

## ***Free Write Journal #58***

### **Free Writes**

#### **Marigolds for Radha-Govinda**

We have a big garden of mostly orange marigolds. We cover Radha-Govinda's altar with fresh flowers every morning. We have enough marigolds to last us weeks, maybe through September. Radha-Govinda are dressed in new brilliant-blue outfits from the Vrndavana *mukut-walla*, Tapan. I take more *darsana* of Radharani than Govinda. She is the tender feminine counterpart of Krsna. Krsna is male, but She is dominant. She keeps Krsna under Her control. I love Them both, but Radharani first. The residents of Vrndavana (Vraja) also think that way, seeing Radharani as the Queen. This is unlike the worship of Laksmi-Narayana or Dvarkadhisa and Rukmini. Prabhupada emphasized Krsna in his preaching. He wrote the book *Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead*. He would confide to a few devotees that worship of Radharani was the highest, but he definitely emphasized Krsna in his worldwide preaching.

#### **The Yuga-dharma Party of N.Y.C.**

Rama-aya told me the Yuga-dharma Party goes out every day to Union Square and other locations in New York City. They hold *kirtana*, and some of the men

distribute books. They know that Krsna and Lord Caitanya are very pleased with their *yajna*. They are all *brahmacaris*, and they dress in devotional clothes. They are firmly fixed in the vow to spread the holy name in a compassionate mood. They freely give the holy name to the hundreds and thousands of people who pass by them. They wouldn't be able to survive on the streets and subways unless they maintained strong *sadhana* and a deep understanding of Lord Caitanya's compassion for all living beings. They are following His teachings that in the age of Kali there is no other way, there is no other way, there is no other way, except chanting the holy names, chanting the holy names, chanting the holy names.

### **Was Srila Prabhupada Fastidious about Keeping Plans, Making Dates on the Calendar Long in Advance, Scheduling His Itinerary?**

Prabhupada was not a slave to following a week-by-week or month-by-month planning schedule. He was more spontaneous than that. Prabhupada sometimes promised a temple president in a particular country that he would visit them, but then he would change his plans and go somewhere else instead. The devotees whose visit was canceled felt themselves insincere and unqualified for Prabhupada's visit. But he maintained the right to change his schedule as he was inspired to do. In the early years, he fixed his world headquarters in Los Angeles. But in his later years, he paid more attention to his projects in India. He wanted the devotees to attend the annual Gaura-Purnima meetings in Mayapur and hear from him there. When Prabhupada was in Mayapur for the Gaura-Purnima festival, he wanted the GBC

members to hold their annual meeting. He wanted them to chalk out plans for the year and vote on resolutions. Then he would hear the resolutions and either approve of them or change them to his liking. He expected the GBC leaders in the ISKCON Society to follow the resolutions made in Mayapur for the year and not deviate.

**From *The Radha-Govinda Worship Book***

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“Radha and Krsna are dressed in light green with golden trim and green *chadars*. I am happy for that. My brother wrote me, “Do you feel love for your Radha-Krsna Deities?” and he added, “I am not being sarcastic.” I can’t claim I know love. These Deities do please me and add wonderfully to my life. But I don’t worship them the way we hear devotees of Lord Caitanya, such as the Gosvamis of Vrndavana, worshiped Deities with all their heart and soul. I don’t want to ever give up this worship of Radha-Govinda and Prabhupada.

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“Dear Radha and Govinda look very beautiful. While bathing and dressing Them, I heard *Lalita-madhava*. It was the scene where Krsna takes the place of the sapphire Deity. Radha is not completely satisfied with the statue. She wants the real Krsna. This brings to mind the *murti*

is nondifferent, and we should be fully satisfied. It is not a statue, it is not a play doll, it is actually Radha and Krsna. Let me bathe and dress Them.

