

Free Write Journal #41

Free Writes

Guru

Our Nurse Practitioner knows that we are Hare Krsna devotees. He looked it up on Internet and discovered I was a guru. He asked me how long it took to become a guru. I told him it takes many years. There are many qualifications for a guru, as stated in the scriptures. His behavior must be faultless, and he must be well-acquainted with the Vedic literature. But Lord Caitanya said *kiba vipra, kiba nyase, sudra kene naya / yei krsna-tattva-vetta, sei 'guru' haya*. This means one may be a *brahmana*, a *sannyasi*, a *sudra*, or less than that. But if he knows the science of Krsna, then he can be a spiritual master. Prabhupada often quoted Lord Caitanya's statement, and he used it as a defense against Indian *smarta brahmanas* who would not accept that Westerners could become *brahmanas*, *sannyasis* or gurus.

Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati in his time also defied the *smarta-brahmanas* and gave initiation to persons who weren't born in a *brahmana* family. For Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati it was a great battle, but he came out victorious. Prabhupada also met resistance when he gave *sannyasa* to his disciples, but he

defended himself with *sastric* statements that it is the quality and work of a devotee that allows him to become a *brahmana*, *sannyasi*, or guru, not the birth that he takes. Seminal gurus are those who claim guruship by birthright, but the true guru is called *strotriya*, or one who, regardless of his caste, has heard the truth from the authorized source, his own bona-fide spiritual master in disciplic succession. The relationship between a guru and a disciple is not one of equality where each one gives his opinion. Rather, the disciple surrenders to the guru, and like a blank slate, he receives transcendental knowledge and serves the guru as a menial servant. The guru is also a *sadhu* who cuts. He cuts the knots of illusion which he finds in his disciple. Krsna cuts the illusory ties that Arjuna had for his relatives when he did not want to fight against them on the battlefield of Kuruksetra. Krsna told Arjuna that he was thinking on the bodily platform and not seeing others as spirit-souls. He was not seeing his duty as a *ksatriya* to fight, ultimately because Krsna wanted it. Narada Muni cut the illusions of his illustrious disciple Srila Vyasadeva. Even after compiling all the Vedic literatures, Vyasadeva felt despondent. Narada told him the cause of his despondency was that he did not vividly describe Krsna in all his Vedic writings. After being enlightened by Narada, Vyasadeva meditated and had a revelation that he should write the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, which fully establishes that Krsna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the Cause of all Causes. Lord Caitanya as a young *sannyasi* heard silently from Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, who wanted to teach the Lord Vedanta-sutra in seven days. Lord Caitanya did not speak anything while Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya was teaching, and Sarvabhauma asked

Him why He was silent. Lord Caitanya then said He could not understand the commentaries of Sarvabhauma, but if Sarvabhauma liked, the Lord could speak on *vedanta-sutra*. Lord Caitanya then taught him *vedanta-sutra*, cutting the impersonal interpretation which Sarvabhauma had given to *vedanta-sutra*.

Mahatma Vidura acted as a *siksa* spiritual master to his blind brother Dhrtarastra. Dhrtarastra was living shamelessly at the expense of his enemies after the battle of Kuruksetra, where he had been defeated and lost his 100 sons. Vidura bluntly pointed out that Dhrtarastra was in a precarious state of old age. He was ill, his teeth were falling out, his liver was defective, his hearing was going, and he was blind from birth. But the worst thing was that he was complacently being maintained by those he had tried to kill, the Pandavas. Dhrtarastra was attached to living in a palatial facility. But Vidura told him to get out immediately and practice the process of *dhira*, which means going away from home without telling any of one's relatives, going to a remote holy place and practicing austerities unto death. This would give him partial liberation. Dhrtarastra was submissive to Vidura's compassionate teachings. He practiced the mystic yoga system and set his body on fire within a cottage. His chaste wife Gandhari then gave up her own life and followed him into the fire.

Umbrella

Lord Ramacandra is sometimes pictured as being shielded with a decorative

umbrella by one of His monkey servants. The umbrella was very fancy and ornate and shielded Ramacandra from the sun. In Dvaraka Krsna sometimes walked under an umbrella held by one of His devotees. Prabhupada says that in Kali-yuga there are many vices, and they pour down like rain from the sky. But although the rain is inevitable, one can protect oneself with an umbrella. In his early years in America, Prabhupada always carried an umbrella when he went outside. Everyone noticed it; few asked him why he always carried it even when it wasn't raining. The dwarf incarnation of Krsna, Sri Vamanadeva, was given many gifts by the demigods. Indradeva, the deity presiding over the heavenly kingdom, gave the dwarf incarnation a beautiful umbrella, which He carried with Him as a *brahmacari*. Vamanadeva's only possessions were a deerskin covering, a waterpot, and His umbrella.

