *seva*, taking vows. Everyone knows the offering of lamps and singing of Damodarastakam bring back purification greater than at other times. One who is fortunate enough to have been in Vrndavana during Karttika month can meditate on the special power of the observances during this month. Even if one is not in Vrndavana during Karttika, one can meditate on being there and make a prayer "to increase one's devotion."

Visvarupa Takes *Sannyasa*

In our out-loud reading of *Caitanya-bhagavata*, we heard how Nimai's older brother was completely detached from material affairs. He spent all his time absorbed in devotional books and devotional service. When Visvarupa heard that his parents were arranging for his marriage, he immediately left home and took *sannyasa*. His *sannyasa* name was Sankararanya. Visvarupa's parents were devastated that their older son had left home and become renounced. They still had Visvambhara, and He continued His life of concentrated study in Sanskrit and scriptures. His father was worried that He would become so detached in self-realization that he too would leave home and take up the renounced order. So his father told Visvambhara to completely stop his scholarly studies and do as He pleased. Visvambhara was very disappointed to hear this, but He returned to His mischievous pastimes with equally mischievous boys. They would break into neighbors' homes, steal their butter and milk products, and break the pots and damage everything they found. Nimai's delinquency was so extreme that all the neighbors became alarmed. They pleaded with Jagannatha Misra to let Nimai return to His scholarly studies. Being so unanimously pressured to do this, Jagannatha Misra conceded and told Nimai He could return to His scholarly studies. Nimai was very satisfied with this, and He returned to His deep concentration on studying

Sanskrit and scriptures.

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We are hearing of the childhood pastimes of Visvambhara. During this time, His elder brother Visvarupa left home and took *sannyasa*. After the departure of Visvarupa, Jagannatha Misra passed away from the world. This caused great grief for Sacidevi. But Nimai pacified her, and she focused her love on Him. Nevertheless, although Nimai loved His mother and spent His time in scholastic studies, He continued His bad habits of making havoc in the home. He would destroy all the foodstuffs and pots and even tried to break down the walls and doors of their dwelling. Sacidevi pleaded with Him, ‘You have destroyed all our food and cooking paraphernalia. How will you eat tomorrow?’ Nimai went off to school, and when He came back He met with Sacidevi in a secluded place. He gave her sufficient gold to make up for all the damage He had done. Sacidevi was amazed, but she didn’t know where the gold had come from. She asked five or ten people about the gold, whether it was genuine variety, of where it had come from. They assured her that it was top quality gold. So whenever there was damage by Nimai in the house, He would present gold to her to make up for the debt. This was their *rasa* as son and mother.

At this time Nimai caused great trouble with the other children. He used to snatch their clothes away and not give them back. He argued with them about their *sastras*, and at first the fights were verbal, but then the arguments turned into violence, splashing with mud and dirt.

Nimai also harassed His elders. He would go underwater at the Ganges and grab the legs of a *brahmana* while he was trying to stand in the water and say his *gayatri* mantras. When the elders complained to Nimai’s father, Jagannatha Misra, he swore that he would beat his son for His mischief to the men at the Ganges. But when he went to the Ganges to punish Nimai, Nimai was warned and didn’t go to the Ganges that day. He took a different path, and went home from

school without bathing in the Ganges. His hair and clothes were all dry and sprinkled with ink, as if He had just come home from the school. When His father and mother saw Him in this way, they forgot their anger and showered affection on their beautiful son, praising their good fortune that He was living in their home.

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Nimai gave hints of His identity as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, but no one could understand Him because of the covering of *yogamaya*. Although He was proud and no one could defeat Him, they all offered Him respect and were submissive to Him. The people of Navadvipa admired His extraordinary beauty, and they considered He must be a great personality. But they lamented that He never spoke about Krsna. Sometimes He dropped hints that one day He would reveal Himself as a great Vaisnava. One day Nimai met Srivasa Pandita, who chastised Him, calling Him “O best of the arrogant.” Srivasa said that Nimai was wasting His time with mundane knowledge. Srivasa Pandita said,

“Why do You uselessly waste Your time by not worshiping Krsna? Why do You spend day and night simply teaching mundane knowledge? Why do people study? Education is only for understanding devotional service of Lord Krsna. Therefore don’t uselessly waste Your time any longer. You studied enough—now You should worship Krsna.”

Nimai smiled and said, “Listen, Pandita, that will certainly be done by your mercy.”

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A great *sannyasi*, disciple of Madhavendra Puri, Isvara Puri, lived as a wandering mendicant. He came to Navadvipa and stayed at the house of Sacimata, who treated him with great respect and affection. Nimai met with Isvara Puri and discussed with him. Isvara Puri told Nimai he had

written a book about Krsna and would like Nimai to read it and point out any faults that He found in it. Nimai said,

“Whoever finds faults in a devotee’s description of Lord Krsna is a sinful person. Krsna is certainly pleased with His devotee’s poetry, even though it is imperfectly composed . . . One who finds fault with the devotee is himself at fault, for a devotee’s descriptions are meant only for the pleasure of Krsna. Therefore who will dare find fault with your descriptions of Krsna’s pastimes?”

