

Free Write Journal #149

June 25, 2021

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Free Writes

July 3rd Speaking

At the July 3rd festival, I'm going to speak about our group out-loud readings. We started 2021 with the *Caitanya-caritamrta*, and now we are in the Eighth Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

Then I'll introduce the new books I've published, which most of the audience will not have seen, and I'll read excerpts. Here is an example of one:

“A man came to see Prabhupada in Geneva. He was a biologist, he said, but in the conversation it came out that he had a deceased guru and had been named Ratnananda, “One who learns the truth a little at a time.”

“Prabhupada: ‘What is that truth?’

“Man: ‘I can't express it.’

“Prabhupada: ‘Then you don't know it.’

“The guy had an old voice and was gentle, but bewildered. When you analyze it, he kept saying the truth could not be spoken. He resented that Prabhupada asked him for proof, asked him to define it, then said, “If you can't say, then you don't know.” They are used to saying the Way cannot be expressed.

“Prabhupada: “At least say *something*. We don't claim to know all of Krsna, but

you say at least something of God.”

“We cannot say anything,” he said.

“But perhaps we know as much as you.” I falter while hearing, but stay with it,

my guru strong,

be his follower.”

July 3rd Feast

Nimai Ananda says he’s preparing a special feast for July 3rd. This is the first feast we’ve had in a year and a half. We had to cancel the summer meeting, and the Vyasa-puja meeting was on Zoom due to COVID. Nimai Ananda is getting different cooks to contribute their specialty preparations. And that is the “secret” of the feast. Baladeva will be back from Trinidad after a three-month absence. He has been working on the festival by phoning people from Trinidad and inviting them to come. When he arrives in Stuyvesant Falls, he will kick off last minute preparations to insure that the attendance is big, and he’ll bring things together such as the sound system, the altar for the Deities, space for book distribution (John Endler promises to man a book table all day long and introduce the readers to the new books.) The serving out of *prasadam* has to be organized. (Visnu Aradhanam used to be in charge of it.) Krsna dasi has to fly to Trinidad on July 3rd. But Lalita-kaisori and other ladies know how to set up the altar for the large Gaura-Nitai Deities.

Samsara

A devotee friend of mine wrote me that he’s troubled with the Vedic conception of *samsara* for millions of birth as a consequence of not developing love for Krsna. He says it’s like the Christian conception of eternal damnation as a consequence of being a sinner. But I think the outlook isn’t so dire. When one is initiated by a bona-fide guru and follows the vows, avoiding the principal sinful activities, and chants the quota of Hare Krsna mantras, he is not a candidate for *samsara*. My friend

writes, “And why, oh why, isn’t it enough to come to the point of wanting to love Krsna, wanting to get out of this world, and wanting to transcend?” It is enough to strongly desire to love Krsna and to get out of this world and transcend. Yamaraja tells his Yamadutas to never approach the devotees because they are not candidates for hellish punishments. Prabhupada has assured us, and his spiritual master Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura assured his disciples, that they could get out of the transmigration cycle in one birth, the present lifetime, if they only strictly followed the rules and regulations of *bhakti-sadhana*. Krsna tells Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-gita*, “Tell it boldly, Arjuna, that My devotee will never perish.” Elsewhere, in the Twelfth Chapter of the *Gita*, Krsna speaks liberally of the gradual path to *bhakti-yoga*. Krsna speaks of perfection in *bhakti-yoga*, but then He liberally speaks of what to do if you can’t be perfect: “My dear Arjuna, if you cannot fix your mind upon Me without deviation, then follow the regulative principles of *bhakti-yoga*. In this way, develop a desire to attain Me. If you cannot follow the regulations of *bhakti-yoga*, then just try to work for Me, because by working for Me you will come to the perfect stage. If, however, you are not able to work in this consciousness of Me, then try to act giving up all the results of your work, and try to be self-situated. If you cannot take to this practice, then engage yourself in cultivation of knowledge.”(*Bhagavad-gita* 12.9-12) Krsna continues lowering the bar and giving liberal alternatives to the striving devotee. He says the devotee who at least attempts to serve Him is “very dear to Me.” Karma and *samsara* are for sinful persons who do not surrender to Krsna. Those who sincerely try to please the Lord are on the safe side, and they should not worry about being thrown into the hellish planets.

Ekadasi

Many years ago I used to observe Ekadasi by staying up all night and singing *bhajan*s with Tamala Krsna Maharaja. My longtime assistant Madhumangala accompanied us on the harmonium, but he had hypoglycemia (he needed to keep his sugar level up). So he would get fatigued while

playing the harmonium in the wee hours, and he would fall asleep over the keyboard. It was an enthusiastic practice.

Then I entered my painful period of chronic migraines, and I couldn't stay up all night anymore. Some devotees like the great *tyagi* Mahaniddhi Swami observe every Ekadasi as *nirjala* (fasting and not even drinking water). In the years Prabhupada was with us, he did not observe *nirjala* Ekadasi. He didn't observe strict fasting because he was so "old" and excused himself. He fasted from grains and beans, and he didn't stay up all night, except that he rose around 1:00 A.M. and began his dictations of the *sastras*. He did not order his disciples to observe *nirjala* Ekadasi, but he was strict about ordering us to obey the minimum Ekadasi fasting.

I am now the same age that Prabhupada was when he was with us on the planet. I am eighty-one, and I refrain from fasting, especially total fasting, for fear of recurring headaches. Prabhupada fasted from beans and grains, and all of his obedient disciples and grand-disciples follow that standard.