In the 1970s, one of ISKCON's leaders proposed that the Society be legally organized as an "umbrella organization." He consulted a lawyer and planned out how all the various ISKCON temples could be centralized as one unit. When the devotee proposed this to Prabhupada, he was very upset. He did not like the idea of the umbrella organization. He wanted his temples to stay independent. Prabhupada called his GBC members to Los Angeles for support, and they agreed with him that the umbrella concept was dangerous. Under that model, if one ISKCON temple accumulated a sizeable debt, the whole network of temples would have been liable. In retrospect, from the history of ISKCON and how it has been attacked by different inimical persons and organizations, we can see that the umbrella plan was a great

mistake that we were saved from by Prabhupada's intelligent analysis of the situation and his insistence that we not do it.

How Do I Feel When I Cannot Operate the Computer or Other Electronic Devices, Texting, Iphones, Skype, Youtube, Facebook, Wikipedia, Google, Etc. Etc.?

I feel all right about this lacking of life-skills. I am avoiding an overload of material information. The sages of yore used none of these things. They wrote their invaluable manuscripts on palm leaves, and everything was copied by hand and distributed. My system is convenient for me. I dictate by voice into a Dictaphone my letters and *Journal*, etc. I have lost the facility I used to have to operate the typing keyboard. In recent years I have also lost the ability to make rapid, clear handwriting. I have had to abandon it and instead compose on the tongue into the Dictaphone. I then give the Dictaphone to a devotee who sends it electronically to my typist, who lives in a remote place. The typist produces hard copy and sends it back to me for approval. Due to the willingness of a couple of typists, I do not feel so much limited in my work.

Peacock Fans and Yak-tail Whisks

The peacock fan is used to cool down a Deity or a devotee in warm weather.

The yak-tail whisk is used to actually touch the body and chase off flies.

Once Prabhupada was being fanned with a peacock feather fan in the backyard of the Dallas *gurukula* building. Devotees were gathered around. A nondevotee walking by stopped and rudely addressed himself to Prabhupada: “Why are they fanning you?” Prabhupada immediately replied, “Because it is warm.” The devotees (and the nondevotee) were impressed by this down-to-earth answer, which avoided the perhaps-intended criticism of the guru being treated royally by his disciples.

Lord Caitanya’s physician-devotee Murari Gupta was sitting up on a high platform with the king. He suddenly noticed a peacock fan being used to cool the king. The peacock reminded Murari Gupta of Krsna, and he fainted in ecstasy and fell off the high platform. The king rushed to see if Murari Gupta was injured. Murari Gupta replied that he was all right, but he had a disease of epilepsy that caused these fits. The king was very intelligent and understood the real meaning of Murari Gupta’s response to seeing the peacock feathers. In another instance, Krsna’s servant-devotee Daruka was fanning the Lord, and he felt ecstatic bodily symptoms. But he was disturbed by the manifest ecstasies because they hampered his efficient service of fanning the body of Krsna.

There are electric fans in the ceiling of the Krsna-Balarama Mandir. They are used during hot seasons to keep the Deities (and the devotees) cool. Prabhupada once remarked about the fans during a lecture. He said, “What are these fans for?” He said we use them because of the misery of hot weather. He pointed out that they were a counteraction to the natural condition of misery.

Nrsimha Caturdasi

We are having a festival to commemorate this day at Viraha Bhavan. We are expecting 30 guests. We have two tents set up in our backyard for taking *prasadam*. Indoors, starting at 10:30, we will have *kirtana*. *Kirtana* goes from 10:30-11:30. Then at 11:30 there is speaking by myself, Ravindra Svarupa, Dhanurdhara Swami and Saudamani. Then there will be more *kirtana*, *arati*, and a feast served outdoors under the tents. In my lecture, I am going to say that the story of Nrsimhadeva, Hiranyakasipu and Prahlada Maharaja takes up two volumes of the Seventh Canto. It contains many philosophical teachings and prayers, especially the prayers of Prahlada Maharaja to Nrsimhadeva. I will avoid those things and focus on the tension between Hiranyakasipu and Prahlada Maharaja, who is finally saved when Nrsimhadeva appears and kills the demon Hiranyakasipu. I will tell of the three meetings between Prahlada and his demoniac father. In the first meeting, Hiranyakasipu asks his son, “What is the best thing you learned from your teachers in school today?” Prahlada replies that if one finds himself in materialistic household life, he should get out and go to the forest, or *vana*. More clearly, he should go to Vrndavana, where Krsna consciousness is practiced exclusively. Hiranyakasipu is disgusted with this answer, and he says, “Thus the intelligence of children is spoiled by the enemy.” By enemy he means Visnu. But at this first meeting, he does not become so angry at Prahlada. He tells his teachers to protect

