

## ***Free Write Journal #160***

**September 10, 2021**

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### **Free Writes**

#### **Surrender Unto Me**

Our out-loud reading group is hearing *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. We first heard of Arjuna's unwillingness to fight. But then he accepted Krsna as his spiritual master and surrendered to Him. As a submissive disciple, Arjuna asks Krsna many questions, and He expertly replies. In our group, Krsna dasi is especially enthusiastic to hear the *Gita*, and she wants us to read it repeatedly.

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We have come to the concluding verse of the *Bhagavad-gita*. Krsna says give up all religious practices (which have been taught in the *Bhagavad-gita*) and just "surrender unto Me." The nondevotees find this instruction very difficult to follow; they think it hampers their independence and free will. The verse emphasizes that surrender to Krsna is the topmost form of yoga. The *Bhagavad-gita* is therefore meant for the devotee of Krsna. Krsna says He is teaching this confidential knowledge to Arjuna because Arjuna is His very dear friend. By surrendering to Krsna, His pure devotee will be freed from all sinful reactions and religious obligations. He assures His pure devotee, "Do not fear."

### **Choosing the Next Book**

Since we have almost finished reading *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* in our out-loud reading, we took

time and cast four new ballots on the next book we will read. It has become standard practice that the four inmates of Viraha Bhavan pick out the next book to read. These devotees are: myself, Baladeva Vidyabhusana, Bala T. (Baladeva from Trinidad) and Krsna dasi. The ballots were cast in complete secrecy. No one talked about their choices or tried to canvas devotees as to which book they wanted us to read. But surprisingly it came out unanimously: four votes in favor of *Caitanya-caritamrta* by Krsnadasa Kaviraja. (The previous book we read, *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, was also chosen by a unanimous vote.) It seems we are all likeminded souls who can tell what book each of us wants to read next. We look forward to hearing the *upadesa* and *lila* of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His associates.

### **Going Downstairs for Lunch**

For the first time in six weeks, I felt strong enough to venture downstairs and join the others for lunch at the kitchen table. It was nice being with the family of devotees and reading out loud (now from the *Caitanya-caritamrta*).

### **I Join the Out-Loud Reading**

For some weeks I have joined and taken my place in the out-loud reading at mealtimes. It's a bit of a strain on my breath and eyes to do it, but the participating devotees are enthusiastic that I join them. I want to encourage the others to also take turns reading from the books. It's a deep and serious *sanga* to read together out loud, mostly from Srila Prabhupada's books. There is time for more devotees to take part in reading, and we just have to organize it and invite them all. Guru dasa ([gurudas.sdg@gmail.com](mailto:gurudas.sdg@gmail.com)) can be contacted, and he can remind the devotees that I'd like it if they also took part in the reading.

## Visitors

Bala T.'s grown up children are here in Stuyvesant Falls, giving him solace for his cancer condition. Rasesvari and Dhanvantari are their names. Rasesvari said her father went through one stage of the chemotherapy and thought it wasn't as bad as he expected. Rasesvari is getting an interview for a new job, and Dhanvantari has finished his last year of college. He doesn't know what is next. I expressed to them that they both loved their dad very much, and they agreed. They both went to Hindu schools when they were young, the closest thing to *varnasrama dharma*. They were well-trained and have kept their family values.

## More Visitors

My disciples Bhakti Rasa and Kirtida devi dasi have been planning for a while to travel from Newcastle, England to stay with us in upstate New York. They had to be quarantined for two weeks in Barbados, and then when they arrived in New York City, there was a flooding rainstorm. It was completely unexpected. The trains were not running, so they had to go a little outside the city and get a Trailways bus. The last stop was an hour away from nearby Hudson. So they underwent great austerities to come and stay with us. Kirtida has to go back after a month, but Bhakti Rasa can stay longer. They arrived last night at 10:00 P.M. Baladeva fell asleep while waiting for them, so they didn't have much of a welcoming party.

## Guests for Lunch

We had numerous surprise guests for lunch today. Muktavandya came with many flowers. He brought with him some of his students, devotees who follow him and look up to him. Two of them are a couple from Ghana, Africa who have five girls as offspring. Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja gave them spiritual names at the time of their births. A youngish Indian lady was present. She was very enthusiastic to meet me, and she's enthusiastic about all her devotional service, especially preparing

for festivals. She praised Muktavandya as a natural leader of devotees in Boston. He is very kind to everyone, and they have great respect for him. Also present in the kitchen were Bhakti Rasa and Kirtida dasi from England. They helped cook the lunch and distributed it, and cleaned up afterwards. Everyone was in a good mood. The youngish Indian lady said the best *sandesa* in the world is made and offered to Radha-Gopivallabha in Boston, but Gaura Vani dasa (Rukmini's son) argued that the best *sandesa* was made in Mayapur *dhama* and offered to Radha-Madhava. Both of these Deities are made from the same mold. I said I didn't want to get involved in the controversy over which *sandesa* was best, but I ate one that had been offered to Radha-Gopivallabha. The mood was very mellow as we talked about Krsna consciousness and the recent festivals. The other day Muktavandya underwent a colonoscopy. They were checking to see whether he had any pre-cancerous polyps. During the procedure his heart stopped beating. The doctor got his heart going again and they gave him pills for the pain and sent him home. This is not the first time Muktavandya has had an incident like this. He faces death and then comes back laughing about it. He says he'll just keep going as long as he can. He is a kind of miracle man. He refuses to give up his service of cooking and cleaning and getting flowers from the market. He is like the cat who has nine lives. He keeps going to the edge and then comes back smiling. He is very kind to everyone and is very popular. (A Pennsylvania newspaper took a poll of who was the most popular person in the state. Muktavandya came in second after the coach of the Penn State football team.)

