

Free Write Journal #90

Announcement:

I have been invited by my disciple Madana-Gopala dasa to give a Krsna conscious internet talk on Zoom and Facebook on Saturday, May 9 at 11:00 A.M. EST.

The Zoom link: <https://tinyurl.com/ud7rxd4>

The Facebook link: <https://www.facebook.com/iskconofnj>

This will be a live broadcast, and I invite all *FWJ* readers and other interested parties to tune in.

Free Writes

Narasimhadeva's Appearance Day

We cannot attend any venue for a meeting with devotees to celebrate Narasimhadeva's Appearance Day because of the pandemic restrictions. The three of us in our ashram will arrange for special worship of our Laxmi-Narasimhadeva Deity. We will bring Him down from His upper cave and place Him down on the main altar, just below Radha-Govinda and inches from my chair. Usually I don't get

to see Him so clearly, as He's far away up in His cave. It will be a treat to see Him decorated with flowers, and being close by I will be able to see all His features.

The Mayapur Deity Ministry has sent us a prayer, "All-auspicious Appearance Day of our Divine Protector." The Deity Ministry has recommended that we "encourage every devotee to use this poignant time to take shelter of Lord Nrsimha, to chant extra rounds of *japa*, to pray like Prahlada Maharaja for the Lord's service, and to worship His lotus feet so that all auspiciousness will manifest in the world for all devotees and humanities in general to counteract the evil influence now rampant."

We may chant the special prayers they have sent us. We are cooking a special feast and holding an *abhisekha* for our Lord Nrsimhadeva on this day.

Radha-Govinda Darsana

Radha and Govinda continue to have Their clothes changed every three days. We consider it a high standard for our small home Deities. Our *pujari*, Krsna dasi, is expert and loves to do her service. But she was making the turbans too fancy, with many jewels, and making the turbans into shapes that weren't simple. I think she learned this in Mayapur. I finally convinced her to make them simple, fit for a Vrajavasi cowherd boy.

So what do I actually do in the hours spent in *darsana*? I gaze at Their forms, staying with Radharani's benedicting hand and then to go down to Govinda's lotus feet. Then I start looking at Their entire forms, Their faces and dresses. Sacinandana

Swami said that ISKCON devotees say they are looking at the Deities in *darsana*, but actually the Deities are looking at us. But I say, “Why not both? We are looking at Radha-Govinda, and They are looking back at us.” The *sastra* warns, *arcye visnau sila-dhir gurusu nara-matih*. No one should look upon the *arca-vigraha* as a mere statue of material elements. Nor should he think of the guru as an ordinary man. If one does so, he is in a hellish mentality. I try my best to culture the attitude that the *arca-vigraha* is Radha and Krsna Themselves and not metal *murtis*. Because They’re dressed so beautifully and cared for nicely, it’s not so hard to see Them as Radha and Krsna in the spiritual world. They have kindly come to us in this form because we cannot see Their forms in the spiritual world. But the *arca-vigraha* is accepted as good as Their Lordships Themselves.

“Seeking Strength in Times of Crisis”

ISKCON communications minister Anutthama dasa has sent out an excellent essay addressed to devotees and the general public. His essay is very broadminded and is accessible to all people. As a Gaudiya Vaisnava he offers prayers for the well-being of all those affected by the pandemic. He offers gratitude to those on the front lines who are protecting both neighbors and strangers. He expresses his deep appreciation for the tens of thousands of doctors, nurses and other medical professionals who have put aside their own safety to protect those in need. He also thanks the many “ordinary” yet heroic men and women who have put aside fear and personal comfort to provide for their brothers and sisters. He is inspired to see his

fellow believers in the Divinity, of whatever tradition, congregating in novel ways to keep their faith and their connections alive.

He asks,

“But why must we all suffer so? It seems we are driven almost against our will, primarily by one shared goal, one driving force: To exploit the resources of the earth in search of unending economic growth and unchecked consumerism, and a belief that temporal pleasures can fulfill the desires of the heart. Our planet, and our health, have become collateral damage of this worldview.

“. . . It is *not* the right time, nor is it ever, to succumb to fear, to strike out against those who are more different, more vulnerable, or those of other faiths, nationalities or ethnicities, or to increase racial or communal tensions. Viruses do not distinguish between people. Neither should we. God gave this world to all of us, let us learn to share it as equals. . .

“Our prayer is that at the end of this crisis we will be better human beings. More introspective, more appreciative, more open to connect with other people and with God. And humbled enough to realize that the way things have been—the high- pressure, materialistic culture we subscribe to—is not the way things must be.

