

Free Write Journal #77

Free Writes

Visitors

A South American devotee brought his brother, his brother's wife and their three small children for lunch. They were a disruption to our ashram.

They were not qualified to sit and hear our one-and-a-half hour out-loud reading, so the two men talked loosely of the early years of ISKCON in their part of South America, when I was thin and visited there and initiated. The children were out of control, and their mother couldn't contain them. They played in a box where we keep electronic parts and disarrayed them. The youngest one cried, crawled into the *pujari* room and pulled down some jewelry and scattered it. We will tell this devotee not to bring any more small children to Viraha Bhavan; it's a holy ashram, not a playpen.

As a *sannyasi*, I don't like to meet with *grhasthas* and their small children. We did not speak a word of *krsna-katha*. It will be good to get back to our quiet schedule with little noise, no *prajalpa* or uncontrolled children.

Radha and Krsna's Bed

For two weeks Baladeva has been serving Radha-Govinda by putting Them to

sleep mentally in a miniature bed and waking Them in the morning. The idea came when we were reading *Caitanya-caritamṛta* and a reference was made from *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* that devotees should place the Deities in a bed. In his purport, Srila Prabhupada addresses his devotees and tells them to adopt this practice, and that they may use a small bed for this purpose.

Krsna-dasi, our head *pujari*, pointed this out to Atindra and his wife Lalita-kaisori, and they bought a very nice bed on the Internet. Krsna-dasi was very envious that Baladeva took on the service of putting Radha-Govinda to bed because the hours were inconvenient for her. Baladeva places Krsna's flute under Their pillow. Sometimes he meditates that he is placing Them in a forest cottage, or sometimes he puts Them in the *kunja* on our altar. He places a few rose petals to create a nice scent. The *sadhana* of putting Their Lordships to bed is a sublime addition to the worship of Radha-Govinda.

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Baladeva Vidyabhusana Dasa “At War”

Baladeva started getting symptoms of a cold yesterday afternoon (February 3rd). At first he was in denial, but then he started taking Vitamin C and Echinacea. Overnight his condition got worse. He had symptoms of nausea, diarrhea, a dry cough, runny nose, and his overall feeling was that his body is in a fight. He's wearing a face mask to prevent other inmates in the ashram from catching his disease. Baladeva is usually strong, so he thinks he can beat this. But if he cannot, we

are in big trouble; I'm so dependent on him for physical service. Bala (from Trinidad) is here, but he has not recovered from his serious surgery. He cannot lift heavy weights (such as my body). So we are on alert, watching Baladeva at war with the "bugs" and wondering what I will actually do if he breaks down and gets sidelined.

The Flu

There is a worldwide scare about a flu that has started in China. All the embassies have called their people back home, and the airlines have cancelled their flights to and from China. Cases of the flu have spread to New York City.

We were planning a big festival at Viraha Bhavan for Lord Nityananda's Appearance Day, but we are canceling a big attendance and just inviting Ravindra Svarupa and his entourage. Some devotees say, "If you catch the flu, it's just your karma." We are taking precautions by not mixing with outsiders who may be carrying the flu.

The media is making a big sensation about the Chinese flu. There is no vaccine for protection against it, but ultimately, Krsna is in control. If He protects, no one can do harm; if He neglects, no one can be saved.

(So why are we canceling our big festival? I am 80 years old, and I'm prone to come down with pneumonia. By canceling our festival, my caretakers are protecting me from too much mingling with people who are not sensitive to my condition and who say, "It's all karma, prabhu.")

Nitai

My disciple Nitai in New Delhi, India is printing and publishing some of my books. He is very busy as a consultant in a large fabric factory and the father of a family with two small children, but he manages to find some time to print my books. He distributes the books to the temples in India, but I want him to send some to me in America. He wants to send them by ship, not air, to save on the cost. I am looking for donors to pay for the shipping. Nitai printed a beautiful two-volume set of *Prabhupada Meditations*, Books 1-4. Forty-six sets arrived on time for my Vyasa-puja in December. He also sent me a single sample copy of *From Imperfection, Purity Will Come About*. He is now working on *Vandanam* and gradually some other out-of-print books. I just phoned him at 4:00 A.M., but the lines in India were busy. I wanted to talk to him about his most recent books and the cost of sending them by boat. Nitai is very dear to me. He is my only man in India. Other gurus and leaders have many helpers and much money for distributing books. I have but one part-time worker, but he is gradually distributing many of my books. He serves tirelessly out of love and dedication.

