

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaᅅga

Spreading the Glories of Śrī Kṛṣᅇa Through Book Distribution

compiled by Vijaya Dāsa



The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaᅅga

Spreading the Glories of Śrī Kṛṣᅅa Through Book Distribution

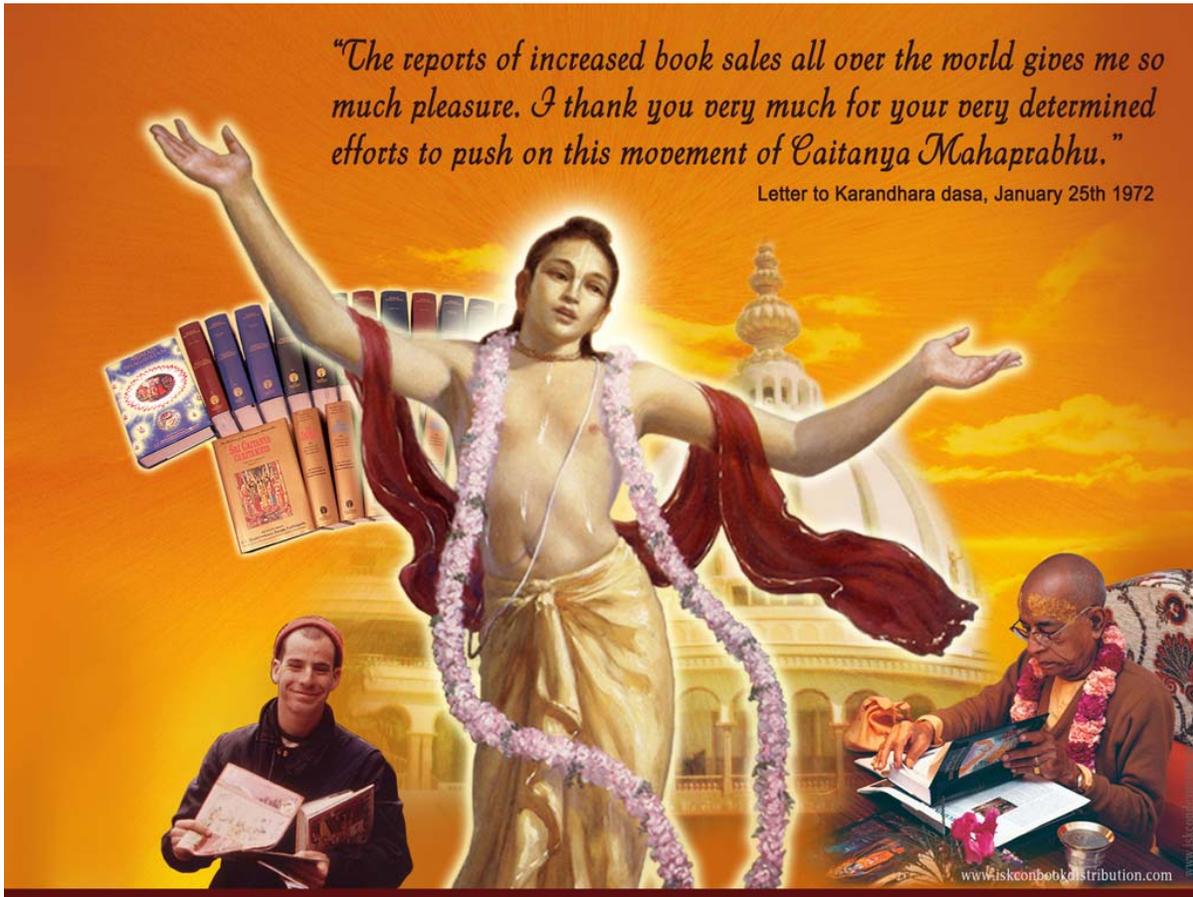
© 2013 by Vijaya Dāsa

Chapters 1-14

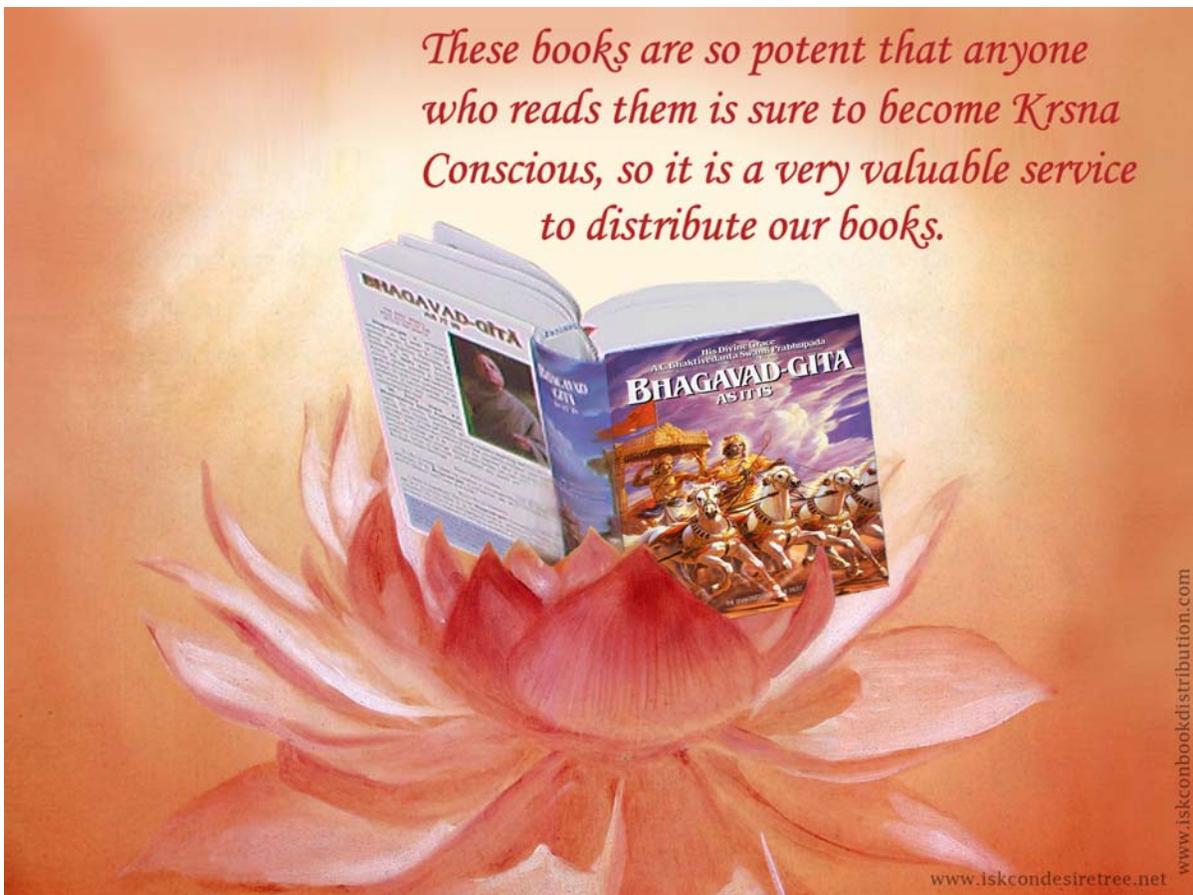
Note: for Table of Contents activate Bookmarks in PDF.

"The reports of increased book sales all over the world gives me so much pleasure. I thank you very much for your very determined efforts to push on this movement of Caitanya Mahaprabhu."

Letter to Karandhara dasa, January 25th 1972



These books are so potent that anyone who reads them is sure to become Kṛṣṇa Conscious, so it is a very valuable service to distribute our books.



The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest days of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasized book distribution. As a deeply compassionate pure devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa, he felt pained to see the conditioned souls suffer. In *Mārkine Bhāgavata-dharma* (“Kṛṣṇa Consciousness in America”), a Bengali poem he wrote upon arriving at Boston harbor, Śrīla Prabhupāda addresses Lord Kṛṣṇa:

Most of the population here is covered by the material modes of ignorance and passion. Absorbed in material life, they think themselves very happy and satisfied, and therefore they have no taste for the transcendental message of Vāsudeva. I do not know how they will be able to understand it. But I know Your causeless mercy can make everything possible because You are the most expert mystic. How will they understand the mellows of devotional service? O Lord, I am simply praying for Your mercy so that I will be able to convince them about Your message.

This is the nature of a kind-hearted devotee: he wants to see everyone become happy by practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Prabhupāda’s books are guides to the happiness everyone is seeking.

It is by knowledge of the Absolute Truth that people can become free of their suffering. There are so many universities, so many libraries, so many books, so many web sites—so much information available today. But where is the knowledge by which a person can be freed of ignorance and attain full satisfaction? That knowledge is found in the teachings of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda.

Śrīla Prabhupāda lived the transcendental teachings he wrote, and thus he inspired countless people all over the world to embrace those teachings. Millions of people are now learning about Lord Kṛṣṇa and becoming purified. We are all very much indebted to Śrīla Prabhupāda for giving us this great treasure of knowledge. He once said, “You cannot repay me for what I’ve given you. I’ve given you Kṛṣṇa. But if you want to try, then preach.” He also said, “The best way to preach is by book distribution.” This is how we can show him our appreciation—by giving this knowledge to others.

Book distribution is a joyful experience because it’s pleasing to Kṛṣṇa and His pure devotee. In 1973 Prabhupāda wrote a letter to some *saṅkīrtana* devotees. It contains my favorite quote about book distribution:

London

My dear Prabha Visnu,

Please accept my blessings. I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated January 1, 1973, and I am very glad to hear from you the wonderful news of traveling party in England. I think the people of that place are becoming more and more inclined for this Krishna Consciousness movement, they are inviting you to stay at their houses, they are taking books, becoming sometimes devotees—all of these are very encouraging signs to me. . . . [A]lways without anxiety for destination and comfortable situations, always relying only on the mercy of Krishna for your plan, just go on preaching His message and selling His books, wherever there is interest.

We shall not waste time if there is no interest or if the people are unfriendly, there are so many places to go. But I understand from your letter that practically everyone is taking some interest. That means you are presenting the thing in a very nice manner, they can detect that here are some persons who are actually sincere and nice, let me hear them, let me purchase one book. So I can understand that it is not an easy matter to travel extensively over long periods of time

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

without proper food, rest, and sometimes it must be very cold there also, and still, because you are getting so much enjoyment, spiritual enjoyment, from it, it seems like play to you. That is advanced stage of spiritual life, never attained by even the greatest yogis and so-called jyanis. But let any man see our devotees working so hard for Krishna, then let anyone say that they are not better than any millions of so-called yogis and transcendentalists, that is my challenge! Because you are rightly understanding through your personal realization this philosophy of Krishna Consciousness, therefore in such a short time you have surpassed all the stages of yoga processes to come to the highest point of surrendering to Krishna. That I can very much appreciate, thank you very much for helping me in this way.

Hoping this meets you and the other men of your party in the best of health and spirits.

Your ever well-wisher,
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

Undoubtedly *saṅkīrtana* can be difficult, but if we are sincere and continue distributing books, then, as Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “It seems like play to [us].”

In the purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.13.55 Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that a pure devotee doesn’t have a material body, because he is “surcharged with the current of the Lord’s identical interest.” What is that identical interest? Kṛṣṇa wants everyone to go back to Him because He’s everyone’s well-wishing father. Prabhupāda also wanted that. He was filled with *kṛṣṇa-prema*, and when he touched a sincere soul’s heart, the spiritual current from Prabhupāda would inspire that soul to become Kṛṣṇa conscious. Then that soul would be inspired to do what Prabhupāda did—preach. This current of Prabhupāda’s mercy is still flowing all over the planet in the form of book distribution, and in many other ways. The current is similar to electricity. If someone touches an electric wire he gets shocked, and if another person touches him he also gets shocked, and if a hundred people touch in this way they will all get an electric shock. Prabhupāda once said, “If they read one line of my books, it can change their life.” That’s because every word is connected with the current of Prabhupāda’s and Kṛṣṇa’s mercy flowing from the spiritual world. The more this current is transmitted, the more the lives of the people will light up with the happiness of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Śrīla Prabhupāda once said this period in history would be remembered as the time when the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement saved the world in its darkest hour. It’s hard to see that now, because there is still relatively little interest in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We don’t know what the future holds. But Prabhupāda, who is totally connected to Kṛṣṇa, knows. Christianity was not a significant religion until two hundred years after Christ departed. Now by some estimates there are more than two billion Christians on the planet. We may see Kṛṣṇa consciousness bring about a revolution in society in our lifetimes, or we may not, but when Śrīla Prabhupāda says something it must be taken very seriously. And after all, we are only a little over five hundred years into the ten thousand years of this Kali-yuga known as the Golden Era of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. When we consider how much Kṛṣṇa consciousness has spread in less than fifty years since Prabhupāda founded ISKCON, we should have great hope.

One may ask what need is there for another book about book distribution since we already have *Preaching Is the Essence*, “Distribute Books, Distribute Books Distribute Books,” *The Nectar of Book Distribution*, and others. All I can reply is *ānandāmbudhi-varadhanam*—the *saṅkīrtana* movement is an ever-increasing ocean of bliss. This book is an attempt to increase this ocean of book distribution.

I’m not a writer; I’m a book distributor. But as the minister of book distribution, I have as one of my services to try to encourage the book distributors. One way I do that is by sending out *saṅkīrtana* stories to the world of book distributors through a conference called “BDN,” or “Book Distribution Nectar.” Through the years I’ve collected hundreds of interesting stories. Many devotees asked me to compile them into a book so they wouldn’t be forgotten over time. So, that’s the main purpose for this book. I

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

hope it inspires those who are already distributing books and pray it will inspire others to take up this glorious activity.

Before the stories or comments I've put the name of the devotee speaking them. I didn't include a biography of everyone in the back of the book, as was done in *The Nectar of Book Distribution*, because there are too many devotees. Although I'm not a writer, book distribution has been my service for over thirty years, and so Kṛṣṇa has inspired me to write much more than I thought I would. To avoid seeing my name before everything I've written in the book, I've put my writings in italics.

A main feature of this book is a series of quotes from Śrīla Prabhupāda expressing the importance of book distribution. Another comprises descriptions of the many ways one can distribute books.

I pray that this book will inspire devotees around the world who are distributing books to continue with greater determination, and that it will inspire those who are not engaged in this activity to somehow take it up in whatever small or big way they can.

Vijaya Dāsa
Minister of Book Distribution

PREFACE

There is some dispute about where book distribution started. Some say San Francisco, some say Montreal. But it's certain that big book distribution began in New York City. Śrīla Prabhupāda came to the US with two hundred three-volume sets of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*'s First Canto—six hundred books. He would sell them to bookstores on consignment. He would also sell them to people who came to his programs. The price was \$18. Many devotees from the early days still have those priceless original First Canto sets that they personally bought from Śrīla Prabhupāda. So Śrīla Prabhupāda was the first big-book distributor in the West.

But the first English Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava book to appear in the West was *Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu: His Life and Precepts*, by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, who sent it to McGill University in Montreal, Canada. This momentous event took place in 1896, the same year Śrīla Prabhupāda appeared on this planet. Śrīla Bhaktivinoda was setting the stage for what would happen in the West seven decades later—Śrīla Prabhupāda's founding of a worldwide movement that would change the lives of millions.

It was Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's son, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, who started book distribution in a big way after establishing the Bhagwat Press in 1915 and the Gauḍīya Maṭha in 1918. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta continued his father's Bengali-language magazine, the *Sajjana-tosaṇī* ("Satisfaction of the Devotees") and began an English-language version called *The Harmonist*. He also printed the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and *Bhagavad-gītā* with commentary. Later he established the Gauḍiyā Printing Works and published the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (with annotations) and the *Caitanya-bhāgavata*. Many more books would follow. In one temple he started he installed the printing press in the temple room because he knew that the Lord would be pleased to hear His words being printed. If one of his disciples went out and distributed even one magazine, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta would express his great pleasure to that disciple. He called book distribution "the *bṛhat-mṛdaṅga*," "the great *mṛdaṅga*." The traditional *saṅkīrtana* party, with congregational chanting of the holy name accompanied by *karatālas* and *mṛdaṅga*, could be heard for maybe a few blocks, but the *bṛhat-mṛdaṅga* could spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world. On a walk with Śrīla Prabhupāda, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī instructed him, "If you ever get money, print books." Prabhupāda didn't forget this instruction. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī considered book distribution so important that when there was some friction among the devotees in the temple/ashram at Bhagbazar, the Gauḍiyā Math's center in Calcutta, he said, "It would be better to take the marble from the walls and secure money. If I could do this and print books, that would be better."

In his *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in the Concluding Words:

If there is any credit to my activities of translating, it is all due to His Divine Grace [Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura]. Certainly if His Divine Grace were physically present at this time, it would have been a great occasion for jubilation, but even though he is not physically present, I am confident that he is very much pleased by this work of translation. He was very fond of seeing many books published to spread the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Therefore our society, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, has been formed to execute the order of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His Divine Grace Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

In 1965, by the desire of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, Śrīla Prabhupāda had come to America. After a year he had attracted a small following in New York City, and then the movement gradually spread to San Francisco and Montreal. But there wasn't much money in the beginning. So to support the

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

temples Śrīla Prabhupāda asked some devotees to keep the jobs they had, and others to get jobs. In San Francisco Jayānanda Prabhu supported the whole temple by driving a taxi. Other devotees around the small movement also took on some responsibility by getting jobs.

Śrīla Prabhupāda saw that his disciples weren't making much money in their jobs, and that they also didn't like the jobs. So he instructed them to do *harināma-saṅkīrtana* and depend on Kṛṣṇa. This was in 1968. Devotees would go around with a conch shell near the chanting party and collect donations. Whoever gave a donation would receive a *Back to Godhead* magazine. Sometimes devotees were going on *harināma* twelve hours a day. At one point the devotees in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, and London were distributing five thousand BTGs a month.

For some time this was the way information about Kṛṣṇa consciousness was spread, through BTG distribution. Then in 1970 the first volume of *Kṛṣṇa* book was printed, and Srila Prabhupāda had the copies sent to the few centers in North America at that time. The devotees didn't know what to do with the boxes and boxes of books. Then big book distribution began. Devotees would mainly go door to door. At first the books trickled out—if someone distributed five *Kṛṣṇa* books, that was a very big day.

This is a quote from a 1971 *saṅkīrtana* newsletter:

Recently, in an all out program to sell books, the San Francisco Temple has been averaging 20 Krishna Books per day distribution. What is their technique? Keshava Prabhu the temple president says, "Simply we make it our priority activity. All you have to do is want to do it and then try as hard as you can. Everywhere we go, we carry BTGs and Krishna books—on street SKP, door to door, to the laundromat, to the store, everywhere. We have been taxing our brains in so many fancy and complicated ways to try to increase sales, but as it has been experienced, nothing is more successful than simply taking the books personally in hand and going door to door with this Causeless Mercy."

Prabhupāda wanted the books distributed, and that was the main force behind the books going out—the desire of the pure devotee.

The BTG they may read, Śrīla Prabhupāda knew, but most likely they wouldn't keep it. He once said that "BTG is the backbone of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement." But still he wanted the hardbound books distributed more, because people would be more likely to keep a big hardbound book. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* book and the *Bhagavad-gītā* became the main books distributed. He once said, "Book distribution means big books."

Śrīla Prabhupāda once said, "I have only one disease: I always think big." He wanted there to be at least one BBT book in every household on the planet. He understood how important book distribution is, and he passed on this understanding to his disciples. So much so that he once wrote this message on the back of a *saṅkīrtana* newsletter: "Everyone should go with the Sankirtan Party as soon as possible." This message was sent all over ISKCON, and devotees all over the movement were put into a frenzy to distribute Prabhupāda's books. One disciple who reminisced about that period said that when he heard of this letter he, his wife, and another couple got in their car with as many books as they could and went traveling around the country distributing books. From then on it was increase, increase, increase—and then double it.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda, his son Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta, and then his disciple Śrīla Prabhupāda set the pace for Kṛṣṇa consciousness to be spread all over the world.

It is from these great, pure devotees that we members of ISKCON understand the importance of distributing books. They understood how much people need Kṛṣṇa consciousness, that it is their only hope for becoming free of their unfortunate position.

Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself came to help the conditioned souls by speaking the *Bhagavad-gītā*. He knew it would be a guide to millions around the world for millennia to come. A devotee is *para-duḥkha-duḥkhī*, he feels sad to see the suffering of the conditioned souls. And Kṛṣṇa, especially in the form of Lord

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Caitanya, is also known as *para-duḥkha-duḥkhī* (see *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Antya* 3.51). Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu appeared in order to give His mercy to those who were considered the most fallen: Muslims, Māyāvādīs, a leper, Jagāi and Mādhāi, etc. He broke open the storehouse of love of God. One devotee asked Śrīla Prabhupāda, “Why didn’t Lord Caitanya spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world? Since He’s God, He could have.” Prabhupāda replied, “Because He saved it for me.” Śrīla Prabhupāda is continuing the transmission of the mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Śrīla Prabhupāda grasped the essence of the teachings of Lord Caitanya: Spread this message throughout the world.

*yāre dekha, tāre kaha ‘kṛṣṇa’-upadeśa
āmāra ājñāya guru hañā tāra’ ei deśa*

“Instruct everyone to follow the orders of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa as they are given in *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam*. In this way become a spiritual master and try to liberate everyone in this land.” (Cc. *Madhya* 7.128)

Once in 1972 Śrīla Prabhupāda was in Mexico City and had just had a full day of preaching. It was around 10 pm. The temple president timidly entered Prabhupāda’s room and asked if he would like to do one more engagement. Prabhupāda asked him what it was, and the devotee said it was a radio interview and would begin at 12 midnight. Prabhupāda was not so enthusiastic to go to such a late program, but he asked how many people would hear. The devotee said it is the most popular radio show in Mexico City and more than twenty million people would hear it. Prabhupāda then said, “Then we must go!” This was Prabhupāda’s mood: To get the message of Kṛṣṇa out to as many people as possible. But he knew the best way was through book distribution.

He once wrote, “There is no doubt about it, to distribute books is our most important activity. The temple is a place not for eating and sleeping, but as a base from which we send out our soldiers to fight with *māyā*. Fight with *māyā* means to drop thousands and millions of books into the lap of the conditioned souls. Just like during war time the bombs are raining from the sky like anything.”

Other services are also important. We need managers, cooks, *pūjārīs*, etc., and they can’t be neglected but are to be appreciated. So many services are needed to carry on this movement. But still there is something special about book distribution. And the book distributors are also special—Prabhupāda called them “frontline soldiers.”

In the mid 1970s a devotee who was taking care of the *saṅkīrtana* newsletter wrote that the *saṅkīrtana* devotees were in the mood of the *gopīs* because they enjoyed going out to bring others to Kṛṣṇa more than worshipping Kṛṣṇa directly in the temple. Some of the devotees in the temple thought the book distributors were becoming a little bit *sahajiyā*, so they wrote to Śrīla Prabhupāda to learn how he felt about this new understanding. Prabhupāda wrote back that the understanding was correct: the *saṅkīrtana* devotees are in the mood of the *gopīs* because they are bringing others to Kṛṣṇa.

An Interview with Rādhānātha Prabhu

While visiting the ISKCON center in Kansas City in 2005, I had the good fortune of associating with one of the greatest inspirations in ISKCON, Rādhānātha Prabhu. He joined in 1975, in Philadelphia, and shortly thereafter contracted a disease that put him on crutches and then in a wheelchair. Eventually his legs were amputated below the knee. Despite all this, he continued enthusiastically distributing books for thirty-one years! I’m a big fan of his, so I decided to interview him. It’s fortunate that I did because he went back to Kṛṣṇa in 2006. One of Lord Caitanya’s great warriors, he will live on much longer through his reputation than he lived in his body.

Vijaya Dāsa: What year did you start distributing books?

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Rādhānātha Prabhu: I joined in Philadelphia in 1975, and after a few weeks I went out on book distribution during the Christmas marathon. The devotees were making headway distributing books in the subways, airports, and other places.

Vijaya Dāsa: What inspires you to distribute books?

Rādhānātha Prabhu: When I read Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books I get inspired to distribute them. I used to be into welfare work; I always wanted to help people. From reading Prabhupāda’s books I could see that these books are the ultimate solution to all problems. Before I joined I read the *Kṛṣṇa* book that my sister gave me, along with the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *The Perfection of Yoga*, and by reading these books I became very inspired to take up the process and give it to others.

Vijaya Dāsa: What do you say to distribute books?

Rādhānātha Prabhu: It depends on the person’s mentality. The face is the index of the mind. If they look very sinful, I just try my best and pray to Kṛṣṇa. If they say they’re Christian, I say, “Yoga means to think of God always, so this won’t impede your faith in Christ, but it will help you understand what a great devotee Jesus was because He was always thinking of God.” With other people I hand them a *Bhagavad-gītā* and tell them that A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda’s translation has sold more than fifteen million copies and has the best translation, and why it is best. Small books I distribute randomly. I tell them, “This book will help you become more successful in life.”

Vijaya Dāsa: You’ve gone through many trials and tribulations. How is that you’re able to go on despite the difficulty?

Rādhānātha Prabhu: Everyone has trials and tribulations, mental or physical. One way or other the trials are there—there is suffering. But when I think of the difficulties Śrīla Prabhupāda had to endure just to come to America to inspire us, I consider whatever trials I have very insignificant. We have temples, books, *prasādam*, etc. All we have to do is enter the temple, become inspired, and preach. All we have to do is get the books and go out. We should see how fortunate we are and do our best.

A friend of mine has been a nurse for the past twenty years. One day she decided to go out to distribute. She went out and tried her best, but she couldn’t distribute a book. She came back and was feeling a little depressed. But that night she had a dream. Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke to her: “That’s OK. Just keep on trying.” If we just endeavor to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, we’re doing the right thing. Success will come. Success will ultimately come because we’re getting purified. Simply by the desire to get the books out, they will go out.

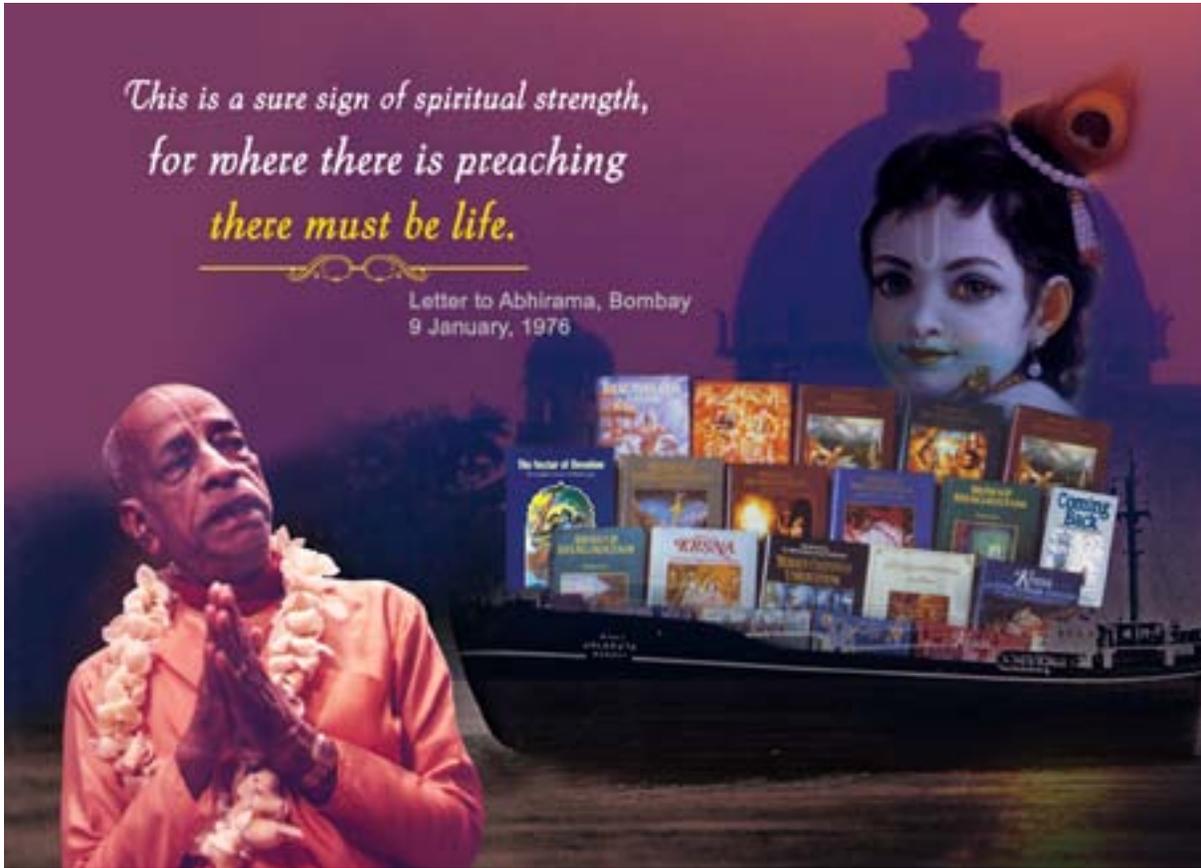
Vijaya Dāsa: What advice do you have for someone that wants to distribute books throughout his or her life?

Rādhānātha Prabhu: Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted all the devotees to learn the art of book distribution. There are so many types of devotional service, but book distribution is especially important. If a devotee distributes his favorite books, he’ll be inspired to distribute them. There should also be a variety of other books, but we should mainly distribute the ones that inspire us the most. This will give you a taste, and you’ll then enjoy distributing books very much. It’s a very wonderful service, and you’ll love to do it.

Vijaya Dāsa: Thank you.

*This is a sure sign of spiritual strength,
for where there is preaching
there must be life.*

Letter to Abhirama, Bombay
9 January, 1976



*Any page you open, that is wonderful reading matter.
My ambition is to spread these books far and wide all
over the world so that everyone shall read at least one of
our books and that will change his life. If only 196
become devotees, that will change the world.*

Letter to Kanandhara, Tokyo
2 May, 1972



Chapter One

Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

Compassion is a quality practically everyone appreciates. It's a symptom of love. The dictionary meaning of *compassion* is "sympathetic concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others." A compassionate person who sees someone suffering will feel pain and want to help. To one degree or another, everyone is suffering in the material world because they've forgotten Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa's kind devotees try to relieve the suffering of the people by giving them Kṛṣṇa.

The Nectar of Devotion says that of all Kṛṣṇa's unlimited qualities, the most prominent is His compassion for the conditioned souls. Some of the ways Kṛṣṇa shows His compassion are by coming Himself and speaking the *Bhagavad-gītā*, leaving us *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, sending His pure devotees to teach us, and descending as Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu to show us how to be devotees.

But why, one might ask, does Kṛṣṇa say in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.68), "For one who explains the secret of the *Bhagavad-gītā* to My devotees, devotional service is guaranteed, and at the end he will come back to me," rather than "For one who explains the secret of the *Bhagavad-gītā* to devotees and nondevotees alike, devotional service is guaranteed . . ." ? It appears that He has compassion not for all conditioned souls but only for His devotees.

