

Free Write Journal #13

November 4, 2018

This is the thirteenth week of the *Journal*. I announced in the 26 Second Avenue storefront that the devotees could use my apartment on First Street for taking showers. (They had been using the Swami's bathroom.) So they started coming over, and I gave up my solitude. The janitor, who was French, short, and wore a flat cap, used to curse at the devotees for entering “his” building. Hayagriva and Kirtanananda used to take naps during the day on a mattress. Then Raya-Rama asked if he could move in and be my roommate. I agreed and gave him a room and a desk to do his writing service. I was satisfied to sacrifice my privacy and gain more association with the devotees. Gaurasundara and his wife Govinda dasi used to go into the bathroom together; we *brahmacaris* didn't think anything of it. We were one family under Swamiji, and it was in that spirit that I opened up my apartment.

The big change was in the storefront. At first it was bare, but then Hayagriva and Kirtanananda donated the framed pictures they had picked up on their visit to India. They did not know who the persons were in their pictures, but Swamiji told them one was Hanuman, one was Lord Caitanya

dancing with His *sankirtana* party, and some he didn't agree to hang up, like goddess Kali and demigods. Someone donated an old oriental rug. Then Jadurani began painting under Swamiji's direction. She did four-armed Visnu, Radha and Krsna, and a portrait of Prabhupada, and they were hung in the temple. Swamiji said, "Now that these pictures are up, you cannot do any nonsense in this room." A couple of men who had carpentry skills built a wooden frame, and a *vyasasana* cushion was placed within it. Now we could properly sit on the floor and look up at our Guru Maharaja as he lectured and led the *kirtana*. Allen Ginsberg, who had enjoyed a prolonged stay in India, thought 26 Second Avenue looked like something right out of India, and he considered the Swami an authentic holy man. The young people of the Lower East Side attended the Swami's Monday, Wednesday and Friday night *kirtanas* and lectures in force. And when he began a Sunday "Love Feast," the free diners used to fill up the temple, and there was an overflow outside in the courtyard. At first the Swami had to cook it all himself. But he quickly taught his disciples how to do it. The menu had savories and sweets: yellow rice, dal, pakoras--sweet rice, halavah and Simply Wonderfals. The devotees and guests loved it and accepted second servings, and even thirds.

Manohara is making pizza today. He is also teaching me a laid-back kind of exercise for my ankles, and I've stopped doing my vigorous exercises. But I just read in the weekly newsmagazine that a sedentary life with no exercise is the number one shortener of longevity. I have resolved to resume my vigorous exercises and do them in addition to the laid-back exercise. I thought Manohara's pizza was average and not, as Baladeva said, "the best." I don't remember what the best was. Manohara's was good authentic Italian. I seem to remember New York City pizza joints being superior. But of course, Manohara's pizzas (and he made many of them, one for Ravindra Svarupa) are properly offered to Gaura-Nitai, Radha-Govinda and our other Deities, and are therefore spiritually the best.

Can you think of anything to say? I have a pain in my right eye. I called twice for Baladeva on the radio, but he didn't respond. I want Sumatriptan medicine, but the radios may be dead. Right eye means migraine, and it was building up. I felt helpless not being able to get anyone to come up. I took a regular non-migraine painkiller. Finally Lal-Krsna came up at 6:00 P.M. with the offerings for the Deity. I told him what I wanted. He went downstairs and brought Baladeva. He told me the radios downstairs were dead. He gave me a Sumatriptan and turned out the lights.

I tilted the La-Z-Boy chair back and chilled. Gradually the right eye pain subsided.

The clocks fall back today to Eastern Standard Time, and we get an extra hour. I didn't use it for sleeping but for trying to write. At first I wrote something repeating myself--about Prabhupada first awarding second initiation in 1968. But then I remembered that I had already written it in *Free Write Journal* Week 12. So I scratched out what I had written and stared at the blank, demanding page. My wife and I had an apartment across the street from the storefront temple. Sometimes I was sensuous with her, and as a result she didn't look up to me as a strict *grhastha*. We lived in one room, and in the larger room three *brahmacarinis* painted Krsna art (for use as illustrations in Prabhupada's books) under the direction of my wife. When we first moved in, a big black man pounded on our door and threatened violence if we ever played the drum, hand cymbals or sang the Hare Krsna chant. I told him we wouldn't do those things in the apartment building (where he and his girlfriend lived)--we did it only in our temple or in the park. My wife spoke to him in a mocking, sniffling laugh that was her habit. That infuriated him, and he told her to stop it--*or else!* We couldn't calm the man down or assure him we would be a quiet neighbor. He stormed off menacingly, repeating in a loud voice what he

would do to us. As it turned out, he didn't come back. His scare tactics were just a way of introducing or "welcoming" us to "his building."