Muktavandya

Muktavandya is a genuinely humble devotee. For thirty years he sold flowers to the nondevotees in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and Boston. He was the number one donor to both the Boston temple and Gita-Nagari. He has serious health issues. He

had two serious heart attacks, and they gave him a pacemaker. If his heart stops, the pacemaker will give an electric jolt to his heart muscles. Right now, he has glaucoma and a cataract. The operation was difficult, and he lost the eyesight in one eye for a predicted four weeks.

Muktavandya works in the temple cleaning pots, floors, *pujari* services. But after an hour he has to stop and take rest. As the seniormost devotee in Boston, he counsels and does conflict resolution. Muktavandya frequently visits our ashram and brings us plenty of flowers for the Deities. He's friendly and upbeat, and doesn't complain about his situation. His only frustration is when devotees don't cooperate or get along with each other.

Shop Talk

I received an advance copy of the book *Meditations and Poems*, which will be printed and distributed at the July 4th meeting of devotees. I am going through it for a last proofreading. Lal Krishna did a good job of layout, design and covers. John Endler is ready to send the manuscript of *Daily Compositions* to Caitanya-Candrodaya for layout, design and covers, also to be ready for distribution on July 4th. Caitanya's computer broke down, and we sent him money to buy a new one. He also broke his leg, and he's laid-up in a cast. But he's ready to work on the book as soon as he gets the manuscript and a new computer. John and I are working on compiling the two books to be distributed on my Vyasa-puja in early December. One is a story titled *Seeking New Land: At Sea with Hemanta Swami*. The other is a

collection of improvised poems titled *Kaleidoscope*. Jan Potemkin and Guru dasa are editing the *Free Write Journal*. (Jan wrote me that Guru dasa has the last word, but sometimes he allows for Jan's changes.) Our group endeavor is going well, with full cooperation and on schedule. I am pleased to work with these devotees.

Vipralambha

A large part of my day is spent in culturing *vipralambha*. The *ashram* we live in is called "Viraha Bhavan," which means (to me) "separation from Vrndavana." I spend hours in *darsana* of Radha-Kalachandji during my sixteen rounds and throughout the day I look upon Radha-Govinda from my chair. I have the two dramas of Rupa Gosvami (translated by Kusakratha) on my bookshelf. I also have *Gita-govinda* translated by Banu Swami, with commentary by Prabhodananda Sarasvati. I am eagerly awaiting the time when I'll read them. I don't travel to Vrndavana, but I live there in my mind.

Feeling separation from Krsna in the mood of Radharani is the special meaning of Lord Caitanya, and He also appears in Her golden complexion. We ISKCON devotees of Srila Prabhupada are following in the footsteps of the Six Govamis led by Rupa Gosvami, and they are all serving in *vipralambha*. Although we are tiny and imperfect, we are the servants of the servants of the servant of Rupa Gosvami.

Book Report

Vrndavana dasa Thakura, as the last disciple of Lord Nityananda, spends much time glorifying Nitai in the *Sri Caitanya-bhagavata*. Nityananda stays in the house of Srivasa Thakura and acts in the mood of a child. Srivasa Thakura's wife Malini feeds Nityananda from her hand. Visvambhara forbids them from telling anyone about these pastimes. Lord Nityananda takes off all His clothes and walks around in a trance of love of God. Lord Caitanya puts Lord Nityananda's clothes back on and asks Him not to act in that way. Lord Caitanya asks Lord Nityananda for His *kaupinas*. He then rips them into little pieces and gives them to His associates. The Lord asks the devotees to tie the pieces in their hair and to worship them. The devotees blissfully carry out this order.

Lord Caitanya orders Nityananda and Haridasa to go door to door and ask the people to chant Hare Krsna and follow Krsna's instructions. At some homes they are treated well, but at other homes they are threatened with a physical beating. Being empowered by Lord Caitanya, the two preachers are not afraid. They then see two drunkard brothers creating a row on the street. The preachers are told that these brothers are the greatest sinners, and Nityananda and Haridasa should keep away from them. The two saintly persons approach the pair, but they are chased with a threat of physical punishment. They report in the evening to Lord Caitanya about their preaching adventures. The Lord says the two drunkards are already delivered by the sidelong glance of Nityananda. The next day the two associates of Lord Caitanya again approach Jagai and Madhai. Madhai takes a broken pot and hit Nityananda on the head, causing profuse blood to flow. But Jagai admonishes

Madhai and tells him to desist. Lord Caitanya hears of the attack and comes rushing to the scene with His Sudarsana *cakra*, determined to kill the two drunkards. Nitai intervenes and begs the Lord to spare them. He mentions that Jagai had pleaded with Madhai to stop. Lord Caitanya becomes peaceful, and He forgives Jagai and Madhai. He brings them to Srivasa Thakura's house, where they join in the *kirtana*, and Lord Caitanya declares that Jagai and Madhai should be accepted as *mahabhagavatas*.

