

Free Write Journal #31

February 4, 2019

I have a large photo of Radha-Madhava from Mayapura *dhama* that was mailed to me. The picture is 40 inches by 30 inches. It's in my bedroom. When I wake up in the morning, I sit propped up with pillows facing the Deities. My feet are covered with blankets. There is a low-voltage light in the room which creates a mystical atmosphere blending in with the light-yellow outfits Radha and Madhava are wearing on the occasion of Vasant Pancami, the first day of spring. The picture is so large I can meditate on it easily. This is Krsna in His original, topmost form, more pleasing to the *gopis* than any *avataras* such as Varaha, Kurma, Nrsimhadeva or Lord Narayana. He is two-armed, playing a flute, standing in a three-fold bending form. His black leg is exposed up to the knee, and He wears a golden ankle bracelet. Radharani is holding a garland for Madhava and flowers in Her other hand. She is very graceful.

There has been a gradual growing attachment for me for this Radha-Madhava photograph. I start my *japa* in bed at about 2:15 A.M. At first I mostly concentrated on the *japa*, but then we turned on the extra bulb in

the room and got more light on the photograph. And then more and more I started looking at Radha-Madhava while I chanted.

Toward the end of my chanting, Baladeva removes my blanket, and my feet are exposed pointing toward the Deities. This is an offense in Deity worship. But at Viraha Bhavan we have so many Deities on both floors and so many calendar pictures of Radha and Krsna, that it is impossible to avoid all the sixty-four offenses toward the Deity. We cannot avoid standing with our back to Them sometimes, or eating in front of Them, etc. We ask Them to forgive us for this, but we like to live in an atmosphere surrounded by Deities. It's not just a few extra calendars that we have, but we have also more large photos--of Radha-Syamasundara, a picture of Gaura-Nitai in Baltimore with Prabhupada standing before Them, a nicely framed picture of Krsna-Balarama, and my own paintings, including the one of Krsna whispering into the ear of Radharani.

Radha-Govinda's dress has recently been changed. They are wearing a pale yellow or cream-colored outfit. It is easy to look at; it doesn't have a glaring-back effect on the eyes. Krsna dasi dressed Them expertly, just the way I like it, with Radha wearing a single, looped necklace that is short and lies upon Her breast. And She wears a tight belt at Her waist, emphasizing

the thinness of Her waist. Radharani's expansive skirt has two peacocks prominently printed on the front. Govinda holds an especially ornate flute, a peacock, exposed lotus feet with ankle bracelets like white pearls. Syama dasi in England has been making jewelry for Radha-Govinda, and it's a great addition to Their worship and *darsana*. Syama dasi works closely with Krsna dasi to get the right colors and sizes. As I said about the Radha-Madhava photo, this is true of Radha-Govinda: They manifest Themselves in the topmost form of Godhead: *sarva-karana-karanam*, the Cause of all causes, the Divine Couple of Vraja.

Sanatana Gosvami worshiped his Krsna Deity by placing Him in a tree. He served Him dry unsalted *capatis*. His relationship was so devotional and intimate that the *arca-vigraha* spoke to him. The Lord said, "Sanatana, can't you give Me *capatis* with at least some salt on them?" Sanatana replied, "I am a poor mendicant. This is all I can supply. Please accept it." He was on the spontaneous level of *bhakti*. Prabhupada has taught us to install the Deities in temples and create an atmosphere that captures the senses with *arotiks*, serving of regular meals throughout the day, and *kirtanas* before the Deity. He knew that we could not simply worship Krsna in a tree. He had us follow the rules and regulations of

vaidhi-bhakti, keeping Krsna in a very clean temple and following all the rules and regulations for *pancaratriki-vidhi*.

I also have a number of Christian images in my room. I have three statues which I picked up in my year-long residence in Mexico. I have St. Francis of Assisi and the Virgin of Guadalupe, who is worshiped by millions in Mexico and by Latinos in California. I also have a little statue of St. Therese of Lisieux. I have a medieval reproduction of the Virgin Mary holding baby Jesus in her arms. I have a framed painting of a young boy or girl with folded palms praying to God. I don't read anymore in Christian literature, but these images are here in my room and I have no intention of moving them out. They are part of my environment.