Today is Lord Narasimha's Appearance Day. This was the day when I and four others received *sannyasa* from Prabhupada in Los Angeles in May 1972. When Prabhupada handed me the *danda* from his *vyasasana*, he said, "Preach! Preach! Preach!" I started out by doing lectures in college classrooms with an assistant, Isha, who went ahead and booked classes for me. I did up to four lectures a day, more than any college professor was doing. I got the students to chant Hare Krsna, and we distributed some books. Then we started staying for a month in a college town, giving lectures at a venue and doing *harinama* daily in the streets. We were fairly successful in making devotees in this way. Then at Prabhupada's request we started the Library Party. I was in charge of a group of *brahmacaris*, headed by Ghanashyama (later Bhakti Tirtha Swami) and Mahabuddhi, who were the most successful at placing the standing orders. In several bands, we traveled all over America to every college and university. We approached professors teaching religion or philosophy and got them to recommend to their university library a full set of Prabhupada's published books and a standing order for all the books that would be published in the future. Prabhupada was very fond of the Library Party's work, and he especially liked the letters of praise of his books by the college professors. In a Second Canto purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, Srila Prabhupada writes that the first duty of a *sannyasi* is to write books on Krsna consciousness. After a while, when my health weakened, I took exclusively to writing. I published many books for the devotee audience and was the editor-in-chief of *Back to Godhead* magazine. I also preached and managed in the temples that were in my GBC zone. Thus I

fulfilled the duties of a *sannyasi* of Prabhupada.

Prahlada Maharaja's Instructions to His Schoolmates

I heard a Prabhupada lecture on Prahlada Maharaja's instructions to his demoniac schoolmates. At the recreation hour, they wanted to play, but he told them:

*kaumaram acaret prajno
dharman bhagavatan iha
durlabham manusam janma
tad apy adhruvam arthadam*

One who is sufficiently intelligent should use the human form of body from the very beginning of life—in other words, from the tender age of childhood—to practice the activities of devotional service, giving up all other engagements. The human body is most rarely achieved, and although temporary like other bodies, it is meaningful because in human life one can perform devotional service. Even a slight amount of sincere devotional service can give one complete perfection.

[SB 7.6.1]

Krsna consciousness should be cultivated beginning in childhood. In a series of verses, Prahlada Maharaja outlines the human life. He says the first twenty years are wasted in playing games and sports. Then at the end of life one faces invalidity and wonders, “What to do?” And fifty percent of a supposed hundred years of longevity is wasted in sleep. There is hardly any time left for cultivating spiritual life. So he tells his schoolfellows they should begin Krsna consciousness in their boyhood. Prabhupada was lecturing in New Vrndavana, and there were young children present. He said they were very fortunate. They were bowing down to the Deity and

the guru, and they were offering a flower and honoring *prasadam*. He said these things weren't done merely in play; they were taken into account by Krsna. Ideally everyone should take to Krsna consciousness at the earliest age and not think one can lead a life without it and then take it up in one's sunset years, when it is too late.

Zoom Lecture

I've decided to go ahead and give the lecture on Zoom to a wide audience. I'll tell them I don't give many lectures anymore. My main means of communication is writing. I write many books, and I write a weekly *Free Write Journal*, which is posted every Friday, kept on the Internet for a week, and then replaced with a new *Journal*. I tell of news from our ashram and excerpts from our out-loud readings of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

When I was hot, I used to jump on the *vyasasana* every day and give a lecture. Now I hardly give them at all, and so I'm anxious when I give one, and I prepare for it in advance. I memorize some sections and I read from my books. I take it as a great responsibility to make a presentation to my Godbrothers and Godsisters and the new generation of devotees.

My lecture is billed as "Stories from Srila Prabhupada." I'll be speaking some things I heard Prabhupada say in his lectures. I listen to Prabhupada's Audio Ministry, and from the section "Srila Prabhupada Tells a Story," I will tell in my own words some of the stories he's told, including some ones about Gopala Bhan and the king, Krsnacandra. Then, although it's a little unorthodox to read a lecture and not

