

## ***Free Write Journal #88***

### **Free Writes**

#### **Jayadvaita Swami's Phone Call**

Jayadvaita Maharaja phoned me just to make an update and friendly contact. He's moved out of New York City and is staying in the temple at Towaco, New Jersey. He gives three *Bhagavatam* lectures a week which are broadcast over the internet and watched by shut-ins. He told me he and one of his disciples are working on a literary project, a translation and commentary on the *Katha Upanisad*. He said the *Katha Upanisad* is not impersonal but a personalist *sastra* and important for our line. I told him of the scarcity of manpower in our ashram. He said he would try to see if he could find any available men to send here. If one came, he would go into quarantine in the back building for two weeks and then he could mix with us and share the duties.

Maharaja praised the active and daring service of the Brooklyn temple president, Hansarupa. He is staying in the City and goes to the hospitals and brings prasadam for the health workers. He is fully occupied in the temple programs (although they can't have large programs.) But just the fact that Hansarupa is staying at his post in the City, which is the epicenter of the disease, is commendable.

It was nice to talk to an old friend in trying times. He said he would phone me

again before too long.

### **Meeting with Saci Suta**

We spent forty-five minutes talking together on the front porch. He is my patron saint. He told “war stories” about his business during the lockdown, and he spoke about the members of his family. Equal Vision is open and he has lots of orders to fulfill. But he is only allowed four workers to report to the office. (He normally has about twenty people reporting to work.) They are selling paraphernalia for the rock bands, even though the musicians have canceled tours and concerts. In a month he thinks he can call more people back to work.

His youngest daughter, Subhadra, is taking college courses online, but she’s bored and restless. She has a boyfriend but Saci doesn’t approve, thinking she’s too young. Subhadra protests. His youngest son Laksman is also taking classes on Zoom while staying on lockdown in his parents’ home. Laksman and a friend go skateboarding in an abandoned parking lot for hours a day. Laksman has grown his hair long, and he wears a single earring. His father told him he’d have to get rid of them when he actually returns to his classes. Saci’s oldest daughter, Kaulini, lives with her boyfriend in Philadelphia. They walk people’s dogs for a living. Their business has gone down, but they manage to get by. Saci promised his wife a trip to Paris as a Christmas gift, but because of the crisis they’ve had to cancel that. Saci and I don’t talk *krsna-katha*. He rarely attends our out-loud reading of the *Bhagavatam* and reads for half an hour when he comes.

I was glad to speak with him for an hour on the porch. He is very dear to me and is protective and supportive in many ways.

### **Kirtan Rasa**

Kirtan Rasa sent me a donation, and I phoned him to thank him. He said he misses coming to Viraha Bhavan and being with me. As a lawyer, his office was closed down as “nonessential” business. He works mostly in trials, and the courts are all closed down. He’s feeling a pinch in finances but says when he gets low on cash he likes to give money away in charity. When he drives around his neighborhood on essential errands, he says everything looks like a ghost town or a scene from *The Twilight Zone*. Everything is deserted; the world is turned upside-down. He told me that the major league baseball season will be shortened. The teams will play in different ballparks in Arizona to no live audiences, but the games will be broadcast on TV. We cheered each other up by our phone call, breaking the self-isolation. Kirtan Rasa can’t go to the gym to exercise, so he’s chopping up dead trees in his yard, and he also has a stationary bike that he rides to break a sweat. Kirtan Rasa’s children are doing schoolwork on the internet. He think the lockdown will last a long time. He’s a good friend and I seek his association, at least by telephone.

### **Govardhana Retreats**

Sacinandana Maharaja spoke about Radharani. He said he felt unqualified to speak about Her, but since She is so prominent in the worship of the Gaudiya

Vaisnavas he felt compelled to speak something. He told a story as written by Prabhodhananda Sarasvati about Krsna and Radharani in a wrestling match. Krsna was bragging among the *sakhis* how He had killed so many demons and done heroic acts. The *sakhis* said, “You were only able to do those acts because You were eating *prasadam* cooked by Radharani.” (Radharani had a benediction from Durvasa Muni that whatever She cooked, the person who ate it would be healthy and victorious. So that was the reason Krsna was able to kill the demons.)

Krsna said, “No, I killed them on My own, and I can out-wrestle Sridhama. The *sakhis* laughed and said, “Let’s see you wrestle Radharani!” And so the word spread throughout Vrndavana that there would be a wrestling match between the Divine Couple. Lalita and the *sakhis* dressed Radharani for wrestling. They arranged Her *sari* so that She would have free movement of Her legs. Madhumangala coached Krsna and gave Him many points of strategy, and Lalita did the same for Radharani. When the Divine Couple came a little close to one another, Krsna smelled the aroma of Radharani’s body. When He smelled it, His knees became like butter and He trembled in weakness. Madhumangala shouted, “Krsna! This is not the time to become weak! Pull Yourself together!” Krsna managed to compose Himself and get ready for the match. Radharani was covered with a veil. But She slightly parted Her veil and shot arrows of sidelong glances at Krsna. When Krsna was hit by Her glances, He toppled and fell unconscious to the ground. The *sakhis* all began to cheer, “Jaya Radhe! Jaya Radhe!” And thus Srimati Radharani was the victor in the wrestling match.