Some visitors to my room are relieved to see the Christian images. Many of them have some Christian background, and they like to see that I have not rejected all remnants of my past. It's a pious attachment.

I am in the process of readying Volume Two of *POEMS/From Every Day, Just Write*. I have proofread and carefully edited all the poems. I went through them twice. I removed all the names of jazz musicians, but I allowed references to listening to music to remain. I gave my edited version to John Endler, and he's typing it this week so we will have a clean copy. Then I will ask Krishna-kripa if he will do a proofreading of the book. Here is my letter to Krishna-kripa:

Dear Krishna-kripa,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada. The last I heard of you, you were in Florida chanting with the devotees on *harinam*.

I am preparing to publish another book and have it ready by my Vyasa-Puja, which is in early December. I would like to ask you to do a proofreading of the book. Please let me know if you are available and willing to do this service.

In the past you have always been willing, timely and expert in doing this service. I have personally done a proofreading and editing of the poems. I read them and corrected them two times. John Endler is typing up a clean copy with my editing changes, and it will be ready for you next week. Please let me know if you can do this.

I am very grateful to you for being able to do this service for me, even though your heart is mainly in *harinama*.

Hoping this meets you in good health and Krsna conscious spirits.

Yours in the service of Prabhupada,

Satsvarupa dasa Goswami

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February 6, 2019

In the past, I have been afraid of Baladeva's constant reading of *Vrndavana Mahimamrta* by Prabhodhananda Sarasvati. The book is radical. It repeatedly says you should drop everything you are doing and run to Vrndavana and stay there. You may die at any moment, so why are you living outside of Vrndavana? He does not refer solely to Goloka Vrndavana in the spiritual world, but to Bhauma Vrndavana in India. The two are nondifferent. But Baladeva had a bad experience the last time he was in Vrndavana. He was trying to protect a building that we were buying. But the *gundas* in Vrndavana were opposed to him, and they actually beat him and shot him in their conflict over the ownership of the building. He finally fled from Vrndavana because he hadn't really been there on my order, with my blessings, and now he feels that he may have displeased Srimati Radharani and She sent him away.

But how can you live in Vrndavana in the West? Rupa Gosvami, in a slightly different mood than Prabhodhananda Sarasvati, says that one should live in Vrndavana, but if he cannot, then he should live there in his

mind. So how to do that? Mahanidhi Swami, a longtime resident of Vrndavana with his base at Radha-kunda, says that if you want to culture Vrndavana consciousness while living in the West, the first thing you need to do is to take care of a *tulasi* plant. That's what he said. We have 40 *tulasi* plants in Viraha Bhavan, and we take care of them and protect them against the cold weather by keeping them in a warm house with grow lights. I always keep one pot of Tulasi in my room and chant *japa* before her every morning. In addition to this, we have created a Vrndavana-like *kunja* with many plants and vines and placed Radha-Govinda in the center of it. So They are my *ishta-devatas*, and They bring me to Vrndavana. I don't have an urgency to travel to India and make a visit to Vrndavana. I have visited many times and enjoyed it and found it very special, especially in the years before it was built up with many buildings, much traffic, and much population of devotees and tourists. There is a covering over Vrndavana which keeps insincere people from staying there. An acquaintance of Prabhupada said to him, "Why are you living in such a dirty place as Vrndavana in your retirement?" Prabhupada said the man didn't understand the inner meaning of Vrndavana which is open to sincere, determined devotees who see beneath the superficial covering of Vrndavana, with its stark poverty, dirtiness, intense population of mischievous monkeys and loud sounds from car horns, and radios with big speakers. I live in separation from Vrndavana. In my old age and

invalidity, the prospect of traveling to Vrndavana, India does not appeal to me. Therefore I avoid the *Vrndavana Mahimamrta*, which is so heavy about the need to immediately drop what you're doing and go live in Vrndavana because you may die at any moment.