look at the audience, I'm going to read some poems from my collection *Remembering Srila Prabhupada*. I have lined up ones starting with Prabhupada's visit in 1969 to ISKCON Press in Boston, where he said the Press was his heart. Then I've got a group of poems about Prabhupada going to India with a group of disciples, his "dancing white elephants." We devotees who stayed back happily received the news that Prabhupada was able to visit high-placed politicians and businessmen and tell them the message of Krsna. The devotees said he was different in India, more relaxed and more accessible to the devotees. He kept an open door. Although the devotees were doubtful about it, he put up big *pandals*, or massive tents, in which ten and twenty thousand people fit in and heard his lecture and watched the "foreign devotees" hold enthusiastic Hare Krsna *kirtana*. And they distributed profuse *prasadam*. The audience was pious, and they rushed forward to touch Prabhupada's feet. Prabhupada made great efforts to teach his devotees how not to be cheated by the merchants and Indians that they dealt with. He called his disciples "damn cheap *babus*," a term used by the Indians for the foreigners who pay five times the usual amount and declare that they have gotten the item "damn cheap." Prabhupada was expert at not being cheated, but it seemed he could not teach his expertise to his devotees. When his disciples were criticized that they could not be *brahmanas* because they were not born in *brahmana* families, he defended them, citing the scriptures that a *brahmana* is not known by birth only, but he has to have the qualifications. And his disciples qualified by following the four rules and chanting Hare Krsna. Prabhupada made Tamal Krsna a *sannyasi*, and Tamal asked him if he

could preach alone. TKG did a successful program, but Prabhupada called him back to stay with all the other devotees in India and not avoid management.

I hope to give a heartfelt presentation of the presence of Srila Prabhupada. They should not hold it against me that I'm reading and not always looking at them. Spontaneous lecturing is no longer my forte. I'm a writer, and it's the very best I can do, to read to them from my books and notes. I will continue rehearsing this week and hope to make a nice presentation in the Zoom lecture. I've got three Gopala Bhan stories memorized, but aside from that I'll read my poems about Prabhupada in India. I hope the devotees will accept my reading stories about Prabhupada, which are the best thing I can do and which are actually nectar.

Meeting with John Endler

Speaking of Zoom, I met yesterday with Rev. John Endler on Zoom. He read to me his introductory essay to *Kaleidoscope* in which he introduces the reader to stream-of-consciousness writing, which I use in the book. He writes a lot *about* stream-of-consciousness and how it is used by writers like Virginia Woolf in her book *The Waves* and James Joyce in *Ulysses*. He sent me his introductory pages. I think they are good, but I want him to add an excerpt of actual stream-of-consciousness quoted from James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Then the reader will not only understand what stream-of-consciousness is about, but he will actually see it on the page. John writes,

“With open eyes, allow Satsvarupa Maharaja’s words to draw you in. With open ears, listen to the sound of his language. With an open heart, enter this imaginative world in which the writer draws you closer to himself as he points even beyond his ever-flowing consciousness toward the source of life and inspiration, Krsna, the Supreme Person. Yes, He is to be found within every shape and color of this poetry’s kaleidoscope.”

Partha Sarathi Maharaja

I finally received another letter from Partha Sarathi Maharaja after many months of waiting. He wrote me that he previously sent a letter but didn’t get an answer. It may have gotten lost in the mail. But he has given me an update on his activities. He is living in lockdown at Govardhana because of the pandemic restrictions. His health is poor and he has to lie on his back for most of the day. But his mind is clear, and he’s receiving sweet realizations about Vrndavana and Mayapura. He has a deep personal *bhajana* in the morning where he prays to the pictures of many ISKCON devotees for their mercy. He quotes that service to the Vaisnavas is higher than service to Visnu. He encourages me to realize my *sthayi-bhava*, or permanent relationship with Krsna, in this lifetime. I am very fond of Partha Sarathi Maharaja for his realizations and his friendly disposition to me. I also received a letter from him dated 2019. That’s probably the letter he said he sent and never received an answer to. He wrote me that if there was anything he could do for

me to please let him know. I wrote to him previously that if he could write me letters occasionally, that would be wonderful.

In his latest letter he said that he previously used to chant a *lakh* of rounds, but now he is focusing on quality. Possibly this may be due to his ill health also. He now takes twelve minutes to chant a round. He wants to hear each syllable attentively.

Disturbing Phone Call

I received a short email letter from India: “I am in great trouble. Please phone me.” Yes, she is in great trouble, but I have given her a solution which she won’t obey. She lives with her ailing mother and her brother, who is about to get married. I cannot get her a husband on my own, and I cannot bring her to America to be with me, as I am a *sannyasi*. So I have told her to go to ISKCON Mayapur. I know that devotees from all over the world go there to get married. They have a marriage council and make arrangements. But this *mataji* says she has always stayed under the protection of her relatives and does not want to go out to “the world.” She says she depends only on me, I am her only shelter, her mother, her father. But she won’t obey my instructions. This has been going on for twenty years, my asking her to go to ISKCON and my inability to find her a husband. But if she goes there they can help her make arrangements. I will write her a letter and emphasize the same point. Her best option for getting a husband is to go to Mayapur and approach the

marriage council. She cannot expect me to do it for her. If she truly believes that I am her only shelter, she should follow my *vani* and do the needful.