I dreamt I discovered (or yearned to discover) a new way of writing. It involved placing artistic circles on the page. It was difficult to understand, surrealist, but imaginative in an enjoyable way. In the dream I was hungry but had only a few morsels of food in a tiffin. I was asking people for directions to the Staten Island Ferry, but it was very far away and like a maze to enter it.

I saw a video made by Bhurijana. It was titled "Last Day in Vrndavana." It showed Bhurijana in a car driving on the outskirts of Vrndavana. He kept up an improvised line, "Why am I leaving Vrndavana?" He described the spiritual features of the *dhama*. (It was a little like Prabhodananda Swami's *Sri Vrndavana Mahimamrta*.) He admitted that Vrndavana had become hectic but said that he lived "in a bubble." Sometimes he was out of his car and speaking in broken Hindi phrases to Brijbasi men and schoolboys in shirts and ties. At the end, he made a prayer to return soon--which he did.

I rode my stationary bike with Baladeva watching my performance. I did five laps in over eight minutes, a distance of one mile. I can keep it up

and try to increase. I do some laps, counterclockwise and clockwise, pushing the four-wheeler carriage.

Lord Nrsimhadeva warned Brahma not to give any more boons to demons. He was angry with Brahma and reprimanded him. Brahma was repentant, but he went on to offend Krsna again. He kidnapped the calves, cows and cowherd boys while they were picnicking with Krsna. After a year in earthly time, Brahma came back to see what was happening. He was afraid that he was playing with fire. He saw the same boys playing with Krsna. The Supreme Lord had actually expanded Himself into the exact forms of the boys and cows that Brahma had kidnapped. He did this so that the mothers of the boys could get a chance to breastfeed Krsna and love Him even more than they loved their own children. Brahma was bewildered, and then Krsna showed him countless forms of four-armed Visnus. Krsna then vanished the four-armed forms and stood before Brahma as a small boy holding a piece of fruit and yogurt in His hand. Brahma bowed down and began his prayers. (*S.B. Tenth Canto, Chapter 14*)

Haridasa dasa said my staying in Viraha Bhavan (and not traveling) gives a context to my voice (in writing). I was pleased to hear that. He said if one is always traveling, he has no “residence.” One can always find me at

Viraha Bhavan. In my case, I am particularly immobile (but I do my exercises).

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November 5, 2018

I dreamt I allowed myself to do inclusive (“keep the hand moving”) writing practice in a separate notebook from my weekly *Free Write Journal*. I saw myself putting all sorts of things on the page, including *krsna-kathah*. It was enlivening writing in such prolific freedom. Now if I can do it while awake. In my dream of freedom writing, I included excerpts from a newsmagazine. You don’t worry if it’s publishable.

Garuda wrote me thanking me for my reminiscence of how Swamiji introduced us, with few words, into lighting candles every night for a month during Karttika. Garuda said I was one of the few persons who could share such a 1966 memory. I love it when I can do that. And being able to assist Hari-Sauri as to when Prabhupada first awarded second initiation--1968 in Boston--was satisfying. During the same visit to Boston, the Swami admitted to his secretary Govinda dasi that “Swamiji” was a third-class name to address the spiritual master. After affectionately calling him Swamiji for two years, Govinda-dasi was taken aback. “Then what shall we call you?” she asked. He replied that the spiritual master is usually

addressed by names like Visnupada or Prabhupada. She asked, “May we call you Prabhupada?” and he replied, “Yes.” The happy news spread rapidly.