Out-Loud Reading

In our out-loud reading we are hearing "Instructions for Civilized Human Beings" (*Bhagavatam*, Canto Seven, Chapter Fifteen). Narada Muni has been speaking to King Yudhisthira. In this chapter he gives many varied instructions. He tells about the different kinds of *brahmanas*, the best of which is a *brahmana* who serves Krsna and doesn't fall victim to the dictations of the sense, even if influence comes from his relatives or friends. (If such influence becomes overwhelming, he should take *vanaprastha* and leave the home.) Narada tells Yudhisthira about his previous life. Long ago Narada was a Gandharva with a beautiful body. This Gandharva decorated himself with flower garlands and sandalwood paste and was very attractive to women. He developed lusty desires. Narada told that there was a big festival in honor of the Supreme Lord, and the Gandharvas and Apsaras were also invited. But the Gandharva who later became Narada

surrounded himself at the festival with young girls and began singing songs in honor of the demigods. The Prajapatis who were present became angry with him because they considered he had made an offense. They cursed him to be born in a *sudra* family, and that is what happened in his next birth, with only a maidservant mother to protect him. Fortunately in his birth as a *sudra* boy, he got the opportunity to hear from and serve great devotees who stayed at his home during the period of the rainy season (*caturmasya*). He also sometimes took their *prasadam* after receiving their permission. As a result of these auspicious activities, he later became reinstated as the son of Lord Brahma, eventually to become the great saintly spiritual master known all over the universe.

Narada then told Yudhisthira that he and the Pandavas were most fortunate because Krsna lived with them and performed services as messenger, best well-wisher, friend and cousin. The Lord was their best friend, their well-wisher, their heart and soul, their worshipable director and spiritual master.

Krishna Kripa

I had a meeting outdoors on the porch with Krishna Kripa. I asked him if he were coming to the July 3rd festival in Stuyvesant Falls. But I was disappointed to hear he is going to Europe for *harinama*. I realize he has a tight schedule of travels to different countries for *harinama*. Some months ago Krishna Kripa tested positive for COVID and had to go into quarantine with another devotee. He was frustrated that he couldn't go out and chant, and he was weak from the disease. For years he has been proofreading my books. But now he says Krishna Bhajana has taken up most of that service, and Krishna Kripa presently has no books to proofread. He has a personal blog which has wide circulation. He regularly prints excerpts from *Free Write Journal* in his blog. Some things in my *Journal* really resonate with him, and he loves to share them on his own web page. He had lunch on the porch, listened to the out-loud reading on his computer (and read a section), and then lingered on in the quiet neighborhood of Stuyvesant Falls until 4:00 P.M. before going back to the hectic pace

of his base in New York City.

Nrsimha Dasi as Cook

Nrsimha dasi brought varieties of vegetables from her garden in Guyana. In order to pass them across the border, she had to partially cook them and then freeze them. So now we have an immediate, steady flow of Guyanese cooking. I prefer Indian cooking over Guyanese. But I'll have to wait until we use up the vegetables from her garden before we cook Indian-style. Nrsimha dasi is very competent, and she can prepare any kind of food. So it's just a matter of waiting until she uses up the vegetables she brought from Guyana.

Nrsimha's daughter Gaura Priya is helping, and Krsna dasi has shown them where everything is located in the kitchen. They have also brought from Guyana pickles, condiments, pone and pine tarts (famous sweets from Guyana). Nrsimha also brought from Guyana a favorite of Baladeva's. It's lime pickle—limes mixed with salt, and the jars are left outside in the sun for a week or so before they are ready. Krishna Kripa remarked that the pine tarts were the best desserts he ever had, and he shyly asked if he could take a few home. Nrsimha didn't bring out all the *prasadam* at once. Throughout the day, she continued to bring out another jar and then another jar.

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The two ladies from Guyana help out with the Deity services: the picking of flowers and *tulasi manjaris*, decoration of Their altars, and mainly cooking Their offerings three times a day. They also help keep the ashram clean. Nrsimha likes to water the plants and flowers outdoors. (We keep all of our *tulasis* outdoors all the time now that it's summer and mild weather. The *tulasis* are growing bigger and bigger, and we hope we can fit them back inside when the weather cools off.)

John Endler and I

John Endler has been super-enthusiastic to publish my books (especially those I wrote in the 1990s), but I feel he's been too willful or pushy in taking the lead about what I should publish. I finally expressed this to him, and it made a deep impact on him. He took it as an order from the spiritual master. He wants to back off from telling me what to publish. He wants to give me the manuscripts to read and then I tell him what I want to do with them. I appreciate his humility and backing off from being so willful. But the downside is that I will now have to read all the manuscripts myself and make a decision what to do with them. It means a great deal of reading, which is labor-intensive. I think it's the best way to go, but it's a burden nevertheless.

Vaccination Proof

We have received our two vaccinations against COVID, and we have the proof of this on paper. We want to get the paper printed and laminated for presentation. Doctors have started asking us to show this proof, and we haven't been carrying it. So we're going to make the proof more presentable and carry it when we go to the different medical offices. The last doctor we went to asked to see our proof of vaccinations, and said he needed it before he would proceed with our endoscopy procedure. Some people think it's an abridgement of their civil rights and privacy to have to carry the proof with them at all times. They speculate that it's part of a larger plan to cut back on the American freedoms.

Neurologist

Our primary care physician recommended that we see a neurologist. This is in connection with my weakness of legs. A neurologist treats diseases of the nervous system, which may be early signs of other diseases such as Parkinsons. We've got an appointment at the hospital today to see a Dr. Kozer, and we'll learn more about it.