the boys from Vaisnavas who might be sneaking into the palace and polluting his son. The teachers continue to drill the boys in the school about materialistic education. Prahlada doesn't like it, but he behaves submissively in the classroom. When the teachers think he is sufficiently learned, they take him again to Hiranyakasipu. Once more Hiranyakasipu asks his son, "What is the best thing you learned from your teachers?" But Prahlada has two sets of teachers—he has the teachers Sanda and Amarka, who are demons, and he has as his spiritual master Narada Muni, who imparted Krsna consciousness to him when he was still in the womb of his mother. So Prahlada chooses to answer what his teacher Narada taught him. He blatantly speaks out the grand verse describing the nine principles of devotional service to Visnu:

sravanam kirtanam visnoh
smaranam pada-sevanam
arcanam vandanam dasyam
sakhyam atma-nivedhanam

(S.B. 7.5.23)

Finally he says that unless one rubs the dust of a Vaisnava over his body, he can never understand Krsna. This time, Hiranyakasipu becomes enraged. He throws Prahlada off his lap onto the ground. He tells his assistants that this boy is an ally of

Visnu, his enemy, and that he should be killed at once. The Rakshasas then begin hitting Pahlada with their tridents on the tender parts of his body, but their efforts have no effect on Pahlada, who sits silently meditating on Krsna. Hiranyakasipu is afraid but then devises many other means to kill Pahlada. When none of them succeed, he becomes very morose and thinks that maybe his son is immortal, and that maybe he himself will die. But the teachers Sanda and Amarka reassure him that he is very powerful and that Pahlada is just a little child and his opinions have no value. They should tie Pahlada up with the ropes of Varuna, and anyway, as he grows up, his intelligence will improve. Hiranyakasipu agrees to this and releases Pahlada to the teachers. The next thing that happens is that the sons of the demons in the school invite Pahlada to play with them in the hours when the teachers are away. Pahlada doesn't want to play, but he compassionately teaches the children about Krsna consciousness. They are very young and have not been polluted by the teachers. They accept Pahlada's words earnestly and reject the teachings of the materialistic teachers. In other words, they become devotees of Visnu. The teachers notice this and become very much afraid. They run to Hiranyakasipu and tell him what has happened, and he hisses like a snake that has been trampled. He calls Pahlada to him for a third time. Pahlada tries to pacify his father with words, but his father won't quell his anger. His father tells him that he's going to kill him with his own hand. Hiranyakasipu says, "You have always spoken of a being who is greater than I. Let him come now and protect you. I am going to sever your head from your body. If your God is everywhere, is He in the pillar before me?" Pahlada

immediately says, “Yes, He is in the pillar.” Hiranyakasipu then punches the pillar with his fist. Out of the pillar comes a tumultuous sound which is heard even in the heavenly planets. Then out of the pillar emerges the wonderful half-man, half-lion form of Nrsimhadeva. Hiranyakasipu realizes that this wonderful being is meant for his death, but he prepares to fight against Him. After playing with the demon for a while, Nrsimhadeva puts him on His lap and tears him apart with His fingernails. Then all of the universes which have been terrorized by Hiranyakasipu rejoice. They all come forward to offer Him prayers. But Nrsimhadeva remains angry. Lord Brahma then pushes Prahlada forward. Prahlada makes long, beautiful prayers to Nrsimhadeva and pacifies Him.