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Sacinandana Swami told another story of the time Radharani saw a calf with a sharp straw stuck in her mouth. Her mouth was bleeding. Radharani immediately removed the sharp straw and applied *kunkuma* as a disinfectant. She is described as the tender feminine counterpart of Krsna. In Vrndavana the devotees chant, “Jaya Radhe!” more than they chant Krsna’s names, and they turn to Radha for shelter. If one prays to Radharani and She recommends you to Krsna, then Krsna is obliged to give you His mercy. The devotees gathered at Govardhana, in His lap, are very fortunate. By hearing recordings of their talks and songs, I am connected in *sanga*. I practice Vrndavana *bhajana* in the West. Krsna attracts all living beings, but He is attracted to Radharani.

Bhurijana spoke about Krsna and His cowherd boyfriends. Krsna’s cowherd boyfriends underwent millions of births of pious activities in order to gain the situation of playing with Krsna on an equal level, joking with Him, teasing Him, and all this was for his pleasure. Krsna could completely relax with the cowherd boys and be himself. They did not treat Him with any awe or reverence but as their dearest friend. Sometimes Krsna would leave the boys and go to a distant place to see the scenery. Then the boys would run after Him and say, “I shall be the first to touch Krsna!” And when they caught up to Him, He would give each and every one of them a firm embrace. The greatest yogis and mystics cannot expect to have such intimate contact with the Supreme. Bhurijana likes to say, “Just *imagine* what it must be like

to be in a relationship of friendship with Krsna.” We cannot imagine it, but he provokes us to try. He said the boys steal the lunch of one of the boys and pass it on to the other boys until the owner of the lunch starts to cry. Then they tease him but return his lunch to him. They even steal Krsna’s lunch, and He cries and says He will tell Mother Yasoda. Acting just as boys, on an equal level, they laugh at Krsna when He says like that. But He does it just to please them. Who else would dare to shove Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead?

### **Govardhana Retreats: Disruption and Return**

I’ve been keenly enjoying hearing the Govardhana Retreats. I’m on my third year of the retreats, and there are many to go. Sacinandana Swami, Bhurijana Prabhu and Jagattarini Mataji pour out endless nectar about Vrndavana. They provide me daily hours of sublime listening from the lap of Giriraja Govardhana. It fills my afternoons. Sacinandana Maharaja, with his charming German accent and his repeated uttering of “my dear devotees,” is very entertaining. He is filled with *lila* stories from authoritative sources, and he captures the audience with his personal style. Bhurijana Prabhu speaks mostly on the *Bhagavatam*, illuminating different sections and cantos, and applying the subject matter to our lives as progressive devotees in ISKCON. Jagattarini speaks of Vrndavana *dhama*. Lately she’s been talking about the parrots in *krsna-lila*, and now she’s talking about the trees. Most recently a guest speaker, Madhavananda Prabhu from Bhubaneswar, has been giving a special lecture. He spoke from the *Bhakti-ratnakara* by Srila Narahari

Cakravarti. He told of a devotee who was lamenting that he was born after the disappearance of Lord Caitanya. This devotee cried and cried profusely. His intense distress brought him into the presence of Lord Nityananda, who grabbed him and threw him at the feet of Lord Caitanya. Lord Caitanya sent him to Advaita Acarya for shelter, but Advaita Acarya said He was not worthy, and He sent him to Gadadhara Pandita, who also humbly said he could not give the devotee shelter but sent him to Srivasa Pandita. Then he was sent to the *maha-sankirtana* festival at Kheturi, which was presided over by Jahnavi-mata. Many, many Vaisnavas attended this *kirtana* festival. While they were chanting and chanting, Lord Caitanya and His confidential associates (such as the Panca-tattva and many others) appeared in a vision before the assembled devotees. The vision lasted for hours, and when it finally disappeared, the devotees all lamented. But for solace, they all continued chanting the holy names.

Then I seem to recall that Madhavananda said Lord Nityananda grabbed this devotee and threw him again at the lotus feet of Lord Caitanya, who accepted him.

We are all in the position of that devotee in *Bhakti-ratnakara*—born after the disappearance of Lord Caitanya, but this story illustrates that Lord Caitanya is still present and we can connect with Him through love in separation if we are sincere in our *sadhana* and worship of Lord Caitanya. He can appear to us even now if we anoint our eyes with the salve of devotion. He intersperses his talk with *bhajans* on the harmonium and with many memorized quotes from the Sanskrit. He tells esoteric stories of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His associates as he's read from

authentic sources and heard from his guru, Gaura Govinda Maharaja.