Dear Sky: Letters from a Sannyasi

“July 26

Wicklów

“Dear friends,

“I started on my walk this morning with umbrella in hand, hood up, boots on. I was on the lookout for animals. I looked at the trees and thought of them as friends. Then I tried to cast my thoughts to Vrndavana *dhama*, but the umbrella caught in the wind and tugged at my hand as if to remind me that I'm in Ireland, not in Vraja. I can't expect to get out easily. At least I'm not a householder with lots of cares and responsibilities. Krsna has freed me. But freed me to do what? To serve Krsna and tell others about Him.

“I'm getting the feeling that my time here at Wicklow is running out, both in terms of letters and morning walks, and that I ought to begin winding it up. It's good that it's ending. We're walking over the same ground repeatedly.

“Of course, it can be good to be familiar with a place and to have a familiar solitude. But I think I'm getting ready to go to Vrndavana. There the ground is special. But even if I were to stay and continue to walk this road, it would be possible to go further into Krsna consciousness. In order to do that I would have to get Krsna's mercy and I would have to find new paths, not necessarily new paths in a material sense, but new paths within, new approaches to Krsna.

“For example, in past visits to Ireland at this time of year, I would pray as I walked early in the morning. I had been reading about prayer in the Christian tradition and was trying to enter the life of prayer. Now I'm in quite a different mood. I hope in the future I will be moving down the road of *bhakti*, closer to seeing the dust of Vrndavana wherever I am.

“I wish I could improve my *japa*, but something is preventing me. It seems strange that there are offenses that we've committed that we're not sharply aware of when we chant. If you had a thorn or pebble in your shoe, you would feel it as you walked; you know what's causing the impediment and can do something about it. But if I'm offending Vaisnavas and then I go to chant, the impediment it causes is not so

clear. It's subtle. My inattention is clear, but it's mostly out of my control. I can't even see why I'm inattentive, although I accept Bhaktivinoda Thakura's analysis that it's due to attraction to worldly things. That's almost a definition of inattention. But I guess my question is, "Why can't my desire for good chanting overcome my interest in worldly things?" I don't know the answer to that question, except again in a theoretical way—that my desire is simply not strong enough. That's all. That's an answer, but one that only defines my regrettable situation.

“Why not discuss this basic inattention and this lack of desire which prevents me from hearing the holy name? I can't even cry out, ‘Krsna, please let me hear You.’ Of course, if one chants loudly, the very utterances of the syllables of the Hare Krsna mantra become a way to cry out and express emotion. Just as with loud shouting you can chase away a bear, so you can likewise try to banish inattention. But sometimes if one continues to chant loudly, it becomes a vociferous bellowing without the delicate feeling of serving and loving Krsna. So whether it's yelling or whispering, whether it's attentive or inattentive—any kind of utterance of the holy names is within Krsna consciousness. We can think of it as many concentric circles drawn with a compass, a bullseye. All utterances of the holy names are within some circle, but usually they're in the outer circles. Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare. Who is chanting thoughtfully? Who

is trying to hit closer to the bullseye? Are we just haphazardly scattering mantras? Hare Krsna. Hare Krsna.

“Krsna, please accept this prayer which isn't wholehearted, but which I nonetheless offer. Please help me pay attention. Give me the strength to do rigorous practice, even if it seems an austerity to hear again and again the sound of the mantra, so that eventually I may remember that this is Krsna, the person, and that I may make gains in *hari-nama bhajana*.

“The holy name is always inviting us to chant again. I lament, as in Lord Caitanya's verse, that I don't taste the wonderful nectar that Krsna assures us is available in His name. But I do taste something. There's something tantalizing me to go forward with faith. It's faith, but also experience. And now we're gaining knowledge that there's so much more we have to put into the chanting, so much more we can realize from the chanting. We want to understand that from the Names comes Krsna's form, qualities, and pastimes. We want to practice in that way. O holy name, You alone can grant benediction to the living beings. Therefore the Lord has hundreds and thousands of names. But we are most interested in His names Krsna and Govinda, which speak of His pastimes in Vrndavana *dhama* among His cows and cowherd friends.”

Letters from Srila Prabhupada

“Vrndavana

8th September 1974

“Los Angeles

“My dear Satsvarupa dasa Gosvami,

“Please accept my blessings. I am in due receipt of your letter dated September 2, 1974, together with enclosures. Your letter is very much pleasing to me with the report of the book distribution. Whenever I get report of my book selling I feel strength. Even now in this weakened condition I have got strength from your report.