Rev. John Endler

I asked John Endler to make an announcement to the devotees at the Nrsimha Caturdasi festival. He stood confidently and told them about the poetry book *Complete Poems, From Every Day, Just Write*, which will be published and available for distribution at our midyear meeting at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall on July 6th. He told the devotees that my poetry, written twenty years ago, was twenty years ahead of its time. It is improvisational and contains the voice of my literary self, which the readers may not be familiar with. He said they are wonderful poems, and that he is going to make a presentation of the book in the northeast U.S. at different venues and try to sell many books. John will be successful because he is

so enthusiastic about the book. Any sales presentation depends not so much on the product being sold but on the enthusiasm of the salesman. John will make them understand why it is important to them to get this book. John is so deeply convinced and committed that he will make his buyers enthusiastic, and they will want to tell their friends about the book. John said the book is not only for devotees but for seekers. He has a wider audience in mind. The devotees applauded when John finished his announcement, and Bala put his arm around him and said he was “our Baptist minister.” I feel fortunate to have such a knowledgeable, avid advocate of my books in John. John compared my writing to the current popular movement of young people presenting their poetry in the spoken word at poetry “slams.” I have seen and heard the poetry slammers, and I like being included in their company.

Ravindra Svarupa

I think Ravindra Svarupa’s talk on Nrsimha Caturdasi was better than my talk. I presented a straight, condensed narration from the *Bhagavatam*, focusing on the three meetings between Prahlada Maharaja and his demoniac father Hiranyakasipu. It was good, but it didn’t bring home the fact that we current devotees can pray to Nrsimhadeva to remove the demoniac *anarthas* from our heart. But Ravindra Svarupa spoke on this point considerably. I thought he brought home the subject matter to the devotees in the room and made it more relevant than just an ancient history. I had thought of speaking something about the “inner Nrsimhadeva,” but

my lecture grew long and I forgot to mention it. I had in my pocket five verses from Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's *Sri Sri Navadvipa Bhava Taranga*, "Five Prayers for Receiving the Mercy of Lord Nrsimha," but I forgot to read it. The prayers are so good in describing the inner Lord Nrsimha that I will quote them here:

1) "Within my sinful heart the six enemies headed by lust perpetually reside, as well as duplicity, the desire for fame, plus sheer cunning. At the lotus feet of Lord Narasimha, I hope that He will mercifully purify my heart and give me the desire to serve Lord Krsna.

2) "Weeping, I will beg at the lotus feet of Lord Narasimha for the benediction of worshiping Radha and Krsna in Navadvipa, perfectly safe and free from all difficulties. When will this Lord Hari, whose terrible form strikes fear into fear itself, ever become pleased and show me His mercy?

3) "Even though Lord Narasimha is terrifying toward the sinful souls, He offers great auspiciousness unto the devotees of Lord Krsna headed by Prahlada Maharaja. When will He be pleased to speak words of compassion unto me, a worthless fool, and thereby make me fearless?

4) “He will say, ‘Dear child! Sit down freely and live happily here in Sri Gauranga-*dhama*. May you nicely worship the Divine Couple, and may you develop loving attachment for Their Holy Names. By the mercy of My devotees, all obstacles are cast far away. With a purified heart, just perform the worship of Radha and Krsna, for such worship overflows with sweet nectar.’

5) “Saying this, will that Lord delightedly place His own divine lotus-feet upon my head? I will experience sublime love for the Divine Couple, Radha-Krsna, and undergo the ecstatic transformations called *sattvika*. Falling on the ground, I will roll about at the door of Sri Narasimha’s temple.”

Syamasundara’s Book

I have received a copy of *Chasing Rhinos with the Swami, Volume 2* by Syamasundara dasa. It is all set in India in 1971, when Prabhupada went there with a group of devotees. He had no permanent residence anywhere but stayed at the houses of wealthy supporters. He preached very vigorously, doing many programs a day. Syamasundara has an uncanny ability at recall for events that happened decades ago. He loves to be with the Swami and especially to do some big service which will please him. He prefers to stay in the city of Bombay. Bombay is not a town of *sadhus* like Vrndavana, but it is a large metropolis with many wealthy people who are pious. In Bombay they speak English, and they are ripe for