Hearing Nimai’s reply was like a shower of nectar on the body of Isvara Puri. Isvara Puri insisted that Nimai make a critique of his poetry, pointing out faults. Nimai then mentioned a fault in the verb root of a verse. After Nimai said this and left, Isvara Puri considered the matter from many different angles, and he concluded that his version was correct. He and Nimai used to sit for an hour or two and discuss Isvara Puri’s book. When they met again, Isvara Puri explained that what he had written was actually correct. “When the Lord heard this explanation, He was very satisfied with His servant’s victory and did not find any further fault. In this way Nimai spent several months enjoying scholastic pastimes with Isvara Puri.”

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Mother Saci arranges for the second marriage of her son Visvambhara. She chooses the highly-qualified Visnupriya, who comes from a very good family. The rich merchant Buddhimanta Khan comes forward and bears all the expenses for the lavish wedding. They performed all the rituals that were in current practice. Buddhimanta Khan said this marriage would not be like a *brahmana*’s marriage, which is very simple, but he would make it so lavish that Nimai would appear to be a prince. The whole marriage ceremony was known as *adi-vasa*. In the afternoon, many musicians came to the *pandal* that had been erected, and they played joyous tunes. There

was much charity distributed, including clothes, grains, butter and cows. Some greedy *brahmanas* changed their clothes several times and came back to Misra's house to receive seconds and thirds in charity. Nimai said that everyone could receive charity three times, but if they tried to get more they would be disgraced. The *brahmanas* gathered and chanted sacred hymns, and Nimai sat in their midst. Everyone who saw this was amazed and pleased to see Nimai blessed by the *brahmanas* and professional reciters. Some said the couple looked like Laksmi and Narayana, some said they looked just like Cupid and his consort, some said they looked like Rama and Sitadevi. Mother Saci distributed oil, perfume, sandalwood paste and vermilion numerous times, and everyone was satisfied. Mother Saci and the other leading women performed all the rituals that were in current practice. The same rituals were going on lavishly in Visnupriya's house. Everyone sang and danced in happiness for the couple. What to speak of the children, even the old men sang and danced. After Visnupriya circumambulated Nimai seven times and exchanged garlands, they looked at each other with glances of love, as if for the first time. The demigods headed by Lord Brahma showered flowers. The associates of the bride lifted her in her chair, and the associates of Nimai lifted Him in His chair, in competition to see who could lift their party higher.

Nectar of Devotion Lectures

I'm listening to Prabhupada's *NOD* lectures from Vrndavana in 1972. He had Pradyumna read out loud from the book, and Prabhupada would interrupt him at intervals and "fluff out" the text with extra points.

"All-auspicious" means it is good for the entire world. When one is Krsna conscious, liberation is at his door begging for some service. It is very important to control the senses, which are compared to venomous serpents. But if the fangs of the serpent are removed and they are broken, there is no fear from the snake (except for children). A person in Krsna consciousness

regards the pleasures of the heavenly planets up to Indraloka as mere phantasmagoria, forgetfulness of the real goal of life, devotional service. A person in Krsna consciousness is not interested in beautiful women or children in family life. He has no desires for riches but accepts whatever Krsna sends him and goes on blissfully serving the Lord. In his lectures, Prabhupada elaborated on practically all of Rupa Gosvami's points, thus giving us an enriched *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu*. Rupa Gosvami gives us numerous examples from the pastimes of Krsna to substantiate his points, and Prabhupada expands these points exponentially.

Election Results

After a week's delay, *The Week* newsmagazine finally arrived. I was relieved to read that Trump was clearly defeated in the vote for U.S. President. He is an irrational authoritarian who inaugurated many bad policies and alienated the United States from its allies around the world. I will not follow the news closely now, but I hope Trump will be duly evicted from the White House before too long. His refusal to accept Joe Biden's victory is another piece of arrogance from the president, who has misruled this country for the last four years. He has stirred up feelings of racial tension and sided with white supremacy movements. His record of anti-immigration is simply wrong, and his many impulsive "tweets" have divided the nation.

Devotional Poetry Workshop

Aspiring devotee Jan Potemkin is holding a devotional poetry workshop sponsored by Brooklyn ISKCON. He's inviting devotee-poets to gather on 11/28 at 11:00 A.M. and hear from him as he reads select poetry, and he invites the participants to read and discuss their poetry. He says he is using Rupa Gosvami's *Padyavali* and other collections such as Mirabhai and Vidyakara. He's also presenting some examples of my haiku. He writes, "With all this poetry in front of me, I felt inspired to write one in that old flavor. I hope you enjoy it."

Footprints

When He is not with them
 the cowherd boys seek His footprints,
 and the *tulasi* leaves within,
 marvel at the divine markings pressed onto soft earth,
 the enchanting fragrance.

They peer among the trees, along the cowpaths, near the ponds,
 under branches, amid the grass and flowers.

How can I be like those friends,
 so sure of His protection,
 so desirous of His presence?

I scour the books for an answer
 listen to the *kirtana*, the *japa*,
 gaze at the Deities, the paintings, press everyone for information.