“You should know that in this work you have Krsna's blessings. You are a sincere worker. Right from the very beginning when you joined me you have always been a sincere worker; therefore, I keep you as GBC. You may not be a good manager, but whatever I say you accept. These are all good qualifications. Others should follow your example and take instruction from you to push on this library program. I have instructed Tamala Krsna Goswami that he can also do this library program.

“The American people are very intelligent; therefore I concentrate on the Americans for spreading this movement. They are not crippled by poverty like here in India. In India, of course, the people are

naturally Krsna conscious. Whenever we have some Krsna conscious program they come by the thousands, but they are crippled by poverty. Therefore it is difficult for them to take to this movement seriously. So you go on with your work there in America and distribute my books to these libraries. This is very encouraging to me, to write more books.

“I hope etc.

“ACBS”

This was a very encouraging letter to me. Along with a group of *brahmacaris* in vans, I was traveling widely to all the colleges and universities in the USA. Our outstanding salesmen, Ghanashyam (later Bhakti-tirtha Swami) and Mahabuddhi, were the most expert in securing standing orders from the librarians and professors. We would present Prabhupada’s books to the professors and encourage them to take a standing order—to buy all of Prabhupada’s books that had been already published, and to receive more books as they were published.

Prabhupada says the results of our library work were very encouraging to him, even in his weak health. He says he has gained strength from my report.

Prabhupada’s recognition that I was a sincere worker “right from the beginning when you joined me” was the most gratifying thing he could say. All I wanted to do was to please him and receive some recognition that he favored me in a corner of his heart. That made me think he would remember me, and at the time of death he would help me to my next life. Prabhupada in his letter says something that could

be considered very negative to me. He writes, ‘You may not be a good manager . . .’ My Godbrothers used to quote this part of the letter to criticize me and minimize me and point out I was not qualified to be a good GBC person. But then I could point out the end of his sentence: ‘You may not be a good manager, but whatever I say you accept. These are all good qualifications.’

He writes that he has instructed Tamala Krsna Gosvami to take up the library program. Our party was discouraged by this reference because we thought TKG would try to dominate the field and compete with our own work in a way that would not be progressive. Fortunately, TKG never took up the library program.

Prabhupada points out that he concentrates on the Americans who are spreading this movement. They are not crippled by poverty like the people of India. ‘So go on with your work there in America and distribute my books to these libraries. This is very encouraging to me, to write more books.’ This was a letter that touched my heart, assured me of my intimate relationship with Srila Prabhupada, despite his frank statement that I may not have been a good manager.

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“Vrndavana

17 September 1974

“Los Angeles

“My Dear Satsvarupa das Goswami:

“Please accept my blessings. I beg to acknowledge your letter dated from Denver September 7, 1974 with enclosed outline of the book *A Vedic Reader: Sources of Indian Civilization*. The synopsis is very nice, and if properly written, the book will be very nice. From this book they will understand the importance of our Society. So do it nicely.

“It is all right that you present only the verses with a short description and that you can also write parts of the essays in the first part of the book, as you have suggested.

“I hope this meets you in good health.

“Your ever well wisher,

“A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami”

“This letter is Prabhupada’s official permission in writing for me to write *Readings in Vedic Literature*. He approved of the outline I sent him and said that if it were written nicely people would understand the importance of our Society. My intention was that the book could be purchased by colleges, and the professors could recommend their students to read it. I quoted Indologists, and Prabhupada remarked, ‘He has quoted the rascals without becoming contaminated.’ The book was published while Prabhupada was still with us, and he approved it. This was a great satisfaction for me. The book is still in print and has been translated into different languages and is used in various places in ISKCON. I printed the entire

Bhagavad-gita verses (in English), and Prabhupada approves of this. He also approves of my writing essays in the first part of the book. So with this permission, I enthusiastically dove into the work of actually writing the manuscript. It was published by the BBT in Los Angeles. It was not as widely circulated in the colleges as I would have liked, but temples bought the book and used it in their own ways. I especially like the section of the book where I criticized the first Indologists and exposed them as studying Vedic literature in order to make propaganda for the Christian point of view. This was a smashing critique of the early Indologists, and I said traces of their prejudice remained in the present Indologists. *Readings in Vedic Literature* has passed the test of time and is still used in ISKCON.