Śrīla Prabhupāda answers this question in his purport to *Bhagavad-gītā* 3.29:

Men who are ignorant cannot appreciate activities in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and therefore Lord Kṛṣṇa advises us not to disturb them and simply waste valuable time. But the devotees of the Lord are more kind than the Lord because they understand the purpose of the Lord. Consequently they undertake all kinds of risks, even to the point of approaching ignorant men to try to engage them in the acts of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which are absolutely necessary for the human being.

So Kṛṣṇa is not callous toward the suffering of the nondevotees, but out of compassion toward His devotees He doesn't want them to waste their valuable time with nondevotees who are quite often uninterested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Therefore devotees can be even more kind than the Lord himself because they go to people who are uninterested in Kṛṣṇa and try to help them become interested. When Kṛṣṇa sees the compassion of His devotees, He is so pleased. Imagine a father with many children. One of them leaves the family and takes to the life of a degraded rogue—drinking, carousing, taking drugs, committing crimes. Then one of the boy's brothers goes out of his way to help him. He seeks him out in the seedy part of town, and gradually he helps the wayward boy clean up his life and again become a good man and a good son. How pleased the father would be with his good son who helped the lost son! This is how Kṛṣṇa feels toward devotees who take the trouble to help the degraded conditioned souls who have given up their relationship with their eternal father, Kṛṣṇa.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the most munificent, compassionate incarnation, appeared in this Age of Kali to freely give His mercy to the conditioned souls and relieve their suffering. Extending the compassion of Lord Caitanya to everyone is the essence of the *saṅkīrtana* movement. By performing *harināma-saṅkīrtana* and preaching all over India, He taught us how to be a devotee of Kṛṣṇa and how to have compassion. When a *brāhmaṇa* named Kūrma wanted to leave home and accompany Lord Caitanya in His travels, the Lord told him to stay home and preach. He said, "Instruct everyone to follow the orders of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. In this way on My order become a spiritual master and try to liberate everyone in this land." (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya* 7.128)

In this vein, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in a purport in the Sixth Canto (SB 6.2.36):

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

A Kṛṣṇa conscious person should free himself from the clutches of *māyā*, and he should also be compassionate to all others suffering in those clutches. The activities of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement are meant not only for oneself but for others also. This is the perfection of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. One who is interested in his own salvation is not as advanced in Kṛṣṇa consciousness as one who feels compassion for others and who therefore propagates the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Such an advanced devotee will never fall down, for Kṛṣṇa will give him special protection. That is the sum and substance of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Everyone is like a play toy in the hands of the illusory energy and is acting as she moves him. One should come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness to release oneself and also to release others.

By approaching the conditioned souls to give them knowledge about Kṛṣṇa, one exhibits the highest form of compassion. This is so because all suffering is due to not being Kṛṣṇa conscious. There have been many examples of devotees who had horrible, painful diseases but who were happy because they were Kṛṣṇa conscious, filled with realizations of how they were not the body but the soul within.

There are many philanthropic organizations throughout the world, but they are all concerned with the welfare of the body and not the most important element, the soul. Śrīla Prabhupāda tells a parable about a lady whose husband had fallen into a river but could not swim, so she was crying out for help. A man shows up who tells the lady, “Have no fear, Ma’am, I’m an expert swimmer. I’ll save him.” He dives in and catches hold of the drowning man. But when he gets to shore he finds that he’s only brought back the man’s coat—the man has drowned. This is what all these philanthropic organizations are doing—treating the “coat” of the external body while ignoring the person within, the soul. But the knowledge we distribute tells people how to get to the root of the problem, forgetfulness of Kṛṣṇa.

By nature a devotee of Kṛṣṇa is compassionate. Therefore the history of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava line is replete with great Vaiṣṇavas who dedicated their lives to preaching. Among them is the towering figure of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, who in the late nineteenth century organized hundreds of local *bhakti* groups in Bengal, spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness to thousands. Seeing the need for a powerful preacher to expand his mission, he prayed for a “Ray of Viṣṇu” and was blessed with a son who grew up to become the great stalwart devotee Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

As we have recounted in our Prologue, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta began the mass printing and distribution of Kṛṣṇa conscious literature. He established sixty-four *maṭhas* (ashram/temples) throughout India and sent his disciples to other countries to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Upon meeting Abhaya Caran De (Śrīla Prabhupāda) in 1922, he instructed him to teach the message of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu to the English-speaking world. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta wrote: “I wish that every selfless, tender-hearted person of the Gauḍīya Maṭha will be prepared to shed two hundred gallons of blood for the nourishment of the spiritual corpus of every individual of this world.” He also said, in the same compassionate mood, “Every single door must be knocked on at least once.”

Then Śrīla Prabhupāda, the epitome of compassion, crossed two oceans, braving two heart attacks and serious seasickness, just to show compassion to the conditioned souls. He lived with a motley group of dropouts and hippies in New York, cooking for them and cleaning up after them. They were babies in spiritual life, and he would spoon-feed them very carefully, so expertly that many devoted their lives to him. He would rise in the wee hours of the night to write the pure message of *bhakti* so that people throughout the world, for thousands of years to come, could take advantage of this rare human form of life and hear about Kṛṣṇa. Then he would preach for hours to whoever would listen. A boy named David was staying with him in a loft; he was the first one to live with Śrīla Prabhupāda in America. Prabhupāda had hopes that David would become a *brahmacārī* and assist him in preaching around the world. But then David became crazy on LSD and threatened to seriously harm Śrīla Prabhupāda. Prabhupāda left the apartment, alarmed but not discouraged. And this incident turned out to be a

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

blessing in disguise. When Prabhupāda explained his situation to some of the young men who had been visiting him, they arranged to rent the first temple in ISKCON, 26 Second Avenue. That was the beginning, and for the next eleven years Śrīla Prabhupāda's compassion spread far and wide. By the time he departed this world in 1977 he had established 108 temples around the world.

We understand from reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books that we should desire to get free from *māyā*. If we also try to help others get free of *māyā*, Kṛṣṇa is very pleased. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (4.31.19) Nārada Muni tells the Pracetas that showing compassion toward others (*dayayā sarva-bhūteṣu*) is an essential part of pleasing Kṛṣṇa. One of the reasons Kṛṣṇa descends is to enlighten the bewildered fallen souls, so when He sees someone helping Him, how much pleased He is! People all over the world are bewildered by *māyā*, thinking "I'm this body." No other society in the world is teaching the basic understanding of spiritual life, that one is *not* the boy, but this is the first point that Kṛṣṇa makes in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and it's a point Prabhupāda made again and again. We are so fortunate! If we can help others become fortunate by giving them Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda, we will become even more fortunate.

If we don't feel compassion for the conditioned souls, we should desire to develop it. Everyone is suffering in the prison of birth and death, and their material desires are the bars that keep them locked up. Kṛṣṇa's illusory energy makes them think everything is okay, but as Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says, they are "sleeping on the lap of the witch Māyā." Our desire should be to free ourselves and to free others. Let's widen our circle of compassion, seeing everyone as part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa. In this way we will increase the family of devotees and decrease the inmates in the prison of the material world. If we're compassionate we're happy because we've gone beyond selfishness; conversely, the more selfish we are, the more unhappy we are. Vāsudeva Daṭṭa was so compassionate that if a worm fell off his leprosy sores he would pick it up and put it back. This is inconceivable compassion. Lord Caitanya was so pleased with him that He embraced him, and as soon as He did so the leprosy disappeared and Vāsudeva had a beautiful form. Then he lamented, thinking he would become proud. Lord Caitanya assured him, "If you chant the holy name, you will not become proud."

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Quotes on Compassion from Śāstra and Previous Ācāryas

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

When will Lord Nityānanda shower mercy upon me? When will I reject the world of *māyā*? Bestow unto me the shade of Your lotus feet. Let the right to preach the name be mine. When, oh when will that day be mine?

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.2.2, purport

Sometimes religious men who preach the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement for the benefit of the entire populace are arrested and harassed by the police and courts. The Viṣṇudūtas, who are Vaiṣṇavas, lamented for these very regrettable facts. Because of their spiritual compassion for all the fallen souls, Vaiṣṇavas go out to preach according to the standard method of all religious principles, but unfortunately, because of the influence of Kali-yuga, Vaiṣṇavas who have dedicated their lives to preaching the glories of the Lord are sometimes harassed and punished by courts on false charges of disturbing the peace.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.1.6, purport

A Vaiṣṇava is *para-duḥkha-duḥkhī*; in other words, he has no personal troubles, but he is very unhappy to see others in trouble. Prahlāda Mahārāja said, “My Lord, I have no personal problems, for I have learned how to glorify Your transcendental qualities and thus enter a trance of ecstasy. I do have a problem, however, for I am simply thinking of these rascals and fools who are busy with *māyā-sukha*, temporary happiness, without knowledge of devotional service unto You.” This is the problem faced by a Vaiṣṇava. Because a Vaiṣṇava fully takes shelter of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, he personally has no problems, but because he is compassionate toward the fallen, conditioned souls, he is always thinking of plans to save them from their hellish life in this body and the next. Parīkṣit Mahārāja, therefore, anxiously wanted to know from Śukadeva Gosvāmī how humanity can be saved from gliding down to hell. Śukadeva Gosvāmī had already explained how people enter hellish life, and he could also explain how they could be saved from it. Intelligent men must take advantage of these instructions. Unfortunately, however, the entire world is lacking Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and therefore people are suffering from the grossest ignorance and do not even believe in a life after this one. To convince them of their next life is very difficult because they have become almost mad in their pursuit of material enjoyment. Nevertheless, our duty, the duty of all sane men, is to save them.

* * *

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 5.8.9

When a person is advanced in spiritual consciousness or Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he naturally becomes very sympathetic toward all living entities suffering in the material world. Naturally such an advanced person thinks of the suffering of the people. If one is sympathetic to suffering humanity, he should try to elevate people from material consciousness to spiritual consciousness. By the grace of Kṛṣṇa, we may raise a person to spiritual consciousness if we ourselves follow the rules and regulations. If we give up our own spiritual activities and simply become concerned with the bodily comforts of others, we will fall into a dangerous position.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.29.1b

[TRANSLATION:] If a living entity is developed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and is merciful to others, and if his spiritual knowledge of self-realization is perfect, he will immediately attain liberation from the bondage of material existence.

[PURPORT:] In this verse the words *dayā jīveṣu*, meaning “mercy to other living entities,” indicate that a living entity must be merciful to other living entities if he wishes to make progress in self-realization. This means he must preach this knowledge after perfecting himself and understanding his own position as an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa. Preaching this is showing real mercy to living entities. Other types of humanitarian work may be temporarily beneficial for the body, but because a living entity is spirit soul, ultimately one can show him real mercy only by revealing knowledge of his spiritual existence. As Caitanya Mahāprabhu says, *jīvera ‘svarūpa’ haya—kṛṣṇera ‘nitya-dāsa’*: “Every living entity is constitutionally a servant of Kṛṣṇa.” One should know this fact perfectly and should preach it to the mass of people. If one realizes that he is an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa but does not preach it, his realization is imperfect. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura therefore sings, *duṣṭa mana, tumi kisera vaiṣṇava? pratiṣṭhāra tare, nirjanera ghare, tava hari-nāma kevala kaitava*: “My dear mind, what kind of Vaiṣṇava are you? Simply for false prestige and a material reputation you are chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* in a solitary place.” In this way people who do not preach are criticized. There are many Vaiṣṇavas in Vṛndāvana who do not like preaching; they chiefly try to imitate Haridāsa Ṭhākura. The actual result of their so-called chanting in a secluded place, however, is that they sleep and think of women and money. Similarly, one who simply engages in temple worship but does not see to the interests of the mass of people or cannot recognize devotees is called a *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī*.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.5.46, purport

Engaged in external activities, they kill the internal vision. The Lord’s devotees, however, do not mind the offenses of the foolish in their many gross and subtle bodily endeavors. The Lord’s devotees continue to bestow the blessings of devotion upon all such offenders without hesitation. That is the nature of devotees.

* * *

Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 13.67, purport

A bona fide devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa is always pained to see the fallen condition of the whole world.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura used to say, “There is no scarcity of anything within this world. The only scarcity is of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.” That is the vision of all pure devotees. Because of this lack of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in human society, people are suffering terribly, being merged in an ocean of nescience and sense gratification. A devotee onlooker is very much aggrieved to see such a situation in the world.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.12.36

[TRANSLATION:] The self-effulgent Vaikuṅṭha planets, by whose illumination alone all the illuminating planets within this material world give off reflected light, cannot be reached by those who are not merciful to other living entities. Only persons who constantly engage in welfare activities for other living entities can reach the Vaikuṅṭha planets.

[PURPORT:] From this material world . . . people can be transferred to Vaikuṅṭhaloka if they incessantly engage in welfare activities for all other living entities. Such incessant welfare activities can really be performed only in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. There is no philanthropic work within this material world but Kṛṣṇa consciousness that can engage a person twenty-four hours a day.

A Kṛṣṇa conscious being is always engaged in planning how to take all of suffering humanity back home, back to Godhead. Even if one is not successful in reclaiming all the fallen souls back to Godhead, still, because he is Kṛṣṇa conscious, his path to Vaikuṅṭhaloka is open. He personally becomes qualified to enter the Vaikuṅṭhalokas, and if anyone follows such a devotee, he also enters into Vaikuṅṭhaloka.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.9.12 purport

The Lord is so satisfied with His pure devotees that He wants to give them the credit for missionary success, although He could do the work personally. This is the sign of His satisfaction with His pure, *niṣkāma* devotees, compared to the *sakāma* devotees. By such transcendental activities the Lord simultaneously becomes free from the charge of partiality and exhibits His pleasure with the devotees.

Now a question arises: If the Lord is sitting in the hearts of nondevotees, why are they not moved to become devotees? It may be answered that the stubborn nondevotees are like the barren land or alkaline field, where no agricultural activities can be successful. As part and parcel of the Lord, every individual living entity has a minute quantity of independence, and by misuse of this minute independence the nondevotees commit offense after offense, to both the Lord and His pure devotees engaged in missionary work. As a result of such acts, they become as barren as an alkaline field, where there is no strength to produce.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.5.4

[TRANSLATION:] O my lord, great philanthropic souls travel on the earth on behalf of the Supreme Personality of Godhead to show compassion to the fallen souls who are averse to the sense of subordination to the Lord.

[PURPORT:] To be obedient to the wishes of the Supreme Lord is the natural position of every living entity. But due only to past misdeeds, a living being becomes averse to the sense of subordination

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

to the Lord and suffers all the miseries of material existence. No one has anything to do but render devotional service to the Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Therefore any activity other than transcendental loving service to the Lord is more or less a rebellious action against the supreme will. All fruitive activity, empirical philosophy, and mysticism are more or less against the sense of subordination to the Lord, and any living entity engaged in such rebellious activity is more or less condemned by the laws of material nature, which work under the subordination of the Lord. Great unalloyed devotees of the Lord are compassionate towards the fallen, and therefore they travel all over the world with the mission of bringing souls back to Godhead, back to home. Such pure devotees of the Lord carry the message of Godhead in order to deliver the fallen souls, and therefore the common man who is bewildered by the influence of the external energy of the Lord should avail himself of their association.

* * *

Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya 3.50–52

[TRANSLATION, 50–51:] Lord Caitanya said, “My dear Ṭhākura Haridāsa, in this Age of Kali most people are bereft of Vedic culture, and therefore they are called *yavanas*. They are concerned only with killing cows and brahminical culture. In this way they all engage in sinful acts. How will these *yavanas* be delivered? To My great unhappiness, I do not see any way.”

[PURPORT, 51:] This verse reveals the significance of Lord Śrī Caitanya’s appearance as *patita-pāvana*, the deliverer of all the fallen souls. Śrīla Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura sings, *patita-pāvana-hetu tava avatāra*: “O my Lord, You have appeared just to deliver all the fallen souls.” *Mo-sama patita prabhu nā pāibe āra*: “And among all the fallen souls, I am the lowest.” How Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu was always thinking about the deliverance of the fallen souls is shown by the statement *e duḥkha apāra* (“It is My great unhappiness”). This statement indicates that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, who is the Supreme Personality of Godhead Kṛṣṇa Himself, is always very unhappy to see the fallen souls in the material world. Therefore He Himself comes as He is, or He comes as a devotee in the form of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, to deliver love of Kṛṣṇa directly to the fallen souls. *Namo mahā-vadānyāya kṛṣṇa-prema-pradāya te*. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is so merciful that He not only gives knowledge of Kṛṣṇa but by His practical activities teaches everyone how to love Kṛṣṇa (*kṛṣṇa-prema-pradāya te*).

Those who are following in the footsteps of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu should take the Lord’s mission most seriously. In this Age of Kali, people are gradually becoming less than animals. Nevertheless, although they are eating the flesh of cows and are envious of brahminical culture, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is considering how to deliver them from this horrible condition of life. . . . Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu was always anxious to deliver the fallen souls because their fallen condition gave Him great unhappiness. That is the platform on which one can propagate the mission of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

[TRANSLATION, 52:] Haridāsa Ṭhākura replied, “My dear Lord, do not be in anxiety. Do not be unhappy to see the condition of the *yavanas* in material existence.”

[PURPORT:] These words of Haridāsa Ṭhākura’s are just befitting a devotee who has dedicated his life and soul to the service of the Lord. When the Lord is unhappy because of the condition of the fallen souls, the devotee consoles Him, saying, “My dear Lord, do not be in anxiety.” This is service. Everyone should adopt the cause of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu to try to relieve Him from the anxiety He feels. This is actually service to the Lord. One who tries to relieve Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s anxiety for the fallen souls is certainly a most dear and confidential devotee of the Lord. . . .

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 5.5.24, purport

One who has actually assimilated the essence of the *Vedas* can preach the truth. He is compassionate to the conditioned souls, who are suffering the threefold miseries of this conditional world due to their not being Kṛṣṇa conscious. A *brāhmaṇa* should take pity on the people and preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness in order to elevate them. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, personally descends into this universe from the spiritual kingdom to teach conditioned souls about the values of spiritual life. He tries to induce them to surrender unto Him. Similarly, the *brāhmaṇas* do the same thing. After assimilating the Vedic instructions they assist the Supreme Lord in His endeavor to deliver the conditioned souls. The *brāhmaṇas* are very dear to the Supreme Lord due to their high *sattva-guṇa* qualities, and they also engage in welfare activities for all conditioned souls in the material world.

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

Śrīla Prabhupāda had the *kṣatriya* spirit of fighting Māyā and the Vaiṣṇava-*brāhmaṇa* spirit of giving Kṛṣṇa to the suffering, poverty-stricken souls. This was his mood. His disciples picked up that mood as well. He was so touched by the devotees' enthusiasm. At one point during a class he started crying and said, "You are helping me so much in this mission to please my spiritual master." He was overwhelmed. So we should understand that we are always giving great pleasure to both Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda by going out and preaching. By doing this activity, we ourselves make very rapid advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and we are helping the conditioned souls. It is an all-around successful program.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.30.37

[TRANSLATION:] Dear Lord, Your personal associates, devotees, wander all over the world to purify even the holy places of pilgrimage. Is not such activity pleasing to those who are actually afraid of material existence?

[PURPORT:] There are two kinds of devotees. One is called *goṣṭhyānandī* and the other *bhajanānandī*. The word *bhajanānandī* refers to the devotee who does not move but remains in one place. Such a devotee is always engaged in the devotional service of the Lord. He chants the *mahā-mantra* as taught by many *ācāryas* and sometimes goes out for preaching work. The *goṣṭhyānandī* is one who desires to increase the number of devotees all over the world. He travels all over the world just to purify the world and the people residing in it. Caitanya Mahāprabhu advised:

*prṭhivīte āche yata nagarādi grāma
sarvatra pracāra haibe mora nāma*

Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu wanted His followers to move all over the world to preach in every town and village. In the Caitanya *sampradāya* those who strictly follow the principles of Lord Caitanya must travel all over the world to preach the message of Lord Caitanya, which is the same as preaching the words of Kṛṣṇa—*Bhagavad-gītā*—and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. The more the devotees preach the principles of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, the more people throughout the world will benefit.

* * *

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.29.46, purport

The word *ātma-bhāvitaḥ* also indicates that a devotee is always engaged in preaching to deliver the conditioned souls. It is said of the Six Gosvāmīs: *nānā-śāstra-vicāraṇaika-nipūṇau sad-dharma-saṁsthāpakau lokānām hita-kāriṇau*. A pure devotee of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is always thinking of how the fallen, conditioned souls can be delivered. The Supreme Personality of Godhead, influenced by the merciful devotees' attempt to deliver the fallen souls, enlightens the people in general from within by His causeless mercy.

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

Saṅkīrtana devotees relish this purport because they often see it confirmed on *saṅkīrtana*. People will say they're not interested and twenty seconds later ask, "How much do you want for the book?" As they're walking away they may say, "Why did I get this book?" This is the mercy of the Lord—He enlightens them from within.

I mostly distribute from a book table. When I'm in good consciousness, praying for compassion and a sincere desire to serve, it's amazing how many people just come to my table and want books. But if I'm attached to the results or polluted with material desires, even though I'm motioning people to come to the table and they come, no one takes a book. A *saṅkīrtana* devotee feels this reciprocation from Kṛṣṇa and very much feels the presence of Kṛṣṇa on *saṅkīrtana* because of this reciprocation. Sometimes *saṅkīrtana* devotees become overwhelmed with happiness upon feeling Kṛṣṇa's clear reciprocation on *saṅkīrtana*. And this is what keeps many of them going out year after year after year.

Some devotees go on *saṅkīrtana* not because they have compassion for the conditioned souls but because they know their spiritual master is pleased if they do it or they know Kṛṣṇa is pleased and that some people will benefit. But not so much because of compassion. I'm one of them; maybe sometimes there's a little compassion, but it isn't a driving force. Compassion is a very deep quality that increases as one's self-realization increases, as one's devotion to Kṛṣṇa increases.

Among all the devotees of Lord Caitanya, the one who exemplifies compassion the most is Vāsudeva Daṭṭa. He prayed to Lord Caitanya, "My Lord, my heart breaks to see the sufferings of all the conditioned souls; therefore please transfer the karma of their sinful lives upon my head. Let me suffer perpetually in a hellish condition, accepting all the sinful reactions of all living entities. Please finish their diseased material life." When Lord Caitanya heard this he began crying and trembling, and in a faltering voice He replied, "I can understand why you've said this: because you are the incarnation of Prahlāda Mahārāja. Lord Kṛṣṇa has bestowed His complete mercy upon you. There is no doubt about it."

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.31.19, purport

[TRANSLATION:] By showing mercy to all living entities, being satisfied somehow or other and controlling the senses from sense enjoyment, one can very quickly satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Janārdana.

[PURPORT:] These are some of the ways in which the Supreme Personality of Godhead can be satisfied by the devotee. The first item mentioned is *dayayā sarva-bhūteṣu*, showing mercy to all conditioned souls. The best way to show mercy is to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The entire world is

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

suffering for want of this knowledge. People should know that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is the original cause of everything. Knowing this, everyone should directly engage in His devotional service. Those who are actually learned, advanced in spiritual understanding, should preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world so that people may take to it and make their lives successful.

The word *sarva-bhūteṣu* is significant because it applies not only to human beings but to all species of life. The devotee can do good not only to humanity but to all living entities as well. Everyone can benefit spiritually by the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*. When the transcendental vibration of Hare Kṛṣṇa is sounded, even the trees, animals, and insects benefit. Thus when one chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* loudly, he actually shows mercy to all living entities. To spread the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement throughout the world, the devotees should be satisfied in all conditions.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.21.31

[One's] energy can be utilized for real self-interest if one is compassionate. A person in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, a devotee of the Lord, is always compassionate. He is not satisfied that only he himself is a devotee, but he tries to distribute the knowledge of devotional service to everyone. There are many devotees of the Lord who faced many risks in distributing the devotional service of the Lord to people in general. That should be done.

It is also said that a person who goes to the temple of the Lord and worships with great devotion but who does not show sympathy to people in general or show respect to other devotees is considered to be a third-class devotee. The second-class devotee is he who is merciful and compassionate to the fallen souls. The second-class devotee is always cognizant of his position as an eternal servant of the Lord; he therefore makes friendships with devotees of the Lord, acts compassionately toward the general public in teaching them devotional service, and refuses to cooperate or associate with nondevotees. As long as one is not compassionate to people in general in his devotional service to the Lord, he is a third-class devotee. The first-class devotee gives assurance to every living being that there is no fear of this material existence: “Let us live in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and conquer the nescience of material existence.”

* * *

Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi 3.98

[TRANSLATION:] Seeing the activities of the world, the Ācārya felt compassion and began to ponder how He could act for the people's benefit.

[PURPORT:] This sort of serious interest in the welfare of the public makes one a bona fide *ācārya*. An *ācārya* does not exploit his followers. Since the *ācārya* is a confidential servitor of the Lord, his heart is always full of compassion for humanity in its suffering. He knows that all suffering is due to the absence of devotional service to the Lord, and therefore he always tries to find ways to change people's activities, making them favorable for the attainment of devotion. That is the qualification of an *ācārya*. Although Śrī Advaita Prabhu Himself was powerful enough to do the work, as a submissive servitor He thought that without the personal appearance of the Lord, no one could improve the fallen condition of society.

In the grim clutches of *māyā*, the first-class prisoners of this material world wrongly think themselves happy because they are rich, powerful, resourceful, and so on. These foolish creatures do not know that they are nothing but play dolls in the hands of the material nature and that at any moment material nature's pitiless intrigues can crush to dust all their plans for godless activities. Such foolish

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

prisoners cannot see that however they improve their position by artificial means, the calamities of repeated birth, death, disease, and old age are always beyond the jurisdiction of their control. Foolish as they are, they neglect these major problems of life and busy themselves with false things that cannot help them solve their real problems. They know that they do not want to suffer death or the pangs of disease and old age, but under the influence of the illusory energy, they are grossly negligent and therefore do nothing to solve the problems. This is called *māyā*. People held in the grip of *māyā* are thrown into oblivion after death, and as a result of their *karma*, in the next life they become dogs or gods, although most of them become dogs. To become gods in the next life, they must engage in the devotional service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead; otherwise, they are sure to become dogs or hogs in terms of the laws of nature.

The third-class prisoners, being less materially opulent than the first-class prisoners, endeavor to imitate them, for they also have no information of the real nature of their imprisonment. Thus they also are misled by the illusory material nature. The function of the *ācārya*, however, is to change the activities of both the first-class and third-class prisoners for their real benefit. This endeavor makes him a very dear devotee of the Lord, who says clearly in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that no one in human society is dearer to Him than a devotee who constantly engages in His service by finding ways to preach the message of Godhead for the real benefit of the world. The so-called *ācāryas* of the Age of Kali are more concerned with exploiting the resources of their followers than mitigating their miseries; but Śrī Advaita Prabhu, as an ideal *ācārya*, was concerned with improving the condition of the world situation.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.22.47, purport

Great personalities of the material world are very eager to render welfare service to human society, but actually no one can render better service than one who distributes the knowledge of spiritual realization in relation with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. All living entities are within the clutches of the illusory energy. Forgetting their real identity, they hover in material existence, transmigrating from one body to another in search of a peaceful life. Since these living entities have very little knowledge of self-realization, they are not getting any relief, although they are very anxious to attain peace of mind and some substantial happiness. Saintly persons like the Kumāras, Nārada, Prahlāda, Janaka, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, and Kapiladeva, as well as the followers of such authorities as the Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* and their servants, can render a valuable service to humanity by disseminating knowledge of the relationship between the Supreme Personality of Godhead and the living entity. Such knowledge is the perfect benediction for humanity.

Knowledge of Kṛṣṇa is such a great gift that it is impossible to repay the benefactor. Therefore Pṛthu Mahārāja requested the Kumāras to be satisfied by their own benevolent activities in delivering souls from the clutches of *māyā*. The King saw that there was no other way to satisfy them for their exalted activities. The word *vinoda-pātram* can be divided into two words, *vinā* and *uda-pātram*, or can be understood as one word, *vinoda-pātram*, which means “joker.” A joker’s activities simply arouse laughter, and a person who tries to repay the spiritual master or teacher of the transcendental message of Kṛṣṇa becomes a laughingstock just like a joker because it is not possible to repay such a debt. The best friend and benefactor of all people is one who awakens humanity to its original Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.25.21

[TRANSLATION:] The symptoms of a *sādhu* are that he is tolerant, merciful, and friendly to all

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

living entities. He has no enemies, he is peaceful, he abides by the scriptures, and all his characteristics are sublime.

[PURPORT:] A *sādhū*, as described above, is a devotee of the Lord. His concern, therefore, is to enlighten people in devotional service to the Lord. That is his mercy. He knows that without devotional service to the Lord, human life is spoiled. A devotee travels all over the country, from door to door, preaching “Be Kṛṣṇa conscious. Be a devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Don’t spoil your life in simply fulfilling your animal propensities. Human life is meant for self-realization, or Kṛṣṇa consciousness.” These are the words of a *sādhū*. He is not satisfied with his own liberation. He always thinks about others. He is the most compassionate personality towards all the fallen souls. One of his qualifications, therefore, is *karuṇikā*, great mercy to the fallen souls. While engaged in preaching work, he has to meet with so many opposing elements, and therefore the *sādhū*, or devotee of the Lord, has to be very tolerant. Someone may ill-treat him because the conditioned souls are not prepared to receive the transcendental knowledge of devotional service. They do not like it; that is their disease. The *sādhū* has the thankless task of impressing upon them the importance of devotional service. Sometimes devotees are personally attacked with violence. Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, Haridāsa Ṭhākura was caned in twenty-two marketplaces, and Lord Caitanya’s principal assistant, Nityānanda, was violently attacked by Jagāi and Mādhāi. But still they were tolerant because their mission was to deliver the fallen souls. One of the qualifications of a *sādhū* is that he is very tolerant and is merciful to all fallen souls. He is merciful because he is the well-wisher of all living entities. He is not only a well-wisher of human society, but a well-wisher of animal society as well. It is said here, *sarva-dehinām*, which indicates all living entities who have accepted material bodies. Not only does the human being have a material body, but other living entities, such as cats and dogs, also have material bodies. The devotee of the Lord is merciful to everyone—the cats, dogs, trees, etc. He treats all living entities in such a way that they can ultimately get salvation from this material entanglement. Śivānanda Sena, one of the disciples of Lord Caitanya, gave liberation to a dog by treating the dog transcendently. There are many instances where a dog got salvation by association with a *sādhū*, because a *sādhū* engages in the highest philanthropic activities for the benediction of all living entities. Yet although a *sādhū* is not inimical towards anyone, the world is so ungrateful that even a *sādhū* has many enemies.

What is the difference between an enemy and a friend? It is a difference in behavior. A *sādhū* behaves with all conditioned souls for their ultimate relief from material entanglement. Therefore, no one can be more friendly than a *sādhū* in relieving a conditioned soul. A *sādhū* is calm, and he quietly and peacefully follows the principles of scripture.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.17. 26

[TRANSLATION:] “Any cruel person—be he a man, woman, or impotent eunuch—who is only interested in his personal maintenance and has no compassion for other living entities may be killed by the king. Such killing can never be considered actual killing.”