“My mind is able to accept this. Sometimes doubts come. I remember as a young boy we had very small metal statues of people engaging in winter sports. It was part of the scene we made every year at the base of the Christmas tree. We had a round mirror which became an ice pond. Cotton was the snow around it. Newspapers under the cotton formed a hill. Down the hill we placed some metal figures on sleighs, and some were skating. Sometimes when I handle Radha and Krsna my mind flashes to those little, little figures, and then I had plastic cowboys, and Indians, and horses. That’s all right. That doesn’t change the fact that *murti* worship is transcendental, and that it is all right for an old man like me to worship the all-beautiful Couple in this way. It is not foolish. It is far more advanced than worshiping the Absolute without form. Let them laugh at us “playing with dolls.” We shall follow the example of the greatest *acaryas*, especially the followers of Lord Caitanya. Almost every single one of them had their own Deity of Krsna, Radha-Krsna or Govardhana-*sila*. I am doing that too. And my own Srila Prabhupada is there.

“Waving the incense stick in circles before each picture and Deity. Hearing the beginning of the Ninth Act of *Lalita-madhava*, Krsna and Radha in Nava-Vrndavana. She longs to see Her dear friend Visakha. How nice to think of Radha’s love for Her friends, which arises even when She is directly with Krsna. He tells Her how Visakha is still alive, as an ascetic woman performing vows so that she may meet with Radha again. But it will not take place until Radha is given the Syamantaka jewel.

“Write while you can. With words, say something nice and adoring to Radha and Govinda. Make it true. They accept the dress and ornaments, They look back at me pleased. I will get Them a temple from Vrndavana, and a better *vyasasana* for Srila Prabhupada.”

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Radha and Krsna wear gold and soft purple clothing today. I could not make a perfect arrangement of fit, but did what I could, and They do look beautiful. We heard how Krsna was dealing with Radha as Satyabhauma and with Rukmini-Candravali in *Lalita-madhava*. When He was caught in a lie, Nava-Vrinda came to His aid. Alas, I am such a fool, but still able to hear of the pastimes of Radha and Krsna, which can alleviate one from all distress. I did not give Them woolen *chadars* today because Krsna has long sleeves and Radha somehow didn’t seem to need

it. I thought Her dress was also nice as it was. But if it feels chilly, I can add the *chadar* later.”

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“Hearing of Radha and Krsna (and Madhumangala and Nava-Vrinda) in the cave, looking at pictures of Their Vrndavana pastimes. The artist, Visvakarma, did not depict Kaliya pastimes, thinking it might disturb Radharani. Madhumangala sees the picture of the wives of the *yajnic brahmanas* carrying a feast (with the *jalebis* that curl like peacock feathers) and he becomes hungry. These are sweet to hear. Krsna and Radha agreed to be dressed in the brownish-and-gold outfits. Prabhupada wears the gray *chadar*, which was the first one I ever got for him.”

### **Random Selections from the Index of *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta***

#### **Prabhupada, as retired from management (pp. 566—67)**

“Srila Prabhupada would repeatedly mention that the ISKCON leaders should prepare to carry on without his direct management. One day he was recalling some of the incidents of his first year in New York City, when suddenly he began speaking of

the future. ‘Don't spoil it,’ he said. ‘Now it is up to you, my senior men. I can part away from you. My health is not good. I am old man. It is not surprising. Now you G.B.C., young boys, you are American, expert. You have all intelligence. So you don't spoil it. Let the Movement go forward more. You have a lot of nice places. Don't be anxious for. . . . And even if I go, where is the harm? I have given my ideas and directions in my books. Just you have to see it. I think I have done my part. Is it not? Do you think so or not?’

“Yes, you have done everything. Still, we want the whole *Bhagavatam*, Srila Prabhupada.’

“That will be done,’ said Prabhupada. ‘Even it is not full, there is no loss. You are competent. You can take charge. Now you can take charge of all the money, and let me remain free from management. My only request is, don't spoil it. I have sometimes chastised so that it may not be spoiled.’

“Prabhupada said that for him to see that things were going on nicely under his ISKCON leaders would make him happy. ‘And I will go on writing books. That will be all right?’ He said there was no need for him to eat any more. Since he was not physically active, there was no purpose in taking a lunch of *chapatis* and rice.”