Haiku

Under the Banyan Tree is a slim volume of haiku poems that I wrote about my beginning relationship with my spiritual master, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. The book is actually a variation on haiku. When the poet writes several sentences of prose before the haiku poems, the form is called *haiban*. Basho's famous *Journey* was written as a *haiban*. Here are some *haiban* excerpts from *Under the Banyan Tree*:

“I have come for the books. ‘These are commentaries on the scriptures?’
I ask. ‘Yes,’ he says, and I take them from his hand. ‘Sit down,’ he says
heavily. ‘I’m sorry,’ I say, ‘I’m only on my lunch hour.’ But I leave with

the books. He was glad to see me go like that.

“Book buying:
the price is high
but I want them.”

“Relaxed, philosophical
Swamiji appears
as if he'll never leave.”

“‘Sit down.’
‘I can't—’
but the books.”

“Walking fast
through city streets
with three big books.”

“‘This is Steve,’ I say through the phone. ‘Do you remember me?’
He says yes. I ask if he could please save lunch for me.

“Bowing this first time,
my head at your feet,
just you and I.”

“His lecture over, I loiter on the curb, wondering what to do— a
dangerous moment. He sees me and calls me to him: ‘We are having a

feast and I'm inviting you to come. Do you have an engagement? Can you come?"

“Just before I dove
you caught me
in your glance.”

“Your sweet-rice
saved me.”

“This is my life's savings,’ I say, and shyly hand him six hundred dollars. He smiles, but then sees my pride.

“In his reprimanding eyes,
my naked soul
and a glimpse of his pure love.”

I sent copies of *Under the Banyan Tree* to various American haiku magazines. One editor published a favorable review. He said that the book was about a relationship of a disciple with his guru. He said, “This relationship is one of love, and the *haiban/haiku* form seems well-suited for the subject.”

WRITING SESSIONS

One of the following free writing excerpts from my spontaneous writing practice was published in a book, Radio Shows, Volume 2. The other two took shape in Brescia, Italy during Easter week, 1994.

From *Radio Shows, Volume 2*

pp. 32-33

“It's Valentine's Day today. Another money-making day in the material world. Those paper cut-out hearts, all those people turning to other people and telling them of their undying love. Of course, Valentine's Day is supposed to be about cupidity, lust and sex and romance, but nowadays they've spread out the concept so widely that you can send Valentines to your mother or brother or to people you barely know. You're supposed to express love wherever you can.

“Romance originates in *adi-rasa*. Krsna has romantic feelings, just as He has bellicose feelings, feelings of wanting to be parented, boyish feelings and chivalry. Therefore, He expands His *hladini-sakti* as Srimati Radharani. In effect, He becomes two and enjoys conjugal pastimes. He doesn't do this out of lust or a sense of incompleteness as we try to do in the material world, but out of abundant desire. The Absolute is not a

dead stone. He is also supremely powerful because when He experiences desire, He immediately fulfills it by His own potency.

“He plays with all-attractive Srimati Radharani, who attracts even the all-attractive Krsna. She is Madana-mohana-mohini, the attractor of Madana-mohana. He attracts everyone, even Cupid, but She attracts Him. ‘That is out of love,’ Srila Prabhupada says.

“Out of the fullness of love, Krsna agrees to be conquered by Srimati Radharani, who is nondifferent from Himself the way a flower and its aroma are nondifferent. Srimati Radharani also expands Herself into many *gopis*, and Krsna enjoys with each of them. The details of their ‘lusty affairs,’ as they are sometimes called, their *prema*, is told in many scriptures. Those details are really meant for liberated souls, those who have no material lust. I am not one of them.

“There are persons who may actually be competent to guide other competent persons into relishing the many details of the conjugal *rasa*, as appreciated so much by Rupa Gosvami and Raghunatha Gosvami and others; our spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada, rightly thought that we were not so liberated, not so free of sex desire, that we could hear all these details and not have our mundane sex desire aroused. Hare Krsna.

“Still, it's Valentine's Day, so I will acknowledge that Krsna and Radha are the ideal Couple to exchange that mellow, and that at some distant time, in some distant birth, I hope to assist Them in Vrndavana.”

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“Brescia, Italy

Easter Day

“A writing session is a naked confrontation, coming unplanned, cutting edge, go ahead and write like this.

“Sigh, heavy, write again. It is not as easy as a kid going down the slide in a park again and again with three seconds of soft thrill, then running around and back up the ladder to slide down again.

“It’s facing your own Krsna consciousness.

“Mayor of . . . hold on, don’t just let any word come . . . Harlem, governor of Bengal, police chief of L.A., all unenviable positions, temple president of Gita-nagari, the GBC chairman, the guy who has to take all the flak.