As I was delighting in Madhavananda's talk, my recording device suddenly shut off. I called for Krsna dasi and Baladeva to help me get it going again—they're usually able to do it. But this time, although they worked at it for a considerable time, they couldn't get the device to turn on again. They decided to call Manohara in Italy because he's the one who gave me the Govardhana recordings, and he's savvy in how to work the technology. But we couldn't reach him because he was already asleep in the time change in Italy. So I spent the whole afternoon without my beloved practice of listening to the Govardhana Retreats and feeling close to Vrndavana *dhama* and Giri-Govardhana. I feel real separation from the holy *dhama*, and these dear devotees. I suppose there are plenty of other things I could do, like reading books, but I'm so attached to the Govardhana Retreats that I feel empty and devoid of what I want to do.

This just proves the material world is not dependable with its technology. At any moment it can break down. One has to be prepared with a backup plan in one's devotional service. There are nine principal practices of devotional service, and if you can't do one, you can practice another. I will have to get adjusted to this disappointment and attach myself to another limb of the nine principal practices of *bhakti-yoga*. But I'll be missing the retreats.

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Manohara helped us over the telephone/video and showed us how to repair

the malfunctioning of our devices so that we could return to hearing the Govardhana Retreats. He did it expertly, and I returned to hearing where we left off, with Madhavananda singing a *bhajana* and then explaining different kinds of *vipralambha* experienced by Radharani in separation from Krsna. I was very happy to return to hearing from these speakers at Govardhana. I realized that by listening to these recordings, I have been practicing *sravanam*, the first of the nine limbs of devotional service. I've become so addicted to hearing the Govardhana talks that it was a great disruption when I thought I couldn't hear them again.

After Madhavananda spoke, Sacinandana Swami, Bhurijana Prabhu and Jagattarini Mataji spoke again in turn. Sacinandana Swami spoke about Krsna in various ways, and at the end he humbly said that his presentation was faulty, but I thought it was very nice, a mixture of different *krsna-lilas* and realizations of them by an advanced devotee. Bhurijana Prabhu spoke about *govardhana-lila*, the Govardhana Puja and the lifting of Govardhana Hill by Krsna. He then turned the microphone over to Jagattarini, and she continued to speak about Giridhari, the lifter of Govardhana Hill. She told how Krsna convinced His father to cancel the Indra *yajna* and worship Govardhana Hill, the cows and the *brahmanas*. He convinced Nanda Maharaja to follow his instructions, and they made a grand festival called Govardhana Puja. All the women dressed up brilliantly, and the cows were decorated with golden horns and silver hooves. There was an unlimited number of cows, but Krsna accommodated them by His *yogamaya* potency. The Vrajavasis prepared offerings of *prasadam* for Govardhana, and suddenly the Hill manifested

itself as a gigantic form of Krsna who ate all the food offered and said, “Give Me more! Give Me more! (*Aniyore! Aniyore!*)” Krsna said to the Vrajavasis, “This gigantic form proves that Govardhana is a Person, and He is identical with Me. They then circumambulated the Hill in a celebrative mood.

Jagattarini explained that Govardhana can be worshiped in two ways: 1) As Krsna Himself. This is honored even today, and devotees collect pebbles or rocks from Govardhana Hill and worship them exactly as they worship the Deity of Krsna in the temple or at home. Thus Govardhana and the Supreme Personality of Godhead are nondifferent. 2) The other version, as spoken by Srimati Radharani, is that Govardhana is the best devotee of Krsna—*hari-dasa-varyo*. As the best servant of Hari, Govardhana supplies Krsna and the cows with fine grasses, with caves, with waterfalls and other useful amenities. It is all right to think of Govardhana in both ways.

## **Gaura-Nitai**

Jan Potemkin regularly sends out pictures of his Gaura-Nitai Deities to a long list of devotees. He sends little anecdotes about Them. The latest was that although the Deities are exactly the same, They are different personalities. He says his Lord Caitanya *murti* wears His clothes snug and fit, while Lord Nityananda, wearing these same clothes, wears His loose. He even claims They have very different facial expressions. By his regular postings of his Deities, he is advertising Their glories with much enthusiasm. Jan was a Buddhist for decades, but now he’s becoming fully

Krsna conscious. He approached Kadamba Kanana Maharaja and asked him to accept him as a disciple for initiation. Kadamba Kanana Swami gladly accepted the proposal.