When will I become one of those divine searchers?

My Poetry

I've decided not to read my poems from *Kaleidoscope* on Madana-Gopala's Zoom program. I've been reading them again and again, and I find they are too avante-garde for the ISKCON audience. All the senior devotees are doing Zoom programs, and every one of them is straight Krsna-conscious *siddhanta*. I feel like I'll be misunderstood. I'll be like William Carlos Williams in his poem to his wife, "I Wanted to Write a Poem":

"I wanted to write a poem
 that you could understand

because what is the use otherwise
but you've got to try real hard!"

I'll continue to publish my poems in books, but I'm shy to go on a limb and present them live on Zoom to the devotee audience.

He Lives Forever--On Separation from Srila Prabhupada

p.44

“When a husband and wife want to become renounced, they enter the order of life known as *vanaprastha*. In that stage, the woman no longer combs her hair or makes attempts to dress very nicely for her husband. So sex attraction is diminished or lost. She hardly speaks to him. She just becomes his partner in his Krsna conscious duty —no sense gratification in the name of Krsna consciousness. So Vidarbhi lived like that.

“In his purports, Srila Prabhupada has compared the relationship of Vidarbhi and Malayadhvaja to the relationship between the disciple and the spiritual master. He compares Vidarbhi's renunciation to the vows of austerity accepted by a disciple. Free from sense gratification and the desire to secure his own self-interest from the guru, the disciple just does his duty. And just as the wife receives all spiritual benefits simply by serving her husband, the disciple will get spiritual perfection by serving the spiritual master.

“Our relationship with Prabhupada is always that we are his menial servants, and we should never forget that. It's not that he goes into the background of our consciousness and we become the lords of all we survey and try to carve out some kind of enjoyment for ourselves. Devotional service means you serve him; and

serving him means serving his mission. He is a great personality. He doesn't take service only in dressing and feeding; he takes service in executing big worldwide activities, which are his personal service to his spiritual master and to Krsna. So anything you can do to help in that preaching is just as direct and personal as bodily service. Srila Prabhupada would give us that bodily service also, but now it is not possible. Now everyone should take to the service of this Krsna consciousness movement, which is Srila Prabhupada's mission."

Prabhupada Meditations, Volume 3

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“From Prabhupada's Point of View: Alone in New York City

“Suppose you want to tell of your experience in facing a tiger. You were traveling unarmed through the jungle, when suddenly you came upon a tiger. As the narrator, you build up the suspense, ‘There I was, face to face with a ferocious tiger!’

“We can empathize with the terror you must have felt, simply by stretching our imaginations a little. We feel your danger. Similarly, we may try to put ourselves in Prabhupada's position. What was it like for him to come alone to America and to live in New York City? Let us think of those circumstances and appreciate how it was from Prabhupada’s point of view.

“In New York, Prabhupada is wrapped up in the preaching mood. He thinks, ‘My dear Lord Krsna, why have you brought me here? This place of demons is far away from Vrndavana. But You must have some purpose.’ Prabhupada's disciples find themselves in similar situations when they go to preach in countries where there is no ISKCON temple to support them. Fortunately, by Prabhupada's work, the

International Society for Krishna Consciousness is never very far away from us. Yet occasionally we are on our own. At times like that, we can remember what it was like for Prabhupada alone in New York City.

“Prabhupada was very compassionate to accept his first disciples. Nowadays, those disciples tell of the old days in a humorous way, but for Prabhupada, it was not merely humorous. Sometimes it was painful to see how degraded the youth were.

“Prabhupada realized in a humble way that this was the opportunity Krsna was giving him. He said that our natural beauty was covered over by a morose, dirty appearance.

“Those who became his disciples were respectful, but some people were insulting, even while sitting in the audience of the *Bhagavad-gita* lectures. Prabhupada's disciples were indirectly offensive in their failure to understand the etiquette of approaching the guru. Also, after initiation, they were offensive when they broke the vows. These things were painful to Prabhupada.

“We get a little hint of how Prabhupada saw things from some of his expressions. He said that working with the broken youth in America was similar to picking up a discarded wire and an old gourd and making a *vina* out of it. Prabhupada said that his work was similar to Lord Ramacandra's task of creating an army of monkeys.

“Prabhupada might have thought like this: ‘At first I planned to open a Gaudiya Math branch in uptown Manhattan where ladies and gentlemen could come. But Krsna is arranging it that these bewildered hippies—all young enough to be my grandchildren and great-grandchildren—are coming forward. They are asking me, ‘Swamiji, can I take LSD? Do we really have to follow these rules?’

“Prabhupada preached wholeheartedly. He was a refined and elderly gentleman, yet he took on rough, untrained disciples. He gave himself in a loving relationship, yet always remained dependent on Krsna—and that is what made him attractive to us.”

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“Poem

“I can’t believe the horoscope reading that said
it was sin for me to speak his name.

What about his *pranama* mantras,
and the *prema-dhvani* prayers?

And he gave me the mantra typed on paper,

‘I offer my obeisances to His Divine Grace

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami . . .’