Prabhupada's new plan for preaching in India, the Life Membership. For Rs. 1,111 the donor gets a copy of all of Prabhupada's books and other privileges in ISKCON. Prabhupada launches this program, and his devotees go out and contact pious people and get many life memberships. It is the perfect form of preaching for India, because street *harinama* will give the appearance that the devotees are like so many beggars in India. Syamasundara, Tamal Krsna and others encourage Prabhupada to put on a grand *pandal* program for a week in Bombay. With his unique talent for advertising, Syamasundara plasters Bombay with signs of the upcoming *pandal* program and even hires a big blimp to float hundreds of feet into the air with the words "Hare Krsna" painted in big letters on its side and a string of lights hanging from it with another message of "Hare Krsna." The devotees secure a *pandal* (stage inside a tent) that will fit in 10,000 people, and they plan a week-long program of *kirtanas*, Prabhupada lecturing, and *prasadam* distribution. I am just reading in the book up to the point where this *pandal* is going to open. Syamasundara describes himself as a regular "Bombay *walla*," liking the city, which he compares to Los Angeles. He lives simply to do something big in service so that he will get Prabhupada's special smile. The book is well-written, accessible, and fast-paced. Syamasundara has done a great service sharing these memoirs of devotion with us.

Duty

It is my duty to try and maintain my health as far as possible. Prabhupada said

it was a priority. He even wrote once on a piece of paper the priorities (especially meant for a devotee facing physical limitations). He wrote that a devotee's first priority was keeping health. His second priority was chanting *japa*. His third priority was reading Prabhupada's books. Only as a fourth priority should he render active service. Thus Prabhupada emphasized taking care of one's health in order to be a fit servant for guru and Krsna. I do my daily exercise as duty. I don't do it with spontaneous joy, but I do it steadfastly almost every day in an attempt to keep my body strong and not allow my weak condition to deteriorate.

Radha-Govinda Worship Book

*

*

*

It is Wednesday, and They wear purple and white. Krsna carries His silver buffalo horn and flute again. White crystal earrings. The golden forms of the Lord (who can assume any color) and Radha. And They appear to smile. The warm water. Go downstairs to fetch it in the dark. Chant Hare Krsna as you go, and return to Him and soak His limbs with a paper towel dipped in warm water. And as you do this, hear *Vidagdha-madhava*, where Radha gives Krsna a garland of red *gunja* berries and in His bewilderment of love, Krsna appeared to reject the garland—and many stirrings of *rasa* ensue.

*

*

*

I knew you were happy to have done the *puja*. Your mind and consciousness enter it as you hear *Vidagdha-madhava*. Radharani could not accept Her great fortune. She thought Krsna had rejected Her (because of His apparent rejection of the garland She offered), and She was so distraught, She spoke of giving up Her life. Purnamasi, Lalita and Visakha consoled Her. They told her that actually Krsna was so much in love with Her, He was bewildered and didn't know where His peacock-feathered crown and flute were. Madhumangala confirmed, by touching Krsna's chest, that He had become hot in His desire to attain Radharani. Visakha teased Him and lied, saying that She had been taken away by Abhimanyu to Mathura. So Krsna and Radha manifest great love for each other in the mood of *purva-raga*. I'm just repeating some of the words I heard and the discussion we held as we read.

Warm water soaks the paper towel, and I wipe it generously onto the body of the Lord and then onto His eternal Consort, on Their foreheads, chests and feet, all over. Then I carefully dry Them with a "man-size" tissue, careful to dry up all spots of moisture and then pick out any dirt or water I can find with a cotton bud around Their eyes, in between Their toes, and wherever I can go with the bud. Their bodies glow with a soft gold shine.

*

*

*

Radha and Krsna in Their maroon, near-red outfits with white trim made by Mahamantra dasi on Inis Rath. Krsna with His crooked silver leaning-stick and His crooked dealings with different *gopis*. Both Radha and Chandravali meet Him in the

same place. They feel jealous anger. Krsna slips and says the word “Radha” to Chandravali but tries to give it a different meaning in Sanskrit. And then He says “Chandravali” in front of Radha. “O Kana, You are very clever.” Sometimes they walk away from Him. Madhu-mangala is always ready to assist Krsna in His moods, but sometimes he makes a mistake, as when he brought Chandravali when Krsna was actually hankering to be with Radha. The fool or the serious nondevotee scholar, and certainly persons with material desires, cannot understand these pastimes. One has to be highly qualified. Verses from the *Vigdagdha-madhava* appear in the *Caitanya-caritamrta*, and we relish them there. Thus, there is a precedent or permission from Srila Prabhupada. It is the ideal accompaniment to early-morning *puja* and bathing and dressing of Radha and Govinda.

You are asking yourself, “How can Krsna appear golden, as in this *arca-vigraha*?” Maybe His Lord Caitanya nature is coming through. You might as well ask, “Why does Krsna appear in metal, or why does Krsna not move about on the altar? You could try to make the original *arca-vigraha* more like the original Krsna, but that would be external. He is Krsna in metal form, and although He is gold brass, you see Him as Syama. That’s all I can say about it.