Jan's enthusiasm about his Deities makes me want to talk about our large (36-inch) main Deities of Gaura-Nitai from Ekacakra which are here in Viraha Bhavan. I originally commissioned these Deities when I was in a troubled condition and longed for Their *audarya* (lenient) shelter in my ashram. A disciple of mine bought Them at Ekacakra and had Them safely shipped to California. In those days we dressed Them in very simple clothes as we thought was fitting to Their mood. They have changed locations from Mexico to Delaware, but now They are permanently situated in Stuyvesant Falls. We are fortunate to have a wonderful, talented, dedicated *pujari*. Krsna dasi and Bala, her husband, take care of Them very nicely. We have Radha-Govinda in Vrndavana upstairs, and downstairs many Deities on an altar predominated by Nitai-Gaura. Krsna dasi has obtained many beautiful, lavish outfits for Them, different than the mood we started in California. But it's nice to see Them worshiped in this way. Even during the lockdown due to coronavirus, when many ISKCON temples have reduced their Deity worship to no garlands, and even in some places dressing Them in night outfits, Krsna dasi has maintained a high standard even to giving Them garlands and fresh sets of new clothes. They get changed in Their outfits once a week. Yesterday I went in to receive *darsana* of Them in Their parrot-green outfits, with hyacinth garlands from our garden. They are now wearing a pendant and several necklaces, some of which Krsna dasi makes

herself. It is awkward for me to go into Their Deity room in my wheelchair, but I take delight in looking up at Their faces and postures with Their mild smiles. (Kalki and Rukmavati at Gita-Nagari also make jewelry for our Gaura-Nitai here.) When one goes into Their room and beholds Them, it is amazing and impressive to see such a high standard of worship outside of an actual ISKCON temple, in our ashram of Viraha Bhavan.

### ***Writing in Gratitude***

“Writing doesn't have to be orderly. I will have time to make better sense when all I do is record what Prabhupada says, whether I am leaving this house, and whether lunch is on time. But beyond that, I can write pages like this one.

“Listen, I don't want to be disrespectful to anyone, and lastly to Krsna or my guru, but there's something defiant and impish in me, and it ought to come out.

“I behave like a foolish disciple and I am one. I don't know anything by realization. At the same time, I've been around awhile. I can see the insides of situations by intuition. Still, I'm capable of being reduced to an innocent child. I am not a solid block of stone. I can change.

“Give me a glance, Prabhupada. Please give me a milli-particle of a drop of mercy. O Lord, examine this unwarranted impishness. Is it left over from an LSD trip? Something in the genes from my Irish ancestors? Was I once a leprechaun living in a mossy forest and playing tricks on staid folks?

“Imps vanish in battle. Imps disappear during bus rides when they suddenly become afraid of death and realize they have to stop this crap and get serious. Apologize, get down on your knees, and pray. Imps grow old. In that case, we wish they were still impish because that playfulness is also present in the spiritual world.

“I don't like loose talk among devotees. I mean, I don't like it when they cheaply say they want to write poems or sing songs in the spiritual world. I think, ‘Bosh.’

“You can't even be a humble soul and serve Vaisnavas, what to speak of contemplating what kind of sash you'll wear on your hips when you're a *gopi*.

“Yeah, come down, come down. Look us in the eye. Or if you look at the floor, then tell us why.

“I say please, please give us  
nakedness of spirit.

It is such a relief from pompousness.

Don't be a male hero,

or a pretentious pig.

Better an honest guy or

even a lamp post.

Just a boring, ordinary, but

utterly true person or thing.”

### ***The Wild Garden***

“I write to separate out the bogus feelings, to admit them, and then to grasp at the lotus feet of Vaisnavas. Roll in the dust like a madman. The words are weeping. I make a prayer. It is a rather silly display sometimes.

“We are all afraid our expressions will be awkward, even though we think we know what we want to say. Krsna is bluish, like the sky holding a fresh raincloud. He has a broad chest. He is not a human, but He sports among humans when He comes to earth. He satisfies the desires of His devotees and also enjoys Himself, but He is not like the abominable debauch who uses women, or anything else we are familiar with in this world.

“I cannot understand Him, although I want to. The *acaryas* say this Vraja Krsna is fuller and more radiant and purely spiritual than all the other incarnations. The *santa-rasa bhaktas* hear Krsna's flute and they beat their heads, ‘Why have we wasted our time in indifferent meditation?’ Bilvamangala Thakura said, ‘I was fixed in meditation on Brahman, but now my mind has been captured by a mischievous boy who wears a peacock feather in His hair.’

“Vrndavana, do you hear me? My clumsy call goes out to you this night. I picture my friends at the Krishna-Balaram Mandir, aware of the sublime atmosphere they live in, doing their duties, walking on the small campus grounds past the big wooden doors before the altar. I picture them beholding Radha-Syamasundara and the green-leafed *tamala* tree, even though it is winter. I picture the dogs and hogs and beggars and our *gurukula* kids in yellow *dhotis* playing during their free time on the roof. Each of my friends alone with their own altar, chanting *japa*.”

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### *Writing*

“I need to help myself. My inner skeptic is ready to do his quiet, dastardly work. I protect myself by quoting the *Bhagavad-gita*: ‘Armed with yoga, stand and fight.’ I fight with my own word-weapons, and with

my thoughts. If the battle subsides, I try to celebrate creativity, happy times in Krsna consciousness with Prabhupada. Devotees aren't always debating; they prefer to discuss Krsna's pastimes among like-minded devotees. But we have to be ready to defend from any attack. Writing can be a playground, but it must be ready to switch at once to a military camp. My book is not meant to be a vulnerable place that atheists can ravage through or set afire. I am ready for them. I will throw them out. *Then* I can go on praising the solitary, creative life and the service mood, engaged in Krsna's service.