Maybe they mean I talk too much:

‘Don’t take the name in vain.’

But talk is also action.

For a writer to put the names on every page,

Lord Krsna, Lord Caitanya, the spiritual master--

is assurance of value. They may say I don’t serve,

I just talk about you.

But I reply, ‘This is my service and

Prabhupada accepts it.’

It is true that you are far away,
 just as the nectar of the *maha-mantra*
 is far away from me.
 But I can talk and write—and read your book.
 Of all the books,
 yours are the truest:
 ‘Although the Lord is one,
 in His various forms,
 still His form as the young enjoyer of the *gopis*
 and companion of the cowherd boys
 is the most perfect form.’
 Because you say it, we adhere.
 You say we worship
 Laksmi-Narayana within Radha-Krsna
 and therefore we are happy.
 Whatever you say.

Prabhupada Meditations, Volume 4

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“Prabhupada seemed to feel the same way about adding too many innovations into ISKCON. In 1974 a devotee questioned Prabhupada about the chanting of *Gayatri*: “I understand that you say the *Gayatri* morning, noon and evening. But actually, such-and-such Sanskrit books say that *Gayatri* should be chanted at exact times according to the sun. The sun’s movement’s change with the changing of the seasons.” Prabhupada said, ‘Yes, that is true.’ The devotee then asked, ‘So should we

distribute this information and start to follow it?’ Prabhupada said, ‘No. Leave it this other way because if we change it, people will think we have been doing it wrong. Just keep it that way—morning, noon and evening.’ Prabhupada rarely cared about technical adjustments. This was not whimsical on his part; Prabhupada was on the spontaneous raganuga platform of devotional service. He was not bound by the rules and regulations but was interested in giving his disciples the spirit of devotion.

“Another time, in 1973, Prabhupada was up in his room at Bhaktivedanta Manor. A devotee came up and reported that Pradyumna was chanting the ‘Purusa-sukta’ prayers for the fire *yajna*. Prabhupada didn’t approve. He said, ‘Chanting Hare Krsna is enough, but because some of the *smarta-brahmanas* will complain that this is a strange religion because it doesn’t have enough reference to Vedic rituals, the Six Gosvamis, especially Sanatana Gosvami, described these rituals in the *Hari-bhakti-vilasa*, to satisfy them. Therefore we have this fire, few bananas and things, but keep it shortcut.’

“Prabhupada emphasized all the important things: *yena tena prakarena manah kṛsne nivesayet*, ‘Keep the mind fixed on Krsna.’ One may argue, ‘Yes, keep the mind on Krsna is the first thing, and the rules and regulations will come later. So the rules and regulations have to come, not that you 1966 boys—what do you want to have us do, continue to wear japa beads around our necks and have beards on our faces just because Swamiji let you do that?’

“No, we have to progress. But we cannot lose the instructive value of Prabhupada’s methods.

“One way that Prabhupada’s early teachings can be applied is in preaching. Devotees who are preaching especially in countries where ISKCON is just beginning, such as in Eastern Europe, can feel safe to keep things simple by Prabhupada’s

example. They are eternal beginning principles—how to emphasize preaching without getting bogged down by the rules and regulations? Rules and regulations can be added later, but the beginning foundation was stressing devotion. That’s how Prabhupada taught us.

“. . . Swamiji, please let us remember you and continue to be in touch with the devotion you emanated and gave to us in those early days. You freely dispense Krsna consciousness in the mood of Lord Caitanya from your relaxed sitting position behind your tin trunk. Sometimes you sat upright performing your ‘bells’ ceremony. You taught us how to worship Krsna by chanting Hare Krsna. You gave us Krsna consciousness for life by making it so accessible to us.

“Our only purpose in remembering the old days is to share them with others. You were there with us, Swamiji, and we loved you. Please allow me to serve you by making your teachings, even your 1966 teachings, available to everyone everywhere. Let us never forget those days.”

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“Feeling Questions

“Were there some questions we should have asked Prabhupada but didn’t? Were some questions taboo? Were there some questions he didn’t like to answer? Were there some questions he couldn’t answer? What was his general attitude toward answering questions—was he very open or limited?

“In general, I think we can safely say that Prabhupada was very open and willing to discuss almost any subject from the Krsna conscious point of view. He might point out an impertinent or illogical question, but he would answer it anyway.

He considered questions that did not relate to the points he raised in his lecture as improper. Questions after the lecture should be asked to clear up doubts. So many topics can be discussed and questioned, but Prabhupada chose one area of the philosophy to discuss in his lectures, and he preferred the questions to be relevant to that. Even if someone asked something off the topic, though, Prabhupada would answer it.

“An example of an impertinent question: Soon after Prabhupada performed my marriage, I wrote him a letter and asked him about sex life within the *grhastha* ashram. Prabhupada wrote back and said, ‘I am a *sannyasi*; this is not proper that you ask me questions like this. However, I know that you have no one else to turn to for answers, so I will give you the answer.’ Srila Prabhupada was lenient in giving information, even if the questions weren't right.

