

## ***Free Write Journal #30***

**February 10, 2019**

In *Caitanya-bhagavata*, after Visvambhara takes *sannyasa*, He offers many prayers to the River Ganga. In fact, throughout the whole book the Ganga is very prominent. Lord Caitanya and some of His close associates sometimes jump into the Ganges with their clothes on when they hear blasphemy. Some persons who commit suicide do it by immersing themselves in the Ganges. At first, I was a little disappointed that there was no mention of the River Yamuna, but on reading deeply into *Caitanya-bhagavata*, I became educated, enlightened, and appreciative of the purifying effects of bathing in the Ganges. Lord Krsna favored the River Yamuna, and there are scriptural references that the Yamuna is qualitatively greater than the Ganges. But this is made up for when reading of Lord Caitanya's pastimes, because He favored the Ganges with His pastimes in Navadvipa.

There are many references of living close to the Ganges. Even birds and animals benefit if they reside near the Ganges. The air passing over Mother Ganga produces a liberating effect to one who feels it. Sages choose

to live on the banks of the Ganges and perform their austerities and worship. The Ganges, of course, entered the universe when the toe of Lord Vamanadeva pierced the outer covering. The water fell through, but Mother Ganges made two conditions to be fulfilled if she would enter. She said she needed someone to sustain the violent shock of her hitting the ground, and also she was afraid that many ordinary people would bathe in her and she would have to take the sinful reactions they left in the Ganges. King Bhagiratha solicited Lord Siva, who agreed to catch the Ganges in his hair. And Bhagiratha assured Mother Ganges that many saintly persons would come to the Ganges, and they would counteract the karmic reactions of sinful persons who bathed in her. Being assured of these promises, Mother Ganges entered the earth. When Mother Ganges enters the universe in the upper planets, she is known as Mandakini, when she comes down to the earthly planets she is known as Ganges, and when she goes further down she has another name, Bhogavati. When Lord Caitanya advented in the world, simultaneously a lunar eclipse occurred, and all the people entered the Ganges and chanted the Lord's holy names. Thus His birth was made auspicious by the chanting of the holy names. Not only at special times like the lunar eclipse, but every day millions of people bathe in the Ganges at innumerable bathing *ghats*, the most famous of which is Madhai's *ghat*.

Prayers are an integral part of worshipping the Ganges. In addition to prayers, a little bit of Ganges water is offered in reverence to the river, and this is considered auspicious worship. Ganges water and tulasi leaves are used in everyone's home when they worship Tulasi or Salagrama-sila. In ISKCON Mayapura, all the devotees bathe daily in the Ganga, which is right near the temple grounds. The water there is clear and clean (unlike the Yamuna, which is now contaminated by industrial waste from New Delhi). In Mayapura the devotees don't have to chant mantras to purify the Ganges before they use her because she is already purified. In the West there are no sacred rivers, so before using water for Deity worship the devotees have to chant mantras to spiritualize the waters. In His student days Nimai Pandita and His classmates would go to the Ganges and engage in water sports. They would splash each other in competition. Lord Nityananda would forcefully splash water into the eyes of Advaita Acarya, who called Nityananda ill names. Lord Nityananda would float in the Ganges during the rainy season when it was infested with crocodiles. The devotees warned Him, but He did not mind. When Lord Caitanya and Nityananda escaped from the Tantric "*sannyasi*," They jumped into the Ganga and floated and swam down to Santipura to see Advaita Acarya. Lord Nityananda appeared

to be the most active swimmer in the Ganga. In His role as Ananta-sesa, He floated, and in the pastimes of Lord Caitanya He was the most regular visitor to the Ganga, where He floated just as He did in His incarnation as Ananta-sesa.

The girl named Dukhi lined up many waterpots from the Ganges for the devotees to drink and cool off. Lord Caitanya was so pleased with this service that He changed her name from Dukhi to Sukhi, and after that, Srivasa Pandita no longer considered her a maidservant. In Lord Caitanya's time everything was interactive with the Ganges. When He led millions of people to march against the Kazi's house, they walked along the bank of the Ganges. It is often mentioned that travelers walked along the bank of the Ganges; it was a main thoroughfare and a main spiritual force and presence available to all.