### **A Visit by John Endler**

John Endler came and told me the shocking news that there had just been a mugging in the parking lot of his church in broad daylight. Two young men identified as teenagers attacked a schoolteacher and stole her bag and her car. They drove that car to another town, used it in an armed robbery and then abandoned it. The police returned the car, and the woman was safe. But the church has installed new security measures in their grounds. It was a great shock to John and all the

congregational members.

Then we talked about book production. It is going on schedule for the books we want to distribute on my *Vyasa-puja* day on December 4<sup>th</sup>. Lal Krishna has sent me covers for the haiku collection, and he is working on finishing up *The Best I Could Do*. John is ready to serialize on my *Free Write Journal* installments of *Karttika* books. They will appear in three substantial sections, giving prestige to the *Free Write Journal*.

## **Devotees Celebrate Despite COVID**

I received a letter from a devotee in New Zealand. The country is on complete lockdown because of COVID. It's a small nation, and they think that by keeping strict prohibitions, they can keep the cases down. So there is little socialization except for people going out to buy groceries. But the devotees have been observing Vaisnava holidays in their homes. They celebrated *Jhulan-yatra*, Lord Balarama's Appearance Day, Janmastami and Prabhupada's *Vyasa-puja*. Despite the restrictions, the devotees are unstoppable.

Not only in New Zealand but elsewhere, some devotees are enthusiastic and some are bored. Some are excited with possibilities afforded by Zoom, whereas others are depressed that they can't preach in the old ways, wide open.

## **Kirtida's Successful Meal**

After two days of serving *prasadam* that was too hard to chew and too spicy, Kirtida dasi made a successful meal today. It was eggplant and potatoes in a cream sauce, and bread and butter. And the other preparation was mixed greens cooked with olive oil and salt. I complimented her, and she was grateful.

## **To the Prodigal Son, Returned Home**

My favorite sweet, I guess I'd say "*sandesa*." But not just any *sandesa*. If it is too wet or too dry and crumbly, I don't like it. I think *sandesa* was one of Srila Prabhupada's favorite sweets, but they had to be made just right, to his liking.

As for exchanges between us, I feel relaxed in your company. I do not mind it that you see me toothless. We are like spiritual father and spiritual son. I like the exchanges of glances, intimate words and writings. I would like it if you could spend time with me and Baladeva in Viraha Bhavan. I am glad that you are enthusiastic to chant sixteen rounds.

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

pp. 165-66

**"Questions by the Sages" (continued)**

"Apollinaire never

was a devotee in Krsna consciousness and a part of

the GBC meetings where one leader

jumped over the table to contest the

challenge from another who wanted to take

over the Canary Islands.

"Apollinaire never

joined ISKCON. He did not accept Suta

as the captain of the ship. He did however

write strange poems of the modern

(19<sup>th</sup> century) saying the Eiffel Tower

was great and women are wonderful,

soft arms and wet eyes and  
all that.

“I better be a straight *sannyasi*  
and not talk of what Apollinaire  
didn’t do. Or maybe I should  
persist  
for the cause of humankind—  
men and women happy together in ISKCON.  
Make best use of my brief time  
in the ship as we cross  
together. It’s a fact we make  
progress as a crew.  
I praise the individual.  
I learned that from Sri Krsna and  
Srila Prabhupada—we each go alone and  
a good son improves the whole  
family just as one flower improves  
the fragrance of the forest.

“Apollinaire never changed his socks  
the way I do. He didn’t live for  
awhile in South India or south of  
Paris with the bliss to be given  
a task of *staying close* to

the *Bhagavatam*. That's what my master said  
 (as I envisioned in  
 room 42 of Krishna-Balarama Guesthouse):  
 'Whatever you do, stay close to  
*Srimad-Bhagavatam*, faithful to its words, and  
 don't go away. As for your  
 own nonsense, what can I say?  
 If you don't take it seriously,  
 I won't either.

"Or to put it another way—  
 I do declare a little life is  
 truth, but it's within Krsna consciousness.  
 We are all *jiva* servants.  
 Only our *tapasya* will reveal these truths.  
 I too am pulling at the rope  
 in the *Ratha-yatra* of the spirit.  
 My soul is young, but  
 I sometimes feel sad and tired, an old monk,  
 at different times of the day.  
 I just want to be myself."

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**“Canto 1, Chapter 1, Text 23**

**“Since Sri Krsna, the Absolute Truth, the master of all mystic powers, has departed for His own abode, please tell us to whom religious principles have now gone for shelter.”**

**Comment:**

“. . . Prabhupada assures us that the answer will be given later. It is one of the most important questions the sages ask, and Suta will directly reply to it in the third chapter. However, Prabhupada ends his last purport of Chapter One with this statement: ‘The *Srimad-Bhagavatam* is the transcendental sound representation of the Personality of Godhead, and thus it is the full representation of transcendental knowledge and religious principles.’

“That’s the answer. Whenever Krsna is absent—as He travels from universe to universe—the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* acts on His behalf. Everything Krsna is is also in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*: hearing, studying and practicing the *Bhagavatam*’s teachings are as good as being in Krsna’s personal presence.

“Therefore, Krsna’s devotees cleave to the *Bhagavatam* and teach it to others. Sri Jiva Gosvami’s *Sat Sandarbhas* were written to establish the *Bhagavatam* as the supreme *pramana*, the standard of knowledge. Prabhupada chose to translate and write purports on the *Bhagavatam* as his vocation and literary opus. We can feel safe playing in the backyard and lecture hall of the *maha-purana*.”