“For this purpose, I have also had to defend writing itself. It is my *guru-seva*. These wars that arise are sometimes civil wars. ‘The doubts that have arisen out of ignorance,’ Krsna calls them. I must take my place in the phalanx of the army *directed by* Krsna. He is the best military commander, along with His devotees in *parampara*. I am their *cela*. On my own, if I choose to take some independent stance, I'll be cut down by powerful adversaries.

“Someone may be amused by my chivalrous rhetoric, but I know what's required. I don't want to see this devotee's heart ravaged by my old college friends or the atheist philosophers, psychologists, writers, and poets. Therefore, I include self-defense as one of my themes.

“Writing should help me prepare for the journey to Goloka *dhama*. Let it be a record left behind by one who actually took off from here and

went back to Godhead. Then it will be a successful journal! It should not be the record of a futile attempt to make a permanent settlement of peace and happiness in this material world.

“With this in mind, I can write about how I love to take a morning walk or how I am drawn to fulfill the cravings of my creative side. Keep the cause in mind and work toward it. That morning walk is filled with plans and enactments of devotional service to the transcendent Lord; the book-writing is to increase the library of books by the Vaisnava *parampara* to go against the imbalance created by nondevotee books. The poems written in a permissive spirit carry the message of loving surrender to Krsna and the desire to serve Him. Make prayers, efforts, declarations for devotional service. I am your friend in these endeavors.

“And *sastra* is my friend. It lifts me up and makes my writing solid. My life is a touchstone which can help whoever comes in contact with me. If I have *sraddha* and knowledge of Krsna, then I can be a true friend.”

### ***Passing Places, Eternal Truths: Travel Writings 1988-1996***

“Entering La Grand, a sign announced ‘Scenic Wayside.’ These are the same hills that we have been seeing since Utah, but suddenly they're

filled with evergreens. And a quick-running stream alongside the highway.

“On the route of the Oregon Trail, we passed through the Blue Mountains. The firs pressed in closely on both sides of the road—the tree nation. They stand and watch, tall, straight, and silent. If the trees could walk, and if they had bigger brains, maybe they would kill us, just as we kill them and the cows and whatever else we like.

“When the highway entered the Umatilla Indian Reservation, we spoke about the Native Americans and how they were pushed off by the Europeans. More reminders of rapacity. I looked for the Indian tribes, but saw only junk cars in a field, a satellite dish, and an abandoned school bus on a hill. Exit 228, ‘Deadman Pass’; Exit 224, ‘Poverty Flat Road.’ Heading down a six percent decline, we saw a broad vista of the valley below, and in the distance, our day's destination: Pendleton, Oregon.

“We went for a swim in a near-perfect spot on the Columbia River. No one was around except young children at a safe distance. I had seen a dozen large carp at another spot but none where we were swimming. Three ducks quacked and moved off as we took over their beach. On a small hill there was a chunk of solid lava about twenty feet high and

twenty feet across which they say oozed up from the earth millions of years ago.

“The water was cool and refreshing, but here is what I want to say: In Krsna consciousness, you don't surrender at any moment unless you can directly see Krsna there. I mean, everything was beautiful in this swimming spot—even our van parked in the distance was sparkling metallic brown, waiting for us like a friend. The trees were making that ‘whishing’ sound. There was not a cloud in the sky. Everything was agreeable, but I didn't fall for it. The setting wasn't false—it's Krsna's—but my goal goes far beyond the tiny moment of exercise in a river.

“Our Krsna conscious transcendentalism alienates us from most people. Our view is extreme. They are looking for the ideal enjoyment, but I know they will never find it. The only ideal with any hope to be realized is love and direct union with the Supreme.

“While playing in the Columbia River, I also noticed white butterflies and the late summer crumpling of the leaves on the trees, and it reminded me of how I surrendered to similar surroundings while living at Gita Nagari. I am often astonished at how far I took shelter there, resting in the lap of Mother Earth.”

“The next life should concern us. What will people say about us after we leave this body? They will talk because they are survivors for a

while. Will we all be cycled back into the species? An astrologer said that Pandit Nehru became one of two dogs in Switzerland in his next life. It does not do him any good that there is a Nehru museum in New Delhi and that he is praised. The actual person has gone to a dog's body, and that is all that counts. We want to come back and be with the devotees. Pray for that. The perfection would be, if we had to come back, to have complete dedication to the unlimited Lord, loving association with His devotees, and compassion for all living beings. Repeat these words and pray to Him.”

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“Rain on roof of this van. Spotlight run by battery. When I feel raindrops, I'll close the overhead vent. I explained to my Godbrother my open secret of reading in the very early morning. When I said midnight, he wanted to write it down, although he later said he couldn't rise that early. I immediately said, ‘Of course not. You are a preacher and have evening engagements.’ But I am happy to give up those engagements so I can rise at 12. Midnight might not be auspicious by Vedic standards (Nanda Maharaja was arrested for going into the water too early), but Srila Prabhupada set the example, and I do it to follow him. Do I imitate? If so, it's the child's practice, another way of being with my master, I suppose.

