

Free Write Journal #28

February 1, 2019

Vapu (serving the guru in his personal presence) is considered less important than *vani* (following the instructions of the spiritual master). *Vapu* is temporary, whereas *vani* is eternal. But as long as the spiritual master is present in his spiritual body, the disciples must care for him and serve his *vapu*. I have accepted the services of a servant for many years. It is practical. His service to me frees me to do my essential service of reading and writing and lecturing. Now in old age, I depend more on assistance from disciples. I need help in walking, in dressing, and even in bathing. I accept these services in a humble state of mind, not thinking of myself as an aristocratic superior but as one whose capacities have become limited physically and who needs help to function. Many spiritual masters in the past experienced old age and invalidity, and accepted service from intimate and competent disciples. Narottama dasa Thakura served Locanatha Maharaja, and Isvara Puri served Madhavendra Puri, and they became very dear to their spiritual masters, who awarded them blessings.

In my relationship with Srila Prabhupada, I chose service in

separation, even while he was here. I remember standing in the worship room at 26 Second Avenue by myself, while many disciples gathered with Srila Prabhupada in his other room. I remember thinking to myself, “This is where I belong, serving in separation.” It seemed natural to me, although I also loved serving in his personal presence. I had plenty of personal association in the first six months of meeting Prabhupada in 1966 at 26 Second Avenue. Then he left for California, and I went to Boston to open an ISKCON center there. Prabhupada then began to travel around, and I kept contact with him by writing two letters a week and receiving many letters from him. I was also typing for him, and he sent me tapes of his dictation of *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*, *Krsna Book* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, which I typed carefully for him and sent him the original copy, keeping a carbon copy for myself. This was intimate service. When Prabhupada’s long-term servant Srutakirti got married and retired from Prabhupada’s service as a servant, Prabhupada chose me out of all his disciples to come and be his servant and secretary. I was thrilled by the invitation and started off my service in a highly blissful state of mind. But as we traveled to Hawaii, Japan, and then cities in India, I began to feel restless. I would stay in the other room and hear Prabhupada talking to *sannyasis* who came to see him and report their preaching activities. I had been preaching like that when

he called me to be his servant, and I became dissatisfied doing the menial services of the physical servant: trying my best to cook for him, massaging him, and following him into the temple carrying his eyeglasses and listening to his lectures. While in Europe in a room conversation, Prabhupada stated how much he wanted a party of his men to travel to the universities and distribute his books, especially standing orders for books that had not yet been published. There was no one to do it, so I raised my hand and said, “I can do it.” Prabhupada immediately said, “Then do it.” It was just a matter of finding a replacement for me, and Brahmananda Swami was available. The day after Prabhupada told me to go with the Library Party, he asked me if Rupanuga could do it instead. I said frankly, no, I didn’t think Rupanuga was up to traveling quickly all over the country selling books with a party of *brahmacaris*. Prabhupada accepted that and said, “Brahmananda likes my company.” I winced at that, thinking that he was implying I didn’t like his company and that’s why I was asking for release as his servant. But it was a fact I wanted to go out preaching with a party of *brahmacaris*. Fortunately, the Library Party became so successful that Prabhupada wrote to us that we were doing the most important service, and he was especially pleased by the letters that professors wrote praising his books and the reports of how many standing orders we made at

colleges all over the United States. So in this way I was again serving in separation, but I didn't feel I had broken or diminished my relationship with Srila Prabhupada. I was serving his *vani* in something that was dear to him, the distribution of his books. Prabhupada was quoted as saying, "Personal association is for fools."

Now, in 2019, I am 79 years old and something of an invalid. I invite my disciples to come and spare a few weeks and to help with the devotees who serve me at Viraha Bhavan. This is an opportunity for them to render personal service. Many are tied up with jobs and families, but some make a point of saving a couple of weeks in the year to come and be with me, and I appreciate it very much. They can also read my books and my weekly *Journal* posted on the websites, and that forms a personal bond. I am sorry if more disciples don't take advantage of my writings. I am grateful that Prabhupada wrote so many books, especially for his followers, and I relish them by reading them alone or in a group. Prabhupada said, "If you want to know me, read my books." He also wrote that if one didn't read his books, he would grow weak like a man who doesn't eat, and he would gradually fall away.