“Some people asked Prabhupada questions that were too hair-splitting. He considered these unnecessary for those who were seriously trying to practice Krsna consciousness. Other inquiries were too esoteric. I once asked Prabhupada, ‘In your *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*, I read that one should follow an eternal resident of Vrndavana. Could you tell me more about that?’ Prabhupada replied, ‘Don't try for this. That is a very advanced topic. It will automatically be revealed to you. Just go on serving.’ Similarly, when Prabhupada was asked about the origin of the living entity he said, ‘It is not important. There is a history to it, but right now you may not be able to understand it. The important thing is that you are now in a fallen condition and you need to go back to Godhead. It does not matter how you came here.’ Prabhupada did not evade questions, but like the *acarya* he himself described in *Krsna* book, he sometimes gave information and sometimes withheld it. Prabhupada knew what the important inquiries were.

“Sometimes Prabhupada would be blunt: ‘This is not a very intelligent question.’ ‘Are all your devotees pure devotees?’ ‘How many pure devotees are there on the planet right now?’ Prabhupada replied, ‘This is not a very intelligent question.’

“Other questions were too challenging. ‘Why don't you send your missionaries to Muslim countries instead of preaching in India?’ ‘Do you accept Jesus as Lord?’ ‘You don't seem to give many teachings about health, why is that?’ Prabhupada could see the motive behind questions, but he always entered the breach to give the Vaisnava conclusion.

“Sometimes questions were too personal. ‘Are you happy?’ Prabhupada replied, ‘If I told you, would you believe me?’

“Prabhupada was expert at not getting trapped by questions and being able to turn them around to put the question back on the person who asked it.

“Prabhupada was especially exposed to challenges and both sincere and insincere questions in public lectures. Over the years, he had heard practically everything there was to hear. It wasn't possible to shock him. Prabhupada was responsive to intelligent, sincere questions. Like Sukadeva Gosvami who became more enthusiastic to speak due to the intelligent questioning of Maharaja Pariksit, so Prabhupada appreciated solid inquiries.

“One time someone asked him, ‘In *Nectar of Devotion* it says you shouldn't wear red clothes before the Deities, why is that?’ Prabhupada said in reply, ‘There is a reason as to why you shouldn't wear red, but if I reply to your question by saying you shouldn't wear red because it says so in the scriptures, is that all right?’

Prabhupada always gave the most substantial reply according to time, place, and person. Prabhupada was instructing us not just by answering our questions, but by demonstrating by his own responses what was important information for us to know.

He taught us that the important inquiries were based on service and surrender. In this way, he taught us that our sometimes flimsy questions were missing the point, and he uncovered for us our very elementary grasp of Krsna conscious philosophy.”

Reading Reform--Srila Prabhupada's Plan for the Daily Reading of His Books

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“The instruction given in my books is supposed to be personal instruction. When we read the Bhagavad-gita As It Is, it is understood that we are receiving the personal instruction of Krsna. No physical barrier is there in the case of spiritual affairs.”(Letter to Dhrstaketu, October 14, 1973)

“COMMENTARY: Sometimes a devotee feels sorry that he does not see his spiritual master enough, or that he cannot be with him physically. In time he may even feel he has little personal connection with him. In the letter quoted above, Prabhupada removes such doubts by indicating the difference between material and spiritual life. Although in material life the instructions one receives are always external to one’s real self, in spiritual life this is not true. Rather, Prabhupada indicates that in spiritual life, we associate personally with the spiritual master and with Krsna through the instructions we receive in parampara.

“When we read *Bhagavad-gita*, we should not feel bereft because we are not ourselves present on the Battlefield of Kuruksetra with Krsna and Arjuna. Such feelings are due only to material shortcomings. If we are actually enthusiastic to be with Krsna, and if we are receptive to His message, then we can have direct, personal contact with Him through His representative. It is simply a matter of our

submissiveness.

“In a similar way, we can enter the most intimate association with Prabhupada by reading his books. In the intimate solitude of the early morning hours, Prabhupada would concentrate on delivering his nectarean message to his disciples. By entering into the intimate mood of Prabhupada speaking his books in the early hours, we can have very personal *darsana* with this greatest of Vaisnavas. And through such association as this, what could be lacking?”

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“Nowadays there are so many so-called spiritual masters, it becomes bewildering to us as to who can actually give spiritual knowledge. Therefore I have written volumes of books, authorized Vedic literature, of which you can take advantage in association with the devotees who are practicing this knowledge. Thus you will be able to learn the science of God.” (Science of God, Letter to Swami Sat-Premananda Saraswati, June 9, 1974)

“COMMENTARY: In the course of his preaching activities, Prabhupada received letters from thousands of people inquiring into the nature of spiritual life. Again and again Prabhupada would recommend that they learn the science of Krsna consciousness by studying his books.

“An impersonalist *sannyasi* once wrote to Prabhupada asking questions about topics often misrepresented by other swamis. In the letter quoted above, Prabhupada directs the swami to learn the Absolute Truth by reading the authorized books and by associating with the devotees. And in a similar instance, one Dr.