### **Radha-Syamasundara Deities** (p. 629)

“Srila Prabhupada still had no appetite and had scarcely eaten during the past six weeks. He was no longer regular in his times for sleeping, taking massage, or sitting up and translating. Feeling himself to be at a critical period, he had given permission for the devotees all over ISKCON to recite a simple prayer: ‘My dear Lord Krsna, if You desire, please cure Srila Prabhupada.’ He would regularly go before the Deities each morning. Wearing his dark sunglasses and sitting erect in the rocking chair, he would hold his palms together in a gesture of prayer, while two men, one in front and one behind, carefully carried the rocker from Prabhupada's room into the temple room. They would set the chair down first before the Deities of Gaura-Nitai, then before Krsna-Balarama, and then before Radha-Syamasundara. Then they would carry him to a central spot in the courtyard, under the *tamala* tree, and set his chair down on the black and white checkered marble floor.

“Srila Prabhupada would sit facing Krsna and Balarama, and the devotees would sit down around him and begin a *kirtana*. As the *kirtana* began, two *gurukula* boys would rise and come in front of him, where they would begin dancing with arms upraised,



their cotton *chadars* swinging back and forth. Prabhupada would usually not speak or even smile, but after a few minutes would give his garlands to a devotee, who would place them around the necks of the dancers. Soon two other young boys would come forward, and the first boys would garland them with the garlands they had received from Srila Prabhupada and sit down. For half an hour, the dancing and singing continued. Guests to the temple would gather, many of them offering money at Prabhupada's feet, which rested on an embroidered silk cushion.”

## **Free Writes**

### **Dog**

Prabhupada said if you don't believe in God then you are D-O-G. Prabhupada noted that the dogs in India ran freely and were neglected without any masters. They were mostly skinny mongrels, and they foraged in the garbage for food. By contrast, in the West dogs are kept as pets and pampered. Their owners buy them dog food and take them on walks with a leash. On these walks the owner becomes more the servant of the dog. He has to stop when the dog passes stool, and he has to “stoop and scoop” the dog's stool and dispense with it. Prabhupada even claimed that wealthy dog owners sometimes left substantial amounts of money to their dogs in their wills.

Prabhupada frequently said that materialists who begot and raised children without bringing them to Krsna consciousness were all like cats and dogs with no spiritual culture. Transmigrating through the body of a dog is extremely low and degrading. But those in the human form of life who neglect the opportunity to develop spiritual culture and who become enamored with dogs run the risk of becoming a dog in their next life. An astrologer in India predicted that Prime Minister Nehru had become born as a dog in Sweden.

By the mercy of the Vaisnavas, however, even a dog can get liberation. In *caitanya-lila*, Sivananda Sena took care of a dog while the devotees from Navadvipa were traveling to Jagannatha-Puri to meet with Lord Caitanya. The dog arrived at Puri before Sivananda Sena, and when he got there, he saw Lord Caitanya throwing bits of sweets to the dog. The next day the dog disappeared, and the devotees concluded that he had gone back to the spiritual world by the grace of Sivananda Sena and Lord Caitanya. (This extraordinary example of a Vaisnava's compassion should not be taken as an excuse for keeping a dog as a pet and neglecting one's standard of cleanliness and spiritual practice.)

## **Mantra**

The Sanskrit word mantra means "to deliver the mind." In former ages, warriors used to release their weapons by reciting mantras. They knew the art of shooting an arrow in the ground and producing drinking water. Persons who were critically wounded could be brought back to life by those who were expert in mantra.

With the entrance of the age of Kali, the science of using mantra has vanished, as well as those capable of chanting them expertly.

But the *sastras* declare, “My dear King, although Kali-yuga is an ocean of faults, there is still one good quality about this age: Simply by chanting the Hare Krsna *maha-mantra*, one can become free from material bondage and be promoted to the transcendental kingdom.” (S.B. 12.3.51) In His *Siksastakam* prayer, Lord Caitanya states that there are no hard and fast rules in chanting Hare Krsna. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati has written that one can chant even while passing stool and there is no contamination. Even if chanted improperly, in jest, or to indicate something else, the potency of the holy names will have effect. Namacarya Haridasa Thakura said that chanting of the holy name, even in the shadow stage of chanting, brings liberation. Haridasa Thakura also said that the loud chanting of the holy name liberates even the nonmoving living entities like the trees when they receive the echo of the holy name.

### ***Narottama Siksa***

Yadunandana Swami has just published his most recent book, *Narottama Siksa: Bathing in the Pristine Waters of Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura’s Teachings*. Yadunandana Swami began the book at the Govardhana Palace in Vrndavana, and he finished the second half in our ashram in Stuyvesant Falls. It is an excellent book, accessible and yet profound. Yadunandana Swami is my initiated disciple, and he kindly asked me to write a foreword to his book. I read *Narottama*

*Siksa* in manuscript form, and now I am reading it again in the excellent published volume with attractive cover and clear print.