Ghosts and Witches

I received an urgent phone call from a disciple in India. She told me excitedly that there are ghosts and witches in her house. She lives with her mother and brother. The spirits kept calling her name and making sounds. She was very much confused and afraid. She consulted some man who was supposed to know how to deal with ghosts, and he told her not to perform so much devotional service. But she went on playing the recording of Prabhupada, singing *harinama* in a loud voice. Eventually the ghosts also began chanting *harinama*, so by the force of Prabhupada's *kirtana*, the ghosts became devotees. She is still afraid, but I advised her not to stop her devotional service and Deity worship to Gaura-Nitai. I believe in the existence of ghosts and their influence. But her case proves that the power of ghosts is not as great as the power of Prabhupada chanting the holy name. My disciple's mother also saw some strange phenomena in the house and heard the voices of ghosts, confirming the presence of supernatural beings. I advised my disciple to go on with her devotional service and ignore the advice of the man who said she should reduce it. Chanting Hare Krsna was the method Srila Prabhupada used to chase ghosts in England, and when he was younger, in a house in India. So I am simply following in his footsteps.

Controversies

A devotee wrote me and asked me why I don't take part in the ISKCON controversies. He thought it was not responsible of me to be silent, since I have so much experience over the years and know what Prabhupada wants. Many of the controversies split devotees into two emotional camps, and Vaisnava *aparadha* rears its head in the debates. So it is with the various controversies; I choose my path and then exempt myself when the arguing begins.

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From *A Poor Man Reads the Bhagavatam, Volume 1*

pp. 23-24

“Did you know that if you associate with a poor man, there are particular moments when his poverty will be exposed? According to your temperament, you may either be repulsed, or you will accept his poverty and not hold it against him.

“Imagine that you meet a poor man and he invites you to his home. Perhaps at first there is nothing so much to distinguish him as a poor man except his simple or worn dress—nothing so bad. You walk along with him and accept an invitation to his house. Suddenly, his poverty is exposed. Perhaps he lives in one of those straw-and-mud shacks called *bastis* in India. As you step through the door of his shack, it could be a moment of truth for you, and although you might not say it aloud, you might think, ‘What? This is his house? I have to enter here?’ There would be no way for him to hide his poverty from you.

“Another way his standard of living would be exposed is in the meal he would be able to offer. When you sat down at this poor man’s table, you might again think, ‘This is all there is? Just a few *capatis* and a small bowl of rice (or the American version of the same)?’ Perhaps he even apologizes. It’s all he’s got.

“Sometimes Lord Krsna accepted the invitation of poor people. Srutadeva invited Krsna and the sages to his house and could only offer them planks to sit on and a very simple meal, but because he was imbued with devotion, the Lord and his entourage were at ease and satisfied.

“In the case of my *A Poor Man Reads the Bhagavatam*, I think my poverty is painfully exposed when we come to the end of my comment. Perhaps while reading it, it was so relaxed and easygoing that you didn’t notice that we had already reached the next verse. You might ask yourself, ‘You mean that’s it? That’s your entire comment on

1.1.2, a verse that has been commented on in depth by the *acaryas*? You're already finished, and that's all you have to say?!'

“That's it and my spiritual poverty is exposed. Oh, I could say more about the verse, but I want to cover the entire *Bhagavatam*, so we have to move quickly. Therefore, please forgive me and just come with me to the next verse and purport. I count on your empathy and also on the principle that *sadhus* appreciate any sincere effort to glorify the Lord, even if it's filled with defects.”

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pp.28-29

“Schizophrenic, a toad
becomes a prince. I mean Satsvarupa.
I don't know how
the Swami picked my name or
who he really is and wise,
but I didn't make this up, although
I was a mixed-up boy
in black sweater and pants.
I did get a name and 'Steve'
became the young man who
gave money out of his socks
and taped for the Swami.

“O expert and thoughtful *munis*, O fools and rascals, please relish *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. It is the best fruit of the Vedas as spoken by Sukadeva Gosvami (whose name ushers in the third verse, as sweet to hear as Radha's, which he spoke later only

once in a hidden form). Suka has made the *Bhagavatam* sweeter by first tasting the fruit himself.

“When we are reading and all of a sudden we’re not—when we lose attention—where do we go? Then *where* I can tell, and *why* I don’t know except to say that I’m not a devotee or else my mind is *cancala*. That’s the way it is. I’m sure there are psychological and physiological explanations. Maybe we have a vitamin deficiency or our glucose level suddenly drops. I don’t know. May be a lack of devotion for Krsna.

“Surrealists want automatic writing to catch the unconscious, but I want to pay attention and go deeper than even the intellect is capable. I like Prabhupada’s inspirational encouragement: ‘With great respect and attention, one should receive the message and lessons imparted by the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.’

“The highest spiritual realization is to know the Personality of Godhead as the reservoir of all mellows (*rasas*).

“You’ve given me enough to type all winter, Swamiji!”

“Enough,” he replied, “to last you several lifetimes.”

“I remember thinking that I could always leave in a few months if I didn’t like the Swami, just as I could leave a temporary job or the Boy Scouts or the Navy or even home.

I mean I could leave

any scene I didn’t like—

I learned that from Beat life

and marijuana smoking.

‘I don’t need you, man!’

Walk out on a chick (girl)

or a cat (guy) I didn’t like,

even a success scene if it
 rubbed me the wrong way—
 leave, split, go into the
 street and run fast away, my
 feet in winged sneakers.
 That much I could do,
 it was in my power—to *leave*.
 But he said Krsna will
 capture you and you can't
 get away. We laughed,
 enjoyed sitting on the floor
 eating hot rice and vegetables,
 Howard in a plaid shirt, a big
 beard, and me and me and you and
 it's true
 I didn't make it up."