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pp. 172-74

**“Questions by the Sages” (continued)**

“Roberta Kaplan walked up to the bench where I was sitting on the Brooklyn College campus. She was a few years younger than me. We were mildly attracted to each other. She wanted a man to attack her like a leopard, she said. I was too Catholic for that. I was a sad lad in a drab olive raincoat.

“I remember, but I don’t want to—those Brooklyn College days.

“Then how about ISKCON memories? In Dodge vans driving with the library party *brahmacaris* all over America, mapping out the country, each university, me their caretaker reading *Caitanya-caritamrta* manuscripts before they were published by the BBT and talking about the Swami.

“Nothing vivid in my head. My memory of Mahabuddhi dasa is vivid though—an ex-football player from San Diego State University. Everything I touch seems sad now. Mahabuddhi, the last I heard, was an unhappy administrator at a Florida hospital. Am I equally estranged? I dreamt I was crying in loneliness. I was on a big civilian ship. I went to the area where I usually slept, but different people now occupied that space. I knew it shouldn’t matter where you lie down, so I took a place there, saying, ‘This looks like a new neighborhood.’ Then I began to shed profuse, lonely tears.

“Remember shopping bags, *Srimad-Bhagavatam* books, shopping carts—metal A & P carts on wheels, remember this morning chanting the first nine rounds loud and clear but with no devotion? An hour ago outside, I looked at the sun ball and walked in the grass yard, feeling empty, counting beads, and chanting Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

“Where are religious principles now

that Lord Krsna has departed?

Why did He depart and

when is He coming back?

O Suta, select from the  
 scriptures that which will interest  
 and sustain us. What are the six questions of the  
 sages? Who knows? Who cares?  
 How many angels dance on  
 the pin of the *Ayur-Dhanur-*  
*Viveka sastra*? How  
 many declensions to the verb “to be”?  
 Oh, open your mouth wide.  
 You appear to have  
 no teeth.”

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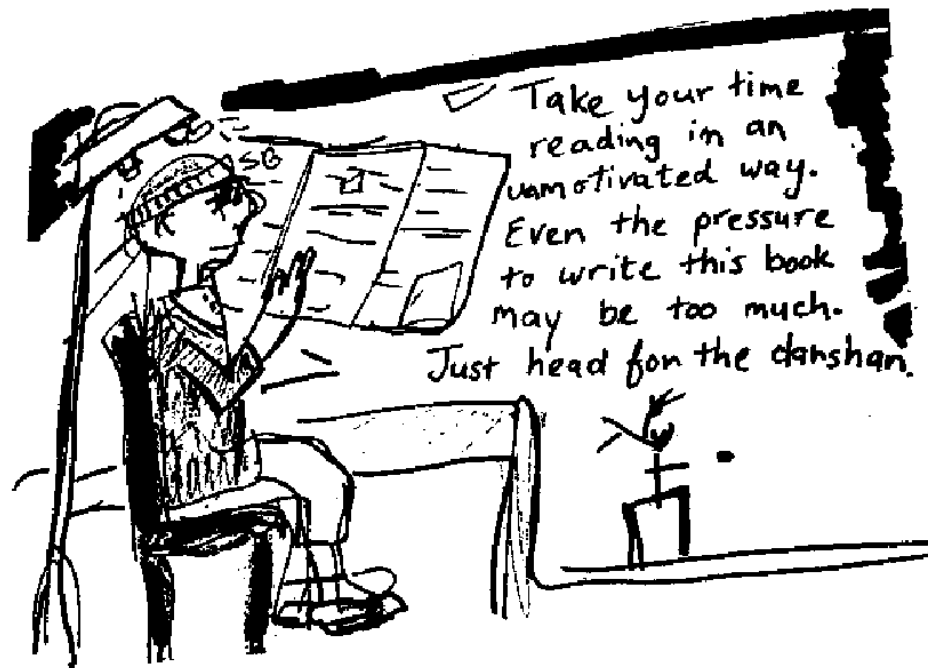
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pp. 179-80

**“Questions by the Sages” (continued)**

“I used to like to recall being struck or enlightened by something particular I read in the *Bhagavatam*. Or maybe it wasn’t like that. I did, however, and do, like to read in a steady, peaceful way. Sometimes I can enter it and feel, ‘This is it. Now I am entering Krsna consciousness.’ This usually happens when I read more than one verse and purport. It happens more if I read for at least half an hour to an hour, especially in the early morning. There’s a limit to my ecstasies, but I’m satisfied.



“This is an authorial aside: I told you that I like it when an author tells us what’s going on with him as he’s writing his book, so here goes. I hit on something important today.

“First came a feeling of resistance. Then I pushed it out of the way and began writing. I found myself saying how nice it is to read the *Bhagavatam* in an unmotivated way. Then I realized that reading a verse and purport in order to write *A Poor Man Reads the Bhagavatam*, as I’m doing now, doesn’t produce the best reading experience. I may also be projecting this lack of reading satisfaction into what I’m writing. I noticed it—I write a short, perfunctory summary of the Kṛṣṇa conscious topics, and then I write ‘what I want.’ In this way I may be setting myself up for something that’s not really in my best interests, or in the interests of the reader.

“I’ve been writing full-time now for six days. I give myself no time for leisurely reading. All day long I read one verse and purport, then write the review in a preacher’s straight prose, then break out into free expression. It’s writing work and I’ve been driven to it due to my vocation. It’s been joyful too, with the emphasis on

*accomplishment*. I'm writing a book. It's projected as the first of many, my opus, given to me by Krsna."