Here is my foreword:

“Yadunandana Swami’s treatise *Narottama Siksa: Bathing in the Pristine Waters of Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura’s Teachings* is a clear and profound exploration of all the themes in the poet’s two books *Prarthana* and *Prema-bhakti-candrika*. Narottama Dasa Thakura’s songs are very influential in the disciplic succession from Lord Caitanya, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who appeared some 500 years ago in India. The author of the book you are about to read has done a great service to devotees of Sri-Sri Radha-Krsna and to all sincere spiritual seekers by presenting Narottama Dasa Thakura in accessible yet modern English. Narottama wrote in simple Bengali language; his teachings are considered “as good as Vedic evidence.” In a similar way, by discussing and explaining Narottama in 21<sup>st</sup> century English, Yadunandana Swami gives us an open view into the heart of the esoteric poet-devotee.

“The author systematically presents the favorite, predominant devices used by Narottama in his songs, expressions of unworthiness, aspirations to serve Radha-Krsna, anticipation of reaching the ultimate goal, these and many other of Narottama Dasa Thakura’s themes are elucidated beautifully in the book.

“In a special section, the author fully discusses the advanced topic of spontaneous love of God (*raganuga bhakti*) and gives precautions about prematurely practicing spontaneous love.

“Narottama Dasa Thakura’s songs are very advanced and confidential in Krsna consciousness, and the author reveals their inner meanings with the hope that the reader will be inspired to patiently follow his or her spiritual master in a way they can authentically enter these topics.

“Yadunandana Swami is an active preacher in the renounced order (*sannyasa*) and the leader of a rural community in Spain. He is also proving himself a prolific author of Krsna conscious books. I hope I have said enough to whet your appetite. Please turn the page and honor the actual feast.”

—SDG

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

*Shack Notes* was the first book in which I attempted to use free writing. I didn’t break into it completely, as I did years later in a book like *Forgetting the Audience*. But it does contain elements of writing freely, spontaneously, in the mood of “keep the hand moving.”

In one section, I was writing about my own skepticism. I said I didn't think I could get completely free of it in this lifetime, but probably in the next life I would be born and raised by pious people:

“But then when I become a teenager will I meet a hip friend who will turn me on to the latest drugs, and who will blow me away from my faith? I remember one guy in my group of hip Brooklyn College friends. He had red hair and freckles. They called him ‘the Barry Goldwater of the hippies’ because he was more well-bred than most of us. Anyway, this ‘Barry Goldwater’ told me that his father was a God-fearing Christian minister, and they had been raised to see God’s will in all things. ‘Now I am painstakingly removing God from everything in my life.’ He gave me the impression that he thought he was suffering from a severe handicap of being raised in God-consciousness. These were the kind of people I counted among my friends.

“Alan Shiffman, another classmate, was a philosophy major. He knew the Logical Positivists well. I didn't know them, but was intimidated to think they were absolute sages. Alan said that, ‘According to Wittgenstein, the question of God’s existence cannot even be raised; it is a useless question.’ When God was mentioned by my milder Staten Island friends, usually while we were drinking beer, I said, ‘We can't talk about that. Alan Shiffman said it was a profitless topic. Those who know exclude all mention of God.’

“Win Burgraff, another minister’s son, didn’t like my bullying him with that. He said, ‘Just because Alan Shiffman says so, now no one can talk of God?’

“I said, ‘You can talk if you want, but it doesn’t make any sense.’ (I tried to impress him that we at Brooklyn College knew things he would never hear about at his Calvinist Bible College in Hope, Michigan.)

“I am bringing this up to help me see why I scream with skepticism inside. A devotee said recently, ‘If garbage goes in, then garbage will come out.’

“But I am hopeful  
 a bum can become a devotee  
 a thief can become a devotee . . .

“Their faces will shine with the luster of *brahmacarya*. They will be armed with the weapons of knowledge and logic, and sometimes they will have bad dreams. When they go and relax and go to hear how Balarama killed the demon Prahamba, they will have to endure the sneers and sniggers of Alan Shiffman and his breed.”