[PURPORT:] The planet earth is actually a woman in her constitutional form, and as such she needs to be protected by the king. Pṛthu Mahārāja argues, however, that if a citizen within the state—be he man, woman, or eunuch—is not compassionate upon his fellow men, he or she may be killed by the king, and such killing is never to be considered actual killing. As far as the field of spiritual activities is concerned, when a devotee is self-satisfied and does not preach the glories of Kṛṣṇa, he is not considered a first-class devotee. A devotee who tries to preach, who has compassion upon innocent persons who have no knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, is a superior devotee. In his prayer to the Lord, Prahāda Mahārāja said that he was not personally interested in liberation from this material world; rather, he did not wish to be

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

liberated from this material condition until all fallen souls were delivered. Even in the material field, if a person is not interested in others' welfare, he should be considered to be condemned by the Personality of Godhead or His incarnation like Pṛthu Mahārāja.

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Quotes on Compassion from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Followers

His Holiness Gour Govinda Swami

Our activity is preaching. Flood the whole world with the message of Mahāprabhu. We are *goṣṭhyānandīs*, not *bhajanānandīs*. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī once said, *prāṇa āche yānra, sei hetu pracāra*: “He who has life is preaching.” The preacher’s heart bleeds when he sees the suffering of the *jīvas*. So he goes out, not caring anything for himself. Go out and preach! Inculcate Kṛṣṇa consciousness into them. Let their suffering be done away with forever. Yes, this is the heart of a *sādhu*. Bhaktivinoda Thākura, at the end of his days, was so old that his eyelids had to be lifted by someone so that he could see. At that time he said, “I want a horse to ride on to go out and preach.” He was very, very old, practically an invalid, but such a spirit was there. A preacher’s heart is pierced to see the people suffering for want of Kṛṣṇa consciousness: “Oh, he is Kṛṣṇa’s servant! Out of ignorance he is suffering. He is not engaged in *bhajan*. Let me go and inculcate Kṛṣṇa consciousness into him. Let me engage him in Kṛṣṇa’s service.” One who does not preach has no life. Lifeless. He is a dead body. Those who go out and preach are not dead bodies. They have life.

* * *

His Holiness Rādhānātha Swami

The devotees are going out each day to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. This is such a wonderful, wonderful service. To give a person medical assistance is good because it gives him relief from bodily suffering for some time, but to give him the mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, as Śrīla Prabhupāda has revealed it to the world through his books, is to give him the opportunity to enter into the spiritual world. It is to give him the only real solution to his problems of life, Kṛṣṇa consciousness. So those who perform this work in sincere compassion are actually performing the greatest welfare activity in all creation. And what you give through Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books should also be exemplified in your lives. In this Age of Kali the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* is the most sublime means of purifying the heart. This is the conclusion of all the writings of the great saints. Let us distribute these books with great enthusiasm, and let us show the world how wonderful and joyful life can be in the association of devotees chanting the holy name.

* * *

His Holiness Śivarāma Swami

At Chicago’s O’Hare airport the devotees would sell books just where the arriving passengers entered the terminal. This was also the place where people would greet and pick up arriving travelers. Sometimes there would be as many as eight or ten devotees in the area, and people waiting would stand in a circle, watching devotees sell books. It was like a spectator sport.

Businessmen who were impressed with devotees’ selling skills would often approach devotees with job offers. I also got a few offers. On one occasion, after I’d sold a book, a well-dressed, well-spoken man approached me and asked, “How much do they pay you for this job?”

I answered, “I don’t get paid and it’s not a job. I work for free because distributing these books is my mission in life.”

He was taken aback. But after a moment he continued, “I can offer you a job starting at \$40,000 a year.” (That would be over \$100,000 in today’s money.)

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

I replied, “You could not match what I get in return for selling these books.”

The man was genuinely curious to know more. So I explained to him about the content of the books, about Prabhupāda, about Kṛṣṇa, about why I had given my life to ISKCON. I explained that the satisfaction of giving people the Absolute Truth, giving them something that would change their lives and set them on the path to eternal happiness, was in itself my salary, one that nullified the desire for any other remuneration. After a while he took out a \$20 bill and gave it to me. “That’s for your cause,” he said. “I wish I could get dedicated workers like you boys. But then,” he said with a smile, “I would have to be like your guru. And I’m not.” Then he shook my hand and walked away.

I didn’t explain to him another reason I wouldn’t accept a salary. He wouldn’t have understood. By selfless sacrifice for Lord Caitanya’s mission one purchases Kṛṣṇa forever, and thus Kṛṣṇa, thinking He is unable to repay the devotee for his service (*na pāraye ‘ham*), becomes the property of His servant. In such an indebted condition, Kṛṣṇa, when asked for it, gives His devotee eternal loving service to Him. That is what I want. Is there any compensation better than that?

Keep distributing books. With every book sold you are putting Kṛṣṇa in your debt, more and more. Then one day invisible Kṛṣṇa will become visible to your eyes, as He became visible before the *gopīs* after disappearing prior to the *rāsa* dance. And He will tell you, *na pāraye ‘ham*: “I am unable to repay My debt for your spotless service.”

* * *

Mañidhara Dāsa (ACBSP)

I like the verse from the *Bhagavad-gītā* that states how the real *yogī* experiences pleasure and pain in connection with other living entities’ pleasure and pain. That’s the lesson one learns on *sañkīrtana* and throughout one’s whole life. The more one experiences pain, the more one understands that others experience the same pain—some more, some less.

I believe that’s the true way to compassion. It has to grow, and it has to mature. It cannot be developed in some sort of academic way, or by a mere arrangement of words. Any pain experienced on *sañkīrtana* becomes tolerable when seeing daily the pain of the conditioned souls around us. To the degree pain arrives, to that degree one remembers that others have walked the same thorny path before. So one grows to be compassionate.

Book distribution is a transcendental activity. Only a realized Vaiṣṇava truly knowledgeable about the nature of this world can be truly compassionate. And so we can only stand embarrassed and in awe of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s unlimited compassion upon us. What he has done! He gave the highest to the lowest, not asking for anything in return. The best way to start to pay our debt to him is to produce and distribute his books.

* * *

Praghoṣa Dāsa (ACBSP)

I keep this beautiful excerpt [from *The Message of Godhead*] with me on *sañkīrtana*:

Each and every soul has a potent, confidential, eternal relationship with the Personality of Godhead. But due to long association with the illusory material energy, every one of us has forgotten that relationship from time immemorial. We are as if roaming in the street like street beggars, although we are all the transcendental sons of the richest personality, the Personality of Godhead. With a cool head we could very well understand this fact. But unmindful of our

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

supremely rich father and our relationship with Him, we go on endeavoring in many ways to solve our street-beggar problems of poverty and hunger, but with practically no appreciable results.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda has said here, everyone we meet is a “street beggar“ looking for eternal happiness. We are also beggars! However, by the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda we simply run from one beggar to another—*begging* them to take up their eternal function of *saṅkīrtana*. We approach each beggar: “Now take this little book home with you. We *beg* you to take out some time from your busy schedule to begin the finishing touches on your human form of life! Now, with this information, you can make your life successful and perfect.“

Thus we make them once again mindful of their supremely rich father, as His Divine Grace has described—and what was once a huge waste of time becomes a glorious and thrilling adventure!

* * *

Vaiṣeṣika Dāsa (ACBSP)

During the first Iraq war in 1991, Iraq’s infrastructure was blown up. Due to a lack of clean water, people were suffering from cholera, and children roamed the streets of Baghdad begging from members of the foreign press: “Do you have any drinkable water? Anything we can drink? Anything?“ They were thirsty, but if they drank the polluted water they would get sick. It was a dire situation.

So the conditioned soul in the material world is in the same situation. Kṛṣṇa says that this world is *duḥkhālayam*, a place of suffering. Here everyone is dying of thirst, not so much for want of water but for want of the spiritual atmosphere. And we have that. Imagine you are in Iraq and a thirsty child is begging you for some clean water and you have gallons back in your room. You’d want to give it to that child.

So we have that transcendental water. And this is our mission—to distribute that water, to let people drink the real thing and become revived and healthy. But we ourselves must understand that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the real thing; then we’ll want to taste it more and more and distribute it more and more. And if people see our good example and the satisfaction in our eyes, they’ll understand we have something substantial and will want to purchase it from us. A devotee is naturally kind and compassionate, and thus he wants to share this pure water of Kṛṣṇa consciousness with others who are so thirsty for love but who don’t know where to find it, who don’t know it’s in Kṛṣṇa.

Daivīśakti-devī Dāsī (ACBSP)

Compassion is the foundation of the entire Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, which has been going on eternally. Compassion is personified by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Nityānanda Prabhu. Without Their mercy we cannot understand the spiritual science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They gave Kṛṣṇa consciousness freely, and those who seek Their mercy also help others become Kṛṣṇa conscious. That is the highest form of compassion—to help a person become Kṛṣṇa conscious.

Book distribution is one of the eternal functions of a compassionate devotee, beginning with Śrīla Vyāsadeva and extending down through the entire *paramparā*. It is something of the past, present, and future of ISKCON. Sometimes we hear “It’s not respectable to go out and try to convince someone to buy a book.” But it can be respectable if done in the proper consciousness.

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

The deep compassion of Lord Caitanya is difficult to comprehend. He converted the most stalwart Māyāvādīs, such as Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya, into *bhaktas*. He sat with Sārvabhauma for seven days, listening to him patiently, before defeating his philosophy. Lord Caitanya went out on *harināma* Himself. He also instructed the Six Gosvāmīs to write books. Why? Because He knew this information would be distributed all over the world by Śrīla Prabhupāda. What doesn't Lord Caitanya know?

Once one of Prabhupāda's godbrothers said to a disciple of Prabhupāda's: "If Lord Caitanya wanted Kṛṣṇa consciousness spread all over the world, why didn't He do it Himself?" The devotee relayed this to Śrīla Prabhupāda, who replied, "Because He wanted me to get the credit." The ISKCON society is a continuation of the mercy of Lord Caitanya. Prabhupāda also says in a purport that this society is one of the branches of the Caitanya tree. Throughout the world, more than five hundred years after His departure, the pure message of Kṛṣṇa is being distributed and appreciated.

This movement is a movement of compassion. People are suffering for want of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They are hungry not for food but for love, love of God. Kṛṣṇa can fulfill everyone's desire for love. Kṛṣṇa is so great that He can satisfy unlimited numbers of people. The problem is people don't know about Kṛṣṇa. We also didn't know about Kṛṣṇa, but when we did hear about Him, we devoted ourselves to Him. So many people will become devoted to Kṛṣṇa when they hear about Him. We just have to have compassion on the conditioned souls and go out to help them.

We can solve all the problems of the world with these books, because they contain the instructions of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Śrīla Prabhupāda, Pṛthu Mahārāja, Lord Rṣabhadeva, King Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīsmadeva, and many others. The main problems are birth, old age, disease, and death. Imagine if a doctor found the cure for all types of cancer and AIDS. He would likely be the most popular person on the planet. It would be front page news all over the world: "Doctor Finds Cure for Cancer and AIDS." But if he didn't give the medicine out and instead went on a six-month cruise around the world, that would be the next big front-page news story: "Doctor Finds Cure for Cancer and AIDS But Doesn't Give It Out!" We have the cure for AIDS and cancer and all other diseases. If someone gets a book, reads it, and follows its instructions, then they will go back to Godhead, where there's no birth, old age, disease, or death. It's Vaikuṅṭha. If we don't go out and give this message, which can solve everyone's problems, then we'll be like the doctor who had the cure but didn't give it out.

* * *

Nidrā-devī Dāsī (ACBSP)

Nidrā-devī Dāsī joined Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement in 1975 and has been distributing books ever since. She is a wonderful Vaiṣṇavī. Here's what she has to say about compassion:

Because we feel Śrīla Prabhupāda's and Lord Caitanya's compassion upon us, we want to share it. Their mercy gives us impetus to pray to Them so that Their compassion will shine through us and touch the hearts of the conditioned souls. People become inspired within. When we see this happening, we become prayerful and desire to have even more compassion. Book distribution thus helps us reawaken pure compassion so that we can share Kṛṣṇa consciousness more and more. It is an ideal service for that because we witness so much suffering every day during this service. Even if some of us may feel stone-hearted at first, the service gives us insights into the suffering of the living entities and gradually softens

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

our heart. We realize that just by some good fortune we are no longer in that unhappy state of ignorance, so we want to share our good fortune and help the unfortunate souls become fortunate. Book distribution thus helps bring out this quality of compassion in ourselves, as long as we try to execute the service in the right consciousness.

* * *

Acyuta Gotra Dāsa

At the end of one day during the marathon I visited a slaughterhouse. Eluding the guard, I got inside and saw an abominable view—dead cows and calves, blood everywhere (on the floor, the walls, the doors), and only one Ukrainian man cleaning up after the slaughtering. I'd never seen anything like it. After weaving through this scene, I became upset and angry and was looking for someone responsible, someone in charge.

Of course, there's nothing we can do but be compassionate and try to get even the cow-slaughterers to purchase a book. After passing many empty rooms and knocking on many doors, I concluded that no one was there because it was late afternoon. A little sad, I continued knocking. Then from one door emerged a man dressed in his pajamas, very surprised to see me, a stranger. Happily presenting the books, I began speaking about a lot of things concerning Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy—except vegetarianism. The man took me inside his room, and I found out that he was the head manager of that slaughterhouse. Seeing my enthusiasm for the books, he also became fired up and finally took three cantos of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and five other books. In fact, he took all the books I had, except the vegetarian cookbook. The only problem was, he didn't have enough money, so I suggested, "Take the money from the slaughterhouse office." And he did it! All together he took twelve books and paid for them out of the slaughterhouse funds.

Ambarīṣa Dāsa (Russia)

We started book distribution in Russia when Communism fell. People had great spiritual hunger. We would just set up a table with books on it, and in five minutes people were standing in line to buy the books. Kṛṣṇa was using us. We were new—we didn't have any purity. Now there isn't as much spiritual hunger in Russia, but many people are frustrated by the present social situation and are inquisitive. When we pray to our spiritual masters and Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda, we ask for purity and compassion so we will be able to reach the hearts of the conditioned souls.

A real preacher is one who has compassion. Such a person can easily convince others to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness because he is a friend to everyone and wants to give everyone the best thing. He's not interested taking, but in giving.

* * *

Ānakadundubhi Dāsa

It is quite normal for a devotee to be compassionate. He just has to remember how his life was before he joined. If we do not feel compassion, we should pray to Lord Kṛṣṇa to give us some of His unlimited compassion so that we can share it with the conditioned souls. This always works for me. Kṛṣṇa never lets you down.

* * *

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

Avadhūtacandra Dāsa (Finland)

Around noon I saw a very old couple. They were so old they could not walk by themselves but needed four-wheeled walkers. I thought, “We have come so far, and here are these old people. They may leave their body at any moment, so now is their chance to get Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mercy.”

I went up to them and presented one with a copy of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.1 and the other with a *Gītā*. The wife immediately accepted her book and put it in her basket. I told them what the books were all about, and the husband also accepted his book. They gave a nice donation and slowly proceeded down the hill clutching their vehicles.

Another interesting incident took place just at the beginning of the week. We were in Hameenlinna, which is a relatively big town by Finnish standards. After our *prasādam* break I saw a man in his late fifties. Looking a bit rough, he walked along the street minding his own business. I stopped him and presented him with a *Teachings of Queen Kuntī* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.1.

“These are very practical books,” I said. “This one is about simple living, and the other is ancient Indian wisdom.” This time I introduced the books in quite a roundabout way, since the man did not seem to be interested in spiritual life.

The man looked at the books and asked, “Is there anything about God in these books?”

“Actually, these books are only about God,” I said, changing my approach.

“Good,” he said. Then the man told me his life story. He had been an alcoholic for many years, but then he had been saved by Jesus. He had been a member of the Free Church congregation for the last eight years. However, a couple of days earlier he had fallen off the wagon due to his wife nagging him.

The man looked intently at the books, absorbed in thought. He said, “Big books are not very good, since people will simply put them on their bookshelves and not read them. I prefer smaller books [like the TQK].” Suddenly he said “If I give you fifteen euros, will you give me three of these smaller books [TQK]?”

I said, “Fifteen euros is not the proper price for three books.”

After some time he said, “Will you give me four for a twenty?”

“Sure,” I said, and started taking out the books from my trolley.

At this point a grandmother was walking nearby. He hugged her and gave her a book. (It seemed they knew each other.) He told her it is a good one and that she should read it.

Then immediately he ran across the street to a group of other men. “Hey Pekka! Here is a very good book. Take it and read it!”

In one minute this man had distributed two books. After a couple of minutes I saw him sitting on a park bench talking to another man and distributing the third one.

It was a wonderful experience to see how the man came under the control of Kṛṣṇa’s spiritual energy, and how compassionate he was. I was praying I could be as enthusiastic as he was to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books.

It was truly amazing: Here was a man who didn’t know anything about Kṛṣṇa consciousness, who had no idea how important it is to show compassion for others by giving them Kṛṣṇa consciousness, who hadn’t heard Śrīla Prabhupāda’s strong emphasis on distributing books, who was not a disciple of Prabhupāda or a granddisciple, and who most likely engaged in sinful activity of some type. But upon first seeing and hearing about Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, he became a book distributor. This example should inspire us, who know so much, to go out of our comfort zones and do what we know is so pleasing to guru and Kṛṣṇa.

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Candraśekhara Ācārya Dāsa

Twenty-two years ago, when I was nine years old, my mother took me to Venice Beach. There a large assembly of devotees was performing *saṅkīrtana* in the bright sun. A table was set up in front of them, and on the table stood many cups of free lemonade *prasādam*, as well as many small books. I remember approaching the group. Then a devotee spoke to me and gave me a cup of lemonade and a copy of *Coming Back*.

A few days ago in Kolobrzeg, Poland, toward the end of the daily *harināma* procession led by His Holiness Indradyumna Swami, a very young innocent girl walked up to me. She could not have been more than seven years old. She had small round glasses and an eager look in her eyes. Pointing to the pile of *Coming Backs* I held in my arms, she asked me for a copy. I smiled and told her that I had to get a donation in exchange for the book. But then I suddenly remembered how I had been graced with the same book twenty-two years ago, how that devotee on Venice Beach had begun my spiritual life by giving me Śrīla Prabhupāda’s book. So I immediately gave the little girl a *Coming Back*. She smiled and ran off to her parents, skipping up and down and waving the book in her hand.

Before joining ISKCON, one of the devotees distributing books in the LA airport had been the biggest drug dealer on the University of Ohio campus, which is the largest college campus in the USA. He met Gaura-Nitāi Prabhu from New Vrindavan, who sold him the book *Dharma: The Way of Transcendence*. He read it in three hours, and the first thing he did after finishing the book was separate himself 100% from all his drug-dealing. Now, as he proudly says, “Instead of drugs I sell love of God in the form of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books.”

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

This story shows the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda. He came to America and turned so many degraded crows into swans. Therefore he’s called “Paramahaṁsa,” the supreme swan.

In New York another incident happened that was similar to this one. There was a drug dealer who owed some money to other drug dealers. The other drug dealers went to his apartment and beat him severely till he lost consciousness. As they were leaving they saw a booklet on the counter called *Kṛṣṇa, the Reservoir of Pleasure*. They opened it, laid it on his unconscious face, and left. When the drug dealer regained consciousness, he found the booklet on his face. He got up, went to the sink, washed the blood off his face, read the booklet from cover to cover, found out where the temple was, and joined. He became a very good devotee.

Kṛṣṇa says there are four types of pious people who approach Him. One is the distressed, a category that includes a large proportion of the people who come to Kṛṣṇa. There is so much suffering in this world. In the USA about 30,000 people a year commit suicide, and in the world about a million, and three times that number try. Millions of people visit psychiatrists to help solve their mental problems, but the psychiatrists themselves are suffering. Among professionals, psychiatrists commit suicide more often any other professional. Through the years I’ve heard of many devotees who were on the verge of suicide before they received Prabhupāda’s books. The solution is Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

* * *

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

Cāru-candra Dāsa

Sometimes when we do *saṅkīrtana* for a while we do it kind of mechanically, not really in the mood of compassion. But despite all our shortcomings, we still get special mercy from the Pañca-tattva. Once I stopped a twenty-year-old girl and ran through my mantra, but she didn't respond in any way. I repeated my line, but she started to do sign language to me, which I couldn't understand. Still, I thought, "Here's a conditioned soul, and she deserves to get the mercy somehow or other." Since she could read lips, I showed her the books and told her what they were all about. When I asked her for a donation to cover the printing price, she happily agreed. She took her books, and while she walked away tears poured down my cheeks as I realized the special mercy of Śrī Śrī Gaura-Nitāi, which they distribute freely to anyone regardless of caste, color, or bodily disability, thus engaging them in Their *saṅkīrtana* movement.

* * *

Jagadīśa Dāsa (Russia)

I was distributing books in a factory in a town in the CIS and had just signed up one hundred workers to each take a set of books (fifteen books per set). When I went to see the director for payment, he sent me to the chief accountant, but she refused to give me the money, saying she had nothing in the treasury.

A few days later was the anniversary of Śrīla Prabhupāda's passing, so we had a big festival at the temple. I thought that to really get the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda I should go to the factory that day and see the chief accountant to get the payment so that the workers could get Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. When I got to the factory, the chief accountant told me, "There's no chance you will get the money today because it's Friday. Come back on Monday."

But this was Śrīla Prabhupāda's Disappearance Day, and I really wanted to please him by getting these books out. So I sat down in the accountant's office, pulled out a picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda, placed it on the table, and began to pray intensely to him. After a while all attention turned to me. The chief accountant was quite concerned and asked me what was wrong.

"Today is the anniversary of my grandfather's passing away," I told her. "I'm praying to him to help me."

She left her office and came back with a paper in her hand—a release for the money.

"You'll get the money today," she said. "I promise."

By now it was late in the afternoon, and the bank was going to close in twenty minutes. We ran to her car and sped off to the bank. When we returned to the factory, she was concerned that the workers hadn't gotten their books. It was already too late for me to pick up the books from the temple and make it back before the workers went home. So she made an announcement over the intercom: "All workers who were to receive books must go to the Hare Kṛṣṇa temple tonight and collect them."

When I returned to the temple later, I was amazed to see a long line of people entering and walking out with boxes of books. The temple was full of workers from the factory. They all received the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

* * *

Madhumaṅgala Dāsa (South Africa)

Madhumaṅgala Dāsa is one of the most personable devotees in our society. It's very common for

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

him to give a big hug to a man who takes a book. In this age of impersonalism, it's rare to find someone so personable and compassionate. Here's a story exhibiting his compassion:

I went into a very exclusive yacht club, and as I walked out a young bearded man came toward me wearing a greasy t-shirt and pants. As I introduced myself I noticed he was in a very agitated frame of mind. I kept talking to him, though he showed disinterest in what I was saying to him as I presented Śrīla Prabhupāda's books to him. I said to him, "I notice you're a bit stressed out."

"Oh yes, well, you know, I have so many debts and things, and a lot on my mind."

I said to him, "Not to worry. Try to understand that everything material is temporary. If you understand that there is something eternal, then you will be free of anxiety and stress. I'm telling you this out of compassion and love. This material concept of life that people are living in is the cause of impersonal and selfish existence. Don't you think it's amazing for one person to tell another, 'I care for you.'"

The anxiety disappeared from his face as he nodded in agreement. I gave him a big hug and handed him one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. He said that he didn't have much money but gave me four rand. I thanked him and said, "It's not the amount of money you give me that counts, but your devotion to God."

While waiting for the bus to come to take me to Coronado, California, where I would distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, I turned to see if the oncoming bus was mine. Suddenly I saw a middle-aged gentleman in a business suit rushing across the street. I remember thinking to myself, "He's really in a hurry and he looks very serious."

As he passed by me I said to him: "Hey, slow down, you're going to make yourself sick."

He stopped dead in his tracks and said, "I can't stop. I have an important meeting to attend."

As he turned to leave I said to him, "No, please wait. I have something important to tell you." He waited as I walked over to him. As I introduced myself I saw he was a bit stressed out. He displayed all the classic symptoms of the Kali-yugites, fixed and focused as he was on the material energy.

I said, "Don't be in such a hurry, sir. Believe me, if you slow down a bit you'll still get there. I can see from your aura that you're a bit stressed out. Stop worrying and start living."

To my astonishment tears started welling up in his eyes, and in a choking voice he said, "The reason my aura is like that is because my wife wants to leave me!"

"Don't worry," I said, "things will soon be all right. I have something to give you that will solve your problem. Look, I care for you very much. What I said to you before, I said out of compassion. When's the last time somebody told you they loved you?"

He looked upward as more tears came, and in a soft voice said, "It's been a long time."

I put my arms around him and said, "I love you very much. You are a very brave and honest person." Then I whispered in his ear: "Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare" and I handed him a *Chant and Be Happy*.

"Thank you very much for the book," he said. "I respect and admire the Hare Kṛṣṇas and the work they do." Then he smiled and said, "Now I have to go."

"It was a pleasure meeting you," I said, "and I look forward to meeting you again. Don't forget to utilize the knowledge in the book."

* * *

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

Compassion develops from serving those who have compassion. The devotee thinks, “I don’t have any compassion, but I see my *gurudeva* literally crying for the suffering of the conditioned souls, so let me alleviate my dear father’s grief.” And by thus serving the spiritual master, who is an embodiment of compassion, we will also develop compassion.

Compassion must also be based on *śāstra*. When we read Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books regularly, we learn how to see this world for what it is—a place of suffering. Otherwise we will forget. *Māyā*’s job is to make us forget the suffering of this material world so that we are inclined to stay here. If our compassion is based on our previous experiences, we will forget, so we must constantly hear. The example is given of how a woman who gives birth vows she will never go through that painful experience again. But what happens? After a year or so she forgets the pain of childbirth and again desires to have a child.

* * *

Madhupati Dāsa

I was distributing in Kassel, a big city in Germany. It was during the Prabhupāda Marathon. I had a quota of a hundred books a day. I really wanted to distribute that much. The previous days had been very nice. But on this day my mentality became that of an ass—work, work, work. No compassion, no Kṛṣṇa, no taste. Oh, what a counting game! Just numbers, no souls . . . uff tough stuff. From nine o’clock till noon I distributed twenty-five books. Then I took a break. Then again I distributed from two to seven. That was my schedule. Well, my heart was closed, people didn’t stop, I couldn’t connect . . . tough.

I saw a young drunken lady, maybe around twenty-three years old—suffering. She didn’t have much clothing on—no heavy jacket—and it was below freezing. I presented a book to her and said, “I’m a monk, and we distribute these books.

“How much?” she asked.

“Nothing, it is my present for you!”

“How much do people usually give?” she asked again.

“Three euros,” I said. Actually, the normal donation was five euros. “But you don’t have to give anything.”

“No, I want to give you something.” She gave eighty cents.

I went for a break in the van. As I resumed my distribution around two, my heart was still closed. Seventy-five books to go. No one stopped and I thought I wouldn’t reach my quota. I was so much into the numbers.

Again I saw the lady begging, freezing, drunk to numb the cold. Just suffering. I wanted to give her some warm *prasādam*. We still had some *dāl* left. But my selfish mind switched in: “No, it’s the marathon. It will cost you at least twenty or thirty minutes, and during that time you could distribute ten books.” So there was an internal fight between my good and bad angel. Finally I decided to approach her and asked if she was hungry. She said she was. I told her, “Wait here till I come back.” So I ran to the van, heated up the *dāl*, filled a plastic bottle with it, and brought it to her.

She was so grateful that I gave her this *prasādam*. She happily ate. Then she approached me, opened her wallet and gave me three more euros. She had actually begged very hard for that *laxmi*. Gaurāṅga!!

Then everything changed. Because I had taken some time to personally care for a soul, I gave up on “my own strength.” Kṛṣṇa opened up the curtain. The people stopped, the flow of love was there, my heart was open. In the last four hours of the day Kṛṣṇa let me distribute around eighty books.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

This was an incident I will never forget. It is not by our own strength that we can get a good result. It is Kṛṣṇa who gives such a result to those who are living the truth. Because of practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness I felt some compassion for the suffering lady, and Kṛṣṇa was pleased.

* * *

Nitāi Rāma Dāsa

I visited New Dwarka, our ISKCON temple in Los Angeles. Much of my visit was spent at the airport (LAX). Day after day the stalwart *saṅkīrtana* devotees there were distributing so many books to people from all over the world.

One real highlight occurred during the last half hour at the airport one Thursday afternoon. Bṛghupati Prabhu, one of the leading book distributors in the world, had completely emptied his suitcase and most of my backpack, having distributed more than fifty big hardcover books, fifteen *Bhagavad-gītā* CD ROMs, and a number of soft-cover books. Arriving at Terminal One, we found Mādhavendra Purī Prabhu standing on the ground floor near the baggage claim. When we reached him I saw that his box was also empty. He looked at us happily and asked if he could take some of our books. Bṛghupati Prabhu told him that we would give him half of everything we had. He then dramatically laid the suitcase flat, completely unzipped the zipper, and then flung open the cover. It was, of course, completely empty. It's an amazing feeling when so many books are distributed. We all laughed in wonder.

Suddenly I heard Bṛghupati Prabhu utter "Military!" and he was gone in a flash. With a CD ROM and one soft-cover book, his only remaining ammo, he was quickly walking across the terminal to greet a young military man with a crew cut and an army-issue green duffel bag. Mādhavendra Purī Prabhu and I just naturally started following so we could observe the encounter. The military guys are almost always the nicest people in the airport. As we picked up our pace to catch up, I looked over at Mādhavendra Purī to see his face beaming with glee. He had the most blissful smile as his eyes followed Bṛghupati Prabhu. We began running to catch up, but then stopped so we could observe from a distance.

As the young military man gave a donation and took the books, Mādhavendra Purī began to worry about the fact that we actually had no more books. We had half an hour before all the devotees would meet at the van to go. The general agreement is that if anyone is more than five minutes late, he can't complain if he has to take a bus back to the temple. We had only a little bit of time left to distribute.

"I'll go and get more books," I offered.

Mādhavendra Purī was delighted. I took the empty suitcase and headed out the door. Terminal One was not far from the van, where there were plenty of books. It was raining outside and they didn't have rain jackets. I got to the van, loaded up with books, and as I ran back to the terminal across the parking lot, wheeling the heavy suitcase behind me, I honestly felt completely happy. I was surprised. Is it true? Am I really feeling this happy? Is it real? Yes! I am a miserable fool always suffering because of material desires, but for a moment I am not hankering or lamenting for anything. Smiling cheek to cheek, I was running clumsily with the suitcase behind me, but it felt more like a dance. There was gravity as well. I understood that I was like an ambulance in a war zone. There was no doubt that the books in this bag were in minutes going to be in the hands of some inconceivably fortunate conditioned souls. The longer I took, the less people would be saved. I really felt that. It had nothing to do with me. I had hardly distributed anything all day. Bṛghupati and Mādhavendra Purī were empowered and would deliver the medicine. I was serving them.

All this to say, What a glorious service this book distribution is! If anyone in any capacity even makes some small, seemingly insignificant effort to just help a book distributor, is there any doubt about his receiving Śrīla Prabhupāda's mercy? Is there anyone on this planet who is not qualified to help a

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

book distributor, even if it is only to give some laxmi? Any person on the street can do that. Therefore, who can understand the fortunate position of those devotees who are consciously endeavoring to help the *saṅkīrtana* movement of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu? I pray to Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva that the image of these devotees blissfully distributing His mercy be forever imprinted in my heart.