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pp.46-49

“I may be a poor man (which signifies that I am spiritually humble and bereft of *ruci*. (Prabhupada used to call us ‘poor students’), but poor doesn’t mean deliberately sinful or somehow not honorable in our speech.

“You see, that’s where my problem lies. Sometimes I have something on my mind, and I need to speak out about it or unburden it. Can I talk it out with friends? I mean, do I always have to be a perfect speaker?

“You know what I mean. I am an ordinary fellow. I need to speak in a friendly way among my friends, even though my speech isn’t always perfect. We all assume that we want to be perfect. Therefore, I want to expand the field of what we may write in a book offered to devotees. This is daring and the source of my fear and trembling. I dare to extend the boundaries and include what hasn’t been included by the perfect *acaryas* in their books, their perfect *sastras*. That’s what’s on my mind and the main point behind the ‘extra’ in this poor man’s writing.

“The judges can decide.

Sit on your case. Meantime,
write it out.

“Don’t add insult to injury but be
aware at all times

I want to be

Krsna conscious and am coming around
to that—

and His lotus feet with loud *japa*.

Felt bad about my shortcoming and
my admitting it purified the ether.

Did not stay angry but gave it up.

Didn’t practice *mauna* but
corrected my guff.

To hear and explain that is more important than reading.

I wept and tried.

“Do you remember your thirty years in ISKCON?

Sure, you must have lots of memories.

What gets churned up nowadays as

You read a purport? Is anybody

Listening?

“I can say that Suta followed

the four rules and repeat over and over again, ‘We

should do this and we should do that’

until my audience is bored sick even

though what I said was

technically perfect.

I think you can

be private and say, ‘I actually feel

okay and grateful, but these

things I recall . . .’

“Then maybe you even tell

of times you were shaky on the

four rules if it’s edifying to hear—

how you overcame it.

Or you could tell a dream

where you were running away

from your Godbrothers, the big ones,
 who were going, ‘Tsk, tsk,
 why do you go apart?’
 You didn’t want love?
 You hid in order to write.

“A puzzle, not clear
parampara conclusion—but
 somehow important, some-
 how full of implicit
 release from *maya*.

“A lot of official stuff in
 an institution may be bunk.
 More and more devotees
 admit it. They are sick of
 pretensions of perfection.
 I don’t want to rant and rail
 against any group or anyone.
 Just to speak and be allowed.
 Actually I only wish to preach,
 I guess. But it comes
 this way.

“Suta obey the four rules. I

do too. And you, I hope.
 If you don't you may tell me.
 I won't hold it against you.
 I'll help as I can.
 I won't help you to sin.
 But . . .
 I know an *acarya*
 should be grave."

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pp.64-68

"It is impressive that the sages have formulated such a question and that Suta is prepared to answer it with confidence. This indicates the great power and learning on the part of speaker and hearer. People often claim cheaply to know the best thing or to have the most important information, although they actually don't know anything at all. Recently, I saw an ad for a New Age book which claimed to teach the knowledge 'most worth learning,' and that this knowledge was derived from the author's family. The sages of Naimisaranya would never accept such an audacious claim—a claim based on whimsy and bluff. Their question is all-encompassing, but they can be confident that Suta Gosvami, who is not only mature in age but blessed by his spiritual masters, can give authorized knowledge.

" . . . It will take time to sort things out. There's no point being impatient. Suta gives everything immediately, but at the same time, he gives it gradually. It unfolds with our lives. We hear and then live and then hear again and then apply what we have heard. The answer to all their questions is, of course, *bhakti*. That is the theme of the

Bhagavatam, how to understand *bhakti-yoga*. Suta will now explain how to engage in *bhakti-yoga* by engaging in hearing, chanting, remembering the lotus feet of the Lord, etc. All of these practices are contained in the Hare Krsna mantra—Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare—because chanting God’s names is the *yuga-dharma*.

“ . . . Write quickly, without any preconceived subject, fast enough so that you will not remember what you’ve written and be tempted to re-read what you have written. The first sentence will come spontaneously, so compelling is the truth that with every passing second there is a sentence unknown to our consciousness which is only crying out to be heard. It is somewhat of a problem to form an opinion about the next sentence; it doubtlessly partakes both of our conscious activity and the other . . . Go on as long as you like. Put your trust in the inexhaustible nature of the murmur.’(Andre Breton)

“I like the idea of writing like that. I have a desire, which I hope is Krsna conscious, to write not just from the mind—the flickering or academic student’s brain—but directly from the arm-body, ‘the unconscious,’ and then to dovetail it with the Supreme consciousness, with Krsna’s purpose. Can I connect with Krsna and not with the demon babblers within?

“If you paint over the surface as fast as you can, you eventually get bored. Better to go deep deeper, or rather, more toward the unconscious.

What does he say, the poet?

Something about the loneliness and that people all

have masks. His impressions of how
 a fluorescent bulb flickers before it
 goes on. He ought to go to India
 where the tubes wait a long
 time before clicking on.
 Hey, he ought to get a haircut and
 A job. That silly saffron skirt.

“Unseen spirits of Vrndavana known only to pure devotees, please bless me and
 Madhu and Samika Rsi and our taxi driver as we make our way to the next place.

“I won’t say goodbye,
 but please be with me as I
 travel. I won’t say, ‘I failed
 to be in Vrndavana,’ but I will
 continue to try.”