Although the contact with the Ganges is so purifying, the sastras say that once offenselessly chanting of the holy names is worth a million times bathing in the Ganges.

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**February 11, 2019**

Health update: I have grown immobile. The low point for me was when I went into the hospital last June, stayed for eight days, and when I came out, I was still sick and didn't do my exercises (or writing) for three months. This weakened my lower legs to an all-time low point, and I couldn't walk except by pushing the four-wheeled walker. But I have persisted in my exercises, and slowly, gradually increased them. I do them daily for 45 minutes. I do several laps (and increasing) , pushing my walker around the room. I pedal one mile in eight-plus minutes at a resistance level of 2. I sit in a chair and do stand-ups and sit-downs, raising my arms and hands as I do so. I do sixteen repetitions of this exercise. So my daily exercise regimen is 45 minutes. The reason I take so long doing exercises is that I have reduced lung power; I run out of breath and have to take considerable breaks between each separate exercise. I also receive a massage on my legs and feet which helps loosen the joints. My balance is bad because of the weakness in my legs and ankles. My exercise regimen is not something I have made up. I am following the training that I have received from various physical therapists who

have visited my house a couple of times a week. I am doing the exercises they have taught me.

Headaches are at a minimum, and diabetes is under control with diet and exercise.

The Deity worship at Viraha Bhavan goes on nicely. Now that Krsna dasi is back, the standard is very high. We change the outfits of Radha-Govinda every three days. She brings me up an array of many outfits, and I pick one out. She dresses Them according to my instructions. I like Radharani to wear a simple, short necklace in one loop that rests upon Her breasts. And a waistband thin and tight which emphasizes the thinness of Her waist. Govinda is dressed with an expert turban, long necklaces, and His feet and shins are exposed. I now pick out the silk garland that Prabhupada will wear by selecting one *pavitra* every day out of a group that we have. A new batch of Deity outfits is scheduled to come from the *mukut-walla* Tapan in Vrndavana in a couple of weeks. That will add to the variety and delight, and our web-watchers will get the treat of seeing ever-new outfits. It will take some time, but Krsna dasi's goal is to accumulate one hundred outfits, and then you'll only see the same outfit in a photograph once a year. Even then it can be varied by adjustments in turbans and jewelry. Why not give the best to Radha-Govinda? Downstairs

where we have our big altar, the large neem Gaura-Nitai Deities from Ekacakra get changed every week. We have a collection of “hand-me-down” outfits from temples like Baltimore and Potomac, which Sankarsana is able to arrange. Every week They have a beautiful new outfit. Now that Rama-raya is visiting, his Giri-Govardhana and Radharani are on the downstairs altar. Their eyes and mouths were painted by Aindra, and Rama-raya is very dedicated to Their service. He has been worshiping Them for 26 years so far. Upstairs I always have two tulasi plants to meditate on. One is in my bedroom, where I chant most of my japa rounds before coming in to my chair before Radha-Govinda. Tulasi is in the bedroom along with a large photo of Radha-Madhava from Mayapura (30 inches by 40 inches plus a big frame), and now another framed photograph of the painting of Mahaprabhu in the Gambhira commissioned by King Prataparudra (5 inches by 7 inches). So I have two altars upstairs. When I go downstairs for darsana of the big Gaura-Nitai Deities, the whole altar is quite spectacular. In addition to the neem Gaura-Nitai, there are many other Deities. Bala and Krsna dasi have placed their Gaura-Nitai Deities on the altar, as well as their home Deities of Jagannatha, Baladeva and Subhadra. They have also placed their personal Deities of Radha-Gopinatha down there.

