

What follows will be a meditational exploration—so please relax and keep your mind and heart—and ears!—wide open...but no problem if you close your eyes!

❶ It is late 1956. As day turns into twilight, Śrīla Prabhupāda is standing on the roof of the Vamśī-gopālajī temple, and he is overwhelmed by Vṛndāvana as only a pure devotee can—his thoughts and emotions are full of appreciation and awareness of Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa’s devotees and Kṛṣṇa’s land. Very naturally he begins to think of preaching. He hankers for others to also know the intimate gifts of mercy offered by Śrī Vṛndāvana Dhāma. From the depths of his heart, he thinks, “Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is inviting all souls to join Him in His eternal abode; yet even in India, few really understand. And outside of India, people know nothing of Vṛndāvana, or of the Yamunā, or of what it means to love and serve Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Why shouldn’t people all around the world have access to this precious treasure?”

Surely a smile must have crept across Kṛṣṇa’s beautiful face to hear His devotee’s most private and merciful thoughts.

❷ It’s September 17th, 1965, and Śrīla Prabhupāda is aboard the Jaladuta which has just touched land in Boston. Although he is an old man who suffered two heart attacks on the journey, and he carries with him only the Holy Name, a trunk full of copies of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, two sets of cloth, and a tiny bag of cheera and small change, his heart is overwhelmed with the mission of his spiritual master.

As he looks upon Boston’s bleak and dirty skyline, he is overwhelmed by both humility and compassion. It is in this mood that he composes his “Markine Bhāgavata-dharma.” He first appreciates Kṛṣṇa’s kindness upon Him, and soon begins to quote Śrīmad Bhāgavatam; to express his faith in the words of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. His heart and mind are then overwhelmed by a feeling of utter dependence on Kṛṣṇa to fulfill his spiritual master’s order. He pleads with Kṛṣṇa, “I’m just a beggar—Your insignificant puppet. Just make me dance, make me dance, make me dance as You desire.”

Hard to even imagine the emotional intensity of this loving exchange. But easy to imagine the great affection and gratitude Kṛṣṇa must have felt for Śrīla Prabhupāda at this time.

③ It's 1966 in Tompkins Square Park. Śrīla Prabhupāda steps out of his white rubber slippers and sits down on the Oriental rug with his followers. He is wearing a pink sweater and a big smile, and leans down to pick up his little drum. His kīrtanas proved successful at the UN, Ānanda Ashram and at Washington Square. And now he is keen to try here. Tompkins Square Park is famous as a hotbed of conflict and counterculture, but all of a sudden—in the midst of all the hype and drugs—the mahā-mantra explodes into the air. Śrīla Prabhupāda's voice is strong and encouraging, and the crowd grows to more than a hundred. Conga and bongo drums, bamboo flutes, metal flutes, mouth organs, wood and metal clackers, tambourines and guitars highlight somewhat awkwardly the throbbing, all-encompassing sound of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra throughout the afternoon.

It's 1966 and Śrīla Prabhupāda is so unassumingly sitting under a tree in the USA—yet so powerfully he is serving Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's sankīrtana mission. He's opening Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's dam to flood this foreign land and the hearts of its residents with the mercy of the Holy Name. Not hard to imagine how much affection Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu was feeling for Śrīla Prabhupāda at this time. How much mercy He was pouring over his head and into the hearts of all those present on such a divinely special day!

④ It's the end of a San Francisco Ratha yātrā. Dressed in a white cardigan and saffron cloth beautified by a large, long red rose garland, Śrīla Prabhupāda gets off the cart and onto the stage at Golden Gate Park.

There is an enthusiastic kīrtana as he raises his hands into the air and begins to dance. Suddenly the crowd goes wild, and everybody is raising their hands, chanting the Holy Name and dancing in ecstasy. Simultaneously there is massive distribution of gulabgamins. But all agree that the highpoint of the entire festival is when Śrīla Prabhupāda finally sits down and speaks his wonderful, wonderful lecture.

5 It is midnight, August 28th, 1977, in Vṛndāvana—the disappearance day anniversary of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī. Although Śrīla Prabhupāda is very, very ill and weak, he has decided to travel West again to encourage his fledgling devotees and further strengthen the movement. He is carried to Laksman Agarwal’s car and rests on a mattress placed across the back seat. The road is rough, but the car safely reaches Delhi airport. Śrīla Prabhupāda lies in the car, waiting for an announcement of boarding time for the plane. 200-300 devotees surround the car chanting kīrtana and crying. Finally Śrīla Prabhupāda is taken by wheelchair onto the plane.

When Śrīla Prabhupāda finally reaches Bhaktivedanta Manor, the devotees are deeply shocked—Śrīla Prabhupāda is so very thin and weak, he’s wearing dark glasses and he’s very solemn. The welcoming kīrtana is soon replaced by an apprehensive silence. But then Śrīla Prabhupāda looks up and smiles. He asks, “So, is everyone all right?”

“Jaya Śrīla Prabhupāda,” comes the warm reply. The tension of seeing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s strikingly deteriorated appearance suddenly melts, and everyone simply wants to make him feel comfortable and to please him with their service.

6 Śrīla Prabhupāda’s health has very seriously collapsed. It’s a month since he left Vṛndāvana for the UK. He is advised to return to Vṛndāvana. He flies from the West to Bombay, and takes a train from Bombay to Mathura. He is so very weak that Brahmananda Maharaja carries him from the train to the waiting car, and again from the car into his rooms at Vṛndāvana. “Now you are home Śrīla Prabhupāda,” says Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī.

Śrīla Prabhupāda slowly brings his hands to his chest, folds them in pranam and softly says, “Thank you very much.”

“Now you are in the care of Kṛṣṇa Balarāma,” adds Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī.

Śrīla Prabhupāda smiles and nods slightly. “Yes,” he very softly says, “kṛṣṇa tvadīya-pada-paṅkaja-pañjarāntam....” and again becomes silent.

Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī then mentally recalls the meaning of this prayer, “My dear Kṛṣṇa, please let me die immediately, so that the swan of my mind may be encircled by the stem of Your lotus feet. Otherwise, at the time of my final breath how will it be possible for me to think of You?” (Mukunda-mālā-stotra, by King Kulaśekhara) How deeply this half-uttered prayer by Śrīla Prabhupāda must have touched Kṛṣṇa’s heart!