Wherever you are or whatever you do, please make the decision to assist those devotees who are distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

* * *

Nityānanda Dāsa

I received a call from a lady in Nadi, Fiji, who was severely depressed. Her husband was giving her a very bad time, always beating her and trying to strip her naked in front of his friends when he was drunk. She was contemplating suicide.

During one of my book distribution programs in Nadi the previous year, I had sold a *Bhagavad-gītā* to her and also given her my card. Now she was desperately calling for help.

When I heard she was thinking of committing suicide, my entire body started shivering. I was stunned. I calmed down by thinking of Guru and Kṛṣṇa

"Please take it easy," I said, "and let me help you. You are very fortunate that in your trouble you decided to talk to a devotee of Kṛṣṇa." I remembered that Jaya Rāma Prabhu, our president, was soon going to visit Nadi, so I put her on hold and called him to see if he could meet her. He agreed. Returning to the lady, I said, "Please meet our temple president, Jaya Rāma Prabhu, on Wednesday. In the meantime, please chant the *mahā-mantra*—Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare—so that Kṛṣṇa will protect you from doing anything wrong." She chanted it to me with all her heart, and later I learned that she had chanted it the whole night. "Please treat me as your brother and call me anytime for anything."

She called me up later and confirmed her appointment with Jaya Rāma Prabhu. She asked, "What shall I say to him?"

"Just reveal your mind to him as you would to Kṛṣṇa." And so she did. After their meeting she called me and told me what she had decided to do, which was exactly what I had suggested.

Jaya Rāma Prabhu asked her to talk to her husband and in-laws and tell them that if her husband did not change within a month she would leave him. Jaya Rāma also arranged for her to call another devotee in the area any time of the day or night if anything happened so that he could pick her up and take her to his home. And if worse came to worst, she could come to Suva.

I call this lady two or three times every day to check how things are going. Recently she told me that her husband had promised not to cause any more trouble and would stop drinking.

She has started continuously chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and is going to start reading the *Bhagavad-gītā*. She's gradually progressing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and has become a vegetarian.

Here's what she wrote to me yesterday:

"Hare Kṛṣṇa, brother. It has been a very bright morning for me after months of darkness. All thanks to Kṛṣṇa. I chant every free moment. This process has saved my life. I just wish I could have come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness earlier so that I could have tried to save my elder brothers, whom I lost to alcohol and drugs."

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Padmamālī Dāsa

When I was just a new *bhakta* distributing books in Prague, I was so spaced out that once for an hour I couldn't approach anyone. I became angry with myself and started to preach to my mind: "How can you just sit here while all these people walking by are actually searching for the very books you're holding in your hands!? Do something!"

At last I pulled myself together and stopped a young man hurrying back to work with his sandwich. He was interested in the books, so he invited me to his shop. It was an alternative gift shop full of oriental and Indian gifts. His two colleagues also liked the books, but no one was willing to buy them. They were just interested in the vegetarian cookbook.

I began to narrate a story about Lord Viṣṇu and showed them a picture from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* depicting Garuḍa carrying Lord Viṣṇu on his back. One of the shop assistants exclaimed, "Hey, He looks like ours!"

"What!?" I exclaimed.

They took me upstairs and pointed to a statue covered with a cloth. A female shop assistant uncovered the statue, and there He was: Lord Viṣṇu standing on the back of Garuḍa, ready to release His Sudarśana *cakra*. I cried out "Viṣṇu!" and paid my obeisances.

At that moment someone entered the shop and the shop assistants went down to look after him. Remaining alone with the Lord, I took advantage of the situation to pray to Him for His mercy so I could distribute some books to these people. They returned and said, "This is your last chance to see Him because a twelve-year-old girl has purchased Him and will pick Him up tonight."

With renewed enthusiasm I showed them all the books again. This time they were really inspired, and the young man I had first met opened the cash register and pulled out some money. The Lord was very merciful, and they took seventeen books among them.

The young girl wasn't the only one to take the Lord home that night. He resides in millions of homes all over this planet in His form of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. I regularly visit this shop and bring the shopkeepers some *prasādam*, and they always give generous donations.

* * *

Parameśvara Dāsa

When you feel it is more important for someone to get a book than for you to be comfortable, then you know you're doing pretty good.

* * *

Pārtha-sārathi Dāsa

As I waited to check in for my flight to Durban, I saw a young man staring at me. After some time he approached me and asked if I was a monk. I replied, "Yes, I'm a Hare Kṛṣṇa monk."

"I work at a new-age yoga studio," he responded. "Can I ask you some questions?"

I turned out he didn't want to ask many questions but wanted to open his heart to me. So I just sat next to him and listened.

"I started practicing yoga," he began, "to escape the pain in my heart from failed relationships, from the pain of disappointing my family. I even thought of suicide once." He was in tears as he revealed this to me. "If yoga is such a peaceful way of using your energy, then why do I feel that something is missing? I've been practicing for over six years and feel no difference in my heart."

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

I saw that this man's heart was heavy with the burden of material life. When he finished, I asked him, "What do you want from life." He looked off into the distant lights and just shook his head. He said, "I just want to become happy. Can you help me, please? Can you show me happiness?"

I said, "Of course. The reason your yoga hasn't worked is because you're missing the key ingredient, and that ingredient is God. The object of yoga is to reconnect with Kṛṣṇa. But *haṭha-yoga* won't help you; you need to practice *bhakti-yoga*. *Bhakti* means serving Kṛṣṇa with all your heart, with all the love you can muster."

The man just looked at me, tears welling in his eyes. By now some others had gathered around, and someone made a comment about this gentlemen being too emotional. I corrected him, saying, "He is only revealing what is in all your hearts; you're all sad deep within because you've forgotten your original relationship with Kṛṣṇa. You should thank this man for making you realize how sad your lives are without Kṛṣṇa." The fellow who'd made the comment just looked down. Everyone else nodded.

For the next twenty minutes I answered questions and exchanged email addresses. When everyone walked away, I was left alone with the original man. He said, "How can I thank you for your help? How can I thank you for your time?" I pulled out a *Perfection of Yoga*. "Please take this book, read it, and apply the knowledge to your life. If you ever need help, please give me a call." With a big smile on his face, he thanked me and gave a donation.

I boarded the flight from JFK to LAX, hoping to catch up on some rest. As I took my seat I noticed that the man sitting next to me was an amputee. I struck up a conversation with him. It turned out he had lost his legs in a roadside blast in Iraq. I said to him, "I was also a soldier in Iraq," and I showed him my military ID card.

"Did you see anything crazy over there?" he asked.

"My friend, I saw too much."

He looked down and with a sad expression said, "Now I drink all the time and am very depressed." As he opened up, I could see that this boy was suffering a lot and was looking for something to guide him through this rough time in his life.

"Look," I said, "I'm here to help you if you want me to."

He grabbed my hands and pleaded, "Yes, please help! How are you dealing with the effects of combat?"

"I try to take shelter of God and develop a loving relationship with Him in my heart. This body is temporary, my friend. When we die, it's only the body dying, not the soul."

He looked at me intensely. "Should I stop?" I asked, and he said, "No, please keep going."

So for the next five hours I spoke to this man about the *Bhagavad-gītā*. When we landed I got my bag out of the overhead luggage compartment and pulled out three books—a *Bhagavad-gītā*, a *Perfection of Yoga*, and a *Science of Self-realization*. As I gave him these books he was moved to tears. He said, "I have gone to so many groups and talked to so many people, but no one wanted to help me. So why are you opening your heart to help me?"

"Well," I answered, "I have a great treasure that was given to me, and I would be a miser to keep it to myself. So here I am, trying to give myself to you, trying to help you come to a better position in life. If I didn't try to do this, I wouldn't be an asset in the mission of Śrīla Prabhupāda." With some tears in both our eyes, we exchanged hugs, and then he grasped the books to his chest and went on his way.

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Tāra Dāsa

True compassion is an exalted emotion. The saints feel compassion because they are satisfied in Kṛṣṇa and they see how *everyone* is suffering.

Despite my lack of compassion, I act with compassion by being the instrument of the compassionate Lord and his servant, Śrīla Prabhupāda.

When I meet a humble soul who is suffering, I feel some compassion. This is my imperfect vision. Everyone is unfortunate in this world. They're all stuck in the world of misery. The enlightened souls make no distinction that "This one is doing well and this one not."

* * *

Vācaspati Dāsa (Russia)

It was New Years Eve in St. Petersburg, Russia, and the authorities said no one could have any gatherings or meetings. But the devotees wanted to go on *harināma*. So they went, but while they were chanting a group of policemen came to arrest everyone and take them to jail. The chief said the ones distributing books should also go to jail. While the police were gathering the devotees I gave a book to the chief. He looked at it and said, "Is this for me?" I said, "Yes, I want you to have it as a gift. Happy New Year." He was so touched by this that he told the other policemen to let the devotees go.

* * *

Viśvambhara Dāsa

The nature of the mind is to take, whereas the nature of the soul is to give. The more we think we're the mind and body, the more we'll want to take, and the more we understand we're the soul, the more we'll want to give. We'll have compassion. There is nothing more valuable to give than knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, which gives the ultimate relief from the miseries of material existence and gives us an opportunity to have a relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

* * *

Yāmunācārya Dāsa

I went to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books door to door in Slovakia. I met a girl who had cancer. Her name was Jana. She was happy to see me and took two books. Before I left I promised that I would visit her again soon. A few days later I learned she was in the hospital.

I went there and found her surrounded by her family, in a room for people who are going to die. She was so happy to see me again. I spoke Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy to her and also to her family members. She said, "I already read three fourths of the book." She was very happy to eat a plate of *prasādam* I had brought her.

She then said, "This is amazing! This is amazing! Why didn't I know of this wonderful process before?"

I sat down and read *Kṛṣṇa* book to her for some time. Then I preached to her mother. When Jana heard my preaching, she opened her eyes and said, "Is it OK if I chant this mantra in my mind?"

"Yes, sure, it's O.K. What do you actually chant?"

She then chanted the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* with closed eyes, intently hearing the holy names. I left her a *nṛsimha-pavitram* and a photo of Śrī Śrī Nitāi-Navadvīpa-candra, the presiding Deities of the

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

Prague temple. I also gave her some *mahā* oil from Lord Nṛsimha and a CD with the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra on it.

A week later I received a message that she had left her body. The family invited me to visit them. When I arrived at their home, her mother was there with Jana's sister. I spoke to them about the eternality of the soul and Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and they heard with rapt attention.

The mother said, "Before she passed away we smeared her body with this oil and held this photo you gave us in front of her. The CD was also playing."

Jaya Śrīla Prabhupāda! At that moment I understood the amazing mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

In the future I am going to visit them again because the rest of the family wants to know me.

* * *

Ahaitukī Bhakti-devī Dāsī

I was distributing books at a New York subway station and showed a lady *Teachings of Queen Kuntī*. After I explained the book, she revealed that her life had been tragic, exactly like Kuntī's, and that she therefore didn't need the book. She started leaving and said, "I know all the gurus, swamis, and groups, but I've found that I don't need any of them. I only wish to concentrate on 'the light' now. I want to bring 'the light' from the astral plane down to the gross plane, to fill each of my cells with light. The true teacher is within, the inner master and guide. Everything is included in the self. Do you understand?"

While she spoke like this I was praying to Kṛṣṇa, "Please help me say something that will change her mind." I answered her: "Yes, but do you think it's a *coincidence* that Queen Kuntī has appeared to guide you today? Include this book within your self." I put the book in her hands and she became thoughtful. At last she decided to take it and gave a nice donation.

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

What Ahaitukī Bhakti did in this circumstance is the essence of book distribution. We have to pray to Kṛṣṇa to allow people to receive His mercy. It really becomes ecstatic when a distributor is not attached to the results and is just dependent on Kṛṣṇa and prays to Him to help the conditioned souls. As we saw in this case, Ahaitukī Bhakti prayed to Kṛṣṇa and the lady had a change of heart before Ahaitukī Bhakti's very eyes. Kṛṣṇa reciprocated with His devotee, and both of them walked away satisfied, feeling that they had gained something from the exchange. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.57) Kṛṣṇa says, *cetasā sarva-karmāṇi mayi sannyasya mat-parah*: "In all activities just depend on Me and always work under My protection." In this way book distribution helps us to be Kṛṣṇa conscious.

* * *

Gokula-līlā Devī Dāsī

I was distributing books on Lincoln Road in Auckland, New Zealand. Many people were taking books. As I saw two young boys approach, before stopping them I concluded that they were either on drugs or depressed. It was obvious from their morbid, expressionless faces. As we talked I discovered they were brothers, fifteen and sixteen years old, and due to circumstances they were also best friends; they didn't really have much shelter other than each other. They were simple, gentle boys. Just

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

remembering them makes me realize how lucky I am to have the protection of Kṛṣṇa and His devotees; any struggle in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a sweet struggle not worthy of complaints.

They explained to me that they lived with their grandmother, who because of old age had just recently broken both her feet. Now these two teenage boys had to do everything for themselves and their elderly grandmother. I asked about their parents. Brace yourself—this is the reality of Kali-yuga. Their mother had left one day and never came home. The boys had no idea where she was. And their father? After repeated heart attacks, depression, and anxiety—at this point the younger brother stopped speaking and turned to the older boy, who completed the sentence: “he took his own life.”

Somehow, by the mercy of Caitanya Mahāprabhu and my showing a little interest in these boys, they gave \$15 and took a *Bhagavad-gītā*. How else was I to help them get out of such a terribly lonely, empty life? Showing pity is not enough. The only possible way to help anyone is to give them the mercy of Lord Caitanya, just as we’ve received it.

* * *

Karuṇā-dhāriṇī Devī Dāsī

When I was a kid growing up I was close to several alcoholics. I felt like I would go on feeling sorry for everything and everyone for the rest of my life! But I couldn’t help them. It was a very debilitating feeling, bad karma.

When I became a devotee I learned you could help people just by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra out on *harināma*. Suddenly I could change the karma of a wino or a businessman or a stray dog. What a relief! Prabhupāda has given us the best and most effective form of compassion.

That compassionate mood gets abbreviated when you start to think about your score on *saṅkīrtana*. I employ different tactics to avert that. Mother Gaurī taught us one. When you come home you put your collection in front of the Deity of Kṛṣṇa or Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *mūrti* and pay your obeisances and pray and meditate on how everything belongs to him. As an offering, tell Prabhupāda about what you did that day, or even about someone special you met, how many of his books went out.

Another great way to be compassionate is to give the *mahā-mantra* to each person you meet. Teach them how to say it. That is very powerful and personal. Another way is to distribute *prasādam* sweets, personally invite them to the temple, take their phone number, and call them.

* * *

Tulasī Devī Dāsī

I stopped a boy who was in his last year of high school. He said he had come to North Carolina to live with his father, but that after a short stay his father decided he didn’t want him and so was sending him back to his mother.

I started preaching to him: “Actually, God is our eternal father. You’ve had so many material fathers. In your last life you had a father, in this life you have a different father, and in your next life you’ll have still another father and won’t remember the previous ones. The pain in your heart you feel isn’t ultimately because your temporary father is rejecting you but because you are separated from your real, eternal father—God, Kṛṣṇa. And just as your father is turning his face from you, you and I are turning our face from our real father, God. And God is feeling pain for us, and we are also hurting, suffering. We want to be loved and to love, and that’s really possible only with our real father, God. So we have to turn our face back to God. And that’s why God has arranged this world in such a way that we eventually, deep in our hearts, cry out to Him again.” The boy just started crying and crying—tears were

Chapter One: Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

squirting out. He bought a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.1 and a small book, and I gave him some *prasādam*. He was very happy to hear about his real father.

* * *

Bhakta Rajesh

One evening at Perangud, a small town on the outskirts of Pune, [India], I ventured into the busy market area. I got a mixed response as I slowly moved among the various vegetable vendors engrossed in bargaining with unyielding housewives on their daily grocery run. I was immersed in showing books to everyone and soon found myself deep inside the market. Suddenly I realized I had unknowingly reached a lane that was exclusively selling meat and fish. As I looked around, there were butchers lined up in their nauseating little shops, which stunk like hell. On the other side were fisherwomen heckling and arguing with each other, ready with their overbearing personalities to drive away any prospective troublemaker.

Wasting no time, I began to flee. As I did so, however, a thought crossed my mind, prompting me to slow down: “These people need Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books more than anyone else.” Aware of the dangers of hanging around in such a sinful place, I hurried through, still reluctant, showing books half-heartedly.

To my great surprise, however, one after another, almost all the animal-slaughterers called me in to their shops and took many copies of the books I had. Even the fisherwomen, usually foul-mouthed and indiscriminately abusive, were polite and also asked for the books. One man was particularly remorseful. Hearing about the severe karmic reactions awaiting him after death, he was sorry about his profession and honestly desired to give up this heinous practice, his family trade for many generations. He took many books, worth Rs400(!) and also promised to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Taking a risk for preaching is healthy, especially when we have the association of strong devotees. It enables us to help more conditioned souls experience the all-embracing mercy of Lord Caitanya.

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (6.17.28) Lord Śiva says, *nārāyaṇa-parāḥ sarve na kutaścana bibhyati*: “Pure devotees of the Lord do not fear any condition of life. For them heaven, hell, and liberation are all the same because wherever they go they serve Kṛṣṇa.” We should have a healthy fear of Māyā, but at times we should take risks to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Kṛṣṇa will protect us. In the *Uddhava-gītā* (SB 11.27.46) Kṛṣṇa tells Uddhava how to pray to Him in His Deity form: *prapannaṁ pāhi mām īśa bhītaṁ mṛtyu-grahārṇavāt*. “O my Lord, please protect me, who am surrendered unto You. I am most fearful of this ocean of material existence, standing as I am in the mouth of death.” When we go on *sankīrtana* it is risky; we are entering Māyā’s kingdom, declaring war on Māyā. So we have to be very careful and pray for protection. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī once said, “When there is war, there will be casualties.” So if we don’t want to be one of those casualties, we have to be very strict in our spiritual life. Then we won’t be harmed by Māyā. Kṛṣṇa will protect us.

* * *

Bhaktin Ellen

I was distributing in the Czech Republic and met a young, homeless beggar. He told me he had some of our books and that he really wanted the *Bhagavad-gītā*. But he had no money, and whatever money

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

he collected on the street he had to spend for food. I told him that he could come every afternoon to our Govinda's restaurant and take some restaurant *prasādam* that hadn't been distributed during the day, and then he could spend his collected money on books. He agreed, and the next afternoon he bought a *Bhagavad-gītā*. He plans to buy the whole set of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books in this way.

* * *

End of Chapter One—Book Distribution: the Pinnacle of Compassion

Print as many books as possible, this is my real pleasure. By printing these books of our Krishna Conscious philosophy in so many languages we can actually inject our movement into the masses of persons all over the world, especially there in the Western countries and we can literally turn whole nations into Krishna Conscious nations.

[Letter to Hridayananda, 21 December 1974]

www.icd.com/krishna.html

If we simply present Krishna Consciousness in a serious and attractive way, without need to resort to fashionable slogans or tricks that is sufficient. Our unique asset is our purity. No one anywhere can match it.

Letter to Yogesvara, Bombay
28 December, 1971

www.icd.com/krishna.html

Chapter Two Books Make Bhaktas

Most devotees in our Society come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness because of receiving a book. As I travel around the world, I inevitably ask devotees I meet how they came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Ninety-five percent of the time it's because they received a book. More often than not it was the *Bhagavad-gītā* that convinced them. This is one of the reasons I mainly distribute *Bhagavad-gītās*—it's what makes devotees. It's also what brought me onto the *bhakti* path.

Sometimes we hear this criticism about book distribution: “What is the use of book distribution? Who's becoming a devotee? It's something of the past. Let's do something new.”

Here is a morning walk conversation with Śrīla Prabhupāda, from May of 1975, that may clear up such misconceptions:

It is missionary activity, that they do not understand, but you have to make them understand. They are not calling you, “I am suffering; please come,” but it is your business to go and let them know that “You are suffering. You take this method.” That is the way of becoming very quickly recognized by Kṛṣṇa. Otherwise, if you think, “They are not understanding; what is the use of going there? Let me sleep,” that is not good. They are not understanding; still, you have to go. Then Kṛṣṇa will take that “He is laboring so hard for My sake.” Never mind he is successful. It doesn't matter. But you are working hard for Kṛṣṇa. That is noted down.

So our business is to be recognized by Kṛṣṇa. Whether one man is converted or not converted, that is not our business. We shall try our best. But Kṛṣṇa must see that I am giving service to Kṛṣṇa. That's all. That is wanted. Not that you have to judge that you have approached so many men; nobody became Kṛṣṇa conscious. That doesn't matter. But you have gone there. You have endeavored your sincere effort. That is recognized by Kṛṣṇa. That is the order of Caitanya Mahāprabhu: *yāre dekha, tāre kaha 'kṛṣṇa'-upadeśa*: “Whomever you meet, you give him, you inform him the instruction of Kṛṣṇa.” Caitanya Mahāprabhu never said that “You see that he has actually become Kṛṣṇa conscious.” Never says. You simply say and go and say. That is your business. It is not that you have to see that he has become Kṛṣṇa conscious. It is not so easy. It will take, *bahūnām janmanām ante*, after many, many births. But you have to do your duty. Go and preach. Then your duty is finished. Of course, you will try to convert. If he is not converted, that is not deviation of your duty. You have simply to go and spread. Just like when I came to your country, I never expected any success because I knew as soon as I say “No illicit sex, no meat-eating,” they will reject me immediately.

Whether people join or not has a lot to do with the sincerity of the preachers. In Chowpatti devotees are lined up to move into the *āśrama*, and there are 130 *brahmacārīs* living in the temple. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that a temple is as good as the leader. In Chowpatti the main activity is preaching, and the leader, Rādhānātha Mahārāja, is expert in *ācāra* (acting properly) and *pracāra* (preaching)—rare to find. When devotees were preaching in Bombay in the early 70's, practically no one was joining. One of the leading *sannyāsīs* said to Prabhupāda, “Practically we're seeing that only in West Bengal are people becoming devotees.” But now in the same city, Mumbai, under the guidance of Rādhānātha Swami and Gopāla Krishna Mahārāja, so many people are joining.

It is Kali-yuga, and most of us are born *mlecchas*. If someone does join, it is the mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Śrīla Prabhupāda, and devotees who are going out of their way to give mercy. In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (8.7.44) we find this statement:

*tapyante loka-tāpena sādharmaḥ prāyaśo janāḥ
paramārādhanaṁ tad dhi puruṣasyākhilātmanaḥ*

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

“Great personalities almost always accept voluntary suffering because of the suffering of people in general. This is considered the highest method of worshiping the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is present in everyone’s heart.”

Even if there is no result—people aren’t joining—still we should know that Kṛṣṇa is pleased and that people are benefiting. They may not join, but people are definitely reading the books and getting purified.

* * *

His Holiness Bhakti-vijñāna Swami

Here is Mahārāja’s account of how the first large shipment of books entered the USSR.

“In 1989 Brahma Muhūrta Dāsa heard that the Russians were allowing religious books into the USSR for the first time. The BBT decided to print 200,000 books and send them in. They were put in three semi trucks, but when the trucks reached the border the customs officials wouldn’t allow them in because they hadn’t heard of the new law. After three days the books were allowed in, but they would have to be held in a warehouse. The devotees went to the warehouse and asked the persons in charge why the books would not be given to them. The officials told the devotees to come back in ten days. After ten days the devotees returned, only to find that nothing had changed. One *mātājī* then told the officials: ‘You’re all dinosaurs, living a hundred years in the past. Don’t you know there’s a new trend in this country? Don’t you watch television!’ Then the devotees demonstrated outside the warehouse until the books were released.”

Bhakti-vijñāna Mahārāja, who was there at the time, said that from these 200,000 books hundreds and hundreds if not thousands of devotees came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

* * *

His Holiness Bhakti Vikāsa Swami

As a devotee advances in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he begins to feel blissful when rising early in the morning. How wonderful — another day in the service of Kṛṣṇa! So much work in the service of Kṛṣṇa, so many things to do. There are so many people all over the world who have to know about Kṛṣṇa. They don’t know about Him yet. They are just going to work or school, and they don’t know that they are devotees of Kṛṣṇa. Some are just waiting for someone to come and say, “Hey, here’s a book about Kṛṣṇa.” Then they read it and come to the temple and ask, “What is this?” They start to associate, to chant.

There are so many people like us before we knew about Kṛṣṇa. We thought that life means to go to school, eat some bread, watch some TV, sleep, etc. This is life. We didn’t know about Kṛṣṇa. Now we know about Kṛṣṇa and our life has changed. So many people all over the world — they don’t know about Kṛṣṇa yet. Or they may have heard something, but they haven’t come to the point of understanding that there is no meaning to life except to serve Kṛṣṇa.

So devotees have an exciting mission — to go out and find all those devotees who don’t realize yet that they are devotees. Great mission. Just like some kind of hunting —transcendental hunting. Where are the devotees? Many *karmīs* like to go hunting. They go out with guns and shoot rabbits and deer — very demoniac. But devotees go out hunting for more devotees: “Where are those spirit souls who are eager to understand Kṛṣṇa? Where are they?” There are so many. You can never tell who will become a devotee. They may be old or young. They may be pleasantly behaved or very nasty. Sometimes very nasty people also change and become devotees. Who are these people? They are all spirit souls, servants of Kṛṣṇa. So it is a great mission for the devotees in The International Society for Krishna

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Consciousness to find people who want to know the truth. That is the greatest pleasure: to find someone who forgot Kṛṣṇa and is now willing to take up the process to remember Him.

Kṛṣṇa Himself likes to do this. He finds such pleasure in waking others up to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He Himself comes as Lord Caitanya and preaches by spreading the holy names, requesting people to preach, discussing philosophy, appointing His disciples the Six Gosvāmīs to renovate Vṛndāvana and write books. The Six Gosvāmīs carried the message of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, sending their disciples to preach the message in their books, and this process is going on at the present time, the same movement of Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Caitanya Mahāprabhu, who is Kṛṣṇa Himself, came to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. This is the victory sound. Wherever there is the chanting of the holy name, that is a sign of victory. Wherever devotees are enthusiastically chanting, then Māyā's influence will definitely be cast away and the transcendental potency of the holy name will awaken the sleeping souls. So devotees have to go out among the people who are sleeping in the lap of the witch called Māyā and chant the name of Kṛṣṇa, which will enter the hearts of the sleeping souls and awaken them and enliven them. This is the joyful life of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Arjuna forgot it; he became despondent. A devotee wants to conquer *māyā*, just as Arjuna conquered the forces of the Kauravas. Conquer *māyā* by preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness. And there will be some casualties, no doubt. In preaching, in fighting *māyā*, there may be some casualties. Even big generals may fall, but their service is not forgotten. And those who are alive and strong in Kṛṣṇa consciousness should remain alive and strong by always adhering to *sādhana* and chanting nicely, studying Prabhupāda's books. Do not entertain foolish, nonsense ideas. Real knowledge is that which comes in *paramparā*. Prabhupāda is the great empowered associate of Caitanya Mahāprabhu who has given us this knowledge. What we have heard in disciplic succession, what Prabhupāda has given us — that we should follow. Just follow what the *ācāryas* have given us — simple system. Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and be happy, and spread that chanting to others. In that way we will remain strong, blissful, and happy, and Kṛṣṇa will always be there to help us.

I was about sixteen when my best friend at school wanted to show me some of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. But I refused, saying, "I know all about these Indian swamis; they're all cheaters." About two years later I came across a *Kṛṣṇa* book in someone else's house. The owner hadn't read it. I did. Afterward I went to the temple and joined.

* * *

His Holiness Jayapatāka Swami

One of my disciples told me an unusual story of how he came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Drunk one night in Toronto, he bought a *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* from a devotee and stuck it in his briefcase. When he got home and opened his briefcase and saw the *Bhagavad-gītā*, he couldn't remember how he'd gotten it. So he opened the book and started reading. He became so purified by reading the *Bhagavad-gītā* that he wanted to visit a temple right away. And when he looked in the back of the book and saw the address list he said, "Wow, there is a temple right here in Toronto!" So he went to the temple, and that day happened to be Nityānanda Trayodaśī. When he arrived a huge *kīrtana* going on, and that was it for him. He moved in and became a devotee.

So we give the books out to people, and they are like seeds that later come to fruition.

* * *

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

His Holiness Śivarāma Swami

This was back in the early 70s, soon after I joined. It was very cold in Montreal, windy and snowy, and although I was in bliss, the people walking around me were not. I decided to try to sell books in the department store I was standing in front of. I filled my book bag, went inside, and began approaching the shoppers. I constantly kept moving so the security guards wouldn't catch me. It was easy selling books in the store, and I did not correct people's spontaneous misconception that the books I was selling were part of a special sale by the store management. After about a half hour I saw that a security man was following me. I tried to lose him by going up the escalator to the 5th floor and then down again. He followed me and finally stopped me and said, "I want to talk to you." I was used to being thrown out of shopping centers and stores, so I followed him to a little office and braced myself for a dressing-down.

He asked, "What are you selling?"

From my bag I pulled out one volume of the *Kṛṣṇa*-book trilogy, showed it to him, and replied, "Books about God, who appeared on earth five thousand years ago."

"Can I buy one?" he asked. At first I thought he was teasing me, but it turned out he was serious. He had already read one of Prabhupada's books, which he'd retrieved from the trash, a book someone had bought and thrown away. Now from me he bought a *Kṛṣṇa*-book trilogy for \$10, and I invited him to the temple.

A few weeks later, during the Sunday Feast I noticed that the security guard had come. And he continued to come regularly for some months, taking up chanting and our devotional practices. Then one day I suggested to him that he quit his job and move in. He did. Of course, I sent him out on *sankīrtana*, and sometimes he would stand in front of the store he had worked in. Eventually he moved to Chicago and received initiation, receiving the name Sītā-Rāma Dāsa.

Sītā-Rāma's is one of countless stories in which someone ends his or her timeless wandering in the material world by receiving and reading one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. Bring the sufferings of others to a close and give them a book. Don't get in the way.

It was December 1975, during the first marathon in Winnipeg, where I was distributing *Kṛṣṇa* books on the street in -50-degree weather. One day, although freezing, I was in so much ecstasy that I was crying. People didn't know why. One boy was watching me, and when I went into a store to warm up he followed me. He was so impressed that devotees could stand in the cold and distribute books for no pay. He bought several books, giving all the money he had, and asked why I was crying. I told him. A week later he joined the temple and became a book distributor.

A *mātājī* distributing books in the early days of ISKCON approached a young man and offered him many books. He held the stack in his arms. Then she asked for a donation. He couldn't get to his wallet, so she said, "I can get it." He turned around so she could get to it. She took all the money and was about to give the wallet back to him when a policeman came up and asked, "What's going on here?"

She said, "I'm distributing some books to this man." He saw that she had taken all the money out of his wallet. So the policeman asked the young man, "Is this OK with you?"

He said, "Yes, but I do need some money for the train."

The policeman asked the *mātājī*, "Can you give him some money for the train?" She did.

He then went home and read the books — and eventually became Candramauli Swami.