So many disciples claim I am their only shelter, but they will not follow my instructions. So what is the basis of the relationship? It is sentimental.

Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta

I received a letter from a woman who is a friend of Nitai in India. She has read the *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta* three times and continues to read it at night. I have exchanged a letter with her, and now she writes me again with a number of things that she learned from the *SPL* and that she wanted to share with me:

- 1) Loyalty to Gurudeva. She points out that Prabhupada sacrificed his life for the sake of adherence to the instructions of his Gurudeva. This led to the formation of ISKCON and giving us wonderful scriptures and wonderful disciples. “In this way *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta* inspires me to adhere to the instructions of my Gurudeva in disciplic succession.”
- 2) Interest in reading Srila Prabhupada’s books. “Problems will appear, but his books will enable us to encounter these problems with confidence.”
- 3) Uniformity in speech and action. Prabhupada never compromised on

the philosophy.

4) Utility of priceless time.

5) Tolerance. “*Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta* displays examples of Srila Prabhupada’s matchless tolerance.” She gave the example of Prabhupada lecturing to an unruly crowd in a theater in Paris. They were disrespectful, but he tolerated their remarks.

I was appreciative and glad that she shared these learning points with me.

Govardhana Retreat—Or

It is a great, edifying pleasure to listen every day for hours to the Govardhana Retreat, where speakers are telling the stories from the *Bhagavatam* and the commentators’ *krsna-katha*. They are up to the *brahma-vimohana-lila*, just beginning.

But yesterday, the newsmagazine *The Week* arrived in the mail, and I read it instead of listening to the Govardhana Retreat. The main thing I read was that there’s a protest movement in the USA by people who don’t want to stay at home in forced lockdown and want the right to “Live free or die!” It’s never satisfying to read the worldly news, and so I felt like the *brahmana* who was hungry and ate at the Muslim’s house but didn’t get enough food to appease his hunger. He lamented, “I

have lost my caste but I am still hungry!” Maybe tomorrow I’ll be through with the news and be able to tell you the nectar of *brahma-vimohana-lila*.

Gita-Govinda

Jayadeva Gosvami’s *Gita-govinda* is available on the market, with a commentary by Srila Prabhodhananda Sarasvati and a translation by H.H. Banu Swami. It is a book meant to be appreciated only by the very mature devotees of Radha-Krsna. For myself, I found it too erotic, with descriptions of “full, heavy breasts,” kissing, biting, etc. Much of it is taken up with Radharani being angry at Krsna because He mixes with other *gopis*. Krsna approaches Radharani and speaks to Her, trying to win Her back and asserting that She is His only love. I stopped reading the commentary and read just the verses, and I found this a better way to go. I have been comfortable with the translations by Bhanu Swami in his many books. The book includes Jayadeva’s song to the ten *avataras*, which Srila Prabhupada very much liked to sing. But I wouldn’t recommend *Gita-govinda* for the average ISKCON devotee. One has to be free of all material desires or he will misunderstand the amorous pastimes of Radha and Krsna.

From Imperfection, Purity Will Come About: Writing Sessions While Reading Bhaktivinoda Thakura’s Saranagati

“Our work is to discriminate between the elevated and the

degrading forms of surrender and choose the favorable one. I especially try to do that in writing. Sometimes my offering is not the deepest act of voluntary love, but Srila Prabhupada says we have to act like soldiers under a military command. Lord Krsna says,

“If you do not act according to My direction and do not fight, then you will be falsely directed. By your nature, you will have to engage in warfare.’ . . . The Supreme Personality gives directions as to what is good and what is bad, and one simply has to act in Krsna consciousness to attain the perfection of life. No one can ascertain his destiny as the Supreme Lord can; therefore the best course is take direction from the Supreme Lord and act. No one should neglect the order of the Supreme Personality of Godhead or the order of the spiritual master, who is the representative of God. One should act unhesitatingly to execute the order of the Supreme Personality of Godhead—that will keep one safe under all circumstances.’ (*Bg.* 18. 59, verse and purport)

“Bite the bullet. Surrender to Krsna can sometimes be like that. Get in line, stop speculating, stop your sense gratification fantasies.

Follow the orders of your spiritual master, no matter what the cost. Get off the mental plane and surrender.