“Beep beep. Consent to a broken heart. I thought you weren’t going to write like this. Yeah, but we are going to be here three weeks, pal, and may not be able to talk with your mouth (no teeth in front after Tuesday). That’s a long time, and you are really going to delve into the writing sessions, you’ll produce a lot. I let some words come across the stage, the puppet show, star puppet careens across the stage, and the

actual stars on this earth . . . Krsna, Krsna, Krsna.

“‘Why am I left alone and so lonely?’ Father Bede Griffiths kept saying in his last days and weeks, reminded me of Srila Prabhupada saying that no one came to see him, ‘They think I am contaminated.’ Long hours alone to think and chant.

“Don’t make this writing like navel dust contemplation, chewing on your pancreas and heart. Slowly digesting your cud. Well, I can’t make anything special ...

It will come out however it does, eh?

The pistol-whipping,
pistol-packing momma,
lay that pistol down.

“Rare echoes, fine prints. We’re on a slight hill, something a little bit unreal about it, like a postcard print on the painting in this house of Italian fishing boats brightly painted. They look like big rowboats with sails, morbid and quiet harbor seen from the land, artist did them with bold strokes and to please folks, it’s nice enough . . . we are in an atmosphere like that. I defer the too-soft mattress on the bed and sleep instead on my van mattress on the floor, my head just under Prabhupada *murti*.

“You say, ‘Don’t chew cud.’ I look for whatever comes, but you never know. Each day on the radio show, some little opening of a memory box, told you of Easter, but I couldn’t remember anything, main thing is you get a week off from school, right? I think you do. Holidays.

“The Lord gives and the Lord takes away,
Blessed is the Name of the Lord.

“You live in this small room. It’s a tight squeeze to fit your narrow single mattress on the floor. No room to walk back and forth. I schedule an hour *japa* daily in the big room and could do more. Use your time well. More tonight. Get out your typewriter or read something as it gets late.

“We’ve still just begun this session. I have nothing to say. Names and places to remember—oh, that’s for earthlings. I’m a transcendentalist. Well, then you’re even more important with the earth. Tell us the name you got at initiation. What are some of your favorite times and difficult times as a devotee?

They gave me a photo of Gaura-Nitai. When I first went to the temple, I couldn’t relate to those Deities. Then gradually, I could. You can’t explain it. ‘Is it the *audarya* element, in contrast to the *madhurya*? Is it Navadvipa? Do you see Radha and Krsna in Lord Caitanya?’ Not

that much, but you just get closer, and then there is nothing, no one else to take shelter of. Your heart is empty and blank. The same relatively few devotees attend *mangala-arati* every day. As the curtains open, one of the leaders calls out, ‘Gaura-Nitai, Ki —,’ and the others say, ‘Jaya!’ and bow down. I now have my own little rituals in this room. And Srila Prabhupada *murti*, who I appreciate and who allows me to serve him every day.

On a horse in Central Park
 Pablo Neruda wore a wide
 brimmed hat. I’m glad I’m
 far away from Manhattan.

“It’s a privilege. To take advantage of it, I will burrow slowly and gradually into my spiritual master’s books. I hope to hear what he says here with my inner ear.

“Dear Spiritual Master, please let me be with you. I know there’s a price for it, we have to ‘go out’ and preach, don’t just keep it for yourself. May I go out with this solitary writing? I hope so. Some worthy honesty here will be striking. Even those who are very busy preaching may not have time to slow down and hear Srila Prabhupada so carefully, or to catch their own inner natures and write them down in repeated attempts until it comes out right.

“You really want to forego the accumulation of daily stories? You were going somewhere. Yes, and the same can be true of Writing Sessions. Don’t back away from the too-difficult task of getting three full one-hour writing sessions in every day.

“There’s something here, in me, in Krsna consciousness as I receive it. Listening and being the person I am. I happen to like being alone. Not many people know where I am and that I am writing in an apparently purposeless way, drifting like a fishing boat nearer to the Absolute Truth, calling on my master’s name and the holy name of the Supreme Lord. We are three monks in an apartment in a place I don’t even know the name of except that it’s near a big lake in Northern Italy, and it’s not warm enough for lots of people to be out and roaming in the sunshine with loud motorbikes ... I see the plate of water from this window. He said the shape of the lake looks like a tooth that’s been pulled.

“I happen to like it. There is reason to read my master’s *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

“Water.

“Hey waiter, bring the bill. I never lived a worldly life. I had brief forays until I was twenty-five years old, but then I moved into this intense ISKCON world with its own devotee relationships and its own

concept of public image. Years go by and the Hare Krsna Movement gets smaller in America.