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Miśra Bhagavān Dāsa (ACBSP)

I used to be on the Rādhā-Dāmodara traveling party with Viṣṇujana Swami and Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja. Those were the good old days, the best days of my life. But eventually, because of the unusual types of fund-raising the devotees were asked to do in the early 80's (specifically selling paintings), which I didn't at all appreciate, I left to join the Air Force. I was in for six years. Then I became a follower of the Grateful Dead. After a while I met a girl and we stayed together for some time, apparently happy. But gradually I saw my lifestyle as the same old "chewing the chewed" materialism and became disgusted. In 1992, as I wandered around in a Grateful Dead open-air concert, I saw someone glowing. This person looked like a light in darkness, although it was broad daylight. I went over to him and asked his name. He said his name was Tāra Dāsa and handed me a *Beyond Birth and Death*. After reading the book I bought from Tāra at the concert, my former Kṛṣṇa consciousness was rekindled. My girlfriend saw the book lying around and would sometimes pick it up and read it. It started making a lot of sense to her also.

Although my girlfriend and I went our different ways, I again took up Kṛṣṇa consciousness and am now back in the fire of book distribution. My girlfriend also took Prabhupāda's teachings very seriously and is now Lalitā-gopī Dāsī. She lives at the New Vrindavan community and helps take care of the cows.

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

In this case we can see that when we distribute books we are not only helping people who have never had any contact with Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but we may also be helping those who have gotten off the path of pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness get back on it. In this case both kinds of people were helped when Tāra Dasa distributed a *Beyond Birth and Death*. (Another lesson of this incident is that we shouldn't underestimate the power of small books.) Tāra had no idea who Miśra Bhagavān was—he looked just like any other Grateful Dead fan—but underneath the external dress was a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda who was ready to rekindle his Kṛṣṇa consciousness. In a larger sense, all book distributors should see everyone as a dormant devotee of Kṛṣṇa.

Miśra Bhagavān Dāsa (cont.)

In 1999 I went to El Paso, Texas, to do *saṅkīrtana*. It was during the marathon, and a few hundred people bought copies of Śrīla Prabhupāda's first small book, *Easy Journey to Other Planets*.

One El Paso student received a copy of *Easy Journey to Other Planets* from a friend. He liked the book so much that he got a *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* and began to teach its message to his other friends. Then he brought his girlfriend and another young couple to the Dallas temple for a visit. Now all four of them have moved into the temple and become new *bhaktas* and *bhaktins*.

* * *

Sureśvara Dāsa (ACBSP)

I remember selling *Kṛṣṇa* books door to door. On one day, practically everyone who opened a door bought a book. The secret to being a successful book distributor, I found, was to be an avid reader of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

In the beginning all the other devotees were selling books quite easily, but I couldn't sell any. I tried everything, but nothing worked. Then I remembered reading in *The Nectar of Devotion* that if we truly wish to earn Kṛṣṇa's service, we must cry for it. As an experiment, I went to a place in the temple where no one would see or hear me (so I wouldn't be branded a fake), and cried again and again for permission to sell Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. After that, I was permitted to sell some books.

One day, much later, when I was selling books door to door in the Hollywood Hills in full devotional garb, I came to a house way out in the woods. Before ringing the doorbell I said a prayer, in which I admitted to being completely unqualified for serving Śrīla Prabhupāda. I frankly admitted that I didn't have any ability to speak effectively or to represent the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. I begged to be empowered to speak something worthy and to continue being allowed to sell Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. I rang the doorbell, and an elderly woman answered. When she saw me she burst into tears. She said that she was old and practically invalid and so couldn't visit the temple, but that she'd been begging Kṛṣṇa to send a devotee to her home, although she felt it was impossible since she was all the way out in the woods. She bought all my books.

On another day I met a hippy in the hills near Santa Cruz. I tried to sell him *The Nectar of Devotion*, but he was broke. So I continued selling books door to door for the next several hours, until I had collected enough extra money to pay for his book. Then I hitchhiked several miles back to his house and gave him his book. It touched him so much that I would care about him and give him that book that he read it. Later he moved into the temple, became an initiated devotee, and eventually took *brāhmaṇa* initiation.

Udayānanda Dāsa (ACBSP)

In the mid 1990's a woman in her early seventies came into my art shop at the local shopping mall. She bought several paintings for her home, and while I framed them we talked. She told me her name was Harriet Barret. She was the mother of three children and the grandmother of seven, and she had been married for thirty-six years before her husband passed away a few years earlier. Somehow we got to the subject of reincarnation. When Harriet mentioned that she believed in reincarnation, I replied, "It's not a question of belief but a matter of fact. I've been a student of Vedic literature, specifically the *Bhagavad-gītā*, for more than twenty years." I then explained some of the *Gītā*'s teachings, and she was very receptive to the philosophy. At the end of our conversation I asked her to come again. "There's a book I want to give you," I said.

When she came back two weeks later, I gave her a copy of *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. She took the book and thanked me enthusiastically. She then began coming to my shop every week, asking questions about vegetarianism, material attachments, the three modes of nature, and so on. One day she asked if I knew anything about meditation. "Oh, yes," I replied, "I've been doing mantra meditation for many years. Someday, when I'm not so busy, I'll show you how to meditate with beads."

A few weeks went by, and Harriet kept coming to my shop. "When are you going to show me how to meditate?" she would ask. But because of my busy work schedule I just couldn't find time to show her how to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa on beads. Then one day she called me on the phone. By then she had read more than four hundred pages of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. "How do you pronounce K-R-S-N-A?" she asked.

"Oh, that's Kṛṣṇa!" I said, pronouncing it for her.

Then she asked, "How do you pronounce H-A-R-E?"

"That's Hare!" I said.

"And R-A-M-A?" she asked.

"That's Rāma!"

"So," she asked, "you say Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare? Is this the mantra you were going to teach me?"

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

“You got it!” I said. I explained that this is the *mahā-mantra* — the greatest mantra — and that chanting it is the highest form of meditation one can possibly perform. If she chanted this mantra, I told her, all her material attachments would be broken and her past karma removed, and eventually she would become completely purified. She would transcend the bondage of repeated birth and death and return home, back to Godhead.

Harriet started chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* daily. At first she chanted fifteen minutes a day. Gradually she increased. One day she called me in a very excited mood. She had just chanted for two hours without stopping. I was very happy at Harriet’s progress. Her enthusiasm to learn more and more also humbled me and made me appreciate the incredible gifts Śrīla Prabhupāda has given the world. How easy it is to take for granted the perfect wisdom of the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and the potency of the holy name!

The realization I’ve had is that billions of people never get the chance to have the most important questions of life answered — even by the age of seventy-one. Harriet Barrett had led a thoroughly prosperous life, but something was missing. Then she began chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa every day, and the gap in her life was filled. She told me that the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra was the most valuable acquisition of her life. “Never in my seventy-one years have I ever experienced such overwhelming joy and tranquillity,” she said. “I am humbled that at my age the Supreme Lord would be so kind to give me this great gift of purification and the ability to understand it.”

* * *

Vaiśeṣika Dāsa (ACBSP)

Book distribution is based on faith. The more we read, the more our faith increases. Every one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books can purify our hearts and the hearts of those whom we give them to. To show you how this happens, I’ll give you an example. A lady received one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books thirty years ago; she never read it. However, when her son embarked on a spiritual path she thought he might appreciate the book she had received years earlier. She gave it to him. He read it and was immediately convinced. Now he’s a devotee.

* * *

Nidrā Devī Dāsī (ACBSP)

When seeds are sown, they take time to grow into plants. There need to be watering, cultivating, weeding. In time the plants flourish. When we look at the big picture, we see that many *bhakti* plants have sprouted though they may not be in our own backyard. Actually, most who have joined are not living in temple *āśramas*. They are living all over the world in all kinds of situations. Many more are joining now than ever before. We have to be more broadminded about what “joining” really is.

In my own case, I was practicing some Kṛṣṇa consciousness since the early 1970’s (I was somewhat of a closet devotee, since many of my friends and family members did not really know what I was doing). Then in 1976 I moved into a temple. Many felt that I had not joined until I moved in, but in my heart and in my practices I had already started my Kṛṣṇa consciousness and had accepted Śrīla Prabhupāda as my spiritual master several years before moving into an *āśrama*. So there are many people who have joined us but we may not recognize them. But Śrīla Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa surely recognize them, and hopefully in the future we will be more able as a movement to connect with so many who are joining.

In 1972 a devotee approached a man passing through the St. Louis airport and distributed Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *Bhagavad-gītā* to him. He took it home and put it on his bookshelf. There it sat for ten years. In 1982 his wife was pregnant and wanted to do something interesting to pass the time. She saw

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

the *Bhagavad-gītā* on the shelf and thought it would be interesting to read the whole book. She did, and it made her whole life interesting. She told her husband how interesting it was, and he also started reading it. Then he decided they should visit the local ISKCON temple, which they began visiting regularly.

Eventually, the man's job sent him to Boise, Idaho. There the couple became more involved in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but there was no temple. So they decided to start their own. They became initiated and received the names Ananta Rūpa Dāsa and Ārūdhā Devī Dāsī. She home-schooled her two children by mainly teaching them from Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. One of them graduated with a PhD in religion from Oxford University at the age of twenty-two and is now teaching at a university. The other is also at Oxford University, also studying religion. Both of them are initiated and are engaged in the service of Kṛṣṇa. By Ananta Rūpa's and his wife's preaching, many people in Boise have become devotees and are now living on the same street as the temple.

All of this because of one book that was patiently waiting on a bookshelf for ten years, before the "time bomb" went off and transformed so many lives.

I approached a young lady named Nancy in the Denver airport. She took a book but then later threw it in the trash. Paradoxically, she was curious but inimical. Some time later she visited Govinda's buffet at the ISKCON temple in Denver. When I recognized her and approached her, she said she was only coming for the food and did not want anything to do with the devotees.

Then the *prasādam* took effect.

Gradually she started to talk with the devotees. Then she began doing service, and soon she began preaching via the ISKCON Prison Ministry. Eventually she took initiation, receiving the name Bhāgavatī Devī Dāsī. By then she was writing to about a hundred inmates a month, some of whom received initiation. She distributed many books to the inmates and preached enthusiastically for several years. Then, in her early 40s she left her body. About a year or so before she left, I gave her a set of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. She and her husband would read them regularly. He also took initiation. So in many ways Śrīla Prabhupāda's books became her life and soul, and she distributed hundreds of books through the mail. And to think that it all started with a book that she threw in the trash!

In 1988 I was distributing in the Denver airport when a businessman approached me. This gentleman, Chuck, wanted to see what books I had, and I showed him what I was distributing — Ninth Canto, part one. He said that he already had it. I thought, "Most people don't have this volume," so I said, "Perhaps you have another volume of the series?" But he insisted that he did have it, and to prove it he took out a small sheet of paper from his wallet, on which he had listed all the books by Śrīla Prabhupāda he already had and those he still needed to acquire. I was amazed, since most people we met at the airport didn't know anything about *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* yet here was a person who was methodically collecting the whole set!

He asked, "Do you have any of the volumes I need?" I began to shake my head when I realized that I had my own personal Eighth Canto, part one, which I would read during *prasādam* breaks. So I gave him that volume and he gave a generous donation. Then we arranged that I would mail him the remaining volumes.

After I had corresponded with him and mailed him the remaining books over a few years, Chuck was well on his way to becoming Kṛṣṇa conscious — chanting rounds, following the principles, etc. He would even buy books buy the box and distribute them to his friends and fellow employees.

Perhaps the most amazing part of this tale is that Chuck and I wound up getting married, although neither of us were initially interested in getting involved in a marriage. But both of us had a special

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

inspiration from Śrīla Prabhupāda that he wanted us to get married, and we took his desire seriously. Then Chuck got initiated and is now Caitanya Kṛṣṇa Dāsa.

* * *

Acala Dāsa

I used to be a major in the Russian military. At that time I started practicing various types of yoga and studying Eastern philosophy. I heard that some of the privates in my company were devotees of Kṛṣṇa, so I called them in to speak to them.

When they heard that the major wanted to speak to them, they became afraid, thinking, “He’s in such a big position. Why would he want to speak to us unless we’ve done something wrong. Now we’re going to be punished!”

They came to my office, and to their amazement I started asking them about *bhakti-yoga*. “What would be a good way to start learning?” I asked.

“You should read the *Bhagavad-gītā*,” they replied.

“Do you have one?” I asked, and they said they did. They gave me Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* and were so bold that they asked for a donation. I was surprised that these little privates could ask me for a donation—but also impressed, so I gave them some money.

Later, whenever they would see me they’d ask if I’d read the book yet, and I would always say, “No, I haven’t had the time.” I began to feel a little guilty that I hadn’t read it, so I read the translations. After that, when they asked if I’d read the book yet, I could honestly reply, “I have.”

Then one night Śrīla Prabhupāda came to me in a dream and said, in perfect Russian, “It will be all right if you read the purports also.” I woke up and was astonished that Prabhupāda had come to me to instruct me. So I immediately started reading the *Bhagavad-gītā* again, but this time without skipping the purports.

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

One of the book distributors in the Moscow temple used to be a doctor. He told me how he came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

One day he left his office to have lunch, and as he was walking he saw a table with some books on it and a person standing behind it. He stopped and looked and then asked what the books were about. The devotee answered, “They’re about you. They tell you who you are and who you aren’t—that you’re an eternal soul, not your temporary body.”

Impressed with the devotee’s conviction and purity, the doctor asked, “How old are you?”

The devotee replied, “Do you want to know how old *I* am, or how old *my body* is? If you want to know how old *I* am, I’m eternal. If you want to know how old *my body* is, it’s twenty-two years old.”

Again the doctor was impressed, so he thought it would be a good idea to get a book. The devotee suggested the *Bhagavad-gītā*. The doctor read the book, became a devotee, and has been distributing books for the past ten years.

There is a blind devotee in the Moscow temple who goes out every day to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. Another book distributor in Moscow has artificial arms that often malfunction. During the book distribution seminar he asked, “How can I distribute Prabhupāda’s books for my whole life?”

“Don’t stop,” I replied.

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

Acala Dāsa (continued)

While distributing on the street mall in Moscow, I approached a lady and offered her a book. I explained some of the contents, and she enthusiastically took it. Seeing her enthusiasm, I invited her to the temple, and a few weeks later she came. By coincidence, that day the devotees were holding a book distribution seminar. Seeing her come as a result of getting a book, I glorified her for her sincerity: “Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, ‘Out of many thousands of people, one may inquire into the Absolute Truth.’ So here we have this nice lady coming to inquire about the Absolute Truth. She is not ordinary.” She was touched by my kind words and stayed for the whole seminar.

She left that evening, and we didn’t see her again. A year later I was in a plane to go to the Māyāpur festival in India. Next to me sat a lady who, after a few minutes, asked me, “Do you remember me?”

I looked at her and said, “No, I’m sorry, I don’t.”

“You gave me a book in Moscow,” she replied. “I then visited your temple, and you spoke some kind words about me. From getting that book and associating with the devotees, I have become a devotee. I am on my way to the Māyāpur festival.”

I then remembered her and felt very pleased that she had become a devotee.

After the Māyāpur festival she was on a train to Vṛndāvana. While on this train she met another Russian devotee. His service is book distribution in India. When he met this lady on the train, he asked her if she would like to learn how to distribute books. She knew of the importance of book distribution from hearing about it during her first visit to the temple. So she took some lessons from him. She had a nice experience on the train distributing books, and when she returned to Russia she continued distributing. She is now a full-time book distributor in Russia.

* * *

Aiśvarya Dāsa

I’m sitting in the temple room chanting my last rounds on an island in Ireland, in the middle of nowhere, where deer and rabbits roam wild eating all our trees and flowers. Then in comes Arjuna Dāsa with a stranger, a young man in his twenties. Stunned momentarily upon seeing another human being from the outside world in this remote *mandira*, I stammered out a quiet “*Haribol*.” This young man wanted to join our temple and dedicate his life to ISKCON by moving into the *āśrama* and doing whatever was required to become fully Kṛṣṇa conscious. In shock at this unexpected news, I asked, “How, why?” He was working in Dublin two years earlier and got a *Chant and Be Happy* from a *saṅkīrtana* devotee. (At this point I should mention that the Irish *yātrā* has only two full-time book distributors.) He read the book and figured everything inside was safe and sound and then started chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, sixteen rounds a day, and following the four regulative principles. Finally he quit his job, and after some time he took a bus to the town nearest to our temple, determined to meet another devotee. After walking for three hours in the dark asking locals how to get here, one farmer took pity on him and kindly took him in his tractor to the lake surrounding our *mandira*. By chance a devotee spotted him and put him up for the night in his home, and now as I write this he is chanting *japa* in the temple room downstairs, fully fired up and confident that he has changed his life for the better.

So there you have it. Book distribution still works. It is still one of the most important preaching tools we have to offer. This young *bhakta* had a job and was a respectable member of society. Just a normal guy who got a small book, read it, and was convinced that chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is the best thing he could possibly do with his life. So he packed his bags and found the temple.

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Ajita Dāsa

Parigraha Prabhu, a *brahmacārī* from Northern Europe, visited Brisbane, Australia, to distribute books. While standing in front of Govinda's downtown, he gave a soft-cover *Gītā* to a Mr. Wong. Mr. Wong gave Parigraha \$20 and was on his way.

A few weeks later we received a letter from Mr. Wong describing his appreciation for the *Gītā*, and accompanying the letter was a check for \$4,000, "a donation," in Mr. Wong's words, "to further KC."

Needless to say, I at once wrote back to Mr. Wong, thanking him profusely for his generous donation, and Dhruva Prabhu visited him at home to give him a couple of more books. He appreciated the gesture, but his mother didn't. "Better to communicate by phone or mail," he told us out of his mother's earshot.

In a few days we received another letter from Mr. Wong, in which he thanked us for the books, and with the letter was another "donation to further KC." This time it was a check for \$8,000!

In my thank-you letter to Mr. Wong I informed him I had a gift for him and invited him to the temple. He came by the temple a few days later, and we gave him a full set of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatams*. He was very happy to receive the books, and after an hour or so of conversation he pulled out an envelope that said "donation to further KC." Enclosed: yet another check for \$8,000. I soon left Brisbane and the munificent Mr. Wong, but since then I have heard that he sent yet another "donation to further KC," this time a gift of \$6,000. Total: \$26,000, stemming from the distribution of one soft-cover *Bhagavad-gītā*. Who says book distribution is not cost-effective?

Mr. Wong's father, upon hearing that his son had given so much money to the Hare Kṛṣṇas, became upset and demanded the money back. Soon thereafter he went on a business trip and his plane crashed and he perished. Mr. Wong later became an initiated devotee.

While distributing books in Kathmandu, a devotee approached a teenage boy named Suvarna and tried to convince him to take a book. Suvarna wasn't interested. But the book distributor was new and became forceful, demanding that Suvarna take a book, saying, "This book helped me so much, and it can help you, too! Now please take it and give a donation."

Suvarna relented, took the book and three others, and gave a donation, thinking, "These people are poor; let me help them." Then he went to visit a relative in another city. When he became bored, he remembered the books and thought, "I bought them; I might as well read them." He found the books to be exactly what he was looking for.

That very day he returned to Kathmandu to look for the devotees, but he couldn't find them. Every day for three months he went back to the place where he had met the devotees, hoping he would see them again. Then one day he saw two devotees and rushed over to them, expressing how happy he was to see devotees again. They had a book table, so he took some books and started distributing them to the passersby, knowing the importance of the knowledge they contained. The devotees were trying to talk to him, but he would just distribute books and give the devotees the laxmi. He did this for three days. They were very surprised to see his enthusiasm and invited him to their center. He came and soon moved in. Suvarna's parents were upset at first, but when they met Pātrī Prabhu, who oversees the preaching in Kathmandu, they were satisfied that their son was in good hands.

It turns out that Bhakta Suvarna, though quite young, had already led an incredible life. When he was fifteen he entered a national poetry competition with 4,000 participants. Among the contestants were highly educated professors and graduate students, and many others with refined poetic ability. Suvarna was among them. Gradually, as the competition progressed, 300 were left, then 150, 100, 50, 30, 20, 10, 5, and 3. Suvarna was among the last 3. Whoever wrote the best poem would be the national

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

poetry champion. He won! The government awarded him \$10,000 and a scholarship to any university he choose, which would be good until he was thirty.

Suvarna was a sharp boy, so instead of spending the money, he bought shares in a printing company. The company prospered, and over the next three years it became one of the most prominent printing companies in Nepal. Now, at seventeen, Suvarna owns 70% of the company. There are two other shareholders: one is a previous governor of Nepal, and the other is a representative of Google and the BBC. Each has a 15% share of the company. The name of the printing company is Gauranga Printing. Suvarna plans to soon begin printing BBT books at his company.

Also, at the age of 14 and 15 Suvarna would regularly write articles for newspapers and magazines. But now that he's a devotee he's interested only in Kṛṣṇa, so he stopped writing those articles. I encouraged him to write for BTG.

Recently Suvarna took up some managerial responsibility at one of the Kathmandu centers. He regularly distributes books and is quite good at it.

I visited the San Diego temple and was glad to see a couple of new *saṅkīrtana* devotees distributing books. One of them was Bhakta Bronson. I asked him how he became a devotee, and he said he had received *The Perfection of Yoga* from Rādhānātha Prabhu in a parking lot. [Please see “An Interview with Rādhānātha Prabhu” in the Introduction.] Not only did Bhakta Bronson become a devotee, but after reading *The Perfection of Yoga* he explained it to his mother and *she* became a devotee. In India it is not uncommon for a devotee to preach to his mother and bring her under the shelter of Lord Kṛṣṇa, but in the West it is very rare.

* * *

Ambarīṣa Dāsa (the younger)

I was distributing books near a bookstore. One Vietnamese poet was going to this bookstore, I stopped him. He said he was looking for the *Vedas*. He bought the First Canto of the *Bhāgavatam* from me. I then invited him to the temple. When he came to the temple he became so inspired that he bought other books and started to chant. Then he began helping the BBT to translate Śrīla Prabhupāda's books into Vietnamese. Now he is helping devotees to preach in Vietnam.

* * *

Ānakadundubhi Dāsa

Going door to door, I met a couple in their thirties. They had never seen devotees but had bought a few of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books in a used bookstore. They said they were in love with Śrīla Prabhupāda but did not understand a lot of the things they read. I gave them more books and began writing and visiting them regularly, helping them along in understanding Prabhupāda's books. Now they are regularly chanting six rounds a day and reading the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. When I first met them they were not even vegetarian.

On my last visit they asked me how they could do more devotional service. This couple is one of the innumerable miracles done by Śrīla Prabhupāda books! Śrīla Prabhupāda's books are making devotees; we are here just to give a hand!

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mr̥daṅga

Anonymous: How a Follower of Islam Became a Devotee

We'll call him Bhakta Ahmed. He was a member of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) and an associate of Yasser Arafat. But he gave up his involvement in the PLO because of some things he disagreed with, and he went to Germany to study at a university. One night he got drunk at a bar. Just to his right, on the table in front of him, was a magazine that someone had left behind: *Back to Godhead*. He picked it up to read, but he was so drunk that he couldn't read it and eventually passed out. The bar owner found his address on him and had someone take him home. When he got home he still had the magazine in his hand and was trying to figure out where he got it. Then he started reading it and was amazed. This magazine answered questions he'd vainly looked for answers to in the Koran and elsewhere.

He was frustrated with material life, so he looked up the address of the nearest temple and paid a visit. Devotees preached to him and impressed him, and he asked if he could join. When they heard he was a former member of the PLO, they decided that having him at the temple might mean trouble, so they politely replied that he could not join and explained why.

Disappointed but determined, for the next three days he pleaded with the devotees to let him join. But they wouldn't relent, though they were impressed with his sincerity.

He had heard about the Sunday Feast, so he attended it, and when he arrived he went to the *brahmacārī āśrama*, locked himself in the bathroom, and shaved up.

A devotee eventually knocked on the door. From inside the bathroom came the voice of someone determined to surrender: "I'm not coming out until you agree to let me stay." They complied, and he happily became a member. After some time he received initiation and became Rāvaṇāri Dāsa. He became a good preacher and translated many of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books into Arabic.

* * *

Antardvīpa Dāsa

I was in medical school when I found a *Rāja-vidyā* that my brother had received from a devotee. From reading *Rāja-vidyā* I decided I needed to read the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which I found in the university library. I read it and found it interesting, but not interesting enough to give up my medical career and join the Kṛṣṇas.

Then a few months later I found a set of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatams* in the library, so I started reading, and reading, and reading. I loved Śrīla Prabhupāda's books so much that I decided that during my school break I would just go to the local Hare Kṛṣṇa temple in Brisbane and read Prabhupāda's books with the devotees for seven days.

But when I got to the temple, the first person I saw asked me to help him with the garden, which I did all day. I continued visiting the temple, and after a short time I moved into the *āśrama*. While I was living in the temple I continued with my studies and graduated. Then, while still living in the temple, I worked as a surgeon, making lots of money and giving it to the temple. But after a while I became disgusted with the work, which was little more than a fancy carpenter's job, so I gave it up and became a full-time devotee.

* * *

Braja Bihāri Dāsa (Chowpatti, India)

This is the story of a man who bought Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Bhagavad-gītā* in the year 1980 and placed it on his bookshelf. His name is Khemraj Shah. Time passed quietly, but surely the "bomb" was ticking

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

and waiting to explode. Every year during his annual Diwali mahā-cleaning, Khemraj dumped many books, newspapers, and magazines into the trash bin, but somehow he never discarded the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Once a year this gentleman religiously removed the book off the shelf, cleaned the thick dust that had accumulated on it, and placed it back in the same spot on his bookshelf. After more than a decade of this ritual had passed, Khemraj's fortunes changed.

In the early 90s Khemraj was under tremendous stress at his job. His colleagues were plotting against him, his promotions were in jeopardy, and even his very job was in danger. He had an important task to do: identify his enemies and checkmate them. Vaguely Khemraj remembered how the epic *Mahābhārata* is a tale of intrigue and politics. Surely, he thought, this story had something to tell him that might help him solve his problem. That instant he recollected he had the *Bhagavad-gītā* at home, which for some reason he had refused to discard. Knowing it was part of the *Mahābhārata*, Khemraj figured now was the time to explore its pages.

After reading the first chapter, Khemraj felt he could relate to Arjuna's plight and his reluctance to fight. But Khemraj's concern was to destroy his enemies, so he kept reading. As he read the second chapter, his interest grew—never mind if its teachings weren't fitting into his office setup. After reading chapters three and four, Khemraj felt he needed to take a week off from work and exclusively study the *Gītā*. As he read each chapter, Śrīla Prabhupāda's words touched the core of his heart, and slowly his vision changed. A week later he had begun chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and looking for devotees.

Today, twenty-three years after purchasing the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Khemraj Shah is Khagendra Dāsa, a very active preacher and an initiated disciple of His Holiness Lokanāth Swami. A friend of the Rādhā-Gopīnātha congregation, he stays at Alibagh and, along with his wonderful family, preaches full-time. He left his job long ago and has a steady business, which he says is left totally in Kṛṣṇa's hands so that he can devote all his time and energy to distributing Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others.

* * *

Dāru-brahma Dāsa

Although my mother recalls seeing devotees chanting in the street somewhere, I was just a young boy with her at the time, and I don't recall it at all.

However, I do remember meeting a devotee when I traveled on a bus from Princeton, New Jersey, where I lived at the time. I was seventeen, and it was the first time I'd ridden alone on the bus to New York City. I felt somewhat intimidated by being in The Big Apple by myself.

Soon after getting off the bus at the huge Port Authority terminal at 42nd St., I was approached by a devotee with a book. The thing that struck me at the time, and which has had quite an effect on me ever since concerning how I try to deal with people when I first meet them, was how personal and friendly he was. He asked me my name, where I was from, and what I do, but most importantly, I had the sense that he truly cared about my answers and wasn't just asking them as throwaway questions before getting down to the business of selling me something.

Of course, within a short time he *did* get to the point of asking for a donation for the book, and all I recall was kind of feeling unready to give a donation. Thus I clumsily put the book back in his hands and rushed off mumbling some excuse.

I had no idea what group that person was with, and I quickly forgot the incident.

Three years later, on December 24th, 1977, just before my 21st birthday and one month after Śrīla Prabhupāda had left the planet, I moved into the temple in Gainesville, Florida. It was the first temple I'd visited, just once a few weeks earlier, and I'd joined without ever having read one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. I remember thanking God for giving me the greatest Christmas present ever: the understanding of who He was and what the real purpose of life was.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

The morning after I moved in I was still thanking the Lord for my great fortune and kicking myself for having wasted so much of my life, when a little doubt popped into my mind: “But why, O Lord, did You let me suffer and not let me know about this knowledge before?”

Book distribution was going on quite powerfully at the Gainesville temple, and that morning I saw many *saṅkīrtana* devotees getting ready to go out to distribute books. As I looked on in amazement at the flurry of activity, I got a clear answer from inside: “Do you remember that person who approached you in New York a few years ago? He was doing what these devotees are doing. You see, I *was* trying to enlighten you, even then.”

After just a few days in the temple, I also started going out on book distribution, and I quickly learned that many people who are approached do not take books. But I also thought that it was Kṛṣṇa’s perfect arrangement that I had not taken a book my first time, because now I had no right to get discouraged if someone didn’t take a book.

I knew from experience that just because a person doesn’t take a book doesn’t mean *anything*. Perhaps, like me, that same person would within a few years join a temple and distribute books himself. You never know with Kṛṣṇa!

In this regard, I had an experience eighteen years later. I was at the Los Angeles temple gift shop when a *mātājī* working in the store came up to me and asked, “Did you ever distribute books in the Miami airport?”

I said, “Yes, at different times.”

She exclaimed, “It was you! Do you remember giving me a big book in the airport a few years ago and asking for a donation? I gave you a dollar and you said, ‘Well, we really try to get around \$5 to cover the cost of these big books. Do you mind if I give you a smaller book instead?’ Then you started to gently replace the big book with a smaller one. But I got upset and said, ‘No, you gave me the big book and I want that one!’ And I forcibly grabbed the big book back. You then pleaded with me for a bigger donation, but I got so angry that I grabbed even the dollar I’d already given you and stormed off with both the book and my money.”

By now my memory had been jogged sufficiently to remember the incident. I remembered distinctly thinking at the time, “That !%#@#&%#! I bet someone who takes a book like that will go to hell for quite awhile.”

She continued her story, saying, “Well, Prabhu, I read that book and within a short time became a devotee. And for many years I myself went out and distributed Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books in the Los Angeles airport.” It turns out that she was very good at it, too.

So the lesson is that not only may someone who doesn’t take a book from a book distributor become one, but even someone who *steals* a book from a distributor may become one, too. You never know with Kṛṣṇa.

All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s transcendental book distribution!

* * *

Divya-jñāna Dāsa

We were distributing in downtown Melbourne with Prahlādānanda Swami during the last few days of the December marathon. I stopped a man who told me his name was Adrian. He was twenty-seven years old and worked in a seafood restaurant. As soon as I met him I could tell he was special.

I showed him the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and he said he was interested. But he was unsure whether to take it or not. I introduced him to Prahlādānanda Swami. Mahārāja asked him if he knew what yoga was. Adrian said he did not. So Mahārāja explained that yoga means to control the mind and senses, because by controlling the mind and senses one can become free from stress and anxiety. We spoke for a little longer, after which he took the *Bhagavad-gītā* for \$20. I invited him to our Loft, our inner-city preaching program.