Kumar, a professor at McMaster University in Ontario, wrote asking about the claims of some to be incarnations of God. Prabhupadda referred him to the books as well, saying, "The words of the Lord have been recorded in *Bhagavad-gita*, so if someone claims to be an incarnation but also contradicts the *Bhagavad-gita*, you can be sure he is a phony. Please try to read our books."

Morning Songs

p.64

Murdering the Rhyme

Murdering the rhyme in favor
of free verse. The main point
is reaching Krsna's feet
by a roundabout or direct
way. Do not be afraid, if
we surrender to Him. He will
protect us
and we shall give
up all the forms of
religion and surrender unto Him.
That was His order.

How to do it? He showed
500 years ago as Mahaprabhu
in the chanting rhythm

of the holy names with
mrdanga and *kartalās* and
 His leading the *kirtana*
 with love of God.

Follow Him and His devotees,
 the *acarya* in *parampara*.
 Prabhupada is a prominent one in the
 20th century. He did come on the Jaladuta, risking two
 heart attacks, yet he made it
 to New York City, his town
 for breaking the silence
 with *harinama*. Three nights a week,
 then every morning
 his movement grew.
 In San Francisco, he
 planted the seed in the
 same way, with affectionate
 enthusiastic young followers.
 This is the history of disciplic
 succession coming down
 around the world in every town and village.
 Its power is still growing.
 The prediction will take place in every town and
 village, His name shall be sung.

Begging for the Nectar of the Holy Name

“7:30 PM

“Snapshot

“It is never too late to look at a photo of your spiritual master and pay homage to him. In the *Krsna* book chapter containing the story of the forest fire, the trapped *gopas* looked to Krsna. The man who is about to die looks at a picture of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. I want to look at Prabhupada like that.

“He is walking outside the temple, starting a morning walk, surrounded by his *sannyasi* disciples and their upraised *dandas*. They are so youthful. Some are smiling. They jostle for a place. Me too. Srila Prabhupada’s hands are filled with flowers and other items, probably gifts handed to him by his spiritual daughters and their children. The morning is always bright in Mayapur at this time of year. Just outside the temple room hangs the wooden sign ‘Sri Mayapur Chandrodaya.’ Srila Prabhupada is accompanied by one of his Godbrothers or a Bengali *sannyasi*.

“Listening to the man beside him, Prabhupada’s head is turned to hear him. He is compassionate and intent on what he has to do as the spiritual father for thousands. And such heavy personalities among his young leaders! Srila Prabhupada wants a worldwide movement. He already has it, but he wants much more. Political heads and mass populations ignore the Hare Krsna movement. Prabhupada knows this isn’t right—people cannot be happy without Krsna. He worked for this when he was unknown, and he works for it now as Founder-*Acarya* of ISKCON, on behalf of his Guru Maharaja.

“Taking a morning walk, directing affairs, taking the burden: the glory of Lord

Caitanya’s movement. And Westerners coming to India to worship and to serve. Prabhupada has to defend them from critics and from their own minds and fratricidal quarrels.

“Just the colors—what is it like in the cool morning in pleasant Mayapur? What is it like to walk with him, your *danda* in the air?

“‘What is it you are saying?’ Srila Prabhupada seems to say as he hears the *sadhu* beside him. But at the same time, Prabhupada is looking beyond. He took on so much for Lord Caitanya’s new movement. He was empowered tremendously. Strong-minded young men and women became his dear disciples and traveled everywhere on his order. His power was and is very great.”

Every Day, Just Write Volume 3: A Sojourn in Tapo-Bhumi

“January 17th, 12.15 AM

“I’m carrying a notebook I’m calling ‘In Favor of Staying with *Every Day, Just Write*.’ I’ve been keeping it to encourage myself to maintain this format. It also contains some of the doubts. This morning as I completed the section of *Every Day, Just Write* and considered the next—which will be written in Vrndavana—a question arises.

“Writing is my active service and preaching. GN Press is publishing the books, and we will distribute them. People appreciate them. Narayana Kavaca wrote me that I am not futilely trying to tell people to become Indians, but I write from the Western mindset. He said I’m writing a literature as expert as any Western art. I’m delivering Krsna consciousness. I’m presenting myself as naked before the readers, and my books will have an impact on readers, especially of the future, etc.

“I have a responsibility. I want to deliver the goods. Therefore my question today is whether this ‘effortless’ true-to-self, true-to-day’s-flow touch I’ve developed in *Every Day, Just Write* is in any way a relinquishing of the responsibility to work at making literature.

“When I rise at midnight, I give Prabhupada his Dictaphone and I think, ‘You are writing the Bhaktivedanta purports. I am going to write too.’ Is *Every Day, Just Write* just for me, or am I writing *my* equivalent of the Bhaktivedanta purports? I mean, is it worthy enough that others could read what I write? Would it help them in Krsna consciousness?