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Sruti Singh, our doctor friend who is a specialized M.D. in oncology (which deals with cancer patients) told me that she's quite frustrated because her patients do not face their mortality. They think they won't die. She writes to me, "I cannot emphasize to you enough how often I hear, 'Well, I don't want to die.' . . . Lately, I have been grappling with how to be more compassionate with patients when they say this, as opposed to saying, 'Well, no one wants to die, but at some point we all have to face our own mortality.'" She asked me for some advice. I will tell her that if possible, she can speak to them from our "Hindu" scriptures and tell the story of Maharaja Pariksit, who was cursed to die in seven days. He received the news without denial or lamentation. He went to the bank of a sacred river, where sages gathered around him. The greatest saint of that time, Sukadeva Gosvami, arrived on the spot, and Maharaja Pariksit asked him, "What is a person supposed to do? What is his duty in life, especially one who is about to die?" And in reply, Sukadeva first said, "He should chant and hear about God."

Haridasa told me that Natalie Goldberg, the writing instructor, has published a new book. Natalie Goldberg was diagnosed with cancer in 2016, and I expect her book is about her frank facing of her mortality. I am

looking forward to reading it.

I have also read the book edited by Giriraja Swami, *Life's Final Exam: Dying and Death from the Vedic Perspective*. Prabhupada once said, "We should always keep death in front of us."

Now that I am physically diminishing, how do I face my inevitable mortality? I tend to think that I have a few more years to live, but that I am not aware enough of the nearness of death and its inevitability. I know it will come, and I hope to be prepared for it. Baladeva's mother, in her old age and invalidity, had cancer. She told her priest, "I'm afraid of dying. What can I do?" He told her he was not afraid of death because he knew where he was going. But he was afraid of the actual physical pain of dying. When Prabhupada had a life-threatening stroke in 1967, he was hospitalized and the doctor gave him a spinal injection with a long needle. I asked Swamiji, "Did it hurt?" He replied, "We are tolerant." At the very end of his life, he displayed this tolerance. He did not moan, cry or complain although he was in pain. He tolerated and spoke Krsna conscious instructions to his disciples right up until the end. I hope I can maintain a fraction of his tolerance when it is my time to experience the pangs of death. I want to follow his footsteps and not make desperate attempts through medical care to prolong my life.

Prabhupada asked his disciples at the end not to take him to the hospital. He passed away in his bed at the Krsna-Balarama Mandir in Vrndavana during the auspicious Karttika season. In 1968 Pradyumna Brahmachary was hospitalized for a hernia operation. Prabhupada and a few disciples visited Pradyumna in the hospital. Pradyumna said that he was so overwhelmed during the treatment that he could not chant Hare Krsna, but he called out for Srila Prabhupada. He asked if this was all right. Prabhupada said yes, that it was sufficient. I have also advised some of my disciples to do the same--call on Prabhupada --and I hope to do it myself.

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### **February 14, 2019**

Yesterday I saw a photo of a book distributor on Rama-Raya's party selling a full set of the *Prabhupada Lilamrta* in seven volumes, as published in Mumbai, India. This is a wonderful new edition, just like the first edition which was published in Los Angeles. That they are able to sell them as sets in the subways is thrilling. For many years now the condensed version of the *Lilamrta*, in one 300-page book, has been a main weapon in the arsenal of

ISKCON book distribution. It is good that the condensed version has brought many people to appreciation of Prabhupada and ultimately to practice Krsna consciousness. But the condensed book is very incomplete. It has 300 pages, whereas the unabridged edition has over 2000 pages! And what is missing in the abridged edition? What's missing is the sweetness of Prabhupada. Mere details are given in the abridged edition. It is not at all fluffed out to give a full portrait of Srila Prabhupada and what he went through in his lifetime. The first volume in the set is called *A Lifetime in Preparation* and covers Abhay Charan's life from birth up until the time he left India for America in 1965. The seventh volume of *Prabhupada Lilamrta* has been titled, in the Mumbai edition, *Additional Pastimes*. The six volumes take the reader up until the end of Prabhupada's manifested pastimes, and the seventh volume gives extra pastimes, wonderful incidents that we had in our files. In his last days Prabhupada was requested by the BBT to allow a biography of him to be written. He said yes, and "someone like Satsvarupa can do it." In 1978 I was commissioned by the GBC and BBT to write the authorized biography of His Divine Grace. I gathered a team of researchers, interviewers and typists, and we worked as a team. We were fortunate to begin so early after Prabhupada's disappearance. Many of the people who knew Prabhupada before he came