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pp. 193-94

***“Chapter 2: Divinity and Divine Service***

“ . . . What will happen? Will there be world catastrophes? Will seventy-five percent of the population be destroyed and the geography of the planet be radically altered soon? If so, what will happen to my writings? (Why don't I first ask where Srila Prabhupada's writings will go? But I already know the Lord rescued the Vedas as *Matsya-avatara*. I'm not so sure my books deserve to be saved.)

“What about my friends? Will we continue to live? (As I pose these questions, it occurs to me why people turn to astrologers. Astrologers seem to have all the answers. But are they the right answers? That's another question.)

“Where are the snows of yesteryear? Is it all right to remember things that come to mind?

“O Lord, I wish I knew all the answers to questions like, ‘When will my *japa* improve? When will I give up my selfishness and go out to preach the divine command as Bhaktivinoda Thakura orders?’

“Vaisnava songs and prayers are sometimes presented in the form of personal, yearning questions. ‘When will my eyes be decorated with tears of love flowing constantly when I chant Your holy names?’ ‘When will I be able to give up worldly attachment?’

“These questions are often rhetorical questions to which no answer is expected. They are spoken in sincere and unpretentious language. When we say, ‘Oh, when will I

attain love of Krsna?’ but at heart wonder whether there will be milk with breakfast today, we become ashamed.”

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pp.187-88

***“Chapter 2: Divinity and Divine Service (continued)”***

“Be not wry or angry in purpose  
I tell myself. Accept your fate  
to keep moving. Pack your notebooks  
and empty your pens to refill in the  
next place. Royal blue, blue-black,  
before reciting the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*  
which is our very means of conquest.

“I offer obeisances to Srila Prabhupada,  
to Lord Narayana and Vyasa and  
Nara-narayana and Sarasvati and many  
more,  
Six Gosvamis, our  
grand spiritual master, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati,  
Gaurakisora dasa Babaji, Bhaktivinoda Thakura . . .  
They are our exalted  
spiritual family.  
We get

pushed around but we conquer  
 if we are calm and go on  
 chanting Hare Krsna and show ourselves  
 not petty but detached.  
 It's a great thing we hope to  
 achieve, so we have to work for it.

“Prabhupada tells us Dasaratha greeted  
 the sage, ‘How are you doing in  
 your attempt to conquer birth and death?’

*Adhistam yat tat punar-janma-jayaya.*

Conquering over death  
 is the ‘business’ of a sage and devotee.

It happens in little ways  
 when you control your tongue,  
 conquer momentary sex desire,  
 let the ministers have their  
 way. It's their house, not  
 mine. I'm seeking to enter  
 the house of the spiritual  
 world. Give them this  
 bungalow and offer them the  
 real one, with you.

“... Well, we don't have to move after all.

“I'm glad because I preferred to stay here. Make sense. Ease your body, man.”



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From *My Dear Lord Krsna: A Book of Prayers*

pp.4-5

“Please make me anxious to seek Your love. That is positive anxiety. It is not fear but enthusiasm. When I have no assignments in the afternoon (when I have written enough), I do not feel that my life is void or empty. I can chant Hare Krsna; I can read Prabhupada’s books. I need not be lonely.

“Dattatreya quoted something from Lao Tzu:

“Without going outside,  
 you may know the whole world.  
 Without looking through the window,  
 you may see the ways of heaven.  
 The farther you go, the less you know.  
 Thus the sage knows without traveling.  
 He sees without looking.



He works without doing.’

(*Tao Te Ching*, Ch. 47)

“The Christian monks used to say, ‘Stay in your cell, and your cell will teach you all you need to know—about prayer.’ My *bhajana kutira* is a safe and exciting place. I can have fun here. I can be with Krsna, our Beloved.

“Now I must end the writing of this episode. If I write too much, my friends may want to leave me. But you should know I long to speak to you at length, dear reader friends, friends of Krsna. When I write to Krsna, I am not alone, and when I write to His friends, everyone is included. Then how can I be lonely?”

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From ***Every Day Just Write, Volume 3: A Sojourn in Tapo-bhumi***

p. 393

**“VRNDAVANA IS . . .”**

“Vrndavana is known by the veterans who  
refuse to leave summer or winter.

I don’t know

neither do I want to suffer in

body to stay here.

Don’t love the lanes, residents, not

touched by particles of the mercy of

attraction to Radharani’s abode.

Ask me. I’ll say, ‘Whatever is

best for headaches.’

Ask me, ‘Do you love

Radha's *seva*?

I'll say only that I love to hear."

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From ***Dear Sky: Letters from a Sannyasi***

pp.112-13

"Dear friends,

"Usually when I talk about my walks I tell you about what I see, what it's like out there, and about what the real charm of the walks is for me, what I experience. But walking itself is a great joy. Too often we take it for granted that we can walk. It's a God-given ability. Prabhupada commented how nowadays people don't walk very much. He would say, 'They will move not one inch on leg, but everything has to be done by car.' In former days to go from Bengal to Vrndavana, or to cover all of South India or North India, people would travel on foot. And that's what *pada-yatra* is, and *parikrama*. I'm not always able to be in the holy *dhamas* for *parikramas*, and even when I am there I can't keep up with the pace of others. But to take my little morning *parikrama* and see a robin sitting on a post and then fluttering away, to see a dark sky with just a little light in the east—this is bliss, because I see Krsna behind it.

"One of the remarkable things that I notice about Irish weather is how quickly it changes, especially the sky. Like this morning, as I started out there were very heavy clouds, but considerable patches were clear. In the east, through a hole in the clouds, shone a bright, dramatic dawn, almost like the opening notes of a symphony. But by the time I noted it, it was practically gone. This morning the east was gray and troubled, but the north was a clear light blue with streaks of clouds. Just as in the world there will be war in one country, but across the ocean, there will be apparent peace.