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pp.71-72

“I made a sketch of Radha and Krsna and a scribe, and I wrote the words, ‘Angels
 of mercy came to our Room #42 and gave us Idea and Blessing for this book (January
 1996). I leave today promising to always continue it. What can I do to help people of
 this age? I say, a book like this *PMRB. Vrndavana, ki jaya!*’

“Went for *darsana* of the Deities. Touched Prabhupada’s foot and took a rose.
 Felt, ‘I want to hear your lecture tapes, love you, and be dedicated to you.’ Went before

Gaura-Nitai and felt good, the best for this visit to Vrndavana. Thought of Them in Mayapur and felt the desire to return there. Went to Krsna-Balaram and saw Their beauty. Thought of Srila Prabhupada on tape saying that everyone knows they are made of stone from Jaipur, yet they are Krsna and Balaram. Prayed for spiritual strength (*bala*) to write *A Poor Man Reads the Bhagavatam*. Went to Radha-Syama and prayed, “I know You are the pinnacle of Vrndavana, and I will reach you as Prabhupada desires.’ Then Their *pujari* gave me a garland and some *tulasi* leaves. We bowed before Tulasi and took *caranamrta* from the old, saintly *brahmacari* who always serves it and who is always so sweet to us.”

“Canto 1, Chapter 1, Text 10

‘O learned one, in this iron age of Kali men have but short lives. They are quarrelsome, lazy, misguided, unlucky and, above all, always disturbed.’

“Comment

“When we read this verse, we become amazed at the *Bhagavatam*’s relevance. Although spoken thousands of years ago, the *Bhagavatam* draws a picture of the worsening condition of human life. We are living through it now. Hearing this verse should make us more alert to understand that the *Bhagavatam* is speaking to our times and that the remedy the sages propose is actually meant to be taken up by people in the world today.”

From ***Begging for the Nectar of the Holy Name***

pp.158-59

“I am beginning to doubt my purpose here. Maybe I should think of moving on, going traveling, answering my mail. But I can’t stop my *japa* retreat just because I think I won't look good at the end. Stop worrying about your profile. You want a neat diary and a neat *vrata* where you come out looking modest and intelligent and overall pretty. You reached a nice humble conclusion that you are a left-back and that you didn’t mind doing remedial work; you realized that you can’t jump right into spontaneous Krsna consciousness without tending to *japa*. Your main conclusion (which you think will be helpful to others) is that you should bring your mind back from its wandering to pay attention to the sound of the Hare Krsna mantra. You want to end it with those conclusions because you are panicking—‘I won’t get any further than that.’

“But if that's all you learned, then stick it out and keep having it drummed into your head. Besides, you didn't come here to make a neat and tidy diary. Keep going. Krsna is expertly arranging for everything. Have faith.”

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From ***Meditations and Poems***

pp.189-91

“May I Hear, In Spite of My Inner Noise”

“The praises of the guru reach Krsna through the discipic succession. Let’s see that you don’t grab on to them for your own gratification. Number one priority is your own integrity. You can’t get it just by going along with the laws of ISKCON or by defying laws. You are responsible in an individual way. Srila Prabhupada said, ‘Don’t be satisfied that you have understood . . . This should be distributed.’

“The facts are ‘impossible’ by modern standards of history and physics and current opinion. They say how could Vyasa have lived five thousand years ago, how could Krsna be God? They don’t believe. The spiritual master believes and teaches. It’s a hard thing. You believe what you are teaching? Yes, but I can’t exactly say why. *Srimad-Bhagavatam, Bhagavad-gita* . . . because he taught it, I became convinced. I’m living it. Live it openly and honestly by writing. If someone comes along and wants to be a devotee, I can help him. But I don’t claim. Tell them, I am trying to be a disciple of Srila Prabhupada. I can give you the link to him. His movement, ISKCON. What is a guru? Do I know? Do I know Krsna? Do I know anything? Hold on to the steady – accept Vedic knowledge. *Hari-nama* in this age. Actually, in one sense I shouldn’t be a spiritual master. But I do it. We do it. I beg Srila Prabhupada to accept me, Lord Krsna, please accept me. Let me clear my mind and self of these doubts and disqualifications, so that I may serve others in a Krsna conscious way. Nothing else to do with my life.

“Now chant and try to hear. The same thing. The curtain parted, holy sound heard in the inner recess of your self despite noise.”

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From ***Memory in the Service of Krsna***

pp.74-75

“The trying is a start. Like the smart and frugal businessman, we can capitalize on our small amount and increase it. Srila Prabhupada tells the story of the Indian millionaire who began his vast fortune by the sale of a dead rat.

“A young Indian man, who later became the patriarch in a family of multimillionaires, approached his father one day and asked for a loan of money. The young man wanted capital to begin a business. But his father wanted him to earn it and

said, 'You can raise the capital yourself.' The young man said, 'But I have nothing with which to begin.' His father replied, 'Start with a dead rat.' And so the young man went into the streets and found a dead rat. At that time a small bounty was given by the municipality for anyone who turned in a dead rat. With this small amount of money, the young man then bought a few beans and sold them. From that capital his wealth began to increase, and eventually he built a lucrative business into a tremendous success. Similarly, in devotional service we start in a humble way, but with enthusiasm, patience, and God's grace, we can become lovers of Krsna."

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From ***Japa Reform Notebook***

p.22

"You must think of chanting in terms of serving the spiritual master, not just as your own *sadhana*. I am thinking Srila Prabhupada has given me different responsibilities, and if I don't carry them out he will be displeased with me. Spiritual life rests on chanting. That's the main teaching. Chant Hare Krsna, chant sixteen rounds. So how can that not be thought of as service to the spiritual master? Sometimes the spiritual master may find out, 'Oh, some disciple, he is not chanting. What kind of a disciple is that? He promised he would chant. We are always stressing chant.' I can't advance in devotional service unless I chant. Therefore, it's not just your *sadhana*, but everything you do is to serve Krsna and the spiritual master." Everything. That should be our dedication, that there is nothing apart.