“I told him that this early rising is part of my inner life. It's not vague mysticism; I don't get up and meditate silently and I don't enter *raganuga-bhajana*, but I read for an hour (almost) in one of Srila Prabhupada's books, then I write for an hour (almost), and then chant for an hour and a half. These are the big three activities that constitute inner life for me—reading, writing, and chanting.

“Someone may say that my description of inner life is external, and it can be seen that way. I am describing how I turn the pages of a book or write with a pen or finger my beads and enumerate mantras. But that doesn't mean it doesn't have an inner spark. Why else would I do it? I don't read *any* book at this hour; I read Srila Prabhupada's book. I don't write *any* thing; I free-write and steer to Krsna consciousness (with or without gremlins along for the ride). I don't chant ‘Coca-cola’ or ‘Mr. John;’ I chant Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare. The inner is outer and the outer is inner, if you know what I mean.”

***From Imperfection, Purity Will Come About: Writing Sessions While Reading Bhaktivinode Thakura's Saranagati***

“Bhaktivinode Thakura next gives more songs of *bhakti-pratikula-bhava varjanangikara*, renunciation of conduct averse to pure devotion.

He has given us a full glimpse of the ultimate liberation as a *sakhi* in Gokula, and now he returns to instruct all *jivas* how to avoid obstacles on the path. We'll hear more from him about yearning for the perfect state, but if we want to progress there, we still have a lot of ground to cover. Also, he wants to equip us as preachers so that we can help others.

“This material creation of Yours, O Kesava, is most strange. I have roamed throughout the forest of this universe in consequence of my selfish acts, and I have beheld many strange and curious sights.’(*Saranagati* , 5.1.1)

“In this dangerous world, cheating philosophers come forward to deliver me. They offer me material pleasures and liberation. But it is forgetfulness of Lord Kesava's feet that has brought on my anguish and grief—and these philosophers are averse to His devotional service. They are fatally dangerous. Bhaktivinode, considering refuge at the feet of the Vaisnava as essential, pays his respects to these cheating philosophers from afar.’ (*Saranagati*, 5.1.4)

“Don't play with fire. Having come to devotional service, don't look back to see if there was anything you missed enjoying in the world or would like to take with you. You can't bring your old rocks across the

river: they will make you sink. You renounced everything and you felt such relief. Krsna gave you the strength and courage then. He took away all your old friends. Don't rummage through the heap of discarded memories and desires. You have already been given the best. Don't become a crow again.

“I shall never reside at a place unfavorable for devotional practices, and may I never take pleasure in non-devotional works. I will read no book opposed to pure devotion, nor listen to any explanation which disagrees with pure devotional principles.’ (*Saranagati* , 5.2.3-4)

“I vow to completely shun whatever I know to contradict pure devotion. This I strongly promise. Bhaktivinode, falling at the feet of the Lord, begs for the strength to give up all obstacles to pure devotion.’ (*Saranagati*, 5.2.8-9)

“Don't complain that he's not being broadminded. Cut off all ties with nondevotees. You can't be interested in pure *bhakti* and at the same time, averse to its principles. There is no such thing as being favorable to Krsna consciousness and maintaining relationships with those who are averse. How could you live with them or talk with them? No, we have to

get out of all unfavorable situations. We are only interested in our ultimate benefit. Therefore, have a healthy fear of any attachments which are averse to pure devotional service.

“Bhaktivinode Thakura is not discussing *yukta-vairagya*. If you need to study something or use something for your service, ask your guru's permission and then carefully proceed. But don't fool yourself. Non-devotional music and writing and work is often empowered by the grace of Mayadevi. She bewildered you before and she can do it again if you leave the shelter of the Vaisnavas.”

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“In Song Four, Bhaktivinode Thakura confesses, ‘I am a sinner. I caused others pain.’ He doesn't commit sins anymore, but his karma weighs heavily on him. (My karma weighs on me too. During *japa* this morning, I roamed back to 1964 when I was confused, helpless, and sinful—a welfare worker, marijuana-smoker . . . Are these the thoughts fit to accompany *japa*? It's bad enough that I *lived* those things, but do I have to remember them while I am chanting the holy name? Prabhupada saved me just in time.) Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura does not describe the details, but he lays it on the line—a sense-gratifier hurts others, but he doesn't care. Therefore he hurts and ruins himself.

“Most of Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura’s statements seem so extreme that we don't quite know what to do with them. It's almost hard to believe him when he says, ‘I am remorseful seeing others happy.’ But I experience this all the time. ‘I'm a perpetual liar.’ That's not true of me—I am honest. But wait a minute, you can't face *the truth*. You don't even know what the truth is. Isn't that a form of lying?