I just met with John Endler. Krishna-kripa has completed all of the proofreading for the entire book. Now I am going to do my final proofreading of the text. When I am finished, I will ask Caitanya-candrodaya to do layout, design, cover, etc. It will be a major addition to my *oeuvre*. Taking on the big job of proofreading will steal from my time of writing for *FWJ* #13. I hope I can pen enough pages, meeting the deadline of my weekly posting of the *Journal*.

Bala is back in the hospital experiencing much pain, as infections and complications to his surgery have occurred. Manohara has traveled from Italy to be with me, but last night he was pressed into emergency service and asked to stay overnight with Bala in his hospital room. Bala said he felt so much pain and cold that he didn’t think he could endure it. He was moved downstairs (although he complained it was colder) for a complete diagnosis. The nurses and a doctor are tending to his care.

John is reading *EJW, The Best Gosthyanandi*. The title comes from the complete sentence: “The best *gosthyanandi* is a *bhajanandi* who preaches.” John said the volume contains detailed descriptions of my

Radha-Govinda worship in Ireland. While caring for the Deities, I was listening to a recording of Rupa Gosvami's *Lalita-Madhava*. This inspired John to turn to his Bible and read *The Song of Solomon*. He read me some sections and said he thought it was transcendental amorous *rasa*. I agreed with him. He said some Christians are puzzled by *The Song of Solomon* and wonder why it is in the Bible. They take it as a mundane love affair, just as people misunderstand Radha-Krsna and the *gopis*.

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Bala is strained and uncomfortable in the hospital at Albany. As a result, we inmates at Viraha Bhavan are strained, going to meet with him in the hospital, getting updates on his condition, worrying about him, etc. He has already undergone surgery and been discharged. Because of the pain and infection, he is back in the hospital. Sometimes he is better, and sometimes worse. He's going through a great trial, and sympathetically, we are going through it with him. He is getting quite a few visitors. Residing his whole life in Trinidad, Baladeva never experienced much pain, and he never entered a hospital. This is a whole new experience for him, and in addition to the pain, he is feeling depressed. Baladeva is going to visit him this morning and wants to preach from *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*.

Pleasing Swamiji By Working For Krsna

It was a real *yajna* to work for Swamiji at the welfare office, but it was successful yoga, partly because Swamiji was so physically near and I could know that I would see him soon enough. I was there to work for him, to get the money and pay the rent. It was an open secret to all the welfare workers and clients that I was a devotee of Krsna and the Swamiji. Before Prabhupada came, my secret was taking marijuana. But now my secret was open, different--that I had become a devotee of Krsna, with shaven head and *sikha*. I couldn't preach at the office, and so, except for the visible appearance of a Vaisnava, I did the exact same work as everyone else. Devotional service was new to me, and I wanted to keep it alive. I was aware at every moment I was acting outwardly while trying to maintain an inward focus. Swamiji had told us that Krsna is in the heart as Visnu, Paramatma. And so I tried to think of Visnu and love Visnu in the heart. I was also writing Him a poem, which I worked on at my office desk.

One morning I told Swamiji it was hard to remain Krsna-conscious at work. I said, "Swamiji, sometimes when the people in my office say nonsense, I chant within myself without making any sound. Is that all right?" Prabhupada replied, "Not only are they saying nonsense sometimes, but even the greatest philosopher is talking nonsense. So you can chant all

the time like that within, when you can't actually chant out loud." So I would chant within myself. But sometimes I was able to be alone in the corner of the welfare building, and then I could chant audibly, at least loud enough to hear. A good place to do that was on the second floor in the soundproof booths where caseworkers dictated their day's interviews in order to be typed up. You would take your recorder up there and start speaking into the machine: "I visited Mrs. Balroop Ramirez at 62 Suffolk St. She is receiving aid for dependent children. She requests a refrigerator . . ."

This was a good place to do it--"Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare . . ." When I chanted softly but intensely, I felt as if I was pushing away the whole Manhattan Welfare Department and all their crazy clients and office girls and office menHare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare. In my mind's eye, I could sense the presence of Swamiji. And I spoke and prayed to him, "Swamiji, please let me get through this job for you and make money so the temple can run and you can spread Krsna consciousness. Please protect me. Nrsimhadeva, Prahlada, please protect me. Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare." If someone came

by and eyed me suspiciously, I went back to dictating my welfare case, or I took out my poem-in-progress:

I say I want to get out
 to where
 You are
 just to be at Your feet--
 But what do I do? Why
 don't I answer every question
 with Visnu?
 Why do I flinch
 when they ask me why I'm flowering just by the thought of You?
 --You, the Indweller in all of us--
 Visnu-in-me!