Cats are the killers of birds. They wipe out large populations of bird species. One scientific study in England compared neighboring properties, one with cats and one without. They found a striking difference, in that the property with cats was almost entirely devoid of rodents and birds. In that study they described the cats as “lawn sharks.” Humans like to keep cats as pets because they can pet them and they are independent. Prabhupada used to lump cats and dogs together when he described a human society without God consciousness. In some versions of the Ramayana, when Hanuman entered Sri Lanka alone, he disguised himself as a cat. When some cats grow older, they give up their affection to their owners, eat their food supply and keep to themselves. People like to keep cats because they kill the mice. There is not much mention of cats in *gaura-lila* or *krsna-lila*. Cats are considered bad luck. People take seriously that cats should not be around pregnant women because they are so envious they may cause a miscarriage. Having a black cat cross your path is also considered bad luck.

### **“Olympics”**

Baladeva and I play a game of “Olympics” at 2:30 A.M. We moisten seventeen washcloths and keep them in a bucket. The aim of the game is to throw the washcloth from eight feet away and try to hang it on the towel bar attached to a closed door. The aim is to catch the washcloth on the bar without letting it fall to the floor. Baladeva is the lead player, and he goes first. He usually keeps a .500 average and covers most of the rail with washcloths. I go second and I am not as expert,



dropping some washcloths to the floor. I take a second turn, but if I still drop some washcloths, I let Baladeva go again, and he usually covers the entire bar. We then call out, “Knuckles! Hi-five! Solidarity! Eternity, bliss, knowledge, love! Forever and ever and ever! Amen, brother! Amen, Amen!” We glance at the triumphant pile of washcloths for a moment, and then I turn my attention to *darsana* of Kalachandji’s feet, and Baladeva tends to the health drinks and medicine I will take. We see it as a harmless recreation before beginning our serious prime-time of health care and *japa*. It is fun.

### **Open Door Policy**

We maintain an open door policy at Viraha Bhavan, and just now we are having many visitors. Vedic literature states that a householder should go out in the street before eating his meal and cry out, “Is there anyone who wants to take *prasadam*? Please come!” In Vedic culture, even an enemy should be made to feel at home if he comes as an uninvited guest. The uninvited guest is considered holy. But, I admit, it is a bit of a burden and strain on me to receive all these visitors and have private meetings with them. There are just too many people coming, but they are all favorable to me. So I should drop all my anxiety and just meet them as I am capable.

A poet is coming today who is also a recognized actor. He writes iambic pentameter poems on Krsna conscious themes. I think he will recite to us a poem about Vrndavana. With him is coming Henry Schoelkopff, who is well-intentioned toward me and is a long-term friend of the Krsna consciousness Movement. Rama-

Raya will also be here today, and maybe he will take part in hearing the poetry recitation. Tomorrow Rama leaves, just at the time Jayadvaita Swami and his servant arrive for a two-day stay. We are preparing to cook his favorite preparation, *kichari*.

### **Random Looks at Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (11<sup>th</sup> Ed.)**

**harbinger** (n.) : one that pioneers in or initiates a major change

: one that presages or foreshadows what is to come

Prabhupada was a harbinger of the Hare Krsna Movement initiated 500 years ago by Lord Caitanya. Prabhupada initiated a major change. He declared that Krsna consciousness was a world religion, and he sowed the seeds and grew the plant of ISKCON. Forty years after his disappearance, ISKCON is growing more and more. Thousands of people have become devotees in every continent in the world. The world headquarters of ISKCON is at Sridham Mayapur—where a city of 50,000 devotees will reside—centered around the monumental Temple of the Vedic Planetarium.

Even when he did not have many followers or temples, Prabhupada was the harbinger, “the person sent ahead to provide lodgings;” “he who pioneers or initiates a major change;” “one that presages or foreshadows what is to come.” Who knew when A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami came alone on the *Jaladuta*, a steamship from India to America, with no support or finances or institutional backing? Who knew

that he was the harbinger of the now-burgeoning Krsna Consciousness Movement?  
But he was that harbinger.

**free speech** (n.) : speech that is protected by the First Amendment to the  
U.S. Constitution.

ALSO: the right to such speech.