“Love, love, everybody is looking for
 love and understanding and
 authority has to be there too, and buildings,
 someone in charge,
 someone goes crazy and rebels
 against his own spiritual master, calls him
 a robber, jerk and worse.
 Someone . . . sold the silos for a fraction
 of their worth.
 The meetings.
 I happen to like the place where I am, sell it to yourself,
 Mr. Empty.

“Each day give Srila Prabhupada a flower from the potted plant,’
 said Dina, ‘and each second day water the plant so it will continue to
 blossom for a week, huh?’ He’s a sweet old man. Worked physically hard
 yesterday to move us in here. He’s a pensioner and I’m a wise guy. I
 come from Princeton in the mind. I come from the library.

“There is deep-down stuff. Why don’t you come out with it? If not,
 why not switch it over to a short story? Why boycott it? This is crap, this

meandering with nothing to say. It's late afternoon, and I'm not tuned in well, so please forgive me.

“A corpse said hi to a butcher. They flew over India and landed near the Taj Mahal. Nothing works when you're in a disjointed mood like this. Okay, gut it out. Sheer nonsense fraud until 21 minutes. I won't give up. The writing session can yield secrets. I want to be a devotee. Calm down the mind and read and hear more. Don't get violently disturbed. Be calm, man, be calm. You're going to die. Face that fact. Does that truth hurt?

“When you said you were hiding out for three weeks, did you think you could postpone the march to your death? No. Then are you doing the best thing, and will this free writing contribute toward a good death? How and in what way?

“Getting my work done. Getting rid of stuff, like old stuff in the attic. Trying to learn how to be honest so I can know my mind and feelings and can leave the world peacefully and face Krsna in honesty. There he goes, another jerk.

“There he goes, a soul back to God. Rest in peace.

“Flowers on the grave, and survivors chuckle over demitasse cups steaming with a hot mixture of black coffee and liquor.

“Leaves of the trees. Farewell party.

“I am not this body. The body belongs to God. He’s not attached to it. He gave it to you to use, and He will take it back. It doesn’t belong to you. You, as soul, are eternal. You belong to Him. Why don’t you recognize that fully?”

“Call out, ‘O my God,
Lord Krsna!’

“In *santa-rasa* he is dumbfounded with the greatness of God. In *dasya-rasa* he thinks, ‘Since God is so great, why don’t I serve Him?’

“*Govindam adi purusam tam aham bhajami*—we are worshipping the Original Person, Govinda,’ Srila Prabhupada began his 1968 Seattle lectures.

“Ten more minutes here.

“Hit bottom of the barrel. Wanted to quit but keep going. Better you don’t quit. You were pleased with your late A.M. writing sessions, and maybe this was a backlash to that. Scraped bottom. But it’s training for this, for stories, because it is so groping.

“But it is a form, and these are the last minutes, make it worth it. Run for Krsna, breathe for Him, offer Him a ‘crazy’ writing session, as an apple, as a mango you gave to Srila Prabhupada. You were crazy then, and as a writer, even more obsessed now than then.

“My own volcano still active
 pouring out lava. I do
 not call it p. or honey
 but lukewarm tea?
 No, it’s alphabet soup
 ‘A’ is for Atri,
 ‘B’ is for Bhagavan, and I
 won’t tell you what ‘C’ is for . . .

“You are a devotee, aspiring. Your eyes are open. You have lips and
 a head and eyes like no one else I know, Rover. No one loves you or
 knows you in your own myth. You came to be an immortal sage and
 pooped out, collapsed, went from high-gear/forward to sudden reverse
 in 1987, now have no time for anyone else. But Bhagavan Sri Krsna has
 time for each. He’s the knower of all bodies and can have each.

“Let me love You and serve him, please do.

“Six minutes. Express a holy love letter to God. I am a rascal but
 want to chant holy names and write for devotees. Send me your latest.

“I will sleep and get up at 12:00 and have something to say better
 than all this hanging-out. ‘I surrender,’ he says. Put a nickel in your
 mouth. Forgive me.

“This one ends nose-diving, but wheels hit the earth. Non-

blasphemous, nonsmoking, and glad it's over.

“Be jinx. I said in a writing session that God will see the good in the attempt. A face only a mother could love, my own writing session thumbprint. Give it up, give it up. This is your last one. Be a better preacher than this. Cartwheel, *ki jaya!* Gaura-Nitai, Nitai-Gaura, *haribol!* I'm running the clock to stall the opposition from scoring. We won the game because we didn't abandon our spiritual master. Yes, now get out of here and read! Folks, before you die, you better know *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, and I will help you innocent people after hours.