“I have to say, I never had such a sensation that clouds could come down to earth. You think of clouds usually as way up there, but here, clouds come right down to the low hills and even into the valleys. You may say that’s fog or mist rising from the ground, but it looks as if the same big, fluffy wet things that float in the sky have come right down to the earth and are rolling over it.

“I noticed big puddles on the road. Then I remembered there had been heavy rainfall during the night. I remember waking up around 11:30 and hearing it pounding. I got up and closed the skylight. Anyway, that accounts for the puddles and the fact that the stream under the bridge is louder than usual and more forceful. The tar-topped road looked soaked through. It isn't one of those ultra-modern jobs, this road. You can see pebbles mixed with the black tar. Although the water really doesn't soak through it, the road this morning has the appearance of a soaked object. The puddles were full of sky, like mirrors. They were brighter than the air around.

“What is it that makes us so cheerful to see a sparrow-sized bird sitting on a bush? There's really not that much fellowship between us and our ‘feathered friends,’ but they speak to the human being's desire to be happy and full of song when we see them in the morning. Where does that joy come from? From a Krsna conscious point of view, we know that behind every perverted reflection there is a reality. The joy has to come from somewhere, and that source is pure, spiritual joy. So it would certainly be the most unhappy conclusion to say that what appears to be joyful in this world is illusion. Krsna consciousness teaches us about the *sanatana-dharma* from which everything comes. That knowledge enriches and enlightens our perception of this world. There are all kinds of birds, large and small, in Vraja *dhama*. Parrots come and tell Krsna where Radha is and what is happening in different places in the forests. And

by these messages, Krsna is informed about what to do and where to go in order to taste the best nectar. In fact, Sukadeva Gosvami is one of those parrots.”

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pp.120-21

***“Dear Old Tree of Mayapur Dhama,***

“I am just babbling at your roots, speaking in an unrealized way. I’m a dry and distant monk who chants alone, who cannot control his mind, and who has no real access to the *madhurya* mysteries. I take it for granted that you have no access to them at all. So in that sense, we make a good team—we’re both outsiders. You’re a pretty good *kunja*, and I’m in a auspicious position because I can read and hear about *kunjas*. Yet we are both outsiders to the transcendental facts. Still, I yearn for the pastimes of Radha and Krsna. I’m not satisfied to come here and swing back and forth on this rope like a child. By Prabhupada’s grace, I’m also liberated from wanting to do any kind of sinful activity in the *kunja*. Maybe all I can do is daydream about something that will take place millions of years in the future for both you and me, dear tree.

“I don’t know how much longer you have to live, but at this present moment, you are draped with garlands from the Deities, and the devotees come here to chant the Hare Krsna mantra. It may be possible for you and me to meet in the future as *kunja* colleagues.

“When will the day come when we can relish and qualify to read the books of the Six Gosvamis? When will the day come when we will finally forget all mundane association with sexuality and become free enough to hear, without blushing, the love exchanges between the all-attractive Boy and the all-attractive Girl? When that day comes, all our austerities and good deeds will finally bear fruit.

“Let no one try to enter the *kunja* prematurely. (In Vrndavana, Lord Siva as Gopisvara prevents anyone from doing that.) Let no one dabble in these things for the wrong reason. But let us be aware of the goal and rid ourselves of mundane lust so that we can develop the *adhikara* (qualification) to hear about Radha-Krsna. Only then will we understand our relationship with our spiritual master, of whom Visvanatha Cakravarti says, ‘He is always engaged in the *kunjās* of Vrndavana, assisting the *gopis* who are arranging for the conjugal pastimes of Radha-Krsna.’”

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From ***Breaking the Silence***

pp. 17-18

“I still carry with me both the memory of the Navy and the memory of my impotence against my father. I’m glad I don’t face that same impotence anymore—that inability to speak up for my soul, to know who I am and what I want. I’m also grateful that I have a real well-wisher to guide me through.

“Somewhat touchingly, and perhaps naively, Praghosa dasa remarked, ‘Considering your close connection with your father from the material point of view, and given the strong possibility that he will go back to Godhead on the strength of being your father, what are your thoughts of him now?’

“I call his question naive because how can I think my father will go back to Godhead just because I am his son? That only happens if you're a pure devotee, Praghosa, although it's sweet of you to think in this way. I doubt I can benefit my father much. Hey Dad, want to go back to Godhead? That means you’ll have to become a Krsna devotee. You think you can change? Oh, you want to know if they’ll allow firehouse jokes and obscenities in the spiritual world? No, you’ll have to leave those

behind. You must know that by now, since you're dead. I bet you have a lot of new perspectives now. Poor Dad.

“Your son wishes the best for you,  
wishes you could get a new suit. Hey Dad, get this—  
I've got the truth and you're in error.  
Hey Dad, who the hell do you think you are?  
Dad, how wrong you were,  
and how ignorant I was too.  
Nothing to do now but go our separate ways  
as two souls  
and if we meet again  
I hope to offer you the best of all possible gifts, Krsna consciousness,  
and maybe in another life you'll be able to hear from me.  
Oh, Dad, poor Dad . . .”

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From ***Forgetting the Audience***

pp.112-13

“The witnesses know I tried to chant but spaced out due to fatigue and ‘inattention.’ While we read together, M. was slurring the words and drowsing. My first instinct was to be annoyed with him, but then I thought, ‘That's what I was just doing with my beads.’ If M. has to drive a van somewhere, he can push himself. Authorities want to push a man to get the job done and the head man is also pushing himself and that's how we live in the world. Okay, a *japa* retreat should also have some pushing in

it. It's not a vacation for extra food and sleep. But as in any situation, you have to find the right balance.