Prabhupada spoke in America under the protection of the First Amendment. He condemned materialistic civilization and politicians who were not God-conscious, and he called for a revolution of spiritual life, that people should be free to follow four rules: no illicit sex, no gambling, no intoxication, and no meat-eating. His talks were controversial, but he made them freely and no one tried to stop him. This is the privilege that a *sadhu* should have: to speak from the *sastras* and *acaryas*, without regard for political opinion or *vox populi*. Prabhupada “pushed the envelope” and wrote and spoke what the *acaryas* of the past had said, even though it may not have been popular or even allowed in some governments run by dictatorship.

**globalize** (v.) : to make global, especially to make worldwide in scope or  
application

Lord Caitanya predicted that Krsna’s Name would be heard in every town and

village of the world. He was teaching globalization and spiritual life. Krsna consciousness is not a sectarian religion or a teaching that is applicable just to one country or one sect. It is a worldwide Movement with spiritual values that apply to all people at all times. When Lord Caitanya said, “*Kirtaniya sada harih*,” He meant that the *kirtana* of the holy names should be taken up globally. That is happening now very tangibly by the spreading of ISKCON in all the countries of the world.

### **Catching Up on Our Out-Loud Readings of *Bhagavatam* at Mealtimes**

Currently we are hearing the section in the Sixth Canto of the battle between Vritrasura and the heavenly king, Indra. Citraketu was a great devotee of Lord Visnu, but he was cursed by Lord Siva’s wife Parvati, and he had to take the body of a powerful gigantic demon, Vritrasura. There was a great battle between the demons and the demigods. Vritrasura killed many demigods and injured many more. The demigods fled to Lord Visnu for protection. He told them to go to the powerful saint Dadhici and beg from him the bones of his body. From the bones of his body, Visvakarma could make a thunderbolt weapon. Infused with the power of Lord Visnu, that could be used to kill Vritrasura.

Indra mounted his elephant Airavata and along with the other demigods charged against Vritrasura and the demons. But Vritrasura knocked Indra and his carrier back fourteen yards, injuring the elephant. Indra became morose and stopped fighting. Vritrasura spoke to Indra and encouraged him to take up his weapon and fight. Vritrasura was externally a demon, but within he was actually a

devotee of Visnu, and his highest aspiration was to go home, back to Godhead. He wanted to be killed by Indra's thunderbolt weapon. On Vritrasura's encouraging words, Indra attacked again. Vritrasura's demon armies fled from the thunderbolt and ran away from the battlefield, turning their backs. Indra and the demigods attacked them from behind. Vritrasura was disgusted at the cowardice of both his demons (for turning their backs and fleeing) and the demigods (for attacking the demons when their backs were turned). Indra's thunderbolt weapon was more powerful than Vritrasura, and he cut off one of the demon's arms. The demon swallowed Indra, much to the dismay of the demigods, but Indra was protected by the *narayana-kavaca* shield, and he used his thunderbolt weapon to pierce the abdomen of Vritrasura. Indra then cut off the other arm of Vritrasura, but the demon maintained his fighting spirit.

The *Bhagavatam* commentators state that Vritrasura was actually a devotee, while Indra was acting like a demon. This is because Vritrasura's only desire was to be killed by Indra's weapon and sent back home, back to Godhead, whereas Indra's desire was to get back his residence in the heavenly planet and enjoy opulently. But the heavenly planets are temporary, and they lead to death.

Indra finally attacked Vritrasura and began cutting off his head with the thunderbolt weapon. But it took an entire year, 360 days, before Indra could finally sever the head of the demon. When he was dead, the demigods all rejoiced, except Indra. Indra was dejected and afraid because he had killed Vritrasura, who was as great as a *brahmana* and Vaisnava. As a result of Indra's act, sin personified came

after him in the form of an old woman with tuberculosis and bloody clothes. She pursued Indra wherever he went. He finally took shelter in the fibers of the lotus in a lake. After many years of living in this painful, austere condition, Lord Visnu released him and restored him to his place as the king of heaven. But Vritrasura got the better position—he was immediately transferred back to the spiritual world in eternity, bliss and knowledge.