Denise, the care manager and nurse at the doctor's office, has been

inquiring into my well-being. She specifically asked about my mental state. Was I reading and writing? Was my memory clear? How was my cognition of things going on around me? I gave a pretty positive response to these questions. I am mentally engaged in proofreading and editing my upcoming book, and I'm always busy writing drafts for my weekly *Journal* to be posted on the websites. I read, along with the other members of our *ashram*. We read for about two-and-a-half hours a day out loud at mealtimes. I am alert, and I relish the *krsna-katha*. In addition to Denise, some devotees ask the same question about me. They wonder if I am sliding into dementia. But so far, this is not the fact.

If devotees are questioning or doubting my abilities, it may be that they are judging me externally. Since I am lame and have other incapacities, they may judge that I am not “all there.” But if they think like this, it is mistaken and offensive. Not just me, but so many devotees who are reaching their seventies, etc., are slowing down, and they shouldn't be judged as senile. One has to see the inner self of a person. Is he or she fixed on Krsna and engaged in *krsna-katha*? If so, then they are mentally all right. Haridasa Thakura said his disease was that he could not finish his quota of 300,000 Names a day. But Lord Caitanya told him this was no defect. He had already chanted sufficiently for this lifetime, and he was

liberated. So a devotee may diminish in his activities as he grows older, but that doesn't mean that he is incapacitated. Some disciples of Srila Prabhupada began offensively thinking of him as "just an old man," and as a result of this offense, they fell down.

I don't chart books anymore. I write "pieces," starting with "sparks," little inspirations or epiphanies that come to mind. I am not interested in developing a long plot or meta-narrative. I like it this way. There is always more to say. I just lie down in the road like the *paramahamsa*-python and "eat" whatever comes into my mouth. But by that process, the *paramahamsa*-python was very fat! Writing pieces doesn't mean you starve or run out of things to say. You just wait for the next inspiration and accept it.

The books I wrote in the past also started with sparks. I wrote *From Imperfection, Purity Will Come About* after reading Bhaktivinode Thakura's *Saranagati*. I began giving a series of lectures. After the lectures, I asked for questions and collected my questions and answers. Gradually I structured the material into a book. In my fictional series *Nimai and the Mouse*, I just let go and used my imagination to tell a story which on one level was for children but was also for adults. The devotee and the talking

mouse continued for four volumes, ending with *Chota's Way*, which was an autobiography of my desire to be my own man in ISKCON. I wrote the novel, *Sanatorium*, quickly, but I was fortunate to find many interesting characters and plots. "Swami Swims" was the main character, and Sandy was the heroine of the book. It took place in a hospital for Hare Krsna devotees. It was about healing and Krsna consciousness. I gave the book to my ex-college friend and poet, Steve Kowit, and he read the whole thing and liked it. Haridasa used *Sanatorium* in a seminar he taught at Radhadesh, and I was pleased with that. It was a seminar on devotee care. Maybe the wildest book I wrote was *Under Dark Stars*. It had a lot of free writing in it, and obscure mini-plots. My disciple and active preacher Yadunandana Swami read it but confessed he couldn't understand it. So I sat down with him and explained each and every page and what they meant. He was satisfied with my clarifications of the wild prose. I was glad to have a chance to clarify it for him.

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February 2, 2019

4:00 A.M.

What's going on now. Our furnace is broken, and it is not circulating heat on the first floor and on the second floor. It is minus six degrees Fahrenheit (-21°C) outside. We have turned on electric radiators, but the condition with the broken fan has to be fixed. We phoned the oil company which maintains the furnace. They have twenty-four hour emergency service. They said they would come out around 7:30 A.M. and try to fix the problem.