I live in separation from Vrndavana. I cultivate consciousness of being in Vrndavana by worshiping Radha-Govinda and reading books about Vrndavana and Radha and Krsna. I do not live in a passionate place, like New York City. I live in a rural community in upstate New York. It is quiet and peaceful. I think that is conducive for my Vrndavana *bhajana*. I chant japa very early in the morning, and then I write a Krsna conscious journal. I live in an *ashram* with a few select devotees. It is like a monastery or temple. We have many Deities on two floors of the *ashram*. Their clothes are changed regularly, and They are served three meals a day. I believe I am preaching through writing, and I can write peacefully in Stuyvesant Falls, New York. When I think of Vrndavana, I mostly think of Goloka Vrndavana in the spiritual world. It is there I want to go; Goloka is the place I feel separation from. I try to cultivate a rasika connection with Radha and Krsna and the inhabitants of Vrndavana as described in the Gosvamis' literature.

I preach to my readers that they have to cultivate internal consciousness in spiritual life. Much of one's life may be spent in the *grhastha ashram*, or busy in the preaching mission of ISKCON, but one has to spare time, especially at the end of life, in developing one's relationship

with guru, *sastra* and *sadhu*, feeling separation from Vrndavana even while living in the West. Narottama dasa Thakura even writes that there is no use in traveling to holy places, but wherever one is he should engage in chanting and hearing, and then he is accomplishing the essence of “going to Vrndavana.” Most of Lord Caitanya’s close associates never went to Vrndavana. They desired to go but they didn’t make it. Lord Caitanya Himself only visited twice, and briefly, because He couldn’t contain His ecstasies while He was there, and His servant Balabhadra Bhattacharya feared for His safety and took Him out.

Prabhupada is the ideal example of keeping Vrndavana in his heart. He was a resident there as a *sannyasi*, but he left Vrndavana in his old age to follow his spiritual master’s order to preach in the English language, which meant going to the West. So he took all risks and left the security of his beloved Vrndavana and came to America on a perilous journey in a cargo ship in which he experienced two heart attacks. Even in New York City, “the greatest city of the world,” he told his audiences that he would be very glad to return to Vrndavana, where he would have no anxiety at all. But then why had he come? Because it was his duty. His spiritual master told him to leave Vrndavana and go to the West to start the Krsna Consciousness Movement there. Wherever Prabhupada was, that was Vrndavana. And at the very end of his life, when he saw that he didn’t have much time left to live, he returned to Vrndavana and spent his last

days there before his final disappearance. He was the perfect example of living in Vrndavana, but then going out for Krsna's mission, traveling all over the world several times and then finally returning to Vrndavana at the end.

Srila Prabhupada was always Krsna conscious. He wrote that there was never a time when he forgot Krsna. As a young boy, he lived under the protection of his father, who prayed to all the *sannyasis* who visited his home that they could please pray that Abhay would become a devotee of Radharani. When Abhay grew up and began his business, he always talked to his customers about Krsna. His was a lifetime of preparation. He took care of his household responsibilities for many years. But then, when it became too difficult, he left home and started preaching on his own, first in Jhansi, and then in Mathura and Vrndavana. He began writing books and finished publishing three volumes of the First Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. When they were finished he received confirmation that it was now time for him to go to the West. He overcame the bureaucratic difficulties of getting out of India with the proper documents, and attained free passage on the cargo ship to New York City. His spiritual master gave him the order to preach in English at their very first meeting, and in a letter exchange a few weeks before Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati's disappearance. Even while pursuing his business, Prabhupada worked at preparing himself to be an English preacher of Krsna consciousness. He

wrote a commentary in English on the *Bhagavad-gita* (which was stolen). He also wrote “Gita-nagari Prophecy,” in which he visioned a Krsna conscious community. This was even before he left home and went to Jhansi. In his *vanaprastha* years, he started publishing *Back to Godhead* magazine in English and personally distributing them in the tea stalls. So his going to America to preach in English was not a sudden idea that occurred to him in old age, but he was always planning for it and working for it. He was making himself a proper instrument to carry out the order.

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Prabhupada was the leader and pioneer in accepting disciples from all classes, including those who were engaged in abominable activities, provided they gave them up and chanted Hare Krsna. He was compassionate and liberal and didn't see people on the bodily platform. He didn't consider anything like caste. For preaching in the West, he allowed *grhastha* couples who were doing fulltime service to live in the temples, and he trained women to do Deity worship. Women still are *pujaris* in the West, although it is not allowed in India. Prabhupada followed Rupa Gosvami's formula, *yukta-vairagya*--using all materials in the service of Krsna, which spiritualizes them. He followed his own spiritual master Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, who also preached in the *yukta-vairagya* spirit to

spread the message of Lord Caitanya as far as possible. Other Gaudiya Vaisnava gurus in India followed Srila Prabhupada's example and accepted disciples from Europe and America regardless of race. They also accepted women disciples and were criticized by the more conservative Gaudiya Math members.