### **Visitors**

Yesterday we were paid a visit by Henry and his friend Alexander. Henry has been a long-term friend and devotee of the Krsna Consciousness Movement. I asked him what he was doing, and he said he was watching and listening to live broadcasts of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* classes given in the various temples such as Alachua, Los Angeles and others. He is very enthusiastic and absorbed in the live *Bhagavatam* classes. He likes the way the camera pans the audience and how there is interchange between the audience and the *Bhagavatam* speaker. He has also been attending many Ratha-yatras in New York, Los Angeles, etc. He was very friendly to me and asked me to speak some memories of Prabhupada.

Alexander is somewhat new to Krsna consciousness. He is a poet and actor. He is preparing a poetry recitation to give at a retreat conducted by Dhanurdhara Swami called “*Bhakti* Immersion.” Unfortunately, Alexander wasn’t prepared to recite his poetry to me; he doesn’t have it memorized yet. He writes in iambic pentameter as Shakespeare did, and he does Krsna conscious themes. He did read to

me some notes he kept in preparation for his poetry recitation, and they were very interesting. He was very lively and friendly.

After our meeting for an hour, we went downstairs and shared an excellent *prasadam* lunch prepared by Baladeva of lasagna, spinach, bread, corn and salad (made by Haryasva). We continued lively conversation during the meal. Both Henry and Alexander are enthusiastic about Krsna consciousness and devotee association. Henry said he is a “groupie” and likes to be with senior devotees of Srila Prabhupada. I gave Alexander a copy of my recent book *POEMS*. I was a little shy to give it because my poetry is not iambic pentameter, or any disciplined meter. But Alexander kept saying that he wanted to be assured that the Krsna Conscious Movement had room for art and creativity. So I went ahead and shared my humble efforts with him in hopes it would encourage him.

### **Reading the Kindle**

I continue to enjoy reading the *Bhagavatam* with my little Kindle in enlarged print. We are reading the chapter “The Son of Drona Punished.” Arjuna captures Asvatthama after he has killed the five sleeping children of Draupadi. Arjuna ties him up like an animal and brings him into the camp. Arjuna does not want to kill him because he is the son of a great *brahmana* and military teacher, Dronacarya, who specifically taught Arjuna the military art. But Krsna tells Arjuna to immediately kill Asvatthama. When they get to the camp and meet Draupadi, she pleads for the life of Asvatthama and says his wife should not have to grieve like her.

She reminds Arjuna of his debt to Dronacarya for training him up in the military arts. King Yudhisthira agrees with Draupadi, but Bhima says the culprit should be killed. Krsna smiles to Arjuna and tells him he has to make a difficult decision. Because different persons have different opinions, Krsna assumes four arms to hold them apart. Arjuna finally decides that Krsna is testing him to use his intelligence. He therefore cuts off the hair and the jewel on Asvatthama's head, and this is considered as good as killing him. Asvatthama is also driven out of the camp. As we shall read ahead, Asvatthama was not redeemed when Arjuna spared his life. When Asvatthama killed the five sleeping sons of Draupadi, he brought the heads to his master, Duryodhana and thought he would be pleased. But Duryodhana was disgusted by Asvatthama's action and was very displeased with him. Later, still unreformed, Asvatthama threw a *brahmastra* to kill the last surviving member of the Kuru dynasty, Maharaja Pariksit, who was lying in the womb of his mother Uttara. The weapon burned the embryo, but Krsna as Paramatma entered the womb, saved the child and restored his life. Asvatthama lost everything after this last nefarious attempt. He is still living in disgrace.

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

I excerpted something from *Shack Notes* earlier, but I liked it and I'm going to do another one. This one is about the free writing process. It's a particular method called clustering. You write a Krsna-directed word in a circle. Then you put a line extending from the circle and write another word that pops into your head. Then you



extend another line to make another circle and put another word in the center of it. You are writing freely but with the hope that it will all connect to Krsna. That's clustering.

“Here is what happened—it was an action scene, doing a cluster on blood/flesh—I looked close at my hand without thinking. ‘Boy, I am seeing things up close,’ I thought, ‘this is good.’ I felt a pressure to think—*as a devotee should*. But I challenged it, ‘No, don't think. Keep going with this experiment.’