“There are limits to surrender when it is offered only out of fear or duty. Are we afraid of Krsna's punishment? Why do we withhold a part of ourselves—that part that is not fully convinced? Don't we trust Krsna? Don't we trust ourselves? This is *vaidhi-bhakti*—mechanical surrender to the rules and regulations. It will eventually lead to a higher stage, but we shouldn't misidentify obedience to the rules and regulations as surrender.

“Surrender doesn't mean losing yourself. You don't have to renounce your true ego. The liberated devotees of the Lord who please Him most have a full sense of their own desires and selfhood—but they are completely in love with Krsna. Krsna isn't looking for slaves or indentured servants. He doesn't want conscripted soldiers in His army. He is giving us the choice: ‘What do you want to do? Do you want to come to Me, or do you want to stay in the material world?’ When we choose sin, He may order His foolish devotees, ‘No! Surrender!’

“There is a class of devotees, *ragatmikās*, who render all their service voluntarily because they love Krsna. These devotees are experiencing real freedom, and in that freedom, sometimes they order Krsna to carry out their desires. Krsna loves these exchanges because the

orders are coming from His surrendered servants. As Krsna tells the *gopis*, ‘Your connection with Me is beyond reproach’ (*Bhag.* 10.32.22).”

Passing Places, Eternal Truths--Travel Writings 1988-1996

THE SUMMER MARATHON

“The Best I Could Do (March '95, Wicklow).

“I like it! I thought it failed, but so far I like it. I'm on the author's side. Even if later in the book he writes less and says, ‘I'm petering out. This isn't working,’ I'll still be on his side. He's inspiring me to write this one.

“Stopped again. He's in some quiet town, hot noon, at the tourist office? Where is a campground? I don't see anything, just the walls in back of the van with pictures of Prabhupada and Krsna and Radha, back windows covered. Sweat and careen and happy to discover that I can write in a pad while moving. I thought it would be impossible.

Get past that guy who writes.

But it takes so much

acceleration,

it will give me a head-

ache, I fear.

Apply wet rag to head.

One for Madhu too.

He's passionately

seeking the campground and I'm

passionately seeking the—

cigar?

No, the emblem, the bull's eye

of modern prose.

“If someone were to ask me, ‘What are you looking forward to in life?’ I’d say, ‘Getting up at midnight after a good rest, reading *Bhagavad-gita* for an hour in the quiet and then writing in that atmosphere. Feeling that Krsna, the instructor-guru, the divine friend, the all-in-all, is with me.’ He's in the book directly and personally, and He's in my heart in a friendly way. He never leaves me even though I sometimes forget Him. May He keep me aware of Him. I want to surrender, and even before I do, I want to help others. That's what's nice about preaching—you can do it even before you are perfect.

“We went around and around, got trapped in a return to the autostrade before we found the entrance to the campground. The office had just closed for the Italian lunch hour, 12:30-3:00 P.M., but M. somehow roused a white-haired woman to let us in. I watched all this

from the van. You have to pay to bring your dog here. Tattered American flag. Passport. Shade? Now we drive into the heart of the place, packed with campers. Beware of loose, exposed young flesh. I look out just so I can decide it's better to stay in the back of the van, my cell, my reading booth.

“Surrounded by radios and TVs, we turn on our motor fan and drown it out.”

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“M. says he very much likes that I question myself and ask Lord Krsna, ‘What is it You want me to do?’ He says it may be a gremlin or a conscience or whatever, but it's good. Of course, we have to separate out the various voices that take you in the direction of self-examination. The gremlin tries to stop the writing. Another ‘conscience’ voice may be more friendly. Some nag weakness. Some apologize. Some manage to cut through and leave all that behind.

“Would like to explain the art of improvisation to M. Why? He and others may think that on principle you cannot write for weeks without planning and expect it to come out as a publishable book. Then how do you write a publishable book? Oh, they say, by planning it. Then outlining it and writing a first draft and several others, and then

submitting it to an editor. I do submit my work to an editor, to proofreaders, a copyeditor, etc., but I like the main bulk of it to remain.

“Thought if I lost eyesight, I could hear *krsna-katha*. I could also speak it. Chanting and hearing is to vibrate with the tongue and to hear with the ear. Writing and printing is a kind of crutch for Kali-yuga. Yet it's glorious.

“Citralekha’ means one who is excellent in drawing pictures. Be like that. If not expert—*citra*—be a lover of drawing. I'd like that. Unload feelings, splash colors as you did twice this year and would like to do twice every year. ‘Paint as you like and die happy.’

“Hare Krsna pictures of *lilas* and instructions and obsession theme of a man reading a book. Read and pray.