A crucial example of Prabhupada being a revolutionary in applying *yukta-vairagya* was that he accepted boys and girls who had no academic or brahminical qualifications. The few disciples of Bhaktisiddhanta who came to the West catered to the academia, speaking at colleges and not "getting down" to the grass roots people. Prabhupada had full faith in the power of the holy name to purify people. As Professor Stillson Judah said of Prabhupada, "He has made drug-addicted hippies into servants of God and humanity." Prabhupada's mood was like that of Lord Caitanya, who deliberately reached out to persons outside the caste system. Lord Caitanya accepted Haridasa Thakura, who was a Muslim by birth, and Rupa and Sanatana, who were considered as Muslims because of their working in the Muslim government. Lord Caitanya also accepted as intimate followers devotees from all positions, like the poverty-stricken banana seller Kholaveca Sridhara, the political governor Ramananda Raya, and even the king, Prataparudra. Prabhupada similarly accepted all people whom caste-conscious *brahmanas* would consider as untouchable or unfit to be initiated, given brahminical initiation, and given *sannyasa*. Lord Caitanya

accepted the two drunkards and mischief-mongers Jagai and Madhai and transformed them into surrendered devotees. Five hundred years ago there were only a few examples of persons like Jagai and Madhai, but in the 20th and 21st centuries all the people are like Jagais and Madhais, and Prabhupada “tackled” them, purified them, befriended them and taught them to become Vaisnavas.

I came to Prabhupada as a very fallen soul. I used to regularly take LSD and marijuana, engage in illicit sex, etc. I was living mostly alone on the Lower East Side and dedicating my life to my vocation of creative writing, but I did not believe in God. Although I was so dirty, I was immediately attracted to Swamiji and wanted to follow him. He did not regard me with disgust, although he did see--with his penetrating eyes, and with his worldly experience--that I was a rotten person. Sometimes I would do something in his presence at which he would recoil, as if a bad smell had entered the room. But he was so dedicated to his mission and so confident in the cleansing process, that he accepted me despite my “bad smell.” I was very grateful to him for this, and I immediately adopted his principles of no illicit sex, no intoxicants, no meat eating and no gambling, and chanting sixteen rounds on beads. I attended all his evening classes and ecstatically joined in *kirtana* led by him and responded to by about ten men and a young woman.

I went out yesterday to see a foot doctor. The frigid temperatures have abated for a while. The snow is melting. When he saw my condition, the doctor wasn't very encouraging. He said I was a "challenging" case. We went to him asking him to fit us with a foot insert in my left shoe. He described the kind of inserts that existed and the one that was best for me. He said he had to get authorization from our insurance carrier, FidelisCare, and that they were "tough." He said that if they denied the request, he would appeal it. He asked me about my surgery five years ago (when Dr. Dixon fused my ankle) and I told him it didn't improve things. He asked me whether I "complained" to Dr. Dixon.

I was a little surprised that he asked this. This brought up to my mind my feeling that Dr. Dixon didn't give me complete satisfaction. I went to see him a number of times, and then he rather abruptly told me I had no more appointments with him. But at that stage I was walking painfully with a four-wheeled walker I could only walk by pushing the walker. I somehow thought he could have done something more for me, and the foot doctor's mention of whether I "complained" to Dr. Dixon set off my mentality of feeling dissatisfied with Dr. Dixon. But no, I never complained to him. I am tolerating the situation. The foot doctor heard from me that my main activity is reading and writing. He said that was good, because my situation seems largely irreversible. And so it was good that I was satisfied with the sedentary activities that I can do. Of course, I do my daily exercises so that I

am not completely a “chair-potato.” My exercises will keep me able to have some independence, so that I can walk from room to room pushing my walker. I felt the foot doctor yesterday was being realistic. He offered me no miraculous cure but said it was encouraging that I was satisfied by reading and writing. The more prominent condition with me is not the pain in my foot but the weakness in my lower legs. This goes back to the period when I was hospitalized last year for eight days, and when I came out of the hospital I didn’t do exercises or reading and writing, but I was still sick. This continued for three months. It may have led to the weakness in my legs which is so prominent now.