But we are living in an unnatural environment. Yogis go and reside in the north to get away from the population and meditate. But we have an obligation to live in a more civilized environment in order to preach. I am here in upstate New York because Saci-suta provided me a house. The winters are very cold and not conducive for gathering devotees for congregational *sankirtana* and lectures. Nevertheless, we are surviving and going on with our reading and writing. We are playing the big *mrdanga* and posting our writing on the Internet, keeping in touch with our disciples

and interested seekers. Thus we endure the long winter and wait for the emergence of spring. When I was young and living in the temple in Boston, we devotees endured the cold, sometimes not having enough money to heat the building, and living with the hoodlums breaking our windows. We took it as an adventure. But now, in old age, with a proclivity to catch pneumonia, I have to be careful I don't expose myself to the cold. Each time I get pneumonia, I don't recover fully; I get weaker.

An example of my not bouncing back after illness is the last time I went to the hospital in June with pneumonia and complicated issues. I stayed there eight days, and when I came out I was weak and didn't resume my usual duties. For three months I wasn't writing. Writing is the indicator of my health. I have returned to keeping a journal, which I post once a week. My readers and I are relieved that I am back to my writing routine.

More old stories: In the early 1980s, we had *sankirtana* parties that went out in vans, a women's party and a men's party. They were selling candles and paintings. We met in Chicago to celebrate our marathon. The weather was minus 60 degrees Fahrenheit with the wind chill factor. We gathered in motel rooms and cooked a feast on several small electric burners. Our spirits were high. Another time, as zonal guru, I met with *sankirtana* devotees in Edmonton, Canada. When our plane landed, we

saw wolves beside the runway. It was so cold that when anyone opened the door to the house, a huge cloud of white steam would pour into the house or out of the house. I gave out initiations there. I had to leave that wonderful gathering of *sankirtana* devotees to go on an emergency visit to Colombia, South America, for dealing with a deviant guru. It was a folly mission and a waste of money because he was entrenched with his followers and wouldn't even allow us to enter the temple. Such were the dealings of a GBC zonal guru and member of an investigating committee. Old stories.

In London, we boarded a TWA plane bound for Chicago. It was snowing hard and a long line of planes ahead of us, many from the Mideast, started turning back and canceling their flights. The pilot of our plane, with a cowboy accent, told us that although these planes were turning back, we wouldn't turn back, because he was a veteran pilot of the Chicago area and wouldn't be stopped by snow or ice. He announced over the P.A. system, "Don't worry, folks, we'll get this bird off the ground." We were proud and assured to hear this, and sure enough, the TWA plane rolled down the snowy runway and took to the skies unimpeded.

On the Library Party, we used to bathe in winter by pouring a bucket of cold water over ourselves and quickly drying. We quickly dried off and changed into our BBT salesman clothes, suit and tie—and wig. Little did the

professors know, of the austerities we went through to meet them in their offices and try to convince them to take a standing order of Prabhupada's books. Sometimes the professors would see through our disguise and ask us if we were wearing wigs. Mahabuddhi used to reply, "Yes, I am wearing a wig. Everyone in California wears wigs."

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February 3, 2019

Kirtana-rasa was here yesterday. He has read the three-volume biography of Teddy Roosevelt, and he treated us to an excited monologue about the Bull Moose. He said that in addition to all his political activities and hunting activities, he was a prolific writer who wrote every day and produced volumes of books.

I received a letter from a devotee named Dhira Crunkilton. She writes that she has read most of my two hundred books. She has read *The Story of My Life* twice, and she wishes I would continue that book in another volume. She reads my *Free Write Journals* and says, "I truly appreciate and benefit from your work and service." I do not know this devotee, but I will write to her and tell her we are actually friends since she reads so many of

my books. I take great encouragement when I get a letter like this and hear that someone has actually read my books and is benefitting from them. I had been driven to write even before I met Srila Prabhupada. I wrote novellas and poems, published one chapter of my book in a Beat magazine, and published haiku poems in a magazine called *Wind Chimes*. I sent my book *Sagittarius* to a book agent, but they wrote me back that they weren't interested in printing my book. When I first became a disciple of Swamiji, I threw all my writings in the furnace of the building at 26 Second Avenue. I thought my writing was all false ego. I reported that to Hayagriva, and he said, "I am going to write for Kreesna." When he said that, a light bulb went off in my brain. I didn't have to renounce all writing, but I should "write for Krsna." So I began writing essays on Krsna conscious topics, and they were published in *Back to Godhead* magazine. Prabhupada liked my essays and encouraged me to go on writing. I wrote that way for twelve years, writing pieces based on the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* chapters. After twelve years I published my accumulated essays in a book called *A Handbook for Krsna Consciousness*. Then I began writing more freely while Prabhupada was still present. I wrote *Readings in Vedic Literature*, intended for use in college classes. Prabhupada looked at it and said, "He has quoted the rascals without getting contaminated." In Detroit,