“This is sweatpants weather. We will write better, I promise. This is the waterglass opera of days in the Easter neighborhood, you've been blessed by going for an hour almost. Shut up!”

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Brescia, Italy

April 12, 1994

“The volumes of ‘My Stories’ roll off the press, but I only produce two copies to keep. It's not to impress the world—it's for me and my development as a story writer. Once a month, we will print one or two. As the year unfolds, a small group (two hundred) of friends will get to know this side of me—the storyteller.

“Now he starts a little fiction and then backs away from it. It doesn’t seem to be the voice he wants. The fiction is like hot molasses—he wants to drink it and yet it’s too hot, but it’s too sweet to stop drinking. You like it, and yet you don’t.

“Would like to feel compelled to tell your own story every day, but you don’t. You don’t want simply to retell your life, but to enter feelings at a kind of conscious dream-state with the freedom of this writing session, and yet more direction to it. Fiction is the unlimited freedom, but it also has its boundaries and logic and all that makes up a story. So I continue to wander in my story, and one might say, ‘This writer doesn’t know yet what he wants or can do.’ I appear to be only taking notes and not settling down to a serious task. Henry Miller addresses this in a brief statement: that he couldn’t write, was not fit for it, so he spent his time writing about writing, his private grief, and preparing himself for a battle—whose purpose and activity he never gets to do. I am aware this might apply to me. Or the idea that I avoid the work of writing (rewriting and conventional tasks, etc.) by writing in this run-on way.

“But I defy that attitude. I do have friends too, like Brenda Ueland, who say, ‘Just write what you believe in, what you have enthusiasm for, and don’t listen to those critics.’

“By this point of view, my writing problem is not that I don’t listen to the critics, but that I do listen to them too much, try to chuck them off

in *Shack Notes* or face them and fight freely. I've taken to the 'remedy' of writing for myself and not caring for inner critics. It's a constant attempt. I've achieved some freedom, and now I don't claim that this private writing is publishable.

"One might say that the gremlin has defeated me. Thus he says, 'We have driven him (the writer) into a closet. He's convinced that all he can do is scribble down his first thoughts, that he's not more fit to do serious work, he is too intimidated by me and others to even try. We have also convinced him that what he writes in his "free" sessions is not fit to be called a book for publishing. In this way, we've gagged his talents.'

"But I am publishing, gremlin, haven't you noticed? And we are learning how to edit it and package it so it will appear more, more of it. And it will be accepted by readers, as in *From Imperfection, Purity Will Come About* and *Here Is Srila Prabhupada, Prabhupada Meditations, Wild Garden*, and now monthly "Among Friends," a poem volume. You're talking through your hat, gremlin, although you are free to think that way. In fact, go ahead.

"I write, though, of a trip to the dentist, a journey to Spain by highway, a writing-down of the details. More access I'd like, and more direct *sastric* content.

"You could write the story of a devotee and how he fared and give lots of Krsna conscious teachings. I did this in *The Week Before Gaura*

Purnima. You need to believe in some story and enjoy telling it and fabricating a plot. That worked for me. Be patient and keep improvising these stories, for now. Gremlin is right in that I do *practice* a lot. I don't always make a distinction between practice and performance. We take a piece from writing practice and decide to use it as a published piece. Like that—my *modus operandi*.

“Be patient and keep writing. It will evolve from one genre to another. A piece you practice will suddenly become something you want to share in publishing. Even if I do the same story over and over, eventually I'll do it in a way I like, then I may do it again.

“Introduce a character, and then the author enters into dialogue or interacts with him. The two stories go parallel—what the author is doing each day, and what the character in the story is doing. Can you live with that some more? Yeah, I like it; it gives me more reason to tell the reader the life of my *sadhana* and preaching. I could do another one: ‘A Trip to Spain.’

“Keep writing. This writing session has been mostly a writer's life. The devotee's life is to read and be faithful to Srila Prabhupada. Writer's life seems more demanding and challenging, ‘passionate’ creativity. The writer's life is *within* the devotee's life, yes? It's my service. We put everything into it; it interfaces with the world. How to preach, how to

buy land, make an American House in Vrndavana. Bring devotees there, publish their books, establish the Krsna Consciousness Movement in cities, paint and teach and so on. It is an all-out effort to preach what you are learning and practicing. Both tracks go forward at the same time—the writing, preaching and reading, submissive *sadhana*. Don't make a duality or conflict between the two. But always keep a space for good reading, two hours, and *japa*, three hours. Be satisfied with that much *sadhana* and go on pursuing your writing, which is also a kind of combined *sadhana* and self-development and preaching.