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February 8, 2019

Rama-Raya is taking a break from the New York City *Harinama* Party and visiting us in Viraha Bhavan. His party is doing very well. They have a new building in Manhattan, and they house eight to ten *brahmacaris*. They go out every day and chant for six hours and distribute books. In the winter, it is too cold to stay outside in Union Square Park, so they go down to the subways and do their *yajna*. They held a book distribution marathon from Thanksgiving through New Years Day. They distributed 10,000 books

during that period. They made packages of six or eight medium and big books, tied them in gift-wrapping ribbon and sold them that way. It's incredible how many books they sold in the subways! They are a very austere and enthusiastic group. Rama-Raya leads the singing, as he has been trained and inspired by Aindra Prabhu in the 24-hour *kirtana* in Krsna-Balarama Mandir. Different leaders trade off in leading the singing. Rama-raya sings for the last two hours of the six. They are very well situated in their new townhouse, which is in a residential area in a decent neighborhood of New York City. They are on the Upper West Side, a few minutes from the Hudson River and a park. Rama-Raya is feeling separation from Vrndavana, where he spent so much time chanting *kirtana* with the 24-hour *sankirtana* party. He wants to go back to Vrndavana and spend a couple of months there to rejuvenate his bond with the holy *dhama*. He showed me some photos of the book distributors posing with people who bought the Christmas-wrapped pile of books. He also showed me videos, one by him and one by another devotee in the party, seeking support and donations for their mission.

Rama-raya's party has opened a big new door with *harinama* and book distribution in New York City. The two forms of preaching go together. The book distributors wear devotional clothing and stay close to the chanting party; they are seen as one by the public. It is good for Rama-Raya to go visit Vrndavana and become purified from the contamination of

the City. So much depends on the party maintaining purity. The *sankirtana* building houses only *brahmacaris*. The purity is not only the six hours while they are chanting in public, but it includes an entire life. The devotees rise early in their building, observe *mangala-arati*, chant on their beads and have classes on Prabhupada's books. The devotees have different reading vows and chanting vows. Some of them are Vaisesika's disciples and they follow his example of reading 40 pages a day in Prabhupada's books, with the idea of completing the *Bhagavatam* in a year. Others maintain numerical strength in their *japa*. They are accountable to each other all day long. It is not that one of them can go off on his own somewhere or talk to a woman on a texting device. The devotees not only perform austerities, but they cultivate personal relationships among themselves. One cannot overestimate the good that is being performed by the *harinama* party. If we believe in the scriptures, the loud chanting of the Hare Krsna mantra can counteract the evils of Kali-yuga. It is no small thing; it is the greatest welfare work for society. Every day, many people get to hear the holy names and receive books.

I remember the first *harinamas* in New York City, going out with Srila Prabhupada to Tompkins Square Park. Prabhupada led the chanting for three hours then gave a short speech while standing under the "Hare Krsna tree." In the early years in Boston, we would go out in good weather to the Boston Commons. Twenty or thirty devotees, men and women, would go out

and sing enthusiastically while a crowd gathered. We followed Prabhupada's Tompkins Square formula of chanting for hours and then giving a small speech, unless the crowd was too rowdy. In that case, Prabhupada told us to simply go on chanting. We circulated in the crowd asking for donations and distributing *Back to Godhead* magazines and chapters of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, which were printed by ISKCON Press in the Boston temple. During the early years, this was the standard program in ISKCON, as authorized by Srila Prabhupada: chanting in public, distributing *prasadam*, and selling books. Now in the 21st century there is a shift from this simple, straightforward formula. The devotees have toned down their preaching presentation. Many of them appeal now to the New Age yoga societies. Devotees become certified yoga instructors and attract people to do yoga *asanas*, and slip in some *bhakti* lessons in their presentation. Rama-Raya's party, and others like it, have retained the simple, pure presentation by sticking to *harinama* and book distribution. Preaching as yoga instructors is valid and is getting good results, but I have a soft spot for the original program which Prabhupada led us on by going out to Tompkins Square Park, and which parties like Rama-Raya's and others are carrying out in the uncompromised pure spirit.