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

One day at the temple, three months later, I saw Adrian in *Bhāgavatam* class. After class I went up to him, and he asked me if I remembered him. I told him I did. I asked him what happened. He said that he'd been going to the Loft for three months, and that he had bought some beads from the restaurant store and started chanting. When I had stopped him the previous December he happened to be looking for something spiritual to do, but he didn't know what.

Now eight months have passed and Bhakta Adrian is chanting sixteen rounds. Instead of working at a seafood restaurant, he works as a chef at our Govinda's restaurant. He is also taking our Bhakti Śāstrī course, so he is doing well. It took a whole team of devotees to get one conditioned soul out of *māyā*. I think that reading the *Bhagavad-gītā* was the final potent act that convinced him to become Kṛṣṇa conscious.

Here is a story that shows how Lord Caitanya's mercy is spreading in so many mysterious ways. By distributing these books we are spreading so many seeds, and we never know where they might end up and sprout.

In Melbourne we have recycle bins where people take old clothes and other things and donate them to charities to be sold as second-hand goods. Some young people play a game called dumpster busting, in which someone climbs into one of these bins and sees what treasures he might find. Gary was dumpster busting one fateful night and found *The Quest for Enlightenment*. He took it home, read it, thought the book was great, and came to the temple. Now Bhakta Gary chants sixteen rounds, follows the morning program, and helps out at our restaurant.

Here's another story: A Rastafarian co-worker asked Andrew, "Have you ever heard about Kṛṣṇa.?" Andrew hadn't, but his curiosity was aroused. So he went to the library to find out about Kṛṣṇa. There he found many books on the subject, so he picked out one, which happened to be *Bhāgavatam* 1.1, and opened it. He read, "In this iron age of Kali men have but short lives. They are quarrelsome, lazy, misguided, unlucky, and, above all, always disturbed." As soon as Andrew read that, he exclaimed, "That's it! That's why the world is so messed up — it's the Age of Kali." He read some more and eventually became a devotee.

* * *

Divya-simha Dāsa

In the summer of 2011 I meet a young man at a Rainbow Gathering in Switzerland. He was on a journey to find the goal of life. We had a nice discussion, and I invited him to our temple in Zurich. The next day he showed up, and after three days in the temple he decided to stay for the *bhakta* program, which had started just a week before.

One day a friend of his came for the Sunday feast, and when he saw me he shouted, "Hey, I know you! Last summer you gave me a couple of books by your spiritual master."

I also recognized him, and it turned out that he had given those books to his friend, the same fellow who had just joined the *bhakta* program. I felt great satisfaction to see how Śrīla Prabhupāda's books prepared this young man to directly accept Kṛṣṇa consciousness and commit himself to becoming a full-time devotee.

But that's not the end of the story! Now, one year later, a new-*bhakta* course has started with five of his closest friends enrolled. They are very serious candidates, with strong ambitions to join the *brahmacārī āśrama*. Three more friends in this group started a community close to the temple, and they are also on their way to becoming serious practitioners of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Two books distributed created such a tremendous effect in the lives of these young people. By Śrīla Prabhupāda's mercy, such miracles truly happen.

All glories to Śrī Śrī Guru and Gaurāṅga! All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda! *Saṅkīrtana yajña kī jaya!*

* * *

Govinda Dāsa

It has to be the most fortunate thing that could happen to anyone—my whole life changed.

It happened one afternoon while I was going to a shop in Durban, South Africa. I saw a book lying on the side of the road. I walked past it, spoke to some friends, bought whatever I needed, and was on my way back home when I again noticed the book. I stopped and picked it up, although I normally wouldn't pick up something from the road that looked as bad as this. It was dirty, torn, and old.

I was a sinful person at that time, and a great meat-eater. One evening I went out with some friends. When I returned home I sat and read a few magazines and then picked up the book I'd found. I dusted it off and read the title: *Coming Back*. I began to read—and I read and read and read. I had never read anything as clear, pure, and truthful as this book. I was amazed and shocked. I began to think how sinful I was. I completed the book the next day and decided to change my life by becoming spiritually conscious. The next month I gave up eating meat, went to the temple, and started learning more about Śrīla Prabhupāda and the all-glorious Lord Kṛṣṇa. I have now been a devotee for three years, and I enjoy every minute of it. All this happened because I decided to take a walk to the shop one day. That is the power of the Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

* * *

Kṛṣṇa Dāsa (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates)

In one of the Far East countries the police were on the lookout for a very notorious criminal. He decided to hide out in the local Hare Kṛṣṇa temple. After he'd stayed in the temple for a few months, his heart became purified and he became a genuine devotee. He had heard of the importance of book distribution and thought he would be good at it since he had a bold nature. He figured the police wouldn't notice him because of his shaven head.

Once while distributing books he was recognized by the police, and they arrested him and took him to jail. Because of the severity of his crimes, the judge sentenced him to serve his sentence in a torturous island prison. Many hard-core criminals had been sent there. To make it even harder for them to escape, the authorities would inject them with tranquilizers. After a while they would forget even who they were and become almost like vegetables. The devotees from the temple pleaded with the judge to release the devotee, since he'd completely changed his way of life. But the judge said that was impossible because of the seriousness and extent of his crimes. He had to undergo the punishment, and there was no escape from that.

The prisoners in the camp were very badly treated. At meal time the police would throw loaves of bread on the ground so the criminals would have to fight among themselves like dogs to get a morsel. At the temple devotees' request, however, the authorities agreed not to inject the devotee with tranquilizers, since he had obviously undergone a change of heart.

After a few months the prison commissioner went to the island prison to see the status of the criminals there. To his astonishment, there was no more throwing of bread to the prisoners. Each prisoner would get his loaf of bread and would then offer it to the Rādhā-Krishna Deity the devotee prisoner had made out of sand. Only then would the prisoners take *prasādam*. All the prisoners were

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

chanting the *mahā-mantra* and had been completely transformed into devotees by associating with the criminal-turned-devotee.

After visiting the island prison, the prison commissioner informed the temple devotees of what he had seen. He was quite happy about how such notorious criminals had undergone such an extraordinary transformation of character. He was completely stunned by the whole episode and decided to reduce the sentence of the devotee criminal on the island.

* * *

Murāri Gupta Dāsa

Bhakta Rick from Holland is serving in the Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Gopīnātha Mandir, in Chowpatty, Mumbai. Every day he goes on book distribution and is very enthusiastic, even on “bad days” when he distributes very few books. The following account by Bhakta Rick explains his unbreakable enthusiasm:

Once a devotee from Amsterdam came to my hometown to distribute books. He had a bad day, managing to distribute only two books the whole day. He was very frustrated. “I have never done so bad. I think I’m in *māyā*. This is the worst score I’ve ever had.” He was so morose. But when he went back to the temple in Amsterdam, he got the shock of his life. One of the two men he’d distributed a book to that day was sitting in the temple room!

The book distributor said, “This has never happened to me before. I’ve distributed books to so many people, but I’ve never seen any of them again. This is the first time I am seeing a person who took a book from me come to the temple. It is the amazing mercy of the Lord.”

Not only this, the next time the book distributor went to the temple, he found that the man had joined the temple!

This shows that no score is a small score. We may do just one or two books in a day, but if one of those books reaches the right person, it has the power to bring about a complete transformation of the heart. This story keeps me going. I know that even if I have a bad day, with a small score, some person’s life might change due to a book I’ve sold.

* * *

Narajīvana Dāsa

I was studying yoga, and a friend of mine knew this. So when he got one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books he gave it to me, thinking I would appreciate it more than he would. It was the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.1. From page one I knew it wasn’t an ordinary book. I read it six hours a day. When I finished reading the book, I would start reading it again. First I would read all the transliterations; then I would go back and read all the translations and purports. I wanted more, so Kṛṣṇa arranged for some devotees to visit my town and hold a program. At the program I found what I wanted — more books! I was in bliss. I didn’t even stay for the whole program, because I wanted to go back to my apartment and read the books. Then, of course, I started chanting, and soon thereafter I found out where the nearest temple was and joined.

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

Narajīvana Prabhu’s story shows, as we’ve seen time and time again, that the person we give the book too may not be the one who ultimately benefits from it. Incidents like this happen quite a bit. The moral of stories like this: “Let’s keep the mercy flowing, because there are people out there looking for — more books!”

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

* * *

Nityānanda Dāsa

While visiting Vṛndāvana with some friends, I met a group of devotees from Tamil Nadu in front of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *samādhi-mandira*. A *pukka* devotee from the group, dressed in *dhotī* and with clear *tilaka*, approached us and, pointing at me, said to his friends, “He came to my home for the first time a few years ago and sold us *The Science of Self-Realization*. That was my first contact with Śrīla Prabhupāda and ISKCON. Now my family and I are all devotees.” We exchanged pleasant words, and then he introduced me to his wife and two children—all wearing *tilaka* and holding *japa-mālā* in their hands.

This experience was for sure a drop of nectar from Kṛṣṇa. From this I understood that all the austerities I had undergone, preaching almost alone for many months, were successful: a whole family had taken up *kṛṣṇa-bhakti*! And how many more are in the queue to get this matchless gift in the near future? The book they bought was the beginning of the end of their material existence. By Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mercy I was made an instrument in this *līlā* of Caitanya Mahāprabhu—the *līlā* of His delivering four more conditioned souls. I felt very happy. It was Kṛṣṇa’s small revelation to me how no endeavor undertaken in preaching goes in vain.

We may not perceive how Kṛṣṇa transcendently enters the hearts of people when they buy a book, say “Kṛṣṇa,” or taste a *prasādam* cookie we made and offered on a simple altar at home. But Kṛṣṇa does enter their hearts, and we have to be fully convinced of that. So what if we don’t see? Even the Yamadūtas, the expert servants of Yamarāja, the main upholder of dharma in the universe, couldn’t perceive the purity Ajāmila achieved by merely chanting the name Nārāyaṇa in *nāmābhāsa*! Likewise, sometimes we also forget the potency of the holy name and other manifestations of Kṛṣṇa, like the Deity, *prasādam*, Vaiṣṇavas, and Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. Nevertheless they have the power to transform any conditioned soul, and just to prove that, sometimes Kṛṣṇa performs these little “miracles,” which I sometimes call “drops of nectar.”

* * *

Padma Locana Dāsa (Bali, Indonesia)

I had been distributing all day and was about to go home. But something inside me (the Supersoul?) pulled me to a nearby beach. I saw a man sitting on the sand staring out into the ocean. I went up to him and, standing behind him, said, “I have something I think you’ll find interesting. You look thoughtful.” At that, the man reached back, and I handed him the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

I started telling him about the teachings as the man looked at the book. He didn’t look at me at all; he just listened and looked through the *Gītā*. Then he said, “How much?” I told him the price and he paid. I then told him about the temple, which was close by.

That night the man went to the temple and asked the devotees, “What can I do to advance in spiritual life?” They told him to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*, and he took up *japa*. Now, one year later, he is chanting sixteen rounds and aspiring for initiation.

Recently the man told me what he had been through up till the time he had received the *Gītā*: “I was an avid gambler and had lost two houses because of it. I was an alcoholic, addicted to drugs, and often coughed up blood. My doctor said I might have only six months to live if I didn’t change my ways. I’m only forty years old. When you saw me on the beach, I was so confused and depressed I didn’t know what to do. Then you brought Kṛṣṇa into my life. Now I’m so happy. Thank you.”

* * *

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

Rādhā-piyārī Dāsī

A devotee in Mumbai went out to distribute *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā*. At one place he knocked on the door but no one replied. Again he knocked, but still no answer. With firm determination to distribute the *Bhagavad-gītā*, he again knocked on the door with great force. A lady angrily opened the door and shouted, “What do you want? I’m very busy,” and tried to shut the door. But the devotee blocked the door with his foot and put the *Bhagavad-gītā* in her hand. As soon as she touched the *Bhagavad-gītā*, she relaxed and calmed down.

The lady then asked the devotee about the *Gītā*, and he explained to her the difference between the body and the soul according to chapter two — how the body is just a dress for the soul, which never dies. She then told the devotee that what she was “busy” with was committing suicide. She showed him the table she had been standing on and the fan on the ceiling with a rope hanging from it, complete with a noose at the end. It was only by the mercy of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His devotee that she had been saved from suicide. Now she is a devotee chanting sixteen rounds and is associated with an ISKCON temple in Mumbai.

* * *

Rūpa-Raghunātha Dāsa

I was going store to store in a town in India when I entered a shop where about ten men were having a business meeting. In such circumstances it’s usually very difficult to interest anyone in taking a book. This time, however, as soon as the leader of the meeting saw me with the *Bhagavad-gītā*s he invited me in and glorified the *Gītā* very nicely, suggesting that all the men in the meeting purchase a *Gītā*, which many of them did. He said, “This book is filled with so much great knowledge that it can change your life and fill you with so much peace.”

It happened to be the end of the meeting, so after everyone had left I asked the man why he had so much faith in the *Gītā*. So he told me his story.

“For some time I had been going through some difficulty with my family, so much so that it had affected my work at the office. So I started drinking, which didn’t help the situation. Finally I decided that my only alternative was to commit suicide. I just couldn’t continue as I was. I was sitting in my room with a little container of poison in front of me, thinking, ‘This is it, the end of the road.’ Just then I looked up and saw the *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* in my bookcase. Then I looked at the container of poison. Then I thought, ‘Maybe this isn’t the end.’ I pulled the *Bhagavad-gītā* off the shelf, brushed off all the dust, and started reading. After reading just a few sentences I felt relief, so I kept reading. For the next four days all I did was read the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which I finished. My life completely changed. I stopped drinking, all my family problems were solved, and I became so happy, like I’d never been before.”

* * *

Sarvasukha Dāsa

I was a university student in my fourth year, studying agriculture. I was also a fanatical Christian. At one point I decided, “I have to fully give my life to Christ.” So I put the name of Christ everywhere in my room and did other things I thought constituted surrender. I had a roommate who was into yoga. He was also a scientist — very intelligent. We used to have debates. I wanted to know what his beliefs were. Then he got one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. He told me what he was reading, and even though what he was saying made sense, I wouldn’t accept. But when he was out of the apartment I would secretly read Prabhupāda’s books. After a few weeks of doing this, I understood that the Kṛṣṇa consciousness philosophy was superior. I then started chanting. My friend found out that there was

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

going to be a Hare Kṛṣṇa program in town, so he asked if I would like to join him. I did, and it was fantastic — the *prasādam*, the lecture by Bhakti Vaibhava Swami, and the devotees. It was all great, and I was amazed. After that experience, it didn't take long before I joined.

* * *

Prāṇa-nātha Dāsa

Once a doctor bought the *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* from me. I got his contact information, and the next time I saw him he said, "I'm astonished. This book is amazing." So he bought a full *Bhāgavatam* set and many other books. I started to visit him every month. He bought *bhajan* CDs and Kṛṣṇa posters. He began playing the CDs in his clinic (he's a homeopathic psychiatrist) and put the posters on the wall. Being very wise, he started to chant the *mahā-mantra* and became a vegetarian. I went to his house several times. I even went to his farm with his family to do some programs. He has been reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* all this time, and now he is reading it for the third time! He buys many *Bhagavad-gītās*, which he gives to his patients.

* * *

Śarabha Dāsa

Until age 18 or 19 I was like everyone else in Serbia — occupied with attempts to turn my materialistic dreams into reality: a good job, a big car, a house or an apartment with a beautiful wife and lots of ruddy-cheeked children. All my thoughts were focused on realizing this dream, until one day — and to this day I don't know why or how — I suddenly got a completely different vision of that dream, the realistic one. Family fights, misunderstandings, deep-rooted selfishness and intolerance.

Now each day seemed senseless, until the idea of committing suicide as a solution to my despair became more and more prominent in my mind. Happiness, joy, satisfaction — for me these were only a dim memory. Aware of the blind alley I was in, I became desperate to find some solution, some shelter. Totally hopeless and lonely, wandering in darkness, somehow or other I struggled on. I tried to forget all my miseries and problems by absorbing myself in drinking, smoking, sleeping, sports, sex, etc. In other words, I didn't know how to get out of the deep mud I was in, so I plunged even deeper into it, deep enough to hide from both the mud and myself. I thought, "Let me embrace nothingness, darkness, unconsciousness."

After finishing high school I had to go into the army, where even deeper realizations of the emptiness of materialistic life were revealed to me.

After the army I went to college, but for a whole year I just experienced more emptiness and pointlessness. Then the first sign of hope appeared. A student I met at college started telling me about yoga, particularly Transcendental Meditation. I took up the practice, meditating fifteen minutes twice a day, and found some relief. I thought I had finally found the real thing. In this way two more years passed.

Then, although somewhat satisfied, I began feeling the need for real purification and more concrete answers to life's questions. I knew about the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement and had even been attracted by the *mahā-mantra* and *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. But my roommate had advised me, "Don't get too close to that sect," and so I didn't look into the Hare Kṛṣṇas.

On one occasion I was at a friend's house in a nearby city searching through his books, looking for something interesting. I remember seeing on these books such words as *jing-jang*, *tantra*, Freud, Yogananda, and yoga, until I found the *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. An unfamiliar voice within me suddenly said, "This is what you are looking for. This is the real truth. Here you will find all the answers. Take

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

this book and read it, study it. Surrender to it completely, to each and every word in it. Worship each page of it.”

But when I opened the book and read the words “Hare Kṛṣṇa,” my roommate’s advice came to mind and I put it aside, as if it were dangerous.

Later the voice inside me returned when I saw Kṛṣṇa’s picture for the first time. “Decorate the picture with flowers,” the voice said. “Worship it. Meditate on that person.” Unfortunately, when I found out that the person was Kṛṣṇa, I again recalled my roommate’s advice and took the voice to be an hallucination.

Still, my resistance was weakening. Apparently by chance I went to a concert featuring a band called Nityananda, a Serbian devotee rock band. The special guest that night was one of the initiating spiritual masters in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, His Holiness Śācīnandana Swami. That concert was the turning point for me. After that night I could no longer practice Transcendental Meditation. Instead of the Transcendental Meditation mantra, the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* kept playing in my mind involuntarily.

Very soon the *mahā-mantra* became everything in my life, giving me a feeling of satisfaction and inner fullness. I chanted almost constantly while performing my daily duties. All anxiety, heaviness, and misery disappeared from my heart, and I thought that no one in the whole world was more fortunate than I was.

In due course all my family members started reading Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, so that my home slowly transformed into the spiritual world. From reading Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books I understood the importance of accepting a bona fide spiritual master and receiving initiation. To accomplish that goal I would have to live in the association of devotees. But I didn’t know how to meet devotees because at that time I lived in the Bosnian town of Travnik, where there were no Hare Kṛṣṇa temples. A war was going on, and military forces and barricades surrounded the city. Battles between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims were blasting in all possible combinations: Serbs against Croats, Muslims against Serbs, Croats against Muslims, etc., and to get out of Travnik I had to cross all those fronts.

Feeling a little discouraged, I started gathering information on how to get from Travnik to Croatia, specifically to Zagreb or Rijeka, cities that I knew had temples. I did not find any good news. It seemed that in Gornji Vakuf, a town just outside of Travnik, soldiers were shooting at everyone without discrimination, even at United Nations Peace Forces (UNPROFOR) and Red Cross volunteers. I waited about twenty more days, hoping the situation would get better, but it only got worse.

After one more month of studying *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, I prayed to Kṛṣṇa, “My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, I beg You to help me get to a temple.” I found great inspiration in verses like *māre kṛṣṇa rākhe ke, rākhe kṛṣṇa māre ke*: “If Kṛṣṇa wants to kill you, no one can protect you, and if Kṛṣṇa wants to protect you, no one can kill you.” I decided to put my life in Kṛṣṇa’s hands and go to Croatia by foot. Before I started on my journey, a few soldiers told me not to go because in Gornji Vakuf they were killing people — cutting their throats, severing their ears, and plucking out their eyes. But they couldn’t stop me. Feeling Kṛṣṇa’s protection, on February 11, 1993, at 1:00 PM, with just a few personal belongings, I started on the journey to Croatia through Gornji Vakuf. The whole time I chanted the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* on my *japa* beads.

After about ten hours of walking and chanting, I came to the border of Gornji Vakuf. I was surprised at how easily I had reached that far. It was night, and very dark. From my position about a mile outside the center of the city I heard shooting, explosions, and bullets and shells flying from one side of the city to the other. I decided to take the road that wound around the city. After about ten minutes of walking, I entered a small village where literally all the houses had been burned down. The remaining walls revealed that the houses had been new, built in a modern style. A little further down the road a haystack was burning, giving off the only light in that part of the village. An eerie silence pervaded everything. I thought, “I don’t know what hell looks like, but it must be something like this.” In the courtyard of one house a cow and her calf were standing, staring at the burning haystack, their eyes filled with tears.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

I decided to stop there to see if I could do something for the cow and calf. I stood by the wall of a house illuminated by the burning haystack and loudly shouted, “Is anyone there?” The reply was *click, click*, and then through the window of another house someone started shooting at me. Bullets whizzed around my legs and head, bouncing off the ground and broken walls. I ran as fast as I could while fiery bullets continued to fly all around me. I kept running for about fifteen minutes without stopping.

“Oh my God,” I thought, “am I alive?” I was in a state of shock. I couldn’t tell whether I was alive or dead. I clenched my hand and felt my *japa* beads. I nervously repeated the *mahā-mantra*. “I’m alive,” I concluded. “Everything’s OK. Let’s keep going.” Little by little, as I realized what had happened, my faith in Kṛṣṇa increased more and more, while my old conception of God as some light, some impersonal force, vanished.

Because I chanted the *mahā-mantra* the whole time, my distress quickly diminished and my desire to get to the temple rapidly grew. For the next twenty minutes I walked and chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. Everything was peaceful as I neared the exit from Gornji Vakuf.

Then suddenly on my left I heard someone shout “Stop!” along with the ominous *click, click*. I stopped but continued to chant. “Who are you?” the voice demanded. “A spirit soul,” I thought, but after a short pause I said, “A pilgrim, a well-wisher.” The stranger came out of the shadows, pointing his huge gun at me. He came right up to me and stared in my face, apparently a bit confused by my answer. After finding no weapons on me, not even a pocketknife, the man was even more confused, but he considered me harmless, and therefore he relaxed.

But then from the darkness another soldier appeared, shouting and swearing. “On the ground!” he yelled. As I lay on the ground he searched me. Not finding anything, he got mad. I was still chanting. The two soldiers started arguing about what to do with me. The first soldier wanted to take me to their commander, but the second wanted to kill me on the spot. And when the second soldier heard me mumbling something, he really became furious. He aimed his gun at me, preparing to shoot. For a moment I stopped chanting, but then I remembered reading that it is very auspicious to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa while dying, so I started chanting again. The second soldier called me ill names and then pulled the trigger. I felt something hit my back, and then I saw the bullet bounce off a stone and fly by the other soldier’s head. The bullet had been deflected by something in my backpack! “What are you doing?” the first soldier shouted. “Are you trying to kill me?!” The other one yelled something back. And again I had to verify whether I was alive or dead. I was still chanting and didn’t feel any pain. “Good sign,” I thought. The soldier who had shot his rifle was now scared and distressed. He was touching me, unable to believe he had missed me from the distance of one foot.

Then a third soldier came, clearly senior to the other two. He took my old identification card from my pocket and said, “Let’s take him to the commander.” In the commander’s office I was interrogated for a long time. They decided to kill me by hanging me from a tree or shooting me because the photo on my identification card didn’t really resemble me. Still, for some reason I remained very calm. My calmness really puzzled them. They asked, “Do you have any money on you?”

“Yes,” I replied, “three hundred Swiss francs.” They looked at each other. It seemed strange to them that I was not disturbed at the prospect of their taking all my money. In truth, at that moment money didn’t mean anything to me. I just wanted to get to the temple. They said, “We can kill you, we can torture you, we can do whatever we want with you!”

Again I replied very calmly, “There would be nothing auspicious in that, either for you or for me, so it’s better not to do that.” That completely shocked them, and at that point they threw away their facade of rough soldiers.

When they learned of the places I had passed through on my journey, they looked at each other in great amazement. One of them murmured, “He passed through Bistrica, but no one can even get close to that place. Even UNPROFOR and the Red Cross can’t go there, yet he passed through there with his hand in this funny bag while murmuring some Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare!?” Then the whole situation

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

changed. They became very friendly and wanted to help me. They gave me a place to stay overnight, and the following day they gave me a ride to the next town, Tomislav-grad.

But that wasn't the end of my adventure. To get to Croatia I still had to go through three checkpoints with very rigid controls. Even people with all the required documents had a hard time passing through. Then what to speak of me, who had only an expired ID card with a photo that didn't really resemble me? Still, early the next morning we started. Soon the car was on a road with thick forests on both sides. The road was muddy and winding. I chanted the whole time. One of the two soldiers sitting in front said, "You know, we really don't know how you're going to get through this time, but if you do, you're really lucky."

"Kṛṣṇa!" I thought. The recent incidents had increased My faith in Him enormously, and I was sure He was listening. "All I can do is chant Your names," I said to myself, "and if You want, please help me."

We approached the first checkpoint. Both soldiers pulled out their identification cards and some other documents. When asked about their mission, one of the soldiers said he was the commander of a squad that detected and destroyed mines and that he was on a mission. I chanted in the back seat, trying hard to hear the mantra. The soldier at the checkpoint looked at me without saying anything. "All right, go on!" he finally said.

"Is it possible?" I asked myself while my two fellow travelers stared at each other with mouths wide open in wonder. When we came to the second checkpoint we weren't even stopped: the soldier just waved us through. My companions mouths were wide open again. "The third one is the hardest," they told me. But what happened was similar to what had occurred at the first checkpoint. The soldiers checked the documents of my fellow travelers and asked them where they were going, where they were coming from, and when they would return. I continued to chant. The soldiers looked at me but didn't ask me anything.

Then we entered Tomislav-grad, a city near Croatia. We were all pleased that everything had gone so smoothly. They let me out and drove off. I continued happily chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa on my *japa* beads. In Tomislav-grad I bought some fruit and offered it to Kṛṣṇa's picture on a park bench. I had one hour before my bus to Croatia was to leave. I was just finishing with my simple offering ceremony when two police officers approached me. With my palm I signaled them to hold off asking me any questions until I had finished my ceremony. They stopped and waited. After a few minutes I finished the ceremony and they checked my ID. Finding no proper documentation, they returned me to the third checkpoint. They rebuked the soldiers at the checkpoint for having let me pass. The soldiers claimed that they'd never seen me before, although after hearing my description of the car I'd been in, they remembered it and all the details about it. But they still couldn't remember me. Then they received the order to send me back to Travnik, the city where my journey had begun.

Again I very intensely thought of Lord Kṛṣṇa: "Kṛṣṇa," I asked, "are You really going to return me to Travnik after all that's happened?" But I surrendered to Kṛṣṇa's desire, though not happily, knowing that in any case I couldn't go against His wishes.

However, this last reversal turned out to be just another test. Meditating on the power of *prasādam*, I offered some fruit to the soldiers at the third checkpoint. They accepted it and ate with satisfaction. After a short conversation, they decided to let me go, although they had just received an order to send me back to Travnik. They even stopped a truck and convinced the driver to drive me to Posusje (a city on the border of Bosnia and Croatia), where I had some relatives.

That night my relatives arranged for the documents I needed to enter Croatia. The next day I arrived at the temple in Rijeka. Finally I met the Deities and devotees, and there was no end to my happiness. By the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, guru, and the devotees I am still living in an ISKCON temple, and whenever I recall all these incidents I remember Śrīla Prabhupāda's immortal statement: "*Impossible* is a word in a fool's dictionary."

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Tāra Dāsa

Book distribution is an adventure. We never know what’s going to happen to us, or to the people we distribute books to. Once in the Miami airport I distributed some books to a boy from Colombia. He went home and put the books on his bookshelf. The books remained there for five years, sitting and waiting. Then one day a friend of his saw the books and asked him if he could borrow them during his upcoming trip to California. The friend read the books and was so inspired that he wanted to become a devotee. He looked in the back of one of the books and found the address of the LA temple. He visited and joined. Then he began doing *harināma* every day. At one point his friend who had lent him the books decided to go on a vacation to Los Angeles. As he rested on the beach after surfing he heard some chanting, some *karatālas* and *mṛdaṅga*, and he found the sound attractive. He approached the *harināma* party, and as he looked at the devotees’ faces he saw his best friend among them, the one who had borrowed his books. He ran up to him and asked, “Hey, what happened?” His friend preached to him and invited him to the temple. Then that boy also started reading the books and became a devotee.

We were distributing at a rock concert and decided to stretch ourselves and stay for the late-night “break out” after the end of the concert. As the crowd surged by, I met one guy who looked at me intently as I went through my mantra. He then gravely asked, “But does it work?” I mustered up some sincerity and said, “Yes, it really works.” Six months later I met the same fellow, now a new *bhakta* and a *saṅkīrtana* devotee. He recognized me and reminded me of our meeting and thanked me. He had traveled six hours to attend that concert with the hope of finding something meaningful.

In regard to the complaint that “so many books have been distributed but who’s joining?”, we should see things from a broader perspective. Our vision is defective. Better to trust the version of Śrīla Prabhupāda. He stated that every soul who comes in contact with these books is benefited. The fruit might come after one, five, or ten years, or even a hundred lifetimes. Certainly the fruit will mature. In *The Nectar of Instruction* Prabhupāda states, “Devotional service is so pure and perfect that once having begun, one is forcibly dragged to ultimate success.” Only time is separating these souls from perfection. Contact with Kṛṣṇa purifies the soul, period. “Every saint has a past, every sinner has a future.” We need to focus on doing our job with faith in Prabhupāda’s words. Kṛṣṇa knows how to do His job.

* * *

Tṛṇakartā Dāsa

I was walking my dog in a forest when he smelled something. I went over to see what it was, and after I’d moved some leaves I found a book — a *Kṛṣṇa* book. I picked it up and said to myself, “What’s this?” I started reading it and became fascinated by the contents. Soon I joined the temple. This was in the early 70s. This may be the first time a dog became a *vartma-pradarśaka-guru*.

Vijaya Dāsa

Quite often I’m asked how I came to the movement. I was born in 1956 and grew up in Los Angeles. Once, while visiting a friend I saw someone on TV speaking about Transcendental Meditation, an organization founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Interested, I visited their center and took a three-day course. They informed me that if after the course I wanted a mantra they would give me one, but that it

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

would cost \$120. I did want a mantra and they gave me one — “*ain ga.*” Twice a day I would chant this mantra for fifteen minutes. This was how I began meditating.

But after two months of such meditating, I thought, “There must be a better mantra than this.” I decided to travel. My intention was to find something like a paradise where I could live with spiritually-minded people and do my meditation. Before I left I bought *Be Here Now*, a book by Baba Ram Dass, a famous American guru of the sixties and seventies known for his association with Timothy Leary, the LSD “guru.” In his book Baba Ram Dass wrote, “When one progresses on the spiritual path, he gradually becomes detached from material things.” I felt like I was on this path, that God was taking me to a place where I would forget the materialistic life I had been living. In one place where I stopped in my travels, almost all my things were stolen — but I felt relieved, because I knew having fewer possessions would help me in my quest. All I had now was some money, my book, and my passport.