to America were still alive, and they gave us their memories. We used a cross-reference system to assure that the people we interviewed were not just making up stories to give themselves credit, but that they were actual facts of their interaction with Prabhupada. That system went for the whole biography. India had not changed much when we began our work. The original invoices for paper that Prabhupada purchased for the first three volumes of his First Canto *Bhagavatam* were still available, and the press that the book was printed on was still existent. Rare film footage of Prabhupada was available, a television production of ISKCON at 26 Second Avenue, footage of Prabhupada chanting with his devotees in Tompkins Square Park and at Golden Gate Park, California, 8mm films of Prabhupada taken by his disciples (and other people), and newspaper articles from the early times were available to us, including the extensive coverage in the *East Village Other* article, “Save Earth Now.”

Now that the full seven-volume set from Mumbai is available again, it should be required reading by devotees before they receive initiation. They should get to know as much as possible about the Founder-Acarya of the Movement. As *Caitanya-caritamrta* was based on the notebooks and diaries of Svarupa Damodara and Raghunatha dasa Gosvami and others, we had the memoirs of Prabhupada’s long-term servant Srutikirti and interviews with

Tamala Krsna Goswami. (The valuable diaries of Hari Sauri and others were written after the publishing of *Prabhupada-lilamrta* and were not available when we were writing it, but we interviewed those people and got much good material.) The *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta* is read daily in many temples of ISKCON. An outstanding example is Radhanatha Swami's temple in Chowpatty, Mumbai. For many years he has had a devotee read out loud from the *Lilamrta* while everyone else is quiet, during lunchtime, They have read through the entire *Lilamrta* many times and have no intentions of stopping.

When the first edition published in Los Angeles sold out, the books became "lost" for many years. Then the North European BBT published the complete *Lilamrta* in two bulky volumes.

The seven-volume set published in Mumbai is a fresh, delightful, accessible production. Everyone should have a set in their home. They are hardbound, lavishly illustrated and well-printed. By the year 2012, the Mumbai BBT had printed 7000 full sets (mostly distributed in India), but by now they have printed many more and are distributing them in the West. They are available for a whole new generation who have never had access to it. Rama-raya's party wraps the seven-volume set up in a gift wrap ribbon, and the book distributor enthusiastically distributes the full sets to

passersby. Mahotsava, the leading book distributor on Rama-raya's New York City *harinama* party, leaves a good impression on the people, but he tries never to accept "No" in his sales attempt. He approached one man who said, "I don't want these books. I don't want to carry them." Mahotsava said back, "Then we'll ship them to your address!" The man remained negative and said, "No, I don't want to read them." Mahotsava said, "Then give them to your girlfriend." The man said, "I don't like my girlfriend. We're breaking up." Mahotsava said, "Well give the books to her anyway. Show her how you feel." The man accepted that, relented and said, "All right, I'll take them." With enthusiasm like that, the books are going out quickly in New York City. (The man had only \$75 on him and the full set cost \$100. Mahotsava let him have them for \$75 with a promise he would pay more later.)

Mahotsava, an attractive dark-skinned Indian dressed in *brahmacari* orange, approaches an African-American man in the subway. He tunes in and addresses the man in his own lingo and mood: "Hey, bro! You like to read, don't you?"

The man says, "Yeah." And Mahotsava is on the way to another sale of seven gift-wrapped books, which they call the *sapta-rishis*, along with the seven volumes of the *Prabhupada-lilamrta*. Many people have become

attracted to Krsna consciousness by first reading the *Lilamrta*, even before they read Prabhupada's books. They become enamored by the life of the pure devotee, and then they want to read his books. And many people have become first attracted to Prabhupada's books, then want to find more about Srila Prabhupada himself, and they turn to the *Lilamrta*.