“‘The misery of others is a source of great pleasure for me.’ Now *that's* an exaggeration as far as I'm concerned. That sounds like a sadist. Do I think like that? But isn't a holier-than-thou attitude the same thing? Seeing the nondevotees unhappy is proof of my own righteousness. I tell you, I haven't faced the truth; I have no idea what it is. I know neither the evil in me nor the good. I know neither the love nor the pain. I don't know separation from Krsna at all.”

## WRITING SESSIONS

### *The Faithful Transcriber* (Continued)

**“July 5, 1996**

“Last day of the seminar, then I get two days off before beginning four days of disciples’ meetings. Yesterday headaches coming back again and again. I gave an *S.B.* lecture and my afternoon seminar. Not enough

time to write here. The expectations of a book, a book. *The Faithful Transcriber* tells the truth and nothing but the truth but such a small amount of it. And . . . Allen Freed rock ‘n’ roll.

“Yeats and Joyce on Irish currency.

“Did ya hear? We are going to head back to Ireland as soon as these festival days in Belgium are over. So, be here another week. I think and ride on. In Ireland I may end this book. Until then, I won’t have fulltime on it, but still, dear reader, dear Manu and friends, don’t desert us. We’ll give you news of events we couldn’t give even in a one place retreat. Here we are in ISKCON, interacting intensely, so if we don’t get too irritated by all this, we will give you little flashes...in between answering mail and lecturing. Giving heart in person to people who seek it. A lady wrote me about her doubts in her guru. I told her to pray for him. She came up to me yesterday and thanked me for that, but still it was man and woman. I’ll be glad to be away from all that and in a snug place to write. You, you are fine people. The gurus and their disciples. The GBC fiercely protecting its flock. The...clock submerging it all in sands of desert time so that today’s pressing concern soon becomes an old issue and one wonders if he’s dealing with what is actually timeless or if he’s tricked by *maya* into the short time concerns. Don’t say Srila Prabhupada didn’t warn you.

“To get through the day and offer inspiration to others. Do I belong in this fair-skinned European area where people are gathered to hear about Krsna? The leaders and congregation. Jayapataka Maharaja, for example, is saying that there are thousands of devotees to be gathered in *nama-hatta* preaching. Just because they don’t live in a temple doesn’t mean they are not devotees. I wasn’t aware that is his special interest. I supported it and said just because they don’t live in the temple doesn’t mean they are not very good devotees. Balance and praise and carry on. Please excuse me. I will write a note to the speaker of the day’s *S.B.* class, explaining that I will not attend, got headaches all day yesterday. That note will be okay. And then all day I’ll be able to cool it and try to recover from yesterday. Then if you feel better, maybe you can attend class tomorrow when you don’t have your own lecture to give in the afternoon.

“Those who expect so much of you. They want to see you sing and dance. They want to read a book by you. They want you to go to their temple and in various ways fulfill the purport of the verse: *nikunja yuno rati keli siddhi*. Show yourself at least the perfect representative of Srila Prabhupada. Do it, do it.

“I say to you, heaven and earth shall pass away but the words of Christ and Krsna shall not. True enough. And the footnotes. The sojourners can break loose into more thoughtful reflection. I ought to

chant, he keeps saying, giving you the impression that he really doesn't have time to write. But if he did, it would feel so boring – a useless endeavor, pushing a big ball of straw across the field. “Why am I doing this?” he calls out, but he can't stop now. The *pada-yatra* has been announced all over the world and they're expecting him to go on it and to show up and to cover the miles on blistered feet. You said you'd do it. *Pada-yatra* marathon. I'll give you another chance later.

**“July 6, 1996**

*12:34 A.M.*

“I heard TKG is mostly staying in the temple in Dallas and pursuing ‘his studies.’ When I heard it, I thought, ‘Studies? In Prabhupada’s books?’ Then I recalled hearing elsewhere that he’s attending the university. So, he’s fully into it and only travels during the summer. He told his disciples it’s the best preaching he could do and it’s best for them. Told them they have to fly from the nest. I heard it and thought that I too have a right to pursue my studies as fulltime as possible. I attend the university of writing in the notepads, writing. Then I heard that the anti-cult movement in France is growing bigger and the government declared ISKCON a dangerous cult, and in Germany the government denied our religious status on the grounds that our philosophy is against democracy. This news had a similar effect

on me, somehow, as the news of TKG's studies. Write, write. Write it down that you are afraid because ISKCON is branded. Go with the emotion it creates. When I feel pain or fear it is another kind of adventure, like a dream. Or – to cope with the anxiety that ISKCON is branded, you turn to writing.