I decided to go to the Bahamas, off the coast of Florida. I thought this might be a good place to practice my spiritual life. It wasn’t. I decided to leave the day after I arrived. But before I left, someone stole my money. It wasn’t much, just a few hundred dollars, but it was all the money I had. Now I had no money. All I had were the book by Baba Ram Dass, my passport, and my ticket back to the States. But I was happier than I had ever been before because I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God was making an arrangement for my life.

The next day I went to Miami to see what would unfold on this journey. I went hitchhiking, not knowing where I was going. Someone picked me up and suggested I go to Key West (Florida) to get a job. Taking this as God’s will, I went there and got a job.

I was still reading *Be Here Now*. In the back of the book was a list of recommended books. One was the *Bhagavad-gītā*. I went to the public library and found that there were four different translations. The one by Prabhupāda was the most attractive, so I checked it out.

From the first page I understood that this is what I had been searching for. As I read, I became totally amazed. I had never read anything that was so clear and made so much sense. From reading the *Bhagavad-gītā* I started chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa all day. I had a job where there weren’t many people around, so I just did my work and chanted. I was getting a spiritual high from it. After three days of chanting, I stepped out of the building where I worked and saw devotees doing *harināma* about a hundred yards away. I went over to them and said, “That’s the same mantra I chant.” They were, of course, very happy to hear this. They then explained the philosophy to me for about two hours. That night I moved in with them. There were about three devotees living and working out of an apartment. After a week or so they told me about a temple in Miami and suggested I go there to get more training.

The Miami temple was beautiful. It stood on eight lush acres. On six of these acres we grew flowers we would send to temples all around the USA for Deity worship. My first service was picking flowers; my second service was washing Kṛṣṇa’s pots. There were also eighty mango trees, many banana trees, and about sixty other tropical plants. There was a nice pond with swans and ducks. I remember that the ducks always had orange beaks during the mango season because they had a special liking for the mangoes that had fallen on the ground. The devotees were very nice. I had found my home. When I had left Los Angeles a couple of months earlier, I had been looking for a paradise where I could practice my spiritual life. I had found it.

After I’d spent two months washing pots and picking flowers, the temple president, Narahari Prabhu, asked me if I was bold. I said I could be. He then asked me to try *saṅkīrtana*. At first we were just distributing BTGs. I would stand at the street lights distributing to the people who would stop their cars at the lights. Very difficult. Lots of purification. It was quite hot, and the people had already been approached by so many other groups. After two months of that, they asked me to try the airport. After about seven years I became the *saṅkīrtana* leader. In 2002 the GBC asked me to be the Minister of Book Distribution.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

What first attracted me to book distribution was the emphasis on it. This was 1978, shortly after Śrīla Prabhupāda had left the planet, so the momentum was still there. It was and is a very blissful activity. So this is what has kept me doing it for as long as I have. It's bliss.

Earlier we read how Ananta-rūpa Dāsa and his wife Ārūḍhā Devī Dāsī became devotees in Boise, Idaho, a state in the northwestern USA. Here are some more details about their devotional lives.

Ananta Rūpa and Ārūḍhā have been running the temple for many years. Ārūḍhā regularly goes out to distribute books at the university and at some malls in the area. She home-schooled her two boys, Rādhikā Ramaṇa Dāsa and Gopāla Hari Dāsa. As we learned from Nidrā Dāsī, Rādhikā Ramaṇa received his PhD in theology at Oxford University at the age of twenty-two. When he was studying at Boise State University, the professors referred to him as “the boy wonder,” and everyone knew he was a Hare Kṛṣṇa devotee. At his graduation he was the valedictorian and gave the speech at the graduation ceremony, wearing *tilaka* for the occasion.

His younger brother Gopāla Hari is of the same nature. He graduated from Boise State University with a masters at the age of eighteen. But he told me that he just wants to distribute books.

On top of all this, the next-door neighbors are the same way. Aja Govinda Dāsa is fifteen and a junior at the university. In LA, while he and I were at the Ratha-yātrā site after the parade, he came up to me and asked how to distribute *Bhagavad-gītās*. I explained to him that I basically show and explain the pictures, so he did that and people started taking the books. He goes door to door in Boise with Gopāla Hari, and they have great success in their book distribution. Everyone in these two families distributes books. Preaching really is the essence in Boise.

Many years ago, while distributing books at the university in Boise, I met a student from Cambodia whose father had just died. He was sad about that. I explained to him about the eternity of soul and how no one ever dies. He was happy to hear that, took a book, and started to read it. Four years later I received a letter from him inviting me to his initiation ceremony. It was the best e-mail I ever received. His name is now Nimāi Murāri Dāsa. This is a “dream come true” for a book distributor. It doesn't happen often, but when it does, it makes it all worth it—all the austerity, the rejection, etc.

While I was distributing books at the Montreal Ratha-yatra, a devotee I had never seen before came up to me and said, “Thank you, Vijaya Prabhu.”

“You're welcome,” I replied, “but what are you thanking me for?”

He replied, “In the early 1980s a friend of mine was traveling through the Miami airport and bought a book from you. He knew I had some interest in spirituality, so he later gave it to me. I read it and have now been a devotee for the past twenty years. Your name is in the book. I was always hoping I'd see you so I could thank you for performing this important service.”

I said, “Thank you for this encouraging news. It's always nice to learn that people are reading the books and becoming devotees.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda encourages me so much to distribute books, but when events like this happen I'm so much more encouraged to continue doing our “family business.”

While in Atlanta I asked Śikhi Māhiti Prabhu, a longtime book distributor, how he came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Here is his story:

When I was sixteen my brother and I would sit on our patio looking up at the vast expanse of stars in the sky, wondering where they all came from, where we came from, and why we're here. We were always thinking about things like this.

Then one day my brother brought home a BTG someone had sold him and said to me, “Read

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

this. It's amazing." I read the BTG and thought, "This is the highest truth." Then I somehow received Prabhupāda's *Bhagavad-gītā*. After reading it I decided to join the temple.

When I told my mother of my plans she said, "Oh no you're not. You're staying in college." I was studying at Purdue University, and my mother was very happy with that. Finally my urge to surrender to Kṛṣṇa became so strong that I just left home and went to join the temple in Chicago.

My mother later became favorable, so much so that she gave a \$20 donation to a devotee in an airport. While she was on the plane, however, she lamented that she had given that \$20, since it was all she had and thought she might need it. Then, when she reached her destination and was walking down the corridor in the airport, she found a \$20 bill on the floor. Later she happily told me, "I think Kṛṣṇa had something to do with that."

Revatī-ramaṇa Prabhu, the temple president of the Tirupati temple, told me the following interesting incident.

An engineer named Mr. Basowarej was hired to help with the construction of the Tirupati temple. He had devoted his whole life to Lord Śiva. He had a room to stay in on the temple grounds, and after doing his work each day he would visit the nearby Śiva temple. A devotee gave him a couple of small books, and he would sometimes read them just to see what the devotees believed.

There was a problem in his life: His family wanted him to get married, but he didn't want to. He developed a friendship with Revatī Ramaṇa Prabhu and would express his anxiety to him. Revatī Ramaṇa would lightly preach to him to move into the *brahmacārī āśrama* and live a simple life of no anxiety.

After reading the small books and associating with the devotees for a couple of years, he decided to make the move to become a *brahmacārī* in the *āśrama*.

Now for many years he has been a *brahmacārī*, and he is still a full-time engineer for the temple. But he accepts no salary — he does his work as devotional service. His name is now Balabhadra Mādhava Dāsa.

While in Māyāpur, at a seminar by Jayādvaita Swami, I sat next to a young devotee named Bhakta Jean, who had recently joined. During a break I asked him how he joined.

"In high school my sister was known as an avid reader. One day a librarian asked her if she would like to have some books that had been gathering dust. She took a box of them. As she was looking through them, she found the Second Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, and knowing I was interested in religious philosophy, she gave it to me. I read it and was convinced that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the highest religious philosophy. Thank Kṛṣṇa that there was a sincere devotee who went to that high school and left that book in the library."

For the next year Bhakta Jean will be at the Rādhā-Gopīnātha temple in Chowpatti, aspiring for initiating from Rādhānātha Swami.

Who knows how long that book had been sitting in the library? Probably many years. But eventually the transcendental time bomb went off. There are millions of such bombs all over the world, and the more we distribute them, the more they go off.

A boy about fifteen years old had a religious nature. In fact, he was so serious about God that the other boys his age used to tease him. One day as they were playing, one of the boys found a BTG on a

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

seat and gave it to their religious friend, teasing him all the while. He swallowed the teasing and took the magazine. He took it home and read it cover to cover, finding it very interesting.

A few days later a quarrel broke out between his mother and father. Seeing his father approach his mother with a knife to kill her, the boy was shocked and spontaneously jumped in front of his mother and was stabbed. Both parents were horrified, and they called an ambulance to rush him to the hospital. He was in coma for three weeks.

When he came out of the coma he told his mother, “I saw Kṛṣṇa! I saw Kṛṣṇa!” But she had no idea what he was talking about. She was just happy to see him alive.

After recovering from the stab wound, he searched out the nearest temple and moved in.

While I was in Russia the devotees told me of a program unique to that country. A devotee named Adhokṣaja Prabhu, one of the main book distribution leaders in the Russian *yātrā*, oversees a distribution team of eight boys aged ten to nineteen. Of course, they mostly distribute during the summer when school is out, but also during vacation time. I spoke to them while I was in Moscow. They said they really enjoy distributing books. They all chant sixteen rounds a day except the ten-year-old.

During the *saṅkīrtana* festival in Russia, Gopāl Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja told us a nice story:

An officer with the Canadian army was playing hockey with some other officers when he was seriously injured by one of the other officers. He went to the hospital for six months. While he was in the hospital recovering he asked to be taken to the library to read and pass the time. While there he saw Prabhupāda’s *Bhagavad-gītā* on the shelf. He had heard of it and always wanted to read it, but there had been no time. Now he had time. He actually stole the book from the library and read it every day until he was released. Then he was told that he would not be able to continue in the service because of his injury. This gave him more opportunity to read, and from the reading he started chanting. He found out where the nearest temple was and started attending the programs. He decided to return the book to the library and give a donation, since it was because of that library book that he had become a devotee.

* * *

Viśvambhara Dāsa

In 1982, during my *brahmacārī* period, one day I was distributing books door-to-door in Italy, in the region where I grew up. A man came out of his house, and I tried very hard to give him a *Bhagavad-gītā*, but he refused to take it. I was just about to go when his seven-year-old girl came out and said, “Papa, I want it. Please take it,” and with great reluctance the man purchased it. The book (I learned later) was then abandoned on their bookshelf. In those days I would always write my name and the temple phone number at the end of every book I would distribute. If the purchaser would want some more literature or have any questions, they could contact me personally at the temple.

After twelve years or so the girl took the book off the shelf and asked her father what it was about and where it came from. The father told her that about twelve years earlier a young monk had come to their door and she had persuaded the father to get it, but the girl could not remember the incident. She embarked upon reading the *Gītā*, and at the end of the book she came across my name, Bhakta Raffaele, and the phone number of the temple where I had resided twelve years earlier. She then visited the temple for the Sunday feast. She enjoyed the lecture and *kīrtana* and had a good first impression of the devotees. In fact, she later related, it was the most wonderful experience of her life. The smell of the incense and the soft sound of the *karatālas* seemed very familiar to her. Before she left she asked about Bhakta Raffaele, and the devotees told her that in 1985 I had moved to the UK and that my name was now Viśvambhara Dāsa.

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

She then came all the way to the UK to search me out at Bhaktivedanta Manor! One day, after I had given a class, she approached me and asked, “Is your name Viśvambhara Dāsa, and did you grow up in Italy?”

“Yes,” I replied to both questions.

She said, “My name is Cinzia, and I am also from Italy.” Then she said, “Thank you,” with tears in her eyes. She told me about the incident twelve years earlier, and I also started to shed tears. I remembered what Śrīla Prabhupāda had once said, namely, that if we can make one devotee with this *Bhagavad-gītā*, then our life will be successful. I was so happy that this girl had reached the lotus feet of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Gokulānanda.

Cinzia stayed at Bhaktivedanta Manor and became an initiated disciple of Indradyumna Swami. Her name is now Kaumādakī Devī Dāsī, and she is currently serving in the festival programs with Indradyumna Mahārāja. This incident has given me so much faith in the activity of book distribution.

* * *

Bhakta Prabhajan

We were attracting attention by our dress, bulls, and cart on Padayātrā India, and suddenly our Padayātrā party became a sensation in a small town near Allahabad, thanks to a man who had taken a vow of silence six years earlier.

Padayātrā takes six years to complete one round trip of the country, and so we couldn’t recall having met this man years earlier. Others in the town, however, informed us that he’d bought a *Bhagavad-gītā* from us during our last visit and that after he’d begun reading it he’d declared he would observe a vow of silence till we returned. Now the townspeople were anticipating his breaking a six-year silence. We were also told that during this period he followed all the regulative principles and kept his association with his new wife to a minimum.

A pandal was erected and attracted the whole town. We made the best use of being center-stage by distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books by the hundreds. The man entered, with the whole crowd cheering him and showering flowers on him. He then delivered a fiery four-hour speech—and nothing but Kṛṣṇa consciousness, as presented by Śrīla Prabhupāda, came from his mouth! The audience was spellbound by his conviction, confidence, and knowledge, and so were we. Suddenly his mother made a dramatic entry and declared her guru to be God. The vow-of-silence man, outraged by her audacity, roared back that her so-called guru was a bogus Māyāvādī. Then he smashed that philosophy to pieces, repeatedly quoting from *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*.

By one book distributed, a new devotee was made, Māyāvāda philosophy was defeated, and a whole town was infused with Kṛṣṇa consciousness and saturated with Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. *San̄kīrtana-yajña-kī jaya!*

Bhaktin Vanessa and Bhakta Marlon

My husband Marlon started reading the *Bhagavad-gītā* over two years ago. He had been searching for God in the Christian religion but said he couldn’t find the whole truth there. I was on the search with him, but no matter where we looked we just couldn’t really find God. We even joined a church in hopes that somehow that was “a doorway in.”

After that hope died out, we faded from the religious path and almost came to the conclusion that if there is a God, it is whatever it is and one day after we died we would find out what it is, *if* it is. My husband then remembered that when he was seventeen he had come across a *Bhagavad-gītā*. He said he tried to read it but was unable grasp it at that time. He said he knew he could recognize the name of the author (His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda) when he saw it. So he found the *Gītā*

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

at the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust website and bought it. He also bought a CD with a recording of the *Gītā* text on it so he could listen to it while reading it. He then began praying and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, and soon I noticed he was beginning to change in a wonderful way. I decided to join him in his study, prayer, and chanting and see what he was learning.

Lo and behold, we found GOD!! The absolute truth was in the words of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Now we get up at five in the morning each day for prayer and chanting. We couldn't live without surrendering our day to Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is doing wonderful things in our lives. We have become vegetarians, we are developing a love for all of God's creations, and we love Kṛṣṇa with all our heart, mind, and soul. We read or listen to the *Gītā* each day, but most importantly we serving the Lord. We give donations when and where He leads us to give. Another thing we do is that we buy the pamphlet *Kṛṣṇa, the Reservoir of Pleasure* in bundles of fifty and leave a pamphlet wherever we go. We hand them out freely and mail them to churches. One Christian pastor wrote back and said we were going to burn in the lake of fire for eternity. My heart was saddened for him because he just does not know the truth. Anyway, we love Kṛṣṇa and we love serving Him.

* * *

An East European Lady Becomes a Devotee

A lady devotee enrolled in a university in an East European country tells how she became a devotee:

It was summertime and very hot. I was looking out the window and saw a book that was propping up the window in the apartment next to mine. I was amazed at how beautiful it was (the *Kṛṣṇa* book). Since I was spiritually inclined, I could tell that it was a spiritual book. I couldn't understand why they were using such a beautiful book to prop up a window. So I went to the apartment and knocked on the door. When the neighbor opened the door, I said, "I have something you could use to keep your window open, if you let me read the book you're now using to prop it open. When I'm done reading, I'll return it."

The neighbor replied, "Sure, no problem, and you can keep the book."

That's how I came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

We never know how someone will receive Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, but our duty is to just get them out there. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "There are people waiting on every street for this knowledge."

* * *

An Eastern European Man Becomes a Devotee

I engaged in many sinful activities in my youth. At the age of nineteen I decided to leave home and start a new life, so I went on a spiritual quest. As I traveled around, many people suggested I go to India: "That's where spiritual seekers go," they said. So I went to India and began traveling around the country. Once I met a devotee who gave me one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, and when I read it I was convinced that Kṛṣṇa consciousness was my path. After spending some time associating with the devotees at the Chowpatti Temple, I was allowed to stay. Now I'm aspiring for initiation from Rādhānātha Swami.

But now my story gets really amazing. After being away from my mother for three years, I decided it

Chapter Two: Books Make Bhaktas

was time to call her and let her know what I was doing. After we'd talked for a while, I said, "Oh, I didn't tell you. I'm a monk."

She said, "You're a monk? I'm shocked! What kind of monk?"

"A Hare Kṛṣṇa monk."

"Well, *Haribol!*"

I couldn't believe my ears. I said, "How do you know *Haribol!*?"

She said, "I'm a devotee too."

I was astounded and delighted. Then we had a really nice talk about how amazing Kṛṣṇa is. She had received a book from a devotee distributing door to door and was also impressed with the knowledge and took up Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

* * *

End of Chapter Two—Books Make Bhaktas

*All the leaders should **tax their brains** for increasing the sales of our books. I have always said that if we simply rely on book distribution all our needs will be met.*

Letter to: Rupanuga, Bombay, 11 January, 1976

www.iskconbookdistribution.com

www.iskcondesiretree.net

Book distribution is under this category of sravanam kirtanam. The next item is smaranam. If somebody simply remembers the Supreme Lord, that is also as good as sravanam kirtanam. Then there is arcanam.

Letter to: Satsvarupa, Bombay
19 January, 1975

www.iskconbookdistribution.com

www.iskcondesiretree.net

Chapter Three

Be Bold for Kṛṣṇa

Introduction

When I joined the temple in Miami in 1978, the authorities first had me doing menial services (washing pots and picking flowers—we had six acres of flowers), which I liked because it was humbling. Then after a couple of months the president asked me to go on book distribution. His first question: “Are you bold?”

“Yes, I can be,” I replied.

To approach a stranger and ask him or her to give some of their hard-earned money for a book they weren’t looking for—you’ve got to be bold to try that. It takes a lot of confidence. We have to have confidence that the people we approach are spirit souls and eternal servants of Kṛṣṇa.

In a letter to Śukadeva Dāsa, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, “I want that all my advanced disciples become very bold preachers and take up this task of saving the fallen humanity from its worst condition of sinfulness.”

Book distribution is so bold that some devotees feel uncomfortable doing it. But this is our mission—to wake people up. Everyone is *kṛṣṇera nitya-dāsa*, an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa. When we have confidence in Kṛṣṇa, we can become empowered to do so much for Him by distributing His books.

At the same time, we have to be careful that our boldness and confidence don’t infect us with the mode of passion. This is one of the arts of book distribution: to be enthusiastic, bold, and confident and at the same time patient, gentle, and detached from the result.

In the early 70’s a lady who had been very shy and introverted throughout her life somehow became attracted to Kṛṣṇa and joined ISKCON. At that time Śrīla Prabhupāda was very much emphasizing book distribution, so practically everyone was going out. She also began going out. But shy as she was, she didn’t feel very comfortable approaching people. Still, she did it because all the other devotees were doing it and she knew Prabhupāda wanted it. She knew he would be pleased, so she forced herself. But she would distribute very few books, while the others would do so many. Even though she was not very successful, she continued. One day she prayed very sincerely to Kṛṣṇa to take away the shyness that was keeping her from being a successful instrument in Kṛṣṇa’s hands. She went out the next day and the shyness was gone; she approached people like they were her old friends and distributed many books. Everyone was surprised. Eventually she became the first woman in ISKCON to distribute a hundred big books in a single day. Her name is Gaurī Devī Dāsī.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was once asked what the criterion was for his choosing GBC members. He said, “Whoever I saw took the most risk for Kṛṣṇa I chose to be GBC.”

In the *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta* it is said that one of the six principles favorable to the execution of devotional service is *niścayāt*, confidence. Confidence comes from Kṛṣṇa consciousness: one feels the presence of Kṛṣṇa, and therefore one can be confident. Prabhupāda used to give the example of his son. Once he was taking a train somewhere and had one of his little sons with him. The conductor came to punch Śrīla Prabhupāda’s ticket and then said teasingly to the little boy, “Where is your ticket?” (He was so small he didn’t need one.) The boy grabbed Prabhupāda’s hand, taking shelter of his father. He was confident that everything would then be OK. We should be ready to take risks for Kṛṣṇa, confident that He is there to help us. If one is confident, then it’s natural to be bold and take risks for Kṛṣṇa.

Here are some statements about boldness in preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness and examples of boldness in the service of book distribution.

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.30.37 purport

There are two kinds of devotees. One is called *goṣṭhyānandī* and the other *bhajanānandī*. The word *bhajanānandī* refers to the devotee who does not move but remains in one place. Such a devotee is always engaged in the devotional service of the Lord. He chants the *mahā-mantra* as taught by many *ācāryas* and sometimes goes out for preaching work. The *goṣṭhyānandī* is one who desires to increase the number of devotees all over the world. He travels all over the world just to purify the world and the people residing in it. Caitanya Mahāprabhu advised:

*prthivīte āche yata nagarādi grāma
sarvatra pracāra haibe mora nāma*

Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu wanted His followers to move all over the world to preach in every town and village. In the Caitanya-sampradāya those who strictly follow the principles of Lord Caitanya must travel all over the world to preach the message of Lord Caitanya, which is the same as preaching the words of Kṛṣṇa—*Bhagavad-gītā*—and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. The more the devotees preach the principles of *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, the more people throughout the world will benefit.

Devotees like the great sage Nārada, who travel all over to preach, are called *goṣṭhyānandī*. Nārada Muni is always wandering throughout the universe just to create different types of devotees. Nārada even made a hunter a devotee. He also made Dhruva Mahārāja and Prahlāda devotees. Actually, all devotees are indebted to the great sage Nārada, for he has wandered both in heaven and in hell. A devotee of the Lord is not even afraid of hell. He goes to preach the glories of the Lord everywhere—even in hell—because there is no distinction between heaven and hell for a devotee.

*nārāyaṇa-parāḥ sarve na kutaścana bibhyati
svargāpavarga-narakeṣv api tulyārtha-darśinaḥ*

“A pure devotee of Nārāyaṇa is never afraid of going anywhere and everywhere. For him heaven and hell are one and the same.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 6.17.28) Such devotees, wandering all over the world, deliver those who are actually afraid of this material existence. Some people are already disgusted with material existence, being confused and frustrated by material enjoyment, and some people, who are intelligent, are interested in understanding the Supreme Lord. Both may take advantage of the pure devotee who wanders throughout the world.

* * *

From a Conversation with Śrīla Prabhupāda, July 13, 1975

A lady *saṅkīrtana* devotee asked Śrīla Prabhupāda, “When we are doing *saṅkīrtana*, I must be very aggressive, but when I come to the temple, then I’m supposed to be very humble?”

Prabhupāda replied, “A lamb at home, a lion in the chase. [*Laughter*] When you are chasing, you must be a lion. [*Laughter*] But when you come home, you do not try to chase the devotees. [*Laughter*] A lamb at home.”

* * *

Chapter 3: Be Bold for Kṛṣṇa

From a Morning Walk with Śrīla Prabhupāda, 11 December 1973

Śrīla Prabhupāda: So, why this speculation should be allowed? That is our proposition. Every man will say, “No, I’ve got my own mathematics.” Will he be allowed? So we have to fight; otherwise, what is the meaning of preaching?

Hṛdayānanda Mahārāja: Fight.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: If you think that everything will be accepted very easily, then what is the necessity of preaching? You must know that they are all rascals—unbelievers. You have to convert them to be sane man. That is preaching. What do you expect, that every man will immediately . . . agree with you? Why do you expect like that? That is foolishness. You must know that everybody will disagree with you, and it is your preaching work that you will make him agree with you. That is your preaching work.

Hṛdayānanda Mahārāja: *Jaya* Prabhupāda! As your example.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes. We do not expect that everyone will agree. Everybody will disagree. Just like our books. Say, four, five years ago, nobody knew these books. So there was no market. But we have created our market. That is preaching. We have created our market. Nobody was dying for want of these books. So that is preaching. Preaching does not mean everyone is ready to accept your theories. You must expect that everyone will not accept it. Now it is your power to convince him, “Yes, you must accept.” That is preaching.

* * *

Excerpt from a Śrīla Prabhupāda letter, 16 February 1975

Thank you again and again for distributing my books with great enthusiasm. Now try to double this enthusiasm. Anyone who even touches one of our books gets such great benefit. Give them to everyone. Because you are all very sincere and working very hard, Kṛṣṇa is giving you all facilities.

* * *

His Holiness Girirāja Swami

In the early days, every Sunday in Boston we used to go to Cambridge Commons to do *kīrtana*. Various rock bands used to come and perform, and thousands of young people would come to hear the music, dance, picnic, wander around, mingle, or just sit. So on Sundays Satsvarūpa Dāsa would lead the devotees to an area in the Commons where they would chant and dance in a circle, and many young people would join in. Meanwhile, a few devotees would wander in the crowd to distribute books and get donations.

At the time, 1969–1970, there was a lot of interest in spiritual life, and one boy I approached was especially friendly. He said he was interested and had an Indian guru who was God.

“How do you know he is God?” I asked.

“He says he’s God.”

“Just because he says he’s God you believe him?”

“Yes.”

“So if I tell you I’m the President of the United States you will also believe me? Being President is not as great as being God.”

“Yes, I will believe you.”

“Very good. So if I’m president you have to do what I say.”

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

“Yes.”

So I said, “Take all your money from your pocket.” He took out all his money. There was a lot! In those days young people didn’t have much money, but he pulled out ninety-seven dollars.

“You accept that I’m the President?”

“Yes.”

He was stubborn; he didn’t want to admit his philosophy was wrong. Just to maintain his false prestige he insisted, “Yes.”

So I said, “Okay, give me all your money.” He gave me his money, and in return I gave him a book and invited him to the temple. Then I quickly disappeared into the crowd.

About two hours later he found me, still distributing. “You know,” he said sheepishly, “I just gave you all my money, and tomorrow I have to pay the rent. Could you give me twenty dollars?”

I gave him twenty dollars, and he kept Prabhupāda’s books. People will believe anything and be so stubborn about their illusory position.

* * *

His Holiness Śivarāma Swami

Kṛṣṇa observes the activities of all living entities, but He takes special notice of the activities of those spreading His glories, like the book distributors. And when Kṛṣṇa intervenes to help a devotee in his service, that may be called a miracle, for it is an event that begins outside the laws of nature and the laws of karma.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said that Kṛṣṇa might dictate to a person: “Take this book and give a donation.” That is a miracle.

For example, when the first person you approach buys many books and gives a big donation, Kṛṣṇa is encouraging you. It’s a miracle. When a person insults you only to come back later and apologetically buy a book, it’s a miracle. When everyone is buying, and sometimes when no one is buying, it’s a miracle. When there is some special arrangement, that is a miracle. For example . . .

Śukra Prabhu and I were on traveling *saṅkīrtana* in the Canadian Maritime Provinces. We were selling *Kṛṣṇa* books. At one town a new shopping mall had opened the very day we arrived, and so we went in to sell books. We got caught in ten minutes. But being bold, I asked to speak to the manager. I showed him George Harrison’s foreword in the front of the book and said we were selling these books at George’s request to spread peace and love. He was right into it and gave us a booth in the center of the mall for the entire opening weekend. So there we were, authorized as could be, telling everyone, “This is a book to spread peace and to celebrate the mall’s opening, with an introduction by George Harrison right in the book.” Friday, Saturday, and Sunday we sold books faster than we could unpack them. It was bliss. It was a miracle.

Kṛṣṇa also says in scripture, “I am not in Vaikuṅṭha, but I am where My devotees glorify Me.” So by glorifying Kṛṣṇa through book distribution, know for sure that Kṛṣṇa is standing near you and watching you. That is a miracle. And when He helps you or tests you, that is a miracle. And if you think of what you were before Kṛṣṇa consciousness and what you are now, selling Kṛṣṇa’s books, then you know that your standing there is a miracle. Prabhupāda said of his devotees, “They are my miracle.”

So to distribute books is to believe in miracles, for to believe in Kṛṣṇa means believing in things extraordinary—miracles.

* * *

Chapter 3: Be Bold for Kṛṣṇa

Vaiṣeṣika Dāsa (ACBSP)

Śrīla Prabhupāda made our lives exciting. He pushed us, and he was definitely not accustomed to thinking small. In thinking of what my life was like while Śrīla Prabhupāda walked the planet, I often recall a famous quotation from Helen Keller: “Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.”

Life with Śrīla Prabhupāda was and still is a daring adventure.

After arriving in America, at times Śrīla Prabhupāda barely had enough money to pay his rent. Even during those lean financial times, he wasn't at all poor. He carried the most valuable currency of all: absolute faith in the words of his guru and Kṛṣṇa. He took every risk for Kṛṣṇa. He was fearless at all times.

Because of this, after meeting Śrīla Prabhupāda and taking up the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, young people—with little or no worldly training—became emboldened and went out to conquer the world on Kṛṣṇa's behalf. They were convinced that by following the order of their guru they would not fail. They were correct!

Young boys and girls traveled the world, meeting dignitaries and rock stars, opening temples, making hit albums, organizing festivals, and publishing and distributing millions of magazines and books.

As I recall the miraculous accomplishments of all these devotees, I'm reminded of another quotation, this one by the German poet Goethe:

Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back. . . . Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was the epitome of boldness. In 1975 the BBT was publishing books too slowly to keep up with Śrīla Prabhupāda's translating. The manuscripts for the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* had been sitting for some time without being published.

Then on a morning walk at Venice Beach in Los Angeles, surrounded by senior devotees and the heads of the BBT, Śrīla Prabhupāda suddenly said that he wanted all seventeen volumes of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* published within two months.

Until that time, the BBT had only been able to publish one book every four months. Now Śrīla Prabhupāda was ordering that all seventeen be finished in two months! The head of the American BBT, Rāmeśvara Dāsa, was shocked upon hearing Śrīla Prabhupāda's order, and he replied, “Śrīla Prabhupāda, that's impossible.”

Upon hearing this, Śrīla Prabhupāda suddenly stopped walking. He planted his cane in the sand and said, “*Impossible* is a word in a fool's dictionary.”

The devotees were practically speechless.

But as Śrīla Prabhupāda's order began to sink in, Rāmeśvara and the other devotees began to feverishly plan how they would execute his order. With this, the famous *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* marathon began. For the next two months the devotees worked practically without sleeping or eating to publish the seventeen volumes in just two months.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

By the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda they were able to publish the books before the deadline. Śrīla Prabhupāda was very pleased—and the whole Society was electrified by the proven fact that nothing is impossible in the service of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s *saṅkīrtana* movement.