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### **February 17, 2019**

Baladeva's older sister, Kathi, is visiting. She is a practicing Buddhist and associates with Buddhist monks in the monastery, and has gone to India to help out at a Buddhist monastery in South India. But she also has taken part in Krsna consciousness over the years, mostly through the influence of her brother. She likes *prasadam*, *kirtana* and *seva* (service). Every day at lunchtime we have a long out-loud reading from one of Prabhupada's books. But when Kathi was present, I noticed it was hard for her to keep attention for more than an hour. It's just not her "*dharmā*." So yesterday we read out loud for only half an hour, and then we invited Kathi to talk about Buddhism. I started off by saying, "I saw the word 'Siddhartha' in a dictionary, and the meaning was, 'The personal name of Buddha.'" I threw that out to her, and she

began to tell the life of Buddha. She told the standard version that we have heard before, that Siddhartha was born into a royal family, and his father protected him from all outside influence so that he wouldn't see the harsh reality of the world. But one day Siddhartha went out from the house with a friend and went into the city. There he saw a person with a crippling disease, he saw an old person hampered by invalidity, he saw a pregnant woman, and finally he saw a corpse. All these were new to him. It made a deep impression on the young prince. He concluded that life was suffering. Then he left home and went off to seek the truth. At first he associated with a group of severe ascetics who starved themselves and performed severe austerities. In their company he was on the point of dying, but a woman offered him rice so that he could survive, and he took it and ate it. The ascetics then rejected his company, and Buddha chose "the Middle Way." Then he was alone. He sat down under the *bodhi* tree and meditated, determined to find the truth or he would not move. He was tempted by many devils, who sent beautiful women to lure him, and frightening spirits. But he was not shaken. Finally after a long time, he attained enlightenment. He did not preach the truth that he learned for several years, but then he went out and found students and taught his realizations. His first teachings were of the "Four Noble Truths."

They are:

1. Life is suffering. (Suffering is real and almost universal.)
2. There is a cause of suffering. (Suffering is due to attachment.)
3. There is an end to suffering. (It ceases with final liberation, Nirvana.)

4. In order to end suffering, you must follow the Eightfold Path.

Kathi then began to speak of modern contemporaries who are Buddhists. She has met them, and she has also met the Dalai Lama several times. It was ironic that we had her speak after a half-hour of reading *The Nectar of Devotion*. The reading for that day contained “Buddha-bashing,” Prabhupada’s statements that the Buddhists were atheists although Buddha Himself was an incarnation of God. We were a little embarrassed that this section came up just when Kathi was present, but she didn’t seem much fazed by it. Prabhupada has said that the great teachers like Buddha, Christ, Sankara, etc. do not contradict one another. They form a step-by-step revelation of the truth, which fully blossomed in the Vaisnava *acaryas* like Ramanuja and Madhva, and finally Lord Caitanya.

Kathi is in her early seventies, but she is very alert and dynamic. She likes to serve, either with the Buddhist monks in the monastery or when she

comes to our *ashram*. She gets down and does practical tasks. On this visit she taught us about “Japanese tidying up.” Kathi learned about this from watching Youtube films of a Japanese woman who teaches this process. She teaches how to reduce the clutter in your living space by giving things away that you don’t really need or like. And then by folding your clothes and objects, you fill the new spaces available in your home, and it becomes more compact and tidy, not chaotic. It transforms your whole domicile. We had one session with Kathi and Baladeva and I, and we’ll have another session today. We worked up in my room and pulled out my clothes. I was happy to give Kathi a new sweater I received as a gift but which wasn’t my style. It was warm and just suitable for living in Maine, where Kathi resides. We also put things in a plastic bag to drop off at clothing drop center. There the clothing goes to people who have nothing due to various disasters. We have worked quite a bit on tidying up my clothes, and next we will tackle my books. We have started in my room, but there are many other areas of the house which are unkempt, crowded and messy. It is a little like cleaning the Gundica temple. The result is it cleans your mind and makes you feel light.