*

*

*

Lalita-manjari sent a new brown large-sized *chadar* for Srila Prabhupada, and he is now wearing it for the first time. I am happy for this. He is comfortably warm. I

am outside Vrndavana, but I can think, “Be with your spiritual master, and that is as good as Vrndavana.”

What Did Srila Prabhupada Do?

From Shyamasundara’s memoir of Prabhupada’s activities in the early 1970s in India (*Chasing Rhinos with the Swami*, Volume 2), we get the picture of Prabhupada as very active and involved hands-on in all the management and preaching. In America, he thought his disciples were managing well on their own, but in India he supervised all details himself. He was negotiating with two landholders—in Vrndavana and Bombay—for securing land. He took part in several massive *pandals* in India’s big cities attended by tens of thousands of people. He saw constant guests in his room. His health was good, so he was on the go all day, and at night, beginning at 1:00 A.M., he always worked on his translation and commentary of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. He made a big impression on his countrymen with all his *pandals* and other preaching. He was the most prominent swami in India. Prabhupada was targeting the influential leaders of India. He sought their support for getting long-term visas for his disciples and for the leaders becoming life members and participating as much as possible in the ISKCON mission. He followed what Krsna says in *Bhagavad-gita*: “Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.” (*Bg.* 3.21) Prabhupada was seeking support economically, politically

and to get through the bureaucracy of the government to secure a firm place for his ISKCON mission. He had to exert his effort among influential people just to get some bags of cement, bags which were otherwise being restricted by the government. Prabhupada saw that India was being ruined by the Mayavadi teachers and swamis. He made it his mission to fight against them and to curtail their influence. When he was invited to meetings in which Mayavadi leaders also took part, Prabhupada boldly spoke outright against the Mayavadi distortion of Vedic culture. He also let loose his disciples, his “dancing white elephants,” to perform enthusiastic *kirtanas* at these meetings with Mayavadis, which made them abandon the stage. And then Prabhupada and his followers would chant and dance and induce the mass audience to join with him. So he combated the Mayavadis not just by his own speeches but by his demonstrating the *bhakti* of his foreign disciples. In answer to the question, “What did Srila Prabhupada do?”, the answer is “Everything.” He took personal care of his disciples, including three-year-old Sarasvati, and gave special classes just for them. He was the leading general, the expert manager, the kind father, and the bold reformer reminding his Indian audiences that they had given up Vedic culture, but they should now take it up if they wanted to be saved from the materialism they were copying from the West.

Shyamasundara as Secretary

In his book Shyamasundara describes how he became more than an ordinary

secretary to Srila Prabhupada:

“What does being Srila Prabhupada’s secretary—more now, his right-hand man—what does all this mean? Is it more than just typing or taking dictation, the passive role accepted by Prabhupada’s previous secretaries? I’m too active for that. I see myself more as a great warrior’s aide-de-camp, a lieutenant helping spark Srila Prabhupada’s wishes into action. I’m responsible not just for coordinating events as they happen around him, but also for *making things happen*. My job is to *excite* Srila Prabhupada, to look ahead and hasten the future. He has begun to ask for my opinions—on management, events, his schedule. I feel more like a collaborator, someone to bounce his ideas off, a sounding board. This is a new direction for the post called ‘the Swami’s secretary.’ Am I overstepping my bounds? I don’t know. Sometimes I push the envelope, but Prabhupada seems to appreciate dancing on the edge—in fact, he’s the perfect living example of the “Go-for-it” attitude. No matter what else happens, Prabhupada has become so dear to me I can scarcely believe my good fortune.”

I don’t think this description by Shyamasundara of his relationship with Srila Prabhupada is bragging. He actually evolved to this intimate role by surrender and by the creative, bold attitude of actually assisting Srila Prabhupada. At this time, he was unique among Prabhupada’s disciples.

What Would I Do If My Sister Madeline Phoned?