* * *

Ambikā Devī Dāsī

After I attended a book distribution seminar in Fiji, my interest in book distribution revived. I decided to try selling the *Bhagavad-gītā* at my workplace, starting with my manager. Early Friday morning, as soon as I arrived, without even going to my desk, I went straight to his office. I told him, “I have something for you,” and presented him with the *Bhagavad-gītā*. He was surprised at my bold approach, but he really appreciated it and bought the *Gītā*.

But it was what happened next that really floored me. In the afternoon, he quit his job!

After about a week I met him again. The first thing he told me was, “Now I have plenty of time on this earth to read the *Bhagavad-gītā*.” He had enough money, so he didn’t have to worry about that.

* * *

Ānanda Vidyā Dāsa

In Florida during the December marathon I showed a group of young people the Fifth Canto. After briefly explaining the book’s contents to them, I asked for a donation. The guy with the book in his hand seemed slightly interested, but he was still apprehensive.

I said, “It has some cool artwork; I’ll show you.” I opened the book to the pictures showing what happens to sinners on the hellish planets. One picture showed a young boy torturing an insect, and another picture showed a man being eaten alive by various creatures, including a lion. As the guy looked at the picture his eyes widened and he said, “Whoa, he’s really eating him! I’ll give a donation for that!” He pulled out a five-dollar bill, gave the donation, and took the book.

So these books are all-attractive. We should not be afraid that there might be something in the books that might put the people off or might seem a little too extreme for them. We should have full faith that Śrīla Prabhupāda knew exactly what he was doing. Śrīla Prabhupāda translated these books every day in the morning hours, giving his purports with the mood of reaching out to the public. Who is a better preacher than Śrīla Prabhupāda? He knew exactly what he was doing. He said, “I did not write these books; Kṛṣṇa wrote these books.”

So we should know that if we just present the books as they are, try to attract the people to the books as best we can, explain to them as much philosophy as they are able to take, and just glorify the books, then people will be attracted and will buy them.

* * *

Cāru-candra Dāsa

While distributing books at LAX, I suddenly saw Mike Tyson walking right toward me, accompanied by six bodyguards. I approached him, broke through the circle of bodyguards, and started my presentation. Tyson was nice, but his bodyguards pushed me to the side. Determined not to let him go without having received Lord Caitanya’s mercy, I worked my way through those guys again and started my presentation a second time. I told him I was a monk and asked him for a donation. “Yeah,

Chapter 3: Be Bold for Kṛṣṇa

sure!” he replied and told one of his guys to give me a donation. The guy pulled out a roll of big bills and gave me one, and Mike Tyson walked away with a *Bhagavad-gītā* in his enormous hand.

* * *

Chowpatti Book Distribution

One day tow of our young *brahmacārīs*, Vinoth and Venkatesh (both age 17), went for door-to-door book distribution as usual.

Vinoth knocked on a door and a person came out, to whom he showed the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

“No, no!” the person exclaimed. “We’re Muslims. We won’t buy this.”

Vinoth replied, “This book is not meant only for Hindus. ISKCON has so many devotees who are not Hindus. Whatever is described in the *Bhagavad-gītā* is scientific.” Then he explained about the *Gītā*’s descriptions of the soul and God.

“But we have our Koran.”

“That’s good. But the Koran is like a preliminary study. You get some understanding, but not all the detail. The *Vedas* give all the detail, and the *Bhagavad-gītā* is a summary of all knowledge—if you know this, nothing more is to be known.”

The convinced Muslim invited the boys into his house, gave them a seat, and listened further to what they had to say. Later he took a copy of the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

* * *

Ekeśvara Dāsa

I stopped a guy in the street. When I started talking to him he at first seemed puzzled, but then he told me, “I know Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. I’ve been reading them since I was a kid. My mother and father used to talk to me about Kṛṣṇa, but now they’re very covered.”

I said, “Why don’t you come to the temple to talk some more?”

“I’m not ready yet.”

“Yes you are!” I replied.

He left smiling, but not speaking a word.

The next day the temple devotees told me there was a guy in the temple doing service who said he had met me the previous day on the street. I said, “Please call him; invite him to take *mahā-prasādam* with me.”

While we honored *prasādam* he told me what had happened the day before: “Last week, before I met you, I asked Kṛṣṇa to show me His desire through the Supersoul. I prayed to Him that what He showed me should be very clear and not born from a dream of my creation. Yesterday, before I met you, I was thinking ‘Today will be the day.’ So when I saw you in the street I thought, ‘OK, there’s a devotee, but if he doesn’t approach me I’ll know I’m not yet going to get the sign I’m looking for.’”

“So I passed near you as you presented some books to a person, and when I came back after an hour or so you came up to me, and after I’d played the fool, pretending I didn’t know Kṛṣṇa, my heart couldn’t take it any more and I told you my personal life. Then when I told you I wasn’t ready to visit the temple and you replied ‘Yes you are!’ I began to feel a growing compulsion to visit the temple. The next day I couldn’t restrain it, and so I ran to the temple.”

I was amazed by his account for the following reason: After the first time he passed me, it was so cold that I moved to a place with some sun. Then after an hour something told me to return to the previous place, and I was there when he returned so I could approach him.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Who can understand the wonderful plan of our Lord Nityānanda?

* * *

Lakṣmīvān Dāsa (Czech Republic)

In Cesky Tesin, on a busy parking lot, I approached a stressed-out-looking businessman. After he rejected the proffered book with the oft-used comment “No time!” I used a heavy maneuver to respond: “You don’t have time because time has you. Therefore you should stop now!”

He slowed down. I showed him the *Bhagavad-gītā*, pointed to a picture of Arjuna, and explained, “He was in a similarly stressful situation.” The businessman slowed up and finally stopped, at which point I quickly explained to him: “Arjuna is like us, and his best friend Kṛṣṇa gave him expert advice on how to solve the karma problem and the time problem.” Sensing a spark of interest, I quickly presented the set of books I had with me and told him the price. Mr. No Time gave a good donation, shook my hand, and drove off with a stack of fifteen books.

* * *

Pārtha-sārathi Dāsa

It was time for my post-deployment mental-health assessment with a military psychologist. I really didn’t want to go to this appointment. It would involve me and a doctor sitting down and talking about what happened while I was in Iraq. Still, I had to go.

I walked into the doctor’s office, and he greeted me and asked me to sit down. I put down my backpack and took a seat.

“So, how ya doing?” he asked.

“Good, how are you?”

“Good, thanks.”

At this point I decided to turn the tables on him: “Yes,” I replied, “but could you be doing better?”

“Yes, I guess I could be.”

Then I asked him about his life, and he started telling me all about it.

Then I asked, “Do you have an interest in spiritual life?”

“No,” came the reply.

I let him have it: “The reason why you’re unhappy is because you lack God consciousness.”

As the session went on we discussed more and more about spiritual life. I reached into my bag, brought out a *Bhagavad-gītā*, and asked him. “Have you ever seen this book?”

“No,” he replied, “but the cover is very interesting.”

I went on to explain about how Arjuna was a soldier in a difficult situation, and how he resolved his psychological and emotional crisis.

The doctor held the book and scanned through the pages, listening intently as I explained the philosophy. Finally our time was up.

“Can I keep the book?” he asked.

“Sure, no problem. But most people give a donation.”

He thanked me for the nice talk and gave a nice donation.

That evening I got a call. Seemed I had to go back for another assessment because of the “stunt” I’d pulled.

Next day I walked into the doctor’s office and was greeted by a serious-looking man. “I’m your doctor,” he said, “and you won’t pull what you did yesterday on me.”

Chapter 3: Be Bold for Kṛṣṇa

“Ok,” I said, “I will take this seriously.”

I sat down in his office as he went over my post-deployment health survey. He looked surprised. So I asked, “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t understand,” he said. “Usually when I have to evaluate someone who has seen so many horrific situations as you, they’re a mess. But you’re smiling, happy, focused. How are you dealing with all this?”

“I’m a Hare Kṛṣṇa,” I replied, “and by reading the ancient Vedic texts and chanting the *mahā-mantra* I’m able to deal with all the death and suffering I’ve seen.”

For the next twenty minutes I explained the science of *bhakti-yoga* to him. I pulled out a *Bhagavad-gītā* and a *Chant and Be Happy* from my bag and gave them to him. I also gave him my email address and said I would do a reevaluation of him in a week to see what he learned. Then I walked out. I looked in his window from the outside, and there he was, deeply absorbed in reading Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books.

Another incident took place when I got involved with what the military calls a “Finance Brief.” This occurs when you resign from the military and they wonder about your finances.

I had to go to a mandatory finance brief because I resigned from the Army. The woman walked in and commanded everyone being “chaptered” (i.e., being discharged prematurely from the military for some reason) to move to the front. She had a very heavy personality, and I of course followed her instructions. She said, “No sergeant, only chapter cases sit there.”

I said, “Ma’am I’m also a chapter case.”

She looked puzzled. The brief was long and boring; I read the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* on my iPod throughout.

She called us up one at a time. When I got to her desk I saw I was her very last case. She closed the door and said, “You’re a Sergeant First Class. What are you doing in this room with all the privates? I read your file. Are you the Hare Kṛṣṇa they’re talking about?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“What’s your deal?” she asked. “Why would you give up that rank to be a monk? I don’t understand. My husband is trying to get promoted, and here you are—young, a fast-tracker—and you’re walking away.”

“We all have a calling,” I explained. “While the military gave me many skills, I’ve learned that this human life is meant for God consciousness. The books we study are not ordinary books. They change people’s lives. They are the literary incarnation of God, and they will give you a new understanding of life.”

She listened and asked many nice questions about Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and also about Śrīla Prabhupāda. She’d heard about a soldier who was becoming a monk, and about the really powerful books he was giving people. “You know,” she said, “I’ve been curious about those books for some time.”

“Do you want one of them?”

She smiled and said, “Oh, why, do you have one?”

I took out a *Perfection of Yoga* and a copy of *Bhakti: The Art of Eternal Love* and handed them to her.

“Thank you!” she exclaimed, smiling ear to ear.

As I walked to my next appointment I thought how kind Śrīla Prabhupāda is. We have no ability to give out his mercy, but he is so merciful that these books distribute themselves. After all, Kṛṣṇa is all-attractive. How can anyone resist Him?

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

* * *

Prāṇa Nātha Dāsa

Some weeks ago the situation in our city, Sao Paulo, became very critical. This city of over twenty million people is considered very violent. There's a terrorist group called PCC, most of whose members are in the prisons in our state. Annually on Mother's Day they're allowed to leave prison to visit they're families. But this year on Mother's Day they pulled off a big terrorist act, killing more than 140 people and detonating bombs in many police stations. More than fifty prisons were in emergency situations, and more than thirty buses were burned. Everybody was scared.

But the next day everyone thought the situation was under control, so we went out to distribute books on the local buses, as usual. After midday the attacks started again, and many people told us, "Please, young boys, go home and protect yourselves." People were taking off from work early. Everything started to close. There were no buses on the streets, so we went back to the temple. We did *bhajan* and *kīrtana* before the Deity of the Supreme Lord, asking for protection because our temple president was a police officer and his brother, a *pūjārī*, worked at a prison.

The next day things were better and everybody went back to work. So we went out on book distribution again. We went to a train station. Many people were there, and after midday many police officers started to set up a little base there. People were scared, and we asked, "What's going on?"

A policeman said, "You don't know? Today the prisoners are coming back to prison and will be dropped at this station."

We thought, "OK, this is a very good opportunity to 'send Kṛṣṇa to prison.'" Many of the prisoners started to come, and the result was ecstatic: both policemen and criminals took books! We had a very nice time on this transcendental adventure of book distribution.

* * *

Rome Book Distribution

One Sunday the temple president of Rome, Līlānanda Prabhu, was speaking to a guest who began spouting all kinds Māyāvādī nonsense. As the guest droned on, Līlānanda became more and more angry to hear the garbage coming out of his mouth. Then a *bhakta* named Corrado came by and began listening to the man. Corrado said to him, "I think the solution is that you should purchase a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* set." The man asked about it, and Bhakta Corrado briefly described it. The man then asked how much it was, heard the price of \$300, and said, "All right, I'll take it."

Līlānanda's jaw hit the ground. He couldn't believe that this total Māyāvādī, who just seconds earlier was making his blood boil, would on a moment's notice buy an entire *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* set, twenty-seven books. And on top of that, from a new *bhakta*!

Just goes to show how merciful Lord Caitanya is.

* * *

Sthānu Dāsa (Sofia, Bulgaria)

In 1994 I asked the temple president, "What is the best service I can do?" He said, "Prabhupāda is most pleased by book distribution."

Chapter 3: Be Bold for Kṛṣṇa

“But I have my job.” While living in the temple I kept my good-paying job as manager of a printing company.

The president said, “This is not so important. If you distribute Prabhupāda’s books you’ll be doing a great service to Kṛṣṇa.”

The next day I went to my workplace and told my boss, in as nice a way as possible, that I was quitting. (We actually had a nice relationship.) He was very upset that I was quitting and asked if I wanted a pay raise. “No, I now want to distribute books that will help people in their spiritual lives.”

“OK, if that’s what you want then do it, but if you ever want to come back to your job, you’re more than welcome.”

Twelve years later I saw my former boss on *sankīrtana*. He asked me, “So, you’re still distributing those books?”

“Yes, and I would like you to take some also.” I handed him five books, and he enthusiastically took all of them and gave a nice donation. A happy ending and the beginning of his spiritual life.

* * *

Tulasī Devī Dāsī

Tulasī Devī Dāsī is one of the boldest book distributors in our society. She is extremely confident, intelligent, fearless, and nice, all at the same time. She could probably write her own book.

I stopped a boy about twenty years old, with a backpack, long hair, and jeans.

Before I could say a word he exclaimed, “No! No! I’m already saved! I’ve been saved for four years now. I don’t need that—I have Jesus!”

So I said, “Great! You been backpacking for long?”

“I’ve been spending a little time visiting friends in different places, but now I have to go back to my family.”

“Real family members always stay close—spiritually, not just because our material bodies are related. Your real family is a spiritual family.”

He really liked this idea, since he wasn’t feeling very close to his material family anymore.

Then I showed him part one of the First Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and told him, “You’ll love the story of Nārada Muni—how he became detached from his family by the Lord’s mercy.” I explained a little of the story, and then I showed him the verse and purport describing how the little boy Nārada, after his mother died, traveled all over while remembering and following the instructions of great saintly persons who’d visited his home. I showed him the place in the purport where Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “It is the duty of a mendicant . . . to experience all varieties of God’s creation by traveling alone through all forests, hills, towns, villages, etc., to gain faith in God and strength of mind as well as to enlighten the inhabitants with the message of God.”

When I started to say more about Nārada, the boy said, “Stop! Stop! Don’t say anymore. Don’t tell me what happens to Nārada; let me read it for myself. How much do you want?”

I met a lady who’s been a professor of the *Bhagavad-gītā* for thirty years. “Oh, I love the *Bhagavad-gītā*,” she said. “I read it every day.”

“Whose translation do you read?” I asked her.

“Oh, I don’t know. It doesn’t matter. It’s up to each person to feel the words, and that’s the right meaning for you.” She went on like this for a couple of minutes.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Finally I showed a sour face and said, “What’s this ‘feeling’ garbage? Whatever you feel?! How many years have our feelings misled us and gotten us into trouble? How long do you want to drag it out with these stupid feelings?”

She finally snapped out of it and said, “Yes, you’re right. My feelings have been getting me into trouble all day long and for many years.”

I continued, “And how about the kids nowadays with their feelings, which are just like those of animals—have sex with anyone and eat anything and exploit anyone? So what are these stupid feelings?”

She admitted it was pretty ridiculous and took a book.

I approached a Jewish lady and tried to present a book. “No, thank you. I’m sorry, I’m Jewish.”

I had been watching her husband, who had walked away and was ogling some girls.

I said to her, “I was about to chastise your husband for looking at all the women. Very improper!”

Suddenly she showed a lot of interest in what I had to say and listened carefully. After I’d pulled her in more and more, she bought a book. As she was giving the donation her husband saw us from a distance and immediately started yelling at her to stop. Afterwards he continued to yell at her for getting a Hare Kṛṣṇa book. She didn’t care.

I was trying to get a businessman to take a book. He said, “No, I have no time. Too busy—so many things to do.”

“I have the perfect story for you,” I replied, and pulled out the Seventh Canto volume with the story of Prahlaḍa and Hiraṇyakaśipu. I showed him the picture of Hiraṇyakaśipu standing on his toes, turning into a skeleton buried under an anthill, just to become the most powerful and wealthy person in the universe. Then I showed him the picture of Prahlaḍa sitting on his lap and described how his father had tried to teach him the ins and outs of business, how to manipulate friends and enemies, etc., by sending him to the best business school.

Then I said, “When Hiraṇyakaśipu asked Prahlaḍa what was the best thing he’d learned in school, saintly Prahlaḍa calmly told his big proud dad, “Dad, you should just go to the forest and meditate and obtain the highest perfection and pleasure of life.”

Now the businessman really got into the *līlā*, especially when I explained how Hiraṇyakaśipu’s greed and desire overwhelmed him and how he tried to kill saintly Prahlaḍa, who simply took shelter of God and was protected. The man was very impressed with the *līlā* and took a book.

I stopped a Christian couple in their late twenties. I handed a book to the man. The lady wasn’t interested and disdainfully pushed away the book I tried to hand her: “No, thank you. Not interested.” Finally she grabbed the book from her husband’s hands and thrust it back at me: “Let’s go.”

She was rather overpowering, so he had to go along with her. When she saw she had him under control, she headed down the stairs, thinking he was behind her. He followed for a couple of steps, but then he suddenly turned and bolted up the stairs and pulled me to the side so she couldn’t see us. Speaking softly, he said, “Yesterday the doctors told me I have terminal cancer.”

Chapter 3: Be Bold for Kṛṣṇa

I only had a few seconds, so I quickly said, “You have no time to waste! You have to get serious about life, study spiritual knowledge, learn about karma and reincarnation, find out as much as you can about God, learn how to get closer to Him. No time to waste with this ‘Well, I’m a Christian’ stuff. Get serious!”

He hurriedly replied, “Yes, I believe in karma and these things. That’s why I want a book!”
So I quickly sold him a book before his wife freaked out.

I stopped six college students—two boys and four girls. They gathered around me and we got into talking about self-realization, vegetarianism, etc. All ears. Then one of them said that swimming naked was being natural and spiritual.

“No!” I protested. “We believe in the chastity of women—protecting women from being exploited. And if your goal is self-realization but you run around naked you are definitely going to be in illusion that you are a man and she is a woman and vice versa. Then you will want to enjoy or exploit each other’s bodies.”

The girls immediately objected, “No, when we are all in the sweat lodges together our consciousness is not like that. It is very pure and spiritual.” The boys wholeheartedly agreed.

Then I asked the boys, “So, if these girls were all big fat old women, would you be so enthusiastic to go? Would you think it was still very spiritual? Would you still go?!!”

Finally the boys honestly admitted, “No.”

Then I turned to the girls: “You see, exposed.”

Then I said to all of them: “When you are completely pure, these things won’t affect you. But who’s on that platform? You’ll know you’re on that platform when you feel as much love for a rat—the soul in a rat’s body—as you do for a beautiful boy or girl. So are any of you like that?”

They all started laughing: “Ewww! How gross! No.”

“So unless you are like that, we should act and dress in ways that will not put one another into illusion and result in our cheating and exploiting one another. Personally, I want pure love, not exploitive so-called love.”

They all took books, and an hour later they all showed up at the temple, where they took *prasādam*, heard class, danced and chanted before the Deities, and stayed for a few hours talking with devotees.

While distributing at a university I stopped a girl and a boy holding hands. The usual happened: the girl pulled the boy away. Then I said, “Oh, you must be boyfriend and girlfriend.”

They giggled, liking that, and looked at each other with puppy-dog eyes.

“Yeah, I could tell you weren’t married yet because you two still like each other, holding hands and carrying on. Once you get married, it’s all over. Soon you can’t stand each other and fight about every little thing.”

They laughed.

“That’s why you need to get into self-realization—to understand yourself and others on a deeper level. Otherwise you’ll just get bored and start to hate each other. Your cute dimples and mannerisms will become obnoxious.”

They laughed again in agreement and eagerly took a book.

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Vijaya Dāsa

I was distributing door-to-door in Brisbane, Australia. When I knocked on one door, and a man opened it and saw the *Bhagavad-gītā* in my hand: “Sorry,” he said, “not interested. I’m a Satan worshiper.”

I said, “You worship Satan? This book is all about God, so you should know your enemy. You should know what you’re up against.”

“Good point. How much do you want for it?”

He gave \$20. Hopefully, when he read the words of Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda, he understood the reality—that Kṛṣṇa is his best friend, not his enemy.

I approached a man at the Los Angeles airport and offered him the *Bhagavad-gītā*. He said, “Oh, yes, I’m familiar with the *Gītā*.”

I asked, “Have you read it?”

“I’ve read parts of it.”

“So why don’t you read the whole thing?”

“It’s not where I’m at right now. Maybe you can answer a question for me. What happens to a person who commits suicide?”

“He becomes a ghost.”

“You’ve confirmed what I heard from a friend. About three months ago I was really close to committing suicide. I had met this girl who tore up my heart, subtly.”

I said, “This book will definitely pick you up and help you out of the bewildered state of consciousness that would bring you to that point.”

“What word did you say?”

“Bewildered.”

“That’s it! I was completely bewildered. But I don’t want the *Bhagavad-gītā*. I don’t want any spiritual guidance. I just want to depend on fate.”

“Fate is controlled by God, and he is coming to you right now in the form of the *Gītā* to help you get your life together. Yet you’re refusing it!”

He pulled the book out of my hands and opened it up at random to see what message he would get. He opened it to verse 7.13 and read the translation out loud. Then he began reading the purport. He stopped when he read, “‘Those who are bewildered by these three modes of material nature cannot understand that transcendental to this material nature is the Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa.’ There’s that word again—‘bewildered.’”

“Practically everyone in this world is bewildered,” I said, “but the *Bhagavad-gītā* is meant to help us get out of this bewildered condition.”

Again he opened the book at random to see if another eye-opener would pop out. Sure enough, it did. He read to me from the Introduction: “‘Out of so many human beings who are suffering, there are a few who are actually inquiring about their position, as to what they are, why they are put into this awkward position and so on. Unless one is awakened to this position of questioning his suffering, unless he realizes that he doesn’t want suffering but rather wants to make a solution to all suffering, then one is not to be considered a perfect human being.’”

“All right, you got me,” he said with a smile. “I’ll take a *Gītā*. You know, from just talking to you for the past ten minutes and reading a few sentences from this book, I feel happier than I have in a long time.”

Chapter 3: Be Bold for Kṛṣṇa

A couple of devotees were on traveling *saṅkīrtana*. One night while asleep in their van they heard a knock on the door. One of the devotees opened the door to find two policemen. One asked gruffly, “What are you doing here?”

Ignoring the question, the devotee smiled and showed some books to the cops, explaining how they would benefit so much if they gave a donation and took the books. Which they did.

This is an amazing example of someone completely absorbed in preaching. Although awakened unexpectedly at 1:00 AM by the cops, who were obviously looking for some criminal, he never lost his composure but distributed several books to them. This is *samādhī*.

What this devotee did is very important for all *saṅkīrtana* devotees to remember. Quite often when we’re distributing, a person will question us in a challenging mood. The best response is to smile and ask him a question right back, or just go straight to presenting the books, as this devotee did.

For instance, you might approach someone who immediately challenges: “What do you want?” You might respond with a smile and ask, “Are you from here?” Sometimes such a response will throw him off and he’ll end up taking a book. Sometimes to such a question I respond, “Oh, I’m out here today to see how friendly people are.” When he realizes he wasn’t being very friendly, he’ll sometimes soften up and take a book.

Here’s another example of boldness and quick thinking. I was on a *japa* walk with Jayādvaita Swami in New York City. We had just left the Brooklyn temple when a police car pulled up next to us. One of the policemen asked, “Hey, what do ya have to give up to become a Hare Kṛṣṇa?”

“Suffering!” replied Mahārāja without missing a beat.

“Well, that sounds good.”

“And if you want to know more about it, we have a temple just a couple of blocks down the street, on the left.”

When we returned to the temple, the devotees told us that two policemen had come and bought some books. I was amazed.

“Excuse me, sir.”

“Yes? [*Ring, ring.*] Sorry, I just got a call.”

Cell phones! *Arggggh!* Everyone has one, even ten-year-olds. It’s unbelievable.

Sometimes there are two or three people walking along our sacred *saṅkīrtana* areas, each one talking on a phone. They consider it an affront if someone interrupts them while they’re on the phone, so we usually just let them pass. When I’m speaking to someone and we’re interrupted by a cell-phone call, I want to grab the thing and throw it about a block away and tell the person the book is more important. But I can’t do that, which means 99% of the time the transcendental exchange is finished.

Today as I was distributing in Manchester, England, I saw so many people walking around with these obstacles to the *saṅkīrtana* mission. Then I remembered an incident that happened in Santa Monica, California, some time back:

I saw a man coming toward me who looked spiritually inclined, so I decided to speak to him. Just then his cell phone rang, but since I was a little fired up, I thought, “Let me try anyway.”

As he talked to the person on the other end I said, “Excuse me.” He politely asked his friend to hold and asked me what I wanted. I presented *The Science of Self-Realization* to him and briefly explained its contents. By now his friend on the phone was trying to get his attention.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

The man said to his friend, “I’ll be with you in a minute. Someone is selling me a book.”

I continued showing him the SSR. He was interested and asked intelligent questions. Finally he thanked me, gave a healthy donation, and went on his way with the mercy of Lord Gaurāṅga. After a few steps he redialed his friend and continued his phone conversation. No cell-phone blues there.

Often I distribute while sitting at a table on a college campus. Sometimes students who are on the phone come over to look at my displays on karma, meditation, and reincarnation, and if they show some interest I’ll say, “Put him on hold for ten seconds and I’ll show you this book.” Ninety percent of the time they just tell their friend, “I’ll call you back” or “Wait a minute.” Then I show them the book, and quite often they take it.

At *Bhagavad-gītā* 3.15 Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “The all-pervading Transcendence is eternally situated in acts of sacrifice.” Human life is meant not for working hard to maintain the body but for reawakening our eternal relationship with the Lord and then going back to Godhead. All this can be achieved by acts of divine sacrifice. The best sacrifice is to please the pure devotee. Fortunately for us, we’ve been given that chance. Śrīla Prabhupāda has left us with as much service as we like—if we like. It is entirely up to us.

While distributing books at Irvine Valley College, in Southern California, I met an interested person who bought a *Science of Self-Realization* and then went to his class. An hour later he returned and wanted to return the book. He said he didn’t agree with Śrīla Prabhupāda that illicit sex leads to materialism. I asked, “Do you believe in God?”

“No, I’m a devout atheist.”

I replied, “This universe is so perfectly arranged that for millions of years the sun has been radiating heat and light throughout the solar system and it will continue to do so for millions of years into the future. The scientists say it all began with the Big Bang. What happens when there is an explosion?”

“Destruction, chaos.”

“So how can all this order come from a big bang?”

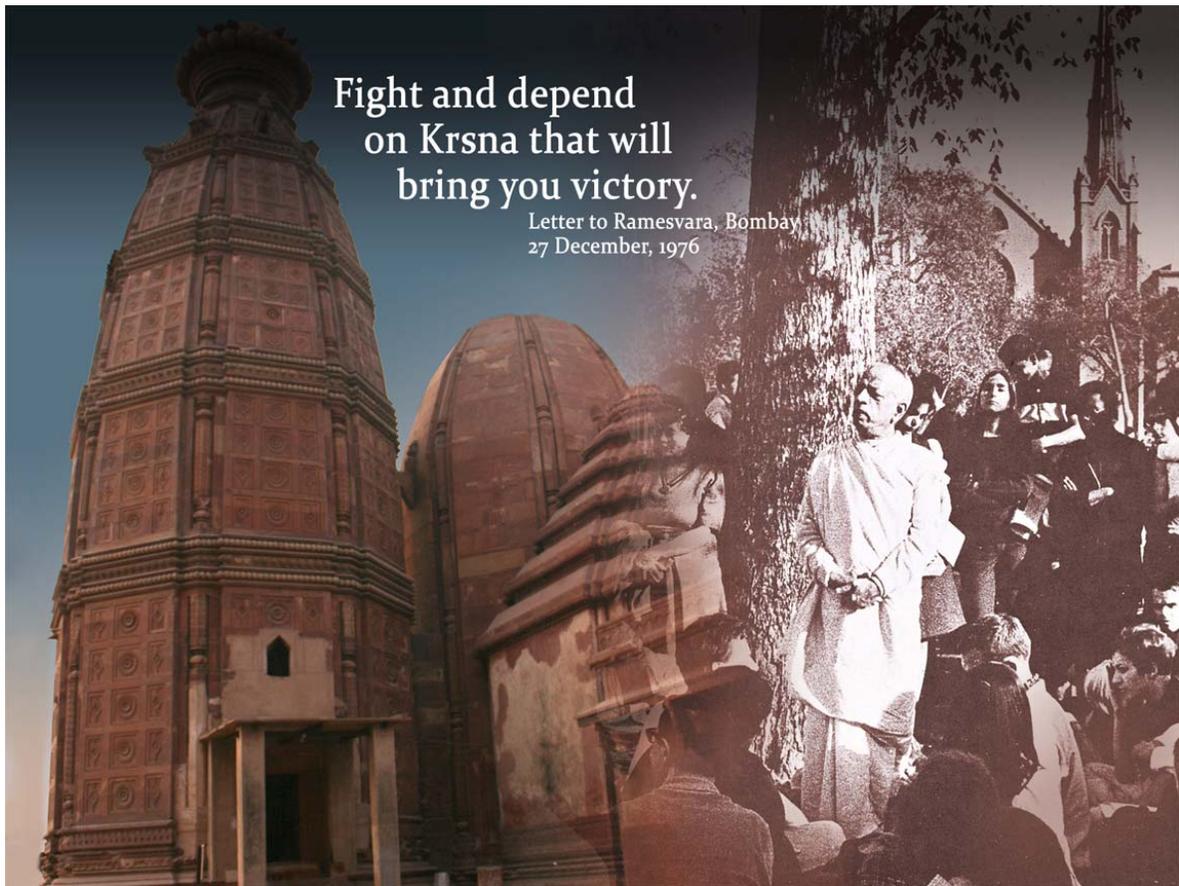
In so many ways I explained to him that the complex arrangement of nature couldn’t have come about by accident. After awhile he agreed that there *might* be a God.

Then I said, “So, if there’s a God then one should use sex not for some selfish purpose but to please Him by having a child who will be raised in God consciousness. Millions of children are killed every year in the womb because of uncontrolled sex desire—exploiting the opposite sex. Every year millions of people contract venereal disease, all in the name of so-called love. What people call love is mostly lust. Otherwise, why is it that more than half of all marriages in the USA end in divorce? Lust means selfish desire.”

“Ok, sure, I agree that people exploit others to satisfy their sex desire.” After a pause he added: “You know, there are so many religions all over the world, but you Hare Kṛṣṇas are the only ones I’ll support, because you don’t condemn nonbelievers and you have a good philosophy, not just sentiment.”