My ex-college friend Steve Kowit continued to write and publish

poetry all his life. His highest recognition was that Czeslaw Milosz included about six of Steve's poems in an international anthology of poetry called *A Book of Numinous Things*. My Godbrother Haridasa very much likes Steve's poetry and has all his books. I sent him my copy of the anthology, which he didn't have. It's prestigious that Kowit was included in the anthology edited by Milosz, because Milosz is a winner of the Nobel prize for literature. The poems place Kowit in very good company. But recently Kowit has died. Now Steve is dead, and he has no connection with the honor of being placed in the anthology. I could have taken the same path as my friend. We wrote together, and even after I became a devotee I sent him my books, and he read them and liked them. He wrote to me that I was "a terrific writer." Of course, he didn't accept Krsna consciousness, and that was a misfortune for him. I could have taken the same path as Steve. Our paths were one for a while. He became a part-time literature professor, and I could have wound up in that position also. But I met a fork in the road when I met Swamiji. As Robert Frost wrote, "I took the path less traveled on, and that has made all the difference." I took the path of becoming Prabhupada's disciple and wrote in Krsna consciousness. Steve wrote to me and said that my writings were inaccessible to the outer world. But I am glad that I wrote spiritual literature for the devotees. Books in pursuance of the Vedic version are permanent.

They continue to help people generation after generation in the most important values of life.

My other close friend at Brooklyn College was Murray Mednick. I looked up to him and thought he was a fine poet. He moved to California and began writing plays. He gained some recognition and taught a school with his own students. I got back in touch with him and sent him a book of my poetry. He liked a line in it where I said I was in Ireland but I would have to return to America and face “the thousand shocks of life.” But in general he dismissed my writing and said it was merely parochial—I would have no readers outside of the cult. So we stopped writing to each other. But he was a good influence on me when we lived together in New York City. We even planned to publish a book together with both of our writings in it, and Allen Ginsberg wrote a foreword, but we failed to raise the money for printing it. I saw a newspaper with Murray Mednick in it where he told the reporter that he was a hipster. I went beyond that to become a transcendental author, a servant of the servant of the servant of the Vaisnavas.

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**February 18, 2019**



Amith, an Indian devotee who lives in Albany, recently came back from a pilgrimage to Kumbha-mela in India. In the ISKCON tent he saw a *murti* of Laddu-Gopal, and he was very attracted to it. He thought of buying it and giving it to me as a gift. When the devotee-sellers heard that it was coming to me as a gift, they donated two sets of clothes. Laddu-Gopal is very beautiful. He is crawling, and in His right hand He is holding forth a *laddu*. I think I like him

better without His clothing, which makes Him less accessible for holding and fondling. Laddu-Gopal worship is very informal. I've heard that devotees even toss Him up into the air and catch Him. I held Him in my hand close to my face and chanted Hare Krsna, just the way ladies did for Nimai to stop Him from crying. He is a new addition to my Deities upstairs. I don't think it's *rasabhasa* to worship Radha-Krsna and Laddu-Gopal. They are the same Krsna in different pastimes. He's newly arrived, and He's capturing my attention. I have asked Baladeva to supply Him a *laddu* every day at lunchtime. He is so interactive! I am holding Him in my hand as I dictate this. Saunaka Rsi has a Laddu-Gopal. When he was in Vrndavana, he lamented to a reputable favorite *sadhu* of his that he did not have a Govardhana-sila. Saunaka told him that he *did* have a Laddu-Gopal Deity. The *sadhu* said, "Well, that's all right. Laddu-Gopal is as good as Govardhana-sila." This gave a lot of comfort to Saunaka Rsi. So I consider that I have gained a great addition to my Deity worship. He does not require a lot of formal rituals, but He likes that His devotee loves Him and plays with Him and gives Him attention.

It was a total surprise for me when Laddu-Gopal arrived yesterday. I had never before thought of worshipping Him. But immediately on seeing Him, it seemed all right that I should have Him. I cleared a place on a nearby shelf and placed Him there. I don't know if I will keep Him in His clothes or let Him crawl nakedly. If I leave Him without clothes, I can perceive His lotus feet and His crawling motion. The cloth seems too fancy and formal. We can always put a little *chadar* on Him when it's cold at night. Now that I touch Him in the

morning, He feels a little cold. But He is smiling and crawling forward with His acquired *laddu*. Krsna has descended as the baby son of Maharaja Nanda and Mother Yasoda. They love Him not as the Supreme Personality of Godhead but as their wonderful child.