“Read the books and go on reading them. Draw pictures of people reading. Sometimes I sketch from a live model and try for accuracy, and when I am in a lucky mood, I draw how it feels within to read a book, to hold it in my hands.

Paint and draw ever more.

Citrlekha drew pictures of
various heroes of the Yadus
and Usa picked out the one
she'd dreamt of as her

lover. She became shy when she saw the picture of Pradyumna who was to become her father-in-law, and when Citralekha drew Aniruddha, Usa cried out, 'That's him! That's the one!'"

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“The devotee who gave class today spoke about the need to use our intelligence in Krsna's service. He also spoke about surrender. He quoted a letter by Prabhupada to Upendra dasa in which Prabhupada recited a prayer we can make to Krsna. The prayer goes like this: ‘I’m unwilling to surrender, so You please put me in a situation where I’ll be forced to surrender.’ The lecturer said, ‘The way out is the way through.’ We should ask Krsna to put us through whatever karma we are due. Otherwise, he said, it's possible to live in this institution for forty years and not be more advanced in *bhakti* than we were forty years ago. Instead of trying to choose our own form of surrender, we should pray to Krsna to put us through whatever we need. If we do that, our lives will be more glorious than we could imagine. He said that Prabhupada exemplified this attitude when although he didn't want to take *sannyasa*, he finally did and everything became glorious.

“These seem to be solid points, but I'm still left with the question of how to surrender. We have to act. What, then, does it take to make such

a sincere prayer? How to prove my willingness to accept Krsna's guidance? We learn this, it seems, in small increments.

Yamuna Going

First we came upon a line of pilgrims,
ladies and men with shaved heads.

We rushed ahead of them over the soft sand.

We encountered a little tributary
and crossed, knee-deep delicious,
to the bank of the river.

Brown bubbles floated along.

Yamuna-devi, I placed your water on my head,
and you tugged us downstream.

Afraid of undertow,

I stayed waist-high and swam
and watched the sunrise and the people
and Madana-mohana temple and Kesi-ghat.

On shore, while putting on our *tilaka*
a man stopped to watch us.

He wore an old turban and handlebar mustache,
 his worn, intense face smiling,
 encouraging the whites in their attempt
 to bathe in Yamuna
 and mark their bodies with sacred clay.
 All these actions form a prayer,
 for entrance into the *dhama*.”

Looking Back, Volume 1

“COMMENT:

“In 1966 Swamiji would work at his writing at odd times during the day. He had not yet adopted his practice of rising at 1:00 in the morning and writing for a few hours. Writing was all he was doing the entire day. He worked throughout the day. Devotees wouldn’t interrupt him when he was looking through the commentaries and typing . . .

“We could see when the Swami was working because there was a glass window between the two rooms—the worship room and his work room, so you could just look in and see what he was doing. You could even see him when he was sleeping.

“His door was closed, but people would still go in during the day. But they usually didn’t disturb him when he was writing. Someone like

Kirtananda would stop them.

“Swamiji was typing. But I was typing edited manuscripts with Hayagriva’s editing marks on them.

“Hayagriva had access, just like I did, to go in and ask Swamiji questions. Swamiji had given him *carte blanche* to ‘Put it nicely.’ He remarked how he first saw the manuscript and saw the phrase, ‘O, the sage,’ and he remarked to Swamiji that it didn’t make sense, and that it should say, ‘O, sage.’ And Swamiji said, ‘Yes, put it nicely.’ When I first read Prabhupada’s *Bhagavatams*, I liked them right away. I didn’t mind the printing mistakes and the grammatical mistakes in the Indian printing and layout of the books. I had to slow down and read. It was different than the reading I was accustomed to. That I liked right away, and I accepted the piety and the theism and the authority.

“I didn’t pass my typing around to the other boys. I just made one copy with a carbon copy because he still needed to keep a carbon copy, but I didn’t pass it around and share it with the others. They may have asked me for it, but I didn’t give them. They were in that way curious. He lost the *Bhagavad-gita* in India and he started it again in America in 1965. In 1965, when he was living uptown, he dictated the *Introduction to Geetopanisad*, which is the introduction that we now have to *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. And then he went on to work on the first chapter.

“*Introduction to Geetopanisad*” was made into a pamphlet and sold. For the little pamphlet distribution we did, we didn’t recruit serious devotees during the first year. Just a solid corps of about twelve devotees remained, the only initiated followers he had. That was the way it was until he left for San Francisco, and when he came back after a few months to New York City, we had about three new devotees to be initiated by him.

“Swamiji was glad that we had some new recruits. He was not disappointed that we didn’t have more devotees. He understood it would be difficult for people to take it seriously and surrender, but we got full attendance at the evening lectures and the *kirtanas* and at the Sunday feasts.”