I would be flabbergasted. Along with my parents, she and her husband Tommy disowned me when I joined the Hare Krsna “cult.” I have heard no word from her in over 50 years. But I frequently dream of her and in a favorable way, as a friendly sister and an ally. I don’t know why I dream of her so much since she’s not in my conscious thoughts. But what about the fact that she might phone me? I would be very friendly to her and not be fanatical, as I was in the last meeting I had with her and her husband, when I went to their home and tried to make them trustees of ISKCON, where they would pay \$40 a month and receive books. I would talk to her very openly and not preach to her. I would try to get news of what she had been doing over the years. She is almost three years older than me, so she’s in her early 80s now (if she’s alive). She has grown up children. Would I dare to invite her family to visit me? Or would I agree to visit her? But I am immobile. I would very much like to talk to her, and even better, to meet with her, if she didn’t have the anti-cult attitude. I would try to defuse that by not being preachy. Yes, I would be very excited if I received a phone call from Madeline. My relationship with her is unresolved. We never had a closure, just an abrupt breaking-off.

I don’t think I’m going to receive the phone call. I don’t have her phone number, and she probably doesn’t have mine. I could research and try to get her

phone number, but it would be going in cold after 50 years, and I'm not optimistic of the results, talking to this elderly woman who has disowned me. She is a Catholic and sees me as an apostate to the one faith, the Roman Catholic Church. I could make the effort to contact her, but it might be unnecessarily entangling myself in family affairs. I am hoping that my commitment to devotional service will have a good effect on all my family members, as is advised in the scriptures.

Do I Feel Trapped in Krsna Consciousness?

It's *maya* to think: "I have invested so much time, there's no use changing now. I'll just live out my sentence and hope for the best."

I don't feel I'm trapped in Krsna consciousness. I am definitely detached from the mainstream of ISKCON events. I live in my *ashram* with a few devotees, and I engage myself in writing the weekly *Journal*, and I am publishing at least two poetry books this year. So I am active. I have periods when I feel flashes of doubt about my situation. But I'm so much settled into my *ksetra-sannyasa* life of staying in one place that I don't dream of trying to change it. Especially because of my physical limitations, I don't see myself going out on preaching tours, attending the big *Sadhu Sanga* in North Carolina, or the many city Ratha-Yatras, or visiting temples to give lectures. I occasionally lecture at a festival here in Stuyvesant Falls. It is not good to be complacent. I don't think I am. I am trying to maintain my status quo and also improve in chanting, writing, and relating to devotees. In my old age, with

diminished powers, it doesn't seem likely I can make quantum leaps of improvement. But I can remain steady and avoid all deviation in my remaining years. I like the expression, "Keep the aspidistra flying!" This is the title of a book by George Orwell, and it means keep on trying, keep on truckin', don't give up, be optimistic. The radio raconteur Jean Shepard, who used to be such an inspiration for me in my teenage years, used to often quote this saying to his radio listeners. So I am not in retirement; I am keeping the flag flying and following Srila Prabhupada's orders.

Offenses

There are ten offenses to avoid when chanting the holy name. If one chants with offense, one cannot make much advancement. In that case, one is advised to chant constantly, and the offenses will clear up. The worst offense is to blaspheme the devotees or the spiritual master. This is called "the mad elephant offense." If a mad elephant goes into a garden, he will uproot all the plants and flowers and ruin the place. There is a fine line between correcting a misbehaving devotee and offending him. A temple leader or manager has the responsibility to correct erring devotees. Some devotees seem to deliberately make mistakes, and the leaders are responsible for correcting them patiently, compassionately but firmly. Correcting is a thankless task, but it has to be taken on as a duty. The spiritual master regularly corrects his disciples. Prabhupada used to say it was his duty to find out the faults in

his disciples and not to flatter them. But among devotees it is different. They are our peers, and they may be doing good services, but *they* may be committing offenses to others, so we have to correct them and try to change their mentality and behavior. Correcting is not offending.

There are many offenses in Deity worship. One has to be aware of them from books like *The Nectar of Devotion* and try one's best to avoid them. It is recommended that devotees begin their Deity worship with Gaura-Nitai or Jagannatha, who do not accept offenses. The worship of Radha-Krsna is more strict, and one should be cautious to take it up.

In the age of Kali, there is a certain leniency toward committing offenses. It is said that if one mentally thinks offensively towards someone, it is not counted. One actually has to carry out the offense in order to be guilty of it. The same is true of favorable service in Kali-yuga. If one follows Lord Caitanya's verse in *Siksastakam*—“ . . . thinking oneself lower than a straw in the street . . .”, etc., with such humility he will be able to guard against offenses: “ . . . ready to offer all respect to others, without expecting any respect for oneself.” (*Sri Siksastakam*, Verse 3)

Prabhupada's Lectures

In Shyamasundara's book he expresses great appreciation for Srila Prabhupada's lectures. He finds them non-repetitive, even though they often cover the same material. He is amazed and impressed at the unique delivery of each new

lecture.