“I find the very early hours so superior that I won't sacrifice them in sleep, even if it means I'm drowsy later in the day. My first sixteen rounds are better than the rest I do after breakfast. Writing varies with ups and downs, but pre-breakfast is usually best.

“Where's that little voice? What does he want me to say? He wants me to find the best way to chant and stay focused. I've touched on some vital themes, but now I have to live up to them, like caring and concentration and prayer.

“Take the *maha-mantra* seriously. I tend to take writing as more vital. Writing lasts, it's preserved; it's me. *Japa* doesn't get preserved; it's something I do, but even a big quantity leaves me broke (without capital). This attitude of minimizing my chanting of isn't good.

“Writing about my problems in chanting is valuable. Don't ask whether it will make interesting reading. I have to write to help myself and not worry if it's repetitive.

“When I notice that one round has taken eleven or twelve minutes, I should do something immediately. Don't stay in the same chair or even the same room.

“Where are other places I could go? The hallways are so cold! Outdoors means putting on a coat and walking around and around the house in the heavy wind, but it might be good. Let's try it in the late morning or after noon when the 'drowsies' hit. Chant faster outdoors.

“Chant faster even if you think it seems mechanical. It's better than too sleepy-slow. Rapidly, rapidly, other things fall away and I'm left with concentration on the

energetic rapid chanting. I hope it works that way.”

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From ***Japa Walks, Japa Talks***

pp.82-83

“I heard one psychologist encouraging his clients that the whole purpose of existence is first of all to survive, and then to have a Big Time, to enjoy yourself. Of course, we know that that is not the purpose of life. The purpose of life is to break the cycle of birth and death and go back to Godhead. If that can’t be done in one lifetime, then at least we should make progress toward that goal. In order to become free of death, we have to diminish our interest in enjoying material life. The chanting helps to situate us rightly. This is one of its qualities.

“We read this verse as axiomatic truth, *sastra*. We don’t look at it and then compare it to our own experience, saying, ‘Well, I haven’t experienced that.’ Our lack of experience is a symptom of lack of advancement. Our experience is tiny. Therefore, first we should find out the experience of *sastra*. *Sastra* will set the standard for us. Later we can discuss how our own experience tallies with *sastra* and how to bring the two experiences closer together.

“The chanting removes dirt from the mirror of the mind. It breaks the cycle of birth and death and puts out the fire of material desire. Therefore, it is the prime benediction, the greatest blessing, for this age. It spreads the rays of Krsna’s blessings everywhere—in our hearts and throughout the world. Although the images in this verse are poetic, we don’t take them as imaginary or fanciful expressions. *Hari-nama* is potent.



“The holy name is the life of all transcendental knowledge. *Jnana* (discriminating matter from spirit and anything else that's considered Vedic or material knowledge) culminates in *bhakti*. Chanting goes right to *bhakti*. That's the purpose of chanting. It's a call in devotion to Krsna. 'O Krsna! O Radha!' It allows us to approach the highest energy.”

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From ***Truthfulness, the Last Leg of Religion***

pp.79-80

“Admitting that I may be wrong—is that what honesty is? Or does it possibly mean that I'm right? Why does honesty mean I'm wrong? One reason to say that honesty usually means admitting I'm wrong is because I'm in this material world for a basic wrong. I can't rationalize my way out of it and say that I came to the material world for divine purposes. I came out of a serious misuse of free will, out of hatred of God and desire. I was wrong, and I am still wrong. Honesty means to return to my rightful position as servant of the servant of the servant of the Lord. Therefore it doesn't seem surprising that success in honesty means admitting to more wrongs.

“Another reason to think that honesty is closely connected to admitting wrongs is that I don't find in myself the symptoms of the advanced Vaisnava. This is wrong. I should feel blissful when I chant Hare Krsna. I should be a more active devotee, more surrendered, more detached from what other people say of me and think of me. So many verses that I look at which describe the symptoms of a devotee don't describe me. These are reasons why I'm wrong, and honesty means to know that I'm wrong.

“A good symptom will be that I feel lighthearted and happy to catch a wrong, and to aspire to rectify it. Even if I have to suffer a setback, if I'm happy to see a gain in

honesty, that's a good symptom."

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From ***From Imperfection, Purity Will Come About: Writing Sessions while Reading Bhaktivinoda Thakura's Saranagati***

pp.82-83

"Admitting our wretchedness is not quite in the spiritual dimension—it's not above the modes of nature—but it is an essential prerequisite, a sub-religious principle. If we think we are at a more transcendental stage, yet we haven't experienced remorse for our failings, then we may be wrong.

"How can a *sannyasi* with disciples of his own turn back and confess his sins? It's too embarrassing. It's incongruous. We'd like to do it, but for various reasons we hesitate.

"Krsnadasa Kaviraja tells us that he is so sinful that if we remember his name, we will lose all our pious credits. Then he goes on to describe Lord Caitanya's pastimes. Do we have such a humble estimation of ourselves? Are we aware of our own lack of devotion? Don't be numb or invulnerable to sorrow. At the same time, discharge your duties in Krsna consciousness. Bhaktivinoda Thakura's songs are our guide.

"Bhaktivinoda Thakura repeats his theme:

"I spent my childhood in play, my youth in academic pursuit, and in me there arose no sense of right or wrong. In young manhood I set up a household and settled down to the spell of material enjoyment. . . . Soon old age arrived and all happiness departed. . . . all my senses are feeble now, my body wracked and exhausted, and my spirits downcast in

the absence of youthful pleasures. Devoid of even a particle of devotion, lacking any enlightenment—what help is there for me now?’