“Then I just *leaped* right out of the clustering rules of order—and without connecting one ball to another, I made a big Krsna in a circle. It was like leapfrog! It was exhilarating and radical (and yet somehow conservative): ‘I want Krsna, *bas!*’ The Krsna circle was like an unconnected island. From it I started new connecting circles, circles that wandered around, and I had to try to connect them to the original cluster. I saw it as an enactment of the separation between body and spirit. I wanted to bring them together in Krsna consciousness. I inched along without knowing *where* I would connect, but finally I did. It was a satisfying sense of completion. I connected the ‘Krsna’ chain with ‘Don't think.’ The two poles came together. Krsna isn't merely intellectual or merely dogmatic, as opposed to free spirit and ‘don't think.’ It was nice.”

## **Russians**

Russians are perhaps the largest-growing membership in ISKCON, except perhaps for the Indians. It began with Srila Prabhupada preaching to a single boy in Moscow for several days during his sole visit there. From that first contact it grew to enormous proportions. They have a large population residing in Vrindavan and Mayapur. In Vrindavan they have their own house, and shopkeepers keep Russian-language signs in their stores. Many of my books are translated into Russian by the arrangement of my disciple Ishana devi dasi. Even in New York City at 26 Second Avenue, there is a weekly class in Russian for the Russian devotees living in New York City. The Russian devotees I have met or corresponded with have a tendency for the “mystical.” They seem to pick it up from the Russian saints of Christianity. They look for miracles and *siddhis*. But I do not know enough about the entire Russian devotee population to say this is true on a large scale. Among the few disciples I have in Russia, I note a tendency to be belligerent, noncooperative, and even envious of one another. It seems like the ISKCON authorities in Russia have to be heavy to control the independent nature of the devotees. In Mayapur, where there is a large number of Russian devotees, they are appreciated for being skillful, artistic and helpful in all departments. In Russia the devotees are enthusiastic for *harinama* and festivals, and they cooperate to carry these out.

### **Abhishek and Vishnupriya**

I had a visit from Nitai-Gaurasundara’s son Abhishek, who was recently married in a civil official way. They will have an elaborate Vedic wedding in a few

months. They have bought a house in Nashville, Tennessee, where Abhishek is based as a lawyer. Abhishek's boss told him he is "baby-faced" and looked too young to represent a client. So Abhishek grew a beard and now looks sufficiently older. Visnu-Priya's parents are initiated by H.H. Jayapataka Maharaja. The newlyweds aspire to be initiated by Niranjana Swami. I asked them how many rounds of *japa* they chant. Abhishek said he completes 16 rounds a day, but Vishnupriya said at present she chants only eight rounds. They appear to be a compatible Krsna conscious couple. Abhishek asked me for some advice. I told him to live peacefully in marriage and that he should not bully his wife. When I said that, he shed some tears. I pray that Krsna will protect them.

### **Jayadvaita Swami**

Jayadvaita Swami wrote me about his recent visit to Gita-nagari and attending the Ratha-yatra there. He said Gita-nagari is not just a rural community, but it is a place that brings out internal issues like Vrndavana. He wrote that he would tell me more what he meant when he visited me.

This makes me remember my old relationship with Gita-nagari in the 1980s. I was the residing guru there. Many of my disciples lived there, and I had the support of my Godbrothers and Godsisters. I did not demand anything of them, but they supported me and my interests in a natural, loving way. I wrote sizeable portions of the *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta* in the cabin there. After the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class I would go on a morning walk with many devotees, and we would talk, and I

would answer questions. We held special *kirtanas* in the evening. Paramananda was in charge, and Bhurijana was the headmaster of the *gurukula* there. During the time I lived there I had chronic migraine headaches. I used to call a rural pathway near my cabin “Recuperation Way.” I endured head pain, particularly in the right eye, and often had to spend a day lying in bed. It was a good place for reflection and recovery. Aside from the *Lilamrta*, I wrote other books at Gita-nagari. I had a small staff of Gita-nagari Press workers, including my editor Mandalesvara. Bhurijana and I read and discussed the Russian prayer mystics like Theophan the Recluse. We talked about integrating their mood into a more prayerful *japa* chanting. I wrote my three-volume journal there, *Journal and Poems*. My influential book *Japa Reform Notebook* was written there, as well as my 1974 memoir of being Prabhupada’s servant and secretary.