“Someone wrote me wishing that I have good health, tasty food (maybe good walks too) and that I find time to happily write without caring for the audience. Run into that space. A quiet meadow, where you meet the void and your own demons. And you write through it in victory. Victory celebration in Bhaktivedanta Manor, Prabhupada disciples' reunion, whatever I hear – *pada-yatra* across the country – becomes another metaphor for the writer's life. A fellow my age said he is just coming to Krishna consciousness, read a few of my books and liked them. But he wrote to me that I'm too hard on myself. He said Prabhupada loves me and I love him, but he saw lamentation and void in my writing and asked me to give up the lamentation. He said, “You caught the wave (of meeting the Swami in 1966) and you are writing it and you are beautiful.” He said he is coming so late to Krishna consciousness and regrets it but doesn't lament. I wrote him back and said, “Yes, maybe my lamentation is a material thing, or maybe it's spiritual.”

“Unsteady – whether the pills can check the headaches. Not forever. The body is running downhill and picking up speed. Write while you can. So, we are fixed on returning to Ireland in a week. Hope to be there and write without disturbance.

“Oh, read, my lad

read of Lord Caitanya at

Puri and go there some day,

write of His love

for all devotees

and the spreading of the holy name

where even the *mlecchas*

became ecstatic and chanted Krishna, Krishna, Hari.

No more Guarino although his name is appearing more on Irish forms. May he too join the effort to write, our study.

Now, soon you’ll be chanting.

“Proofreading *September Catch-all*, when we four took a sixty-four round *vrata* for seven days. Can you do it again? Yes, but I don’t know when. The holy name rose predominant. We asserted its importance in our lives and put aside other priorities. Chant now at least your sixteen in good time.

“That’s all I can afford.

“Two days off here and then four days of disciples’ meetings. I’ll be able to report a little in between, how the meetings are going and any excess steam or insights.

“And some say bad karma is coming soon to the whole planet. But Prabhupada said to keep working to spread Krishna consciousness at best. When Kalki comes or before that when some of our preaching facilities close down, you’ll be forced to stop. Until then, write it as best you can.

“You say you want to write a lot in the upcoming weeks without so much outside input, but you know what that means. You’ll have to face the page with nothing to say because you are not writing a story with structure. You are going into the unknown, in the layers of self, with fear that it may not be a Krsna conscious thing. You’ll have to do that to persevere. Sam Beckett be damned. The mind be damned. At least I’ll be reading only Srila Prabhupada’s books and not listening to non-Krsna conscious music. I’ll be going on whatever I have. You have a whole life of Krsna consciousness in a little thread, like your blood in the veins coming through to you.

“My dear disciples, my dear Manu, dear mother, dear Irish government and cows and bulls for slaughter, and head, precious head,

*kirtanas* I didn't attend. The walks...You'll be writing for no audience and yet...

“So, it is not like it will be all a big feast or you know what you are doing. That is precisely it, you have to enter the wall, the blank and the uncertainty and you just keep writing anyway. I have a little book, *Surrealist Games*, but they have a program of their own, don't they? The mind, the unconscious. I will look for rational in the irrational, for art in the scribble. What seems to me to be sometimes too much self-absorption. A fellow who likes to write and draw wrote me and said some devotees accuse him of being idle for writing all day. He said, ‘How to justify it as preaching if you don't publish?’ I told him to write for purification, but it's hard to convey. You have to go ahead and depend on Krsna, *Un Poco Loco* too, with hope that will be your offering. But I think if going to the university is Krsna conscious, then so is this. I just have to make it come out right from a Krsna conscious life. Writing is a mirror reflection of an actual life.

“Happy about my little private edition books like *Upstate* and *June Bug* and *Dublin Pieces* and so on. They are a genre-like short stories. In these last days I'll answer as much mail as possible, clear the way for writing days ahead in July and August. Please forgive me, *Faithful Transcriber*, if I am now tuned mostly to what will come after you are completed. You are a bridge. Each book is that, provides me a

way to go. I believed in you and later gave you up? No, this book is true adventure, the coping to get through these days and hoping that a book can come, either this or the next. This one has the characteristic of more overtly wanting to be a book and also dealing with outer events in ISKCON. I'm not a recluse but here at Radhadesa. Put it forward as proof.

“This is earning me the right to do the other, to declare, ‘I’m going to write.’ Forever. Forever is just a little bit of time on this earth. No one is stopping me in the summer of ’96 from this Centennial offering, this gathering of water from 108 rivers and putting it in the pen with flavored ink stains. Krsna is allowing you. Krsna, who appears on the horizon (one devotee wrote) “in gargantuan form across the whole horizon” – his poem was called “A Soul’s Smitten” and expressed his newfound love, falling in love with Krsna consciousness, a young man in Manhattan.

“I have the privilege and want to reciprocate as best I can in this way. Please forgive me. Don’t forget to schedule reading of his books. Don’t go off the deep end. But have courage on this inner journey.

*4:30 P.M.*

“Headaches, temple attendance and lecturing by me are making it impossible to sustain this book. I get just one shot a day at midnight. Or

whenever I get up. That's how it will finish out except maybe the two days travel from Belgium back to Ireland.

“Turning also to the extended writing time in Ireland. But I should know that what I set myself up for will be only a beginning and I'll have to find my subject – if any – by writing.

“Sometimes it may be a structure you stick with but maybe you shouldn't even try.”