“At the end of life, you tend to summarize everything you have done. Thus you come to regret all the years you spent in illusion. You are finally free of illusion, but it is too late to suddenly turn a misspent life into a useful one. This life is already recorded not only in your memory, but in the account books of Yamaraja’s servant, Citragupta.

“The sun is setting on the horizon of my life and it's not a pretty picture—yet I can see it all, and there’s nothing I can do to change it. I am singing this song of sadness and asking the Lord to hear it. He already knows my story, but He hears the fresh emotions of a grieving ‘old’ *jiva*. The grief is purifying.”

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

pp. 150

“Bhaktivinoda Thakura recommends chanting in a sacred place, in the association of Vaisnavas who have already developed a taste for chanting. Also, constant chanting will help us to develop a taste. He also recommends chanting in the presence of Tulasi-devi. And for those who try all other measures and don’t get success, he suggests extreme methods like sitting in a closed room alone, covering the head and face with a cloth, ‘. . . and concentrating on the holy name. Slowly, one develops attraction for the holy name.’

“When Lord Krsna sees a devotee sincerely and enthusiastically attempting to chant, He will reciprocate by removing the neophytes

mental inertia with the power of His name, and bring him into the association of advanced devotees.

“One must diligently complete the prescribed number of holy names according to his vow, and he must always check that he chants his rounds sincerely. Those who chant distractedly are always eager to somehow complete the fixed number of holy names and be done with it. It is important to concentrate on the quality of the chanting and not on trying to artificially increase the number of holy names. The name of the Lord should be pronounced distinctly. Only by the grace of the Lord can this be achieved.

“The devotee should make it a regular practice to spend a little time alone in a quiet place and concentrate deeply on the holy name.’ (HNC, p. 84)”

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

pp. 97-98

“The spiritual master and disciple don't have to know anything but Krsna. I've told you how I for one want to stay aloof from the world of nondevotees and even from the wrangling world of how to improve ISKCON and manage it. I can take this privileged position, free of other responsibility, provided I actually fill my time with chanting and hearing. Then it becomes responsible.

“I tell other devotees of our main priorities in chanting the holy names and hearing about Krsna. I myself write every day out of a life of devotional service, my

flow of expression. Of course, this expression includes my falling short, the facts of blockage and distraction, the news of the world as it confronts my senses, and as I cope and experience. I am like an insect with feelers. The insect ‘thinks’ or feels, ‘There is something up there ahead of me, blocking me,’ or the creature smells, ‘Is that an enemy? Can I conquer it?’ We human organisms are capable of hearing about God and our loving relation with Him. We should take advantage of our ability.

“Forget self and its preoccupations. Some people tell us that. Be absorbed only in God, Krsna, His name and *guna* and *lila* and teachings. It seems, then, that we are living in a basic big mistake whereby we are concerned more with our petty selves than with God. We may be concerned with self in terms of how to get this self to render best service to guru and Vaisnavas. But that's not exactly self-preoccupation.”

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From ***Shack Notes: Moments While at a Writing Retreat***

pp. 203-4

“Find your drum and beat it. Learn to play pleasingly in the company of devotees. Study with the masters. And when you get a deep taste for it, consider yourself fortunate. Then play it day and night.

“The scriptures give us the example of the arrowsmith. He was so absorbed in his work that he didn't notice the king's grand procession passing right in front of him on the road. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* offers this as a favorable example of how to perform devotional service in this world. Don't look up from your work. Stay as focused as possible.

“And don't be whimsical. Do things the way Krsna wants you to do them, not just according to your own idea. There is a statement in *The Nectar of Devotion* describing

submission to Krsna accompanied by the desire for perfection. The devotee says, ‘My dear Lord, when shall that day come when You will ask me to fan Your body, and according to Your pleasure, You will say, “You just fan Me in this way”?’ (*Nectar of Devotion*, p. 82).”

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## Writing Sessions

From *Karttika Moon*

### PART ONE

*Karttika Papers, 1994*

#### *Note Pad #1*

#### *Rome to Bombay*

“So, this is my India writing begun three days before the day we are due to fly to Bombay. The van travel and ‘Travel Diary’ is over and today starts Karttika, so I thought I’d begin again. Shall it be a series of Writing Sessions on a conglomerate of various genres? Will I find it too confining to call it a book? I thought of *Karttika Papers*, which I sounds a bit self-important. But ‘papers’ it is. At least ‘Papers’ (as in *Pickwick Papers*) avoids the use of words like ‘Notes’, ‘Journal’, ‘Diary’, ‘Writing’, which I’ve used before.

“One reason I like the word ‘Papers’ is that it implies loose, unbound. A book is bound, confined to beginning, middle, and end, and neat, thematic chapters. Papers are loose.

“William Carlos Williams wrote in his *Imaginations*, ‘I can write what I damn please when I damn please.’ I’m not defiant towards my spiritual master or to the Lord Krsna, at least I hope I’m not. My whole purpose is to find my fullest free self and surrender – give what I have – in loving service to the Lord and His pure devotee. But I need some defiance to others.

“I defy the sense of literary propriety which tells me, ‘You can’t write so much diary stuff; don’t write about specific ISKCON issues and controversies. Don’t put unrehearsed poems in here as if they matter. Such things have to be very carefully edited and re-written. You must decide whether your ‘work’ will be a series of timed Writing Sessions *or* a story *or* a timed book *or* a synthesis of these genres.’