PRABHUPADA TELLS A STORY (from *Prabhupada Nectar*)

“Prabhupada introduced his disciples to the stories of the jester Gopala Bhan, who was famous in Bengal for his intelligence, wit, and quick thinking in the court of Krsnacandra. Prabhupada said that no one, not even an emperor can always be serious without any relief. But since everyone had to treat the king very respectfully, there would be one person allowed to spoof the king. The king would also be able to joke with him, because if the king were to do that with his prime minister, the

prime minister's prestige would be reduced. So King Krsnacandra was always engaged in a battle of wits with his joker, Gopala.

“One time Gopala walking into the king's court and the king said, ‘Gopala, you are an ass.’

“‘My lord,’ said Gopala, ‘I am not an ass. There is a difference between me and an ass.’

“Then Gopala measured out the difference between himself and the king said, ‘six feet.’

“When Prabhupada laughingly told this story, his devotees were not amused but amazed that Prabhupada was inviting them to hear and laugh at the wit of Gopala Bhan.”

Remembering Srila Prabhupada: A Free-Verse Rendition of the Life and Teachings of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

“THE MANGO GROVE

“In the mornings,
traveling from Calcutta
to Mayapura,
Prabhupada used to stop

at the Mango Grove.

The wonderful adventure

of being with him,

taking breakfast outdoors,

the outing-happiness

of going to Mayapura—

a car ride

with a short rest—

“the red blossoming *krsnachor* trees overhead

and the cool ponds, being free of the city,

with the villagers

in simple atmosphere . . .

“But all of this

is of little importance

except that Prabhupada is here.

(Otherwise the Bengal tropics

don't seem much different

than Trinidad or Guyana.)

But here is the Mango Grove

where he always stopped.

“Put out a mat.

He sits

and beside him

come *sannyasis* and others.

At a cue, they also

honor *prasadam*

sitting in a leafy grove

amidst the aisles of trees.

There are usually women also,

his sister

They sit apart

and open the tiffins.

Grapes, bananas,

mangoes, melon,

chidwa, something fried.

Prabhupada doesn't speak much.

We shyly glance

at his moving hand and mouth,

and watch him wash with water.

One time a dog came,

and Prabhupada tossed it a sweet,

the dog catching it
in his mouth.

“Now, on to Mayapura—
we are halfway there.”

WRITING SESSIONS

The Faithful Transcriber

“July 8, 1996

12:59 A.M.

“Struggling with headaches. No time for a full shot writing session now. The four days of disciples’ meetings are here. At the first meeting, I’ll tell them I’m taking allopathic medicine to rise to the occasion of each class – so, they shouldn’t be puzzled why I say, ‘I get headaches every day’ and yet they see me giving classes. Let the cat out of the bag. But now even the pills don’t check the headaches sometimes. So, they’ll know if I have to cancel. M. said it’s enough that they did the *tapasya* to come here and me too. Now whatever we can exchange, that’s good.

“Start with a vital topic of our relationship and draw from letters from Srila Prabhupada. So, you are claiming a guru relationship with

them. You expect to do this for four days and nights and then leave it behind and feel and write like a humble solitary? Well, I'll write about it too if necessary.

“A guru went on *pada-yatra* with his disciples. They set up places for him to lecture but he bagged the goo. He wrote, that is, even chance nonsense as it occurred to him and until his pen time ran out.

“He walked and press reporters did not besiege him but occasionally one did and he said, ‘We are chanting for peace.’ Fictive joy and Adidas sneakers, sixty-four rounds and the mind on its own *pada-yatra*. Big balls of mercy and dust sagebrush from the plains and kids in cars almost ran him down, shouting, ‘Ferbusher!’ What’s that? He didn’t know but returned to his rounds.

“Break out of confining.

Answer letters, sing Hare Krsna

take one thought after another,

sing a memoir but I don’t

like to extend them. Just bits

and pieces as you go along. And select, select. Crows land in the present and cows doomed on that hillock at Uddhava’s and the little house crowded with paraphernalia by Madhu and his phone calls and saga with van and bureaucrats. You know all this will occur and nothing will stop you in your writing marathon, keep the hand moving. Keep

broom sweeping. Rains of mercy frequent in Ireland. Let those clouds be fresh and cleaning the soul.

“He walked out and it was okay.