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From *Songs From Stuyvesant Falls*

p.64

“4:31 A.M.

“One day while Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu was going to the sea to bathe, He suddenly saw a sand dune named Cataka-parvata. Mistaking the sand dune for Govardhana Hill, He ran toward it. Reciting a verse from *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, He ran as fast as the wind, and Govinda and the other devotees could not catch up. Suddenly He became stunned in ecstasy and lost all strength to proceed further. His hairs stood on end, blood and perspiration flowed from His pores, and He produced a gargling sound from His throat. The devotees loudly chanted the Hare Krsna mantra near Him and washed His body with cold water.

“After a long time, the Lord stood up and shouted, ‘Haribol!’ He returned to partial consciousness and said, ‘Who has brought Me here from Govardhana Hill? I was seeing Lord Krsna’s pastimes, but then I couldn’t see them. I saw Lord Krsna tending the cows and playing the flute. Srimati Radharani and all Her *gopi* friends came to meet Him. When Krsna and Radha entered a cave the other *gopis* asked Me to pick some flowers.

“Then all of you made a tumultuous sound and carried me from there to this place.’ The Lord began to weep, and the devotees wept with Him. Just then, the elderly *sannyasis* arrived and the Lord became external. He went to bathe in the sea and then returned to His residence to eat lunch. The author says all the uncommon pastimes of the Lord are simply His play. Whoever hears them attains the shelter of Krsna’s lotus feet. I chanted and kept the picture of the Lord

running to Cataka-Parvata in my mind. I kept my *japa* pure and mindful.”

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From ***My Dear Lord Krsna: A Book of Prayers, Volume 2***

pp.80-81

“My dear Lord Krsna

“Sometimes I can’t think of a nice prayer to make to You. As I said in my free write today, I sometimes feel the weight of my mortality—a kind of depressed mood over knowing that everything in my life is going to end. Sometimes when a headache comes, I feel the necessity to take time out and be tolerant, and this causes a mental strain. I sometimes do not feel enthusiastic to work at my service. These are all downswing moods. I wish I were always in an upswing or steady mood.

“If I were more mindful of Your presence in my life, I would be steadier and more creative.

“I ask You to help me with these mixed moods. Let me be simple and faithful as a servant of You and my spiritual master.

“So many devotees have burdens to shoulder, and I should take care of my own, as they have to take care of theirs. So many nondevotees are working with no real hope or purpose to their lives because they are not in devotional service. As Henry David Thoreau said of the mass of men, they are ‘Living lives of quiet desperation.’ I should not descend to that level. I have real purpose and responsibility to my life. I am dedicated to inspiring readers of my writings. I have taken this on as a service to them and to You and Prabhupada. I should accept that as a duty and perform it without shirking.

“There is no reason to be depressed. I am working in the spiritual energy, where service is eternal and there is no loss or diminution in the work. The smallest effort is saving me from the greatest fear. Whatever I do is to my eternal credit and is added to my account of service to You. I should be confident of this. As I wrote in a poem, ‘I’m a lucky so-and-so.’

“There is every reason for optimism. A devotee typically feels his unworthiness before You, and he feels he is not doing enough.

“These are Vaisnava symptoms. But they are different from material depression. Prabhupada has said that a devotee should feel jolly. If he feels morose, it is a sign that he is not Krsna conscious. The transcendental symptoms of *dainya*, or unworthiness before the Lord, do not make the devotee unenthusiastic to serve. They are symptoms of humility. He does not think he is a great preacher or a great devotee. But he is confident of his connection to Krsna, and it makes him feel satisfied and happy. He is at the same time humble but blissful to have some service to do for Krsna and guru.

“So let me not feel depressed in my life situation. I have the greatest boon. I am able to chant Your names and render some service in the *sankirtana* movement. I am free of sinful karma, and I’m working within Your spiritual energy. Let me hear my little crosses like a good soldier. Let me take joy in my daily communion with You. let me do my service and help others to do theirs. You are handling me kindly You are handling me kindly and gently, and I am ever-grateful to You. May I show a happy face.”

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From ***Passing Places, Eternal Truths (Travel Writings 1988-1996)***

pp.166-67

“Europe

“Brescia, Italy

“I was chanting *japa*, but stopped to write because the sights were distracting me—statues of mermaids, etc. You can chant mechanically while the victimized eyes trip down the city streets. Instead, I am turning chastely to this notepad, although in words I seek the same closeness to the protective holy names.”

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From ***Prabhupada Nectar, Volume Five***

pp.57-58

“LITTLE DROPS OF NECTAR”

“Prabhupada is Considerate”

“Prabhupada once arrived in New York, and as usual, hundreds of devotees had gathered at the temple to meet him. As Prabhupada stepped out of his car, the devotees exploded in a tumultuous *kirtana*. As he walked to the doorway of the 55th Street temple, hundreds of devotees followed close behind, chanting Hare Krsna and ‘Jaya Prabhupada.’

“A young mother carrying her baby followed immediately behind Prabhupada as he passed through the glass doors that led to the temple’s lobby. The lobby was also filled with ecstatic, chanting devotees. Seeing the young mother behind him, Prabhupada stopped and held the glass door open for her. Even with hundreds of people worshiping him, Prabhupada took the time to show proper etiquette to someone else.”