“I don’t have to conform with any of that. Neither do I have to feel, ‘You must do something you never did before – an experiment to go beyond yourself.’

“Instead, I wrote myself this note: ‘Do what I like and what helps. As Krsna conscious as possible but who I am.’

**“October 20, 12:35 A.M.**

“Karen Karper said she had great trouble in writing when she first went to live in solitude after thirty years of life in a monastery. ‘A lifelong habit of concealing my feelings, my fears, and my weaknesses kept me spinning my wheels whenever I considered writing the one thing I know I had to write: the story of what God was doing in my life.’ Right, I thought, oh, I don’t trouble with that. I’ve already made such progress in the honesty required to write. Sister Karper gave herself time to write but still couldn’t put herself into it. She was also explicitly trying to write to sell. She began re-reading her work and seeing places where she could weave in an insight or emotion into her vignettes of her life in the new hermitage. She tried to find her ‘voice:’

“I grope toward clarifying my understanding and then for the words to express it truthfully. This discipline, which other writers have likened to a general confession, scoured my soul with cruel clarity, I saw that my escapes into diffuse language...disguised rather than revealed. The struggle for straightforward expression became a major conversion experience. I had to acknowledge that I did not know myself or what moved me mainly because I did not *want* to. I much preferred the world of fuzzy feelings, experienced but unexpressed, and therefore unexamined...would I dare to tell my truth? More crucially, would I dare to *know* my truth?’

“She eventually found freedom in the demand for integrity in writing.

“Well, I can’t claim to have already attained these achievements. They are the ones I work at. It’s not a lax indulgence to write about yourself and your relationship with Lord Krsna, your attempt to practice Krsna consciousness. They who don’t write may think of it that way, not knowing the actual demands of honest writing and how it may be used as *bhajana* and as devotional service. It may be that they wouldn’t dare expose their own feelings or even explore them. And maybe they are right and don’t need to do it. But some of us do, and when we write our ‘general confession,’ it can be helpful to others.

“What Karper says about the whole life of solitude I may also apply to the life of writing. ‘I was being called to find springs of healing and peace, which might, in time, become a gift to many.’



“I write these words here to encourage myself to write as honestly as possible during the Karttika trip to India. I don’t need to be concerned with craft in the usual sense, with creation of drama and how to affect the reader or with selling a piece on the writer’s market. My discipline is to tell the truth. I need to trust deeply that the life of attempting Krsna consciousness is very valuable and the honest description of it is a valuable service to others. The ordinary or external description of it will not be as valuable as the very truthful one. I shouldn’t kid myself into thinking I’ve gone as far as I can in honest expression. I could be guilty of indulgence if I hit a certain groove and then write along complacently reporting on that level without attempting to go further.

“So, I have to first write for myself, my confessions before God and guru. I don’t, however, want to keep repeating, ‘I can’t chant well, today again I didn’t chant well, I’m a nerd, etc.’ Anyway, there will be repetition. I also know that I do write to communicate to readers as well as myself. But keep that in mind in the assumed background.

“Face it: face yourself. Tell the little story, the big story. Feel it is important. This isn’t merely the umpteenth time I’m going to India. It’s the edge of my life, my last chance before death to make as much progress as possible for going back to Godhead. Please, soul and mind and right hand, write freely and cut deeply into the true story of what Krsna is doing in your life. It’s not a story of only failed attempts. Neither is it one already written, already decided and shaped. Write to save yourself and make it as good as possible.

“Basho’s advice on writing haiku, while not explicitly Krsna conscious, can be applied in Krsna consciousness: ‘When composing a verse, let there not be a hair’s breadth separating your mind from what you write; composition of a poem must be

done in an instant, like a woodcutter felling a huge tree or a swordsman leaping at a dangerous enemy.’

“All right.

“At the Roma *fattoria* of ISKCON, many large bags of wheat from their own crop, stacked under the porch roof, got their own wheat grinder...I spoke a lecture and thought, ‘Okay, serviceable, a Prabhupada man’s lecture. Now let’s hear their questions.’ But they didn’t inspire me. One was too technical. I like a question which makes us all feel and think, ‘How can we improve?’ Not, ‘Which planets exactly are destroyed at the end of Brahma’s day and how does that correspond with Maha Visnu’s exhalation and inhalation?’ Ask for yourself. ‘Speak for yourself, John.’ What about me, how will I go back to Godhead? (John Alden asked on behalf of Miles Standish. ‘Speak for yourself, John,’ said the princess, who did like John and he liked her. I don’t remember the outcome.)

“Didja have milk after one month fast?

“Yessir!

“Didja blink? I did sir and I

noted he gave me old bread

when I would have preferred

new, hot porridge.

What’s this got to do with

your salvation? Don’t you need

to be 100% free of material desire?

Yessir, I do have to be.

And are you?

“I am attached to many comforts indeed and say, showing my free pass awarded on a monthly basis to Staten Island commuters – ‘*Yukta-vairagya*.’ The train conductor nods. But then (in this fantasy) he returns to me and says, ‘This is not a back to Godhead pass, you know.’

“‘It’s good for this month, isn’t it?’ I ask. He says, ‘Yes, but the month ends soon so I’m just warning you to get a *BTG* pass before it’s too late.’

And where can you get them?

In your heart.

“I blabbed, I said the right thing, but no one asked a good question, maybe knowing I couldn’t help them. I said, ‘We should be as determined as was Hiranyakasipu.’ He said, ‘I am eternal and time is eternal, so if I cannot get my heart’s desire in one life I’ll get it in future lives—I’ll go on with my austerity.’ I said, ‘Let us go on with desire to attain the lotus feet of the Lord in “pure devotional service.”’