“Well, the fact is I don’t know what else I can do except to be true to myself. Narayana-Kavaca also said—as others do—that he especially likes the free writing. I *do* have responsibility to readers, and for now *EJW* may be the best and only way I know how to fulfill it. But that doesn’t mean I can’t improve it, deepen it, make more effort to bring out the best in it. Natalie Goldberg quoted her guru as saying, ‘No one is asking us to open our hearts, but we must do it every day. Make a great effort for the truth.’ Yes, that’s what I want to do, and I want to write it down, my secret report on the adventures of a *sadhaka* (or whatever it is I am). I will probably never be completely certain of the value of what I am doing—I tremble with uncertainty—because, in a sense, Prabhupada’s mission is in my hands, as it is in the hands of each and every one of his followers.”

Writing Sessions

My Purpose at Isola di Albarella (continued)

“October 31, 1996

“One should come to Krsna consciousness to release oneself and also to release others. Ajamila said, ‘I shall become a merciful, well-wishing friend to all living entities and always absorb myself in Krsna consciousness.’ (*Bhag.* 6.2.37)

“What am I doing here to help others by my stay at Albarella? The standard (reflex) answer is that I have come here to recoup my health. With stronger health I can continue traveling and see devotees around the world.

“Here you are, writing about yourself. Maybe you hoped to make a new structure for a book in which your little life wouldn’t be prominent. Give what, Vaisnava teachings as prominent? Yes, that could be done, repeating them. One doesn’t have to write of one’s own life.

“I dreamt of a man who was alienated from mainstream ISKCON, gathered some devotees and asked that a certain section of *Krsna* book be read. It was a series of subheading topics. Some of them were about cats, told in detail – an odd section. This devotee proposed that he would like to start a nursery for devotee children, and this was the thing he’d read to them. The devotees listening to the reading didn’t encourage him. Rather, they were embarrassed by the non-KC thrust of the reading.

“Now put that in your book and smoke it. He, he. Here we go, the usual serenade of all things that come through your mind, what you read in the mail, dreams, what reaches you in your own bicycling alienation,
shameless or ashamed

admittance of who you are.

“Yesterday I read this in *Pada-yatra*: ‘Writing book, *Alligators*, says write from what your life actually is, even if that actual life is not all you’d want it to be: ‘The concrete field of daily experience, with its beauty and drabness, is what gives writing its solidity and appeal.’ But does it appeal to me?

“A Godbrother of Srila Prabhupada’s had been saying many things about ISKCON. He said these things to a life-member of ISKCON who attempted to defend against them and who later reported it to Srila Prabhupada. You hear it on a morning walk from Nellore, India, 1976. One charge was, ‘Bhaktivedanta Swami is giving this to the *mlecchas*. But if Lord Caitanya wanted Krsna consciousness given to the Western countries, He would have gone there Himself.’

“SP replied, ‘Krsna left the credit for me.’

“Why bring that up? Because I want to give solidity and appeal to my November book and nothing works as well as Prabhupada and *krsna-katha* – which is in my life too.

Don’t squash me out. I give it to you.

And so, we begin.

“I’m here in Albarella. Madhu thought it would be good for me to tell about the ‘changing places’ we will visit in November. The first one is the rich person’s summer resort, which is located on an island south of Venice, Italy. It is a big reservation of flat land, carefully tended so that it remains rich in small forests and kept up in all ways for the enjoyment of the super-rich. Many of the people who come here have large seagoing yachts. These yachts can be brought right into the backyards of their houses by a series of canals. The houses are not so wonderful,

rather small and all packed together, but they're all looking quite presentable in a modern style. We are renting one of them for three weeks.

“This reservation is so exclusive that no one can enter it from the mainland unless he has permission to go through the main gate. And this main gate is checked very carefully so that only people who live here are allowed to enter. The place is also regularly toured by a private security force on whose cars is written the word ‘Vigilante.’ Another feature of Albarella is that there is a herd of deer who wander around only half-afraid of the humans. There are also many pheasants. And the wonderful thing about this place, from our point of view, is that all of the summer residents are gone. Most of the houses have boarded-up shutters, and when you go out on the main roads no one is around except workers who are constructing buildings or keeping up the maintenance in anticipation for next summer. Otherwise, if we had come here in the summer it would have been somewhat hellish with all of the enjoying mood. There's even a small cement tower onto which is a “New York Bar,” but this is also closed for the winter.

“Every afternoon I bicycle around this reservation for about twenty minutes, stirring through the crackled leaves and trying to listen lightly within for what Krsna wants from me.

“My first big objective in coming here has already been achieved: I wanted to completely stop my thirty-five-week habit of taking allopathic medication. I did it within two days, and now my stay here is a bit anti-climactic. I'm still getting headaches but trying to have faith in a modified naturopathic diet which Madhu is enforcing on me (with my own half-hearted free will).

“*Cats, cats, cats,*’

they mockingly sang, and we can assume that the man who wanted to read it to Krsna conscious tots was sufficiently discouraged. They didn't give him a chance to explain how he may have given relevant lessons to tots from the apparently mundane and useless topics of cats, which he found after all, in one of Prabhupada's books.

"I commiserate with his point of view, but I also share the embarrassment of the devotees. They had been thinking, 'What if some observer came and heard a group of Krsna conscious devotees sitting for a reading which was mostly about the antics of cats?'"