Chanting without beads wasn't as nice, and so I would think of my red *japa* beads and hanker to return to them. As the morning got late, my hunger would increase--it would not be long before lunch hour, when I would be able to get out and go see the Swami. There was always at least one important question on my mind which I wanted to ask him, or a realization I wished to share. One time I went and told the Swami, "When I'm in the office, I can feel the miseries you talked about, birth, death,

disease and old age, and I actually feel that I'm overcoming them." Swamiji liked that and said, "Yes, but almost no one knows this. They put these problems aside, and yet everyone is being forced to die and grow old and be born again. For a devotee, these things are easily overcome."

My practice of karma-yoga was a daily struggle, but the Swami was always there to make it victorious. Swamiji said, "Satsvarupa and Brahmananda are paying our entire expenditures by their work." That's what made it possible: to know that you were doing something worthwhile. I never had such a warm feeling in my own family as I grew up. But now I was Swamiji's son, part of a big family, and so I worked for that.

You Know What I Was

(In the mood of Satsvarupa dasa Brahmachary)

Swamiji, you know what I was;
 you can see it in me still.
 It's obnoxious, my mind
 filled with obscenities
 even if I don't speak them anymore. Semen wasted
 and my brain scattered by LSD.
 That time I sat before you
 and imitated a yogi in lotus trance,

what did I think I was doing
to come into your presence like that?
I argued against your statement
that there was no need to read
other scriptures besides the Vedas.
And I complained, “I’m trying
to appreciate *Bhagavad-gita*, so why
do you have to throw in mind-blowers
about Krsna’s marrying 16,000 wives?”
They asked me why I didn’t write a diary;
maybe because it’s too much madness.
I had to relearn everything
and it took some time
before writing became
useful for your service.
There was no need to tell you, Swamiji
all the gory details
but I could have written down
how sweet it was in the morning
to be with you for *Caitanya-caritamrta*.

When you said, “If you love me, then I’ll love you,”
I should have written it down right away.
I’m sorry it’s mostly all a blank.
But thank you for coming. You are saving me.
I don’t want to ever forget or think
your help was incidental, as if I were almost spiritual
and you just added a few touches.
Until a few days ago
I didn’t have a bead bag;
I thought you were going to teach the
Tibetan Book of the Dead.
I had never seen a picture of Krsna.
I thought everything was One
and that I was the center,
and sorry for myself, love-starved, food-starved.
You saved me.

A Summer Morning

(In the mood of Satsvarupa dasa Brahmachary)

I'm up in my room at 2:00 A.M.,
thinking of Krsna and Swamiji
or should I say thinking of Swamiji
because I really can't think yet
of the Supreme Lord.

But I have my red beads
and I'm fighting sleep. I don't know anything
but I'll see my spiritual master
in just a few hours.

I'll walk to the storefront, sit inside, and he'll come
looking very serious and calm.

He'll begin to sing, "Softly, softly," while the sunbeams filter dust
motes

and the first garbage cans start clanging.

I'll be listening to the new knowledge
of Lord Caitanya's teachings to Sanatana Gosvami
(I think that's how you spell it.)

Swamiji doesn't talk long in the morning
because Rupanuga and I
have to get to work.

That's blissful too, saying goodbye
to Swamiji and the boys
and then I'm on my own.

I take my necktie out of my back pocket
and tie it on as I walk, buttoning my jacket,
feeling cowherd-boy bliss
after two bowls of heavenly porridge
with ISKCON bullet juice.

Into that sad-glad atmosphere
of the downtown street
I'm alone, but no longer alone.

The cowherd boy Govinda,
the Supreme Personality,
whom Swamiji loves and wants us to love--
He seems to be calling me--

I seem to be one of His frolicking friends
and my necktie is like some paraphernalia

for Govinda's sports. I can't explain it
but all I know is that
before I met the Swami, going to work
was never like this!