For myself, I try to listen to a lecture by Prabhupada every day. I listen intently, (like the dog in the RCA Victor advertisement, where the dog is cocking his ear to the phonograph and the caption says, “His master’s voice.”) I love finding new examples and personal reflections in Prabhupada’s talks. It is exciting to hear him.

Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura lectured for an entire month at Dakha on the first verse of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. So he proved lecturing on the *Bhagavatam* is a source of infinite reflections. The lectures include the reflections of all the previous *acaryas*, not just the present speaker. Prabhupada was well-versed in the commentaries of the Six Gosvamis and other Vaisnava *acaryas*, and he spoke their commentaries in his own lectures. He spoke strongly against the Mayavadis, and also told sweet pastimes of Krsna and Lord Caitanya.

Traveling Around the World

Prabhupada traveled by jet around the world a number of times in his ten years with us. He bought round-the-world tickets for himself and a couple of secretaries, but he would keep his itinerary loose. If he received interesting invitations from his disciples in different parts of the world, he might spontaneously take them up. He was increasingly concerned with his three main projects in India—Vrndavana, Mayapur and Bombay. When he was there, he did hands-on management and looked into all details. But he also felt obliged to return to the West and to Australia,

etc., where his devotees were eager to be with him. Once, in a lecture in Berkeley, California, he said, “I am constantly traveling, just to keep my devotees alive.” He knew that as long as he was able to do so, his personal presence in any of his centers gave a great boost and rejuvenation to his devotees. In the early 1970s he traveled especially widely and with no ill health. Later in the ’70s his health began to deteriorate, but he continued to travel. Some doctors opined that his constant travels so frequently cut his longevity of life. They said travel—as well as anxiety over the management of his 100 centers—wore him down. Although he traveled around the world, he kept up his schedule of translating and writing commentaries to the Vaisnava *sastras*, waking at 1:00 A.M. in the morning to work with his Dictaphone for several hours. He said, “Little drops of water wear away the stone. In this way I have written all my books.”

Airplanes

In contrast to the airplanes Prabhupada rode in in this world, the celestial airplanes used by the demigods do not cause stress, jet lag, or any wearing-down of health. Even the celestial airplanes are more coarse in nature than the transcendental vehicles yogis and mystics fly in. (Some yogis fly in their selfsame bodies.) The residents of Siddhaloka all have the mystic perfection of *laghima*, whereby their bodies are so light that they fly in the sky from planet to planet without any vehicle). Vaikuntha airplanes, which are completely transcendental and

don't use jet fuel, were sent to bring Ajamila ultimately back to Godhead, and at the end of his life Dhruva Maharaja, as well as his mother, flew back to Vaikuntha (he to Dhruvaloka, the polestar) in separate airplanes driven by Visnudutas. There are other pastimes in the *Bhagavatam* regarding flying vehicles. The mystic sage Kardama Muni built a grand celestial mansion for his wife Devahuti, and they flew in outer space for many years, enjoying sense gratification. The demigods in their airplanes sometimes flew to earth and observed the young women playing ball on the roofs of their palaces. This sight created lust in the demigods, and they sometimes fell from their airplanes. The demon Salva had a magical flying machine that was able to appear and disappear and was very hard to combat. It was made of iron but flew intrepidly and gave great trouble to the demigods. He attacked Dvaraka. Lord Krsna personally combated Salva and destroyed his airplane. Salva alighted to the ground, and Krsna killed him with His Sudarsana *cakra*. The demigoddesses flew in the sky in planes during the time of the *rasa* dance by Krsna and the *gopis*. Seeing the amorous sports of the *rasa* dance, the demigoddesses' belts became loosened, and they felt agitation from lust. King Citraketu had a large airplane. He flew around and one time came down into the presence of Lord Siva, who had his wife Parvati seated intimately on his lap. Citraketu laughed at the scene and teased Lord Siva for being so attached to his wife. Parvati took great offense in this and cursed Citraketu. Citraketu submitted to the curse mildly, and Lord Siva said to Parvati, "Just see the greatness of the Vaisnavas; they are not afraid of

anything.” He corrected her and her cursing of Citraketu. But Citraketu had to take his next birth as Vrtrasura, who was ultimately killed in battle by Indra.