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Writing Sessions

From *June Bug* (1996)

“June 4, 1996 (continued)”

“4:20 A.M.

“My letters are not reaching disciples. Many are not. We guess it is foul play, like anti-cult or born-again Christians in the post office. What else could it be? I am taking my ‘Goswami’ off the return address and asking them to send me their *karmi* names. That may help stop it. Yes, go ahead and mention such things in your book. Everything may be there. Don’t worry about it. This is your book. You are not writing in fear of critics. You are writing what you do and what you love.

“The fact is I am not so deep. I am occupied with the service events. That’s fine too because I love that. But we hope in the coming week to enter a time where I can sink a little below that surface of agitation. That’s what a writing retreat is for, and that’s why I seek them and why I seek to stay away from social and email discourse. Explain it to others and to yourself: I am a writer, and it’s best for me to be apart so I can tap the inside. I am a person who is very much a part of the Krsna consciousness movement and so I have absorbed many valuable instructions. Now I want to tell of them from a depth. I want to report how I actually feel about them, and I think that will be valuable to the devotees who may be busy with preaching or worldly duties and cannot do this. It is my privilege and duty. That’s the life of a writer. If some don’t understand what I am saying, at least I understand it, and I have to proceed.

“Regarding the surface news, I don’t want to reject it while it’s flowing. It’s all I have. If there is something underneath, then the way to reach it is to first scoop off the top. June comes from the Roman goddess Juno. She is the protector of women in all stages of their lives. She was involved in marriage rites, and that’s why, even today,

people think it's auspicious to get married in June. Maybe I can connect this to a marriage in my own life. *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (William Blake)? No, but the marriage of outer and inner, marriage of the writer and other self. Some combining of forces. That sounds far-fetched. Why are you trying this? Because it's June and this came to me, bitten by the nonexistent love bug I called the June bug. It's from my own imagination, and that makes it even better that there is no reference to it in the slang dictionary, which is just coinage from college kids, rock 'n' roll, and criminals.

"Juno is a goddess of the moon, and I have been liking the moon as I told you, looking through the skylight when I get up. It was quite nice from eleven to twelve overnight until I had to quit. The moon was full on June 1st; now it is diminishing. Life is short. Be happy for what you get. I was imagining I was in a dungeon or prison and this was the only light I could see, and I was up early and chanting. Grateful.

"In June, the birds and animals are out training their young. June 13th is the birthday of W.B. Yeats, a notorious character, but a great poet.

"These are the days when the skies resume
the old sophistries of June –
a blue-and-gold mistake." (Emily Dickinson)

"As for the scarab beetle, who resembles the June bug, he was sacred in ancient Egypt. It seems, the moderns say, that Egyptians could not tell the male from the female scarab, so they concluded that it reproduced itself asexually. The same was true of the sun god Ra, who was self-resurrected. Therefore, they identified the beetle with self-generation or immortality. The scarab became identified with the ability to understand oneself, to be enlightened. Resurrection and immortality. When the Egyptians embalmed bodies, they removed the person's heart and replaced it with a jeweled or golden scarab.

“Today Madhu goes into Dublin on business. I’ll be alone except for devotees coming by to bring food, and for Uddhava’s family, who will come to work in their garden. I have said there is an outside and an inside world, with surface and depth. I don’t want to make too-distinct boundaries with this. The reader can tell for him or herself when I am going down below the frostline.

“Corn is growing up to your calf (on your leg) in Uddhava’s polytunnel. Of course, the mosquitoes, butterflies, and gnats will increase this month. But mind you, all of the phenomena of nature will soon be gone, so in that spirit I must write quickly. I hope what I write will outlive the season, but I have to write it in the brief spell while the season is here.

“The ‘Blessing of the Berries’ is June 18th. It was originally a pagan festival, but was gradually incorporated into the Christian Church in Europe, where people bring baskets of berries up to the altar and the priest prays for good crops. I pray for a good crop too.

“The Saxons called June ‘joy time.’ The colors for June are yellow and orange. The birthstone is moonstone or pearl, both representatives of the moon. May the June flowers of Krsna consciousness push me along and further into the immortal, transcendental teachings of the *Vedas*.

“O, my Love just like a red, red, rose,
That’s newly sprung in June.
O, my Love is like the melody,
That’s sweetly played in tune.” (Robert Burns)

“You will have to start many a time without any theme if you want to write

more. And a neat, cute book about beetles will perhaps have to go by the board. Not just writing about June bugs. It is silly, I tell you, and you will definitely have to go below it. You have to also go below the retelling of what you read in his book five minutes ago. Then down to what? To psychoanalysis? No, that is not very relevant, what this person did in his body when he was a child. That is like telling the ancient history about the battles of Saratoga, New York between the British and the Americans. Therefore, what will you tell if not the Egyptian and Roman histories? Or the things you could look up in books like *The A to Z of the Emotional Problems of Children*?

“The moving of the trees with leaves? The making of sentences good and bad? I think it might be ISKCON attitudes and how to be a devotee nowadays. No, not that. That should not be our fare. There are controversies as to who is the guru and who is the Vaisnava to follow, and how to live in community. Of course, you would not address them directly, but even if you think, ‘I will go under these obvious themes and talk of what is their foundation,’ that also I won’t like because you would have those controversies in mind. *Prajalpa*.

“And neither talk about Radha and Krsna and the *gopis* because it is over your head. Or the Irish-British politics when you get to the north of Ireland in a few days.

“Then what, sir, is left to discuss after this *neti-neti* process?