"Halloween Vignettes

1.

"Madhu says that Albarella seems to be one of the safest places in the world. (But then he qualified, 'As safe as any place can be in the material world.')

That's because of the non-entry for anyone except residents. Plus, the prowling vigilante cars. Madhu came back early one morning from a phone call at the public booth and one of the vigilante cars cruised by, and stopped to question him. "Do you live here?" they asked in Italian.

"He replied, 'Yes.' They asked to see his house key, which he produced. Then they gave a friendly, '*Salvo.*'"

"He replied, '*Salvo.* Hare Krsna.'

"Another day he was walking out to our van and two vigilantes at a distance seemed to share a laugh at the Hare Krsna dress. Instead of going to the van, Madhu walked straight to them and said, 'Do you have a problem?'"

“The vigilantes changed their attitude and asked politely, ‘What is the significance of your cloth?’

2.

“One day on my bicycle ride I saw some older women under pine trees. They had straw baskets and they were collecting something from the ground. Pine cones? My mind went to the pecans that fall from the trees in the yard of ISKCON Dallas. I saw those women on my way back from the ride, and now they seem to be digging in the earth under that tree. I thought it was something they could remember later, like the time my mother asked me to come in the backyard and garden with them, ‘so you’ll have memories later.’

3.

“I wrote a note labeled, ‘Reflections on watching Madhu munching bread and butter along with his breakfast porridge.’ Later that day he said the reason he was eating bread and butter with the porridge was that there wasn’t enough porridge. My note had gone on to say, ‘Why is he trying to restrict me in my diet, but he’s eating the same stuff he restricts me from?’ Madhu said he would put his cards on the table. His first point was that he was strict with his diet. He gives me a sweet but doesn’t take one himself. His next point was that he wasn’t trying to restrict me, and whatever I ordered he would give me, even if it wasn’t part of a naturopathic diet. But he also said that he felt responsible for my health and that he was convinced that there is a definite connection between diet and health. He told me how he had chronic asthma for so many years and had gone into the hospital sometimes and had been given oxygen and inhalers, but none of it helped. Then one year he ate only

brown rice for twelve days and his asthma went away. This was just an example, he said, of how diet affects health.

“I’m only half convinced, and I also have a tongue. If Madhu weren’t here to monitor it, I’d probably slide into the forbiddens.

4.

“What is it like when a bad headache comes? On October 29th, I had one for twenty-four hours. It strikes in a very small area behind the right eye. I can’t do anything else but notice it, dwell on it, and mostly I try to sleep it off. On that day my *japa* is silent and poor. Somehow, I can’t call out to Krsna. I just wait for it to go down.

5.

“My mother was twenty-nine years old when I was born. Since I’m fifty-seven years old, that means she’s eighty-six years old. She’s already outlived my father by nine years. My mother and I don’t communicate. Her policy is, ‘As long as you’re with them, we don’t want anything to do with you.’ Therefore, I can’t ask her for a document, such as her birth certificate, to prove that my grandparents were born in Ireland. When my mother passes away, only then will the New York City authorities release her birth certificate for my use. Hoping that my mother will die soon so that I can get a copy of her birth certificate is not nice. It could breed bad karma. Let her live and pray to God in the Catholic Church. I’m doing all right, and so I bless her alive and at the hour of death. Amen.

6.

“A young man who likes my books foolishly gave one as a gift to one of my Godbrothers who doesn’t like me.

“The Godbrother said, ‘I don’t read these. Satsvarupa’s books are just a manifestation of the mind.’

“My reply is, ‘Yes. But whose mind?’ It’s the mind of an aspiring devotee of Krsna.

“**Day-Before-November Poems**

“(October 31, 1996 is the Disappearance Day of Srila Narottama dasa Thakura)

“My man, the poet,
the angel pure devotee
nitya-siddha – how much can
come across in English print
via Kusakrata dasa’s translation?

“I’m nodding asleep in the sunlight
but it’s coming through to me on
Narottama dasa Thakura’s Disappearance Day,
reading his *Prarthana*.

“A javelin is piercing me,
it’s my forgetfulness of Krsna,
a misery I suffer from sense grat.
O Radha and Krsna, please

accept me.’

He is our poet, and not of this
world but Vraja.

“He calls sometimes from here
to there
lamenting –
I missed the boat,
I didn’t worship the Divine Couple.

“But by the vibration of
pure *bhakti* we’re reminded
of that realm.
Otherwise, no hope;
worldly songs
get you nowhere.”

“Before Beginning Prabhupada Puja

“Canal shimmers in Albarella.
Stoka’s slowly getting to
cook – it’s never on time.
I am so little and materially-minded.
I offer you these lines –
say Ajamila went to Hardwar.

Vrndavana and Sridham Mayapur
are even better. Srila Prabhupada
invites all persons white or black
or brown or yellow, to come and
retire in the holy *dhamas*
and chant constantly
Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare.
All sins will be atoned,
washed away. Yamadutas
chased – no more desire
for it – you’ll awaken your
pure love for the Supreme.
But it’s not easy.”