Prabhupada called me into his room late at night and asked me to write a book on “why things fail without Krsna.” He gave me some ideas about how to go about it. It took me years to actually accomplish that order, but I finally did it in a small book titled *The Daily News*. In Prabhupada’s last days, there was talk from some of the BBT members about a biography being written of Srila Prabhupada’s life. When the BBT communicated this to Prabhupada, he said that, “someone like Satsvarupa can do it,” and he began spontaneously telling incidents from his childhood. In 1978 the GBC commissioned me to be the official biographer for Srila Prabhupada, and my research and writing of *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta* began. There had been a doubt in my mind whether it was all right for a disciple of Prabhupada to write books since he had written so many books. Was it unnecessary to write after him? I put this question before him in a letter, and he wrote back that all of his disciples could write in Krsna consciousness following the *parampara*. Just as the Gosvamis had written many books, and yet Srila Prabhupada also wrote voluminously, so his disciples should continue the tradition and write books in Krsna consciousness. Prabhupada ordered that his disciples should publish *Back to Godhead* magazine, just as he had published it in India before coming to America. He specifically wanted his disciples to write articles in the

American edition of *Back to Godhead*. Hayagriva, a university instructor in literature, wrote essays on Emily Dickenson, Walt Whitman, Thoreau, etc. and by the process of “swanning,” he brought out how these authors expressed transcendental literature.

After writing twelve years in straight *parampara*, essays based on the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, I began to publish books on my own and experimented with different genres. I wrote “free writing” books, like *Shack Notes* and the long series of prose and poems, *Every Day, Just Write*.

Once in the cabin at Gita-nagari with my disciples gathered, Baladeva Vidyabhusana asked me what books I would like to write. I immediately came out with about 40 different projects and specific books that I wanted to write. I rattled them off with confidence. It was like the time Prabhupada told a man that he was going to open many temples but only time separated him from doing it. I actually did write those 40 books (and even more than I had announced in the cabin.)

Prabhupada wrote in an early purport that he was disappointed that he could not grow *tulasi* plants in the West, because it was too cold and not enough sunlight. But Prabhupada wrote that he was very glad to see that his disciple Govinda devi dasi had grown *tulasis* from seeds in Hawaii, and she

had many healthy bushes of them. In the Krsna conscious literature there is mention of the importance of worshiping Tulasi-devi. When Narada converted the hunter Mrgari into a Vaisnava, he ordered him to build a simple cottage and chant the holy names incessantly, sitting before the *tulasi* plant. Haridasa Thakura also sat before the *tulasi* plant as he chanted his quota of 300,000 Names a day. Tulasi has to be carefully protected in the cold countries. Grow lights are used indoors in the winter season, and care must be taken to pick off spider mites and other bugs to keep her healthy. It is a whole practical meditation to nourish the *tulasi* plant, to water her not too much, but not too little, and to pick her *manjaris*. At Viraha Bhavan we have 40 *tulasi* plants, and one is always rotated up to my room so that I can worship Tulasi as I take *darsana* and chant before my other Deities. She is the easiest Deity to worship.

I personally began Tulasi worship in Boston. The devotees there were very devoted to Tulasi, and we arranged for grow lights and read booklets about how to take care of her. We would have a daily Tulasi *puja* and sing Tulasi songs while the *pujari* rang a bell and we circumambulated around the plant. In the Tulasi *arati*, each devotee in the temple would come forward and water Tulasi with a spoonful. We heard that some members of the Gaudiya Math criticized ISKCON for singing such an intimate song to

Tulasi in which we prayed to become her maidservant in the groves of Vrndavana. But we didn't care for that criticism. Prabhupada knew what we were singing, and he permitted it.