“Pray to get through this day with your scheduled program. Pray to be sober and instructive and human and dulcet-toned and humorous. Human and Vaishnava guru *parampara*. Answer letters, typist can construct English grammar. Facts to publish books – ‘When you get money’ is good for me too. Angel-ish; those who think they are especially spiritual. And others. Primrose, wildflowers with flies in them, chase them out of this room, lay me down to sleep and use this body a while longer before they lay it in the shallow hallow with appropriate last words. Divvy up belongings as Roman soldiers did with Christ’s cloak. All glories to Christ, and may we increase in knowledge of his actual example and person.

“Learn from Srila Prabhupada and Lord Krsna all that is to be known. Lord Krsna will teach you in the heart. I have a long way to go and will take more than my allotted years. Oh, if I could hear in love and serve to please Him, not myself.

Krsna, Krsna, Krsna.

“The book they picked up for me in Dublin, *Hermits: The Insights of Solitude*, by Peter France, ends with a chapter on ‘A Hermit for Our

Time: Robert Lax on Patmos.’ Lax used to be Thomas Merton’s closest friend.

“Now, for forty years or so, he has been living alone on a Greek island. He writes every day...This kind of solitude is necessary to Robert Lax because he is a writer and can only work when free from all distraction. Solitude is, for him, above all a working environment – the only one in which he can write. And his writing is, above all, a search for meaning. Insights come from time to time, and if he can work them into a language he can understand, he feels they may be of use or interest to others.’

“We’re then treated to some writings from his journals which are all dated entries. Then there’s a conversation with Robert Lax and the author of the hermit book. Lax says, ‘I don’t feel at all embarrassed about being or thinking of myself as a writer. I’m not using the word as honorific term. I’m not a novelist or writer of mystery stories. I’m just a writer who writes what’s in his mind. I’ve always been a writer in this sense.’

“Peter France asks him, ‘Do you write to discover what you have in mind?’

“Lax replies, ‘More to keep it from getting away. I think that, from the moment, I usually know what I have in mind and I also seem to know that five minutes from now I won’t be able to rediscover it unless I’ve written it down...I have this confidence that if I ever to manage to clear things up for myself I’ll be helping to clear them up for other people, and if I put it in a language that I can really understand, and find simple enough to communicate to myself in, then some other people will be able to pick up on it...I need to escape distractions in order to do something which is not, I think, anti-social. I don’t think I’d be comfortable with it if it was. We all need each other far too much for somebody to take off and do nothing or do something destructive...If you found something creative that you can do in solitude when you’re alone then that really is good news for the whole world. Because they may not be ready for it yet but they may be at another time.’

“4:30 P.M.

“I gave them a writing assignment based on Srila Prabhupada wanting his disciples to do their service. If you can’t do it then say so.

“It’s up to them now to write. And I’ll springboard it too. Twenty or thirty people here. Girls grow older like wilting flowers. Men get pudgy and old. All die. So fast, it happens.

“We keep busy. Robert Lax on Patmos and me at Wicklow, writing down what we can to make it clear. Writing, writing, you get carried away. This is the first time I’ve written since midnight. I have so little time for it.

“P. Swami predicts epidemic diseases and nuclear war by the end of 1997. Srila Prabhupada said in 1974 that there would be ‘awkward’ reactions to mass cow killing. You kill in the slaughterhouse and the reaction is ‘Dum! dum!’ (sounds like bombs). Material energy slaughters you.

“I tend to think optimistically that it won’t happen. We will fix our van, get our Irish license plates, drive over La Shuttle to Europe and back when we want to and go on writing. You better write while you can in this lifetime.

And I will be letting them write five more minutes. Faithful transcriber. Door opens, a five-year old enters and sits beside her mother in a pouting, shy mood. I write on. My hand is an old hand at writing. Snack, give me a snack, pie – Mrs. Wagner’s pie – we used to eat them while out playing, eat in between meals.

“Oh, I’ll go on writing *Pada-yatra* when I leave here. But now play the role well of guruji without frills. Gather questions and mind you P’s and Q’s, maybe they will write: ‘I was aghast when you said I am a servant and want to get close to guru, but I’m afraid of blowing it by

sentimental false service.’ N.D. doesn’t know what to write so I suggested, ‘Write something about your relationship with Prabhupada and how it lines up with your relationship with your spiritual master.’ That’s a good one. They write slowly. But it comes out. I mainly need to use up the time of these meetings. Now I can use their papers and read them a little at future meetings. I’d draw a doodle here but it’s not the right place for it. Deeper, face dragons and dreams. Turn to Lord Krsna and don’t listen to jazz.

“As I write, Samika Rsi comes into the room with his family, back from their trip to Ratha-Yatra, England. I’ll write if Lord Krsna allows in my solitude or crowded place.”