“The writing life. What it means to write when you go and do it. And your little life. And chanting the holy names and the books, inevitably the books, of what Krsna is and your recollection of it. I have been so sleepy and so-called ‘out of it’ as a result of jet lag that I’m not able to do extra chanting or reading. I simply fall asleep. But I hope to recover from that and maybe there will be some life.

“You will look around at the place you are living called Geaglum, a piece of land next to the lakes of Enniskillen and I’m sure you’ll make some observations. But that

may quiet down also and I just hope you'll not be afraid to tell us whatever darned little thing or big things come up. As June bug came up, so anything.

“The significance of June bug is that it appeared, so you said, ‘All right, we shall call it *June Bug*.’ You weren’t afraid of its lack of relevance. In the same way, you have to take the topics that come, even if they are from your childhood or from ISKCON nowadays.

“But there are such things as forbidden topics. I respect your right to feel that something is too private to put into these writings, but you ought to at least write it down on a piece of paper and later throw it away.’

“Okay, I agree to that.

“Although I write freely, I’m aspiring to become a Vaisnava and I don’t want to dwell in nether regions, either in my words or in my next life by transferring there through karma.

“‘Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare,’ came out of his mouth, but he lost his grip on the beads and they fell to the floor. He went to Vrndavana and met up with a fellow who had left ISKCON and said how he chanted all day long and thought of the *gopi-manjaris*. He met up with another man who said only *his* guru was bona fide. He met up with a man who had given up spiritual life entirely and was selling sweets and blaspheming. Another man went to worship Allah. Another and another. It fills your head with sawdust.

“Plans, plans. Madhu goes to Dublin. He has let his hair grow gray, to look friendly, as he says – the old guy with the gray hair is not a skinhead or a Hare Krsna fanatic. As for me, when I come into their office I will be a bit of an odd fellow, certainly old and harmless, who just wants to live in their wonderful country where

scholars and literary artists in the past and even up to the present with Seamus Heaney.

“Have you read Seamus Heaney?”

“Only a little bit. I find him difficult to understand. I had better luck reading Patrick Kavanaugh.

“Do you know one of Kavanaugh’s poems?”

“Yes, there’s one that ends, ‘in every blooming thing.’ It describes how everyone in town has gone to the dance and he has the road to himself, but he is actually lonely as a poet is. There were a series of poems written realistically about experiencing climbing up to Knock. I do remember and I may get a book of his poems again to see the ironic, sometimes bitter flavor.

“Maybe now I will go to Innisfree.

“What about W.B. Yeats and James Joyce?”

“Well, of course, every schoolboy knows them, if only be required reading or some of their great works. But I tell you, sir, I am done with this now and want to simply sign the forms and go on with it. I am not becoming a resident primarily because of Ireland’s literary artists, but because I am a Hare Krsna and find it a pleasant place to write. My primary concern is to write these here religious books.

“Will you tell us something of the sort of books you write?”

“Yes. Some of them are like this biography of our spiritual master. I write *Prabhupada Meditations*. Sometimes I take an ancient text from the Sanskrit and write a commentary on it, which you might call applied theology. I have quite a bit of experience from living in the movement since 1966, so I apply my experience to the teachings and I write something like that.

“And what is that little one, *Castlregregory Prose Poems*? And this book of *haiku*?’

“I think they speak for themselves. I would not tell the man in the office of the Department of Justice (which also has control over the Garda, the police) that I write more freely nowadays than any of the books that I am showing him. I would not tell him that I have commenced one for this month on the theme of bugs that come out on the ground and myself searching like those that fly up with fat, buzzy bodies. I could tell him that I am searching and considering themes, whether the bugs chewing at leaves and causing damage for the growers is analogous to my own search and the damage I may do—perhaps damage to the growth of the errant weeds of *anarthas*. No, I wouldn’t talk about it. Prefer to be taciturn and say, ‘Give me one year in Ireland and next renegotiate, and let us go today because we need to travel north to that place to write. Me buddy is taking me on a tour of Irish places, not including pubs and castles, where we might consider writing.’

“These are some things to consider.

“Hey, what about—’

“That was the voice of Caliban. I don’t want to hear from him. He is lusty, so he should keep his mouth shut. Omit his words. But we may let ourselves know from time to time that he does exist. If you entirely try to deny him, then he will grow in his own way.

“I contend that those who may present themselves as pure devotees and always merged in *Vraja-lila* also have a Caliban in them, but they won’t tell us. Or they only generalize and say, ‘I suppose once in a millennium some nonsense may pass through

my brain, but I definitely don't identify with it. It is like the river that enters into the ocean but the ocean remains still. I prefer to talk of Krsna. I don't give the demon life.'

"Or they may generalize in another way and say, 'Yes, I am always in the mode of ignorance but I pray to Radha and Visakha to save me by allowing me to comb their hair.'

"Let us see things in a better light. I imagine critics and straw men and then I knock them down with my broom and walking stick. A fine battler I am. Better we roam about and seek ourselves. That means our own Caliban, our own little Stevie (no Wonder) from Queens, or poet from a babbling brook, our plowshare, or man of war, Big Guru, saint and elaborator of this and that, free-writer of uncertainty, New Age grab-bag.

"We will let you know. I am mainly sitting here where we used to call the ticker-tape. Now it's FAX or email communications, and the stuff is pouring out, being automatically printed by the brain, especially the right brain. It's pouring out and I am simply the printer. I'm passing it on to you. I don't know much of anything. My job is to at least monitor it, clip out anything that is too nasty, and put in some Krsna consciousness if there is too much lacking. I do want to appear as a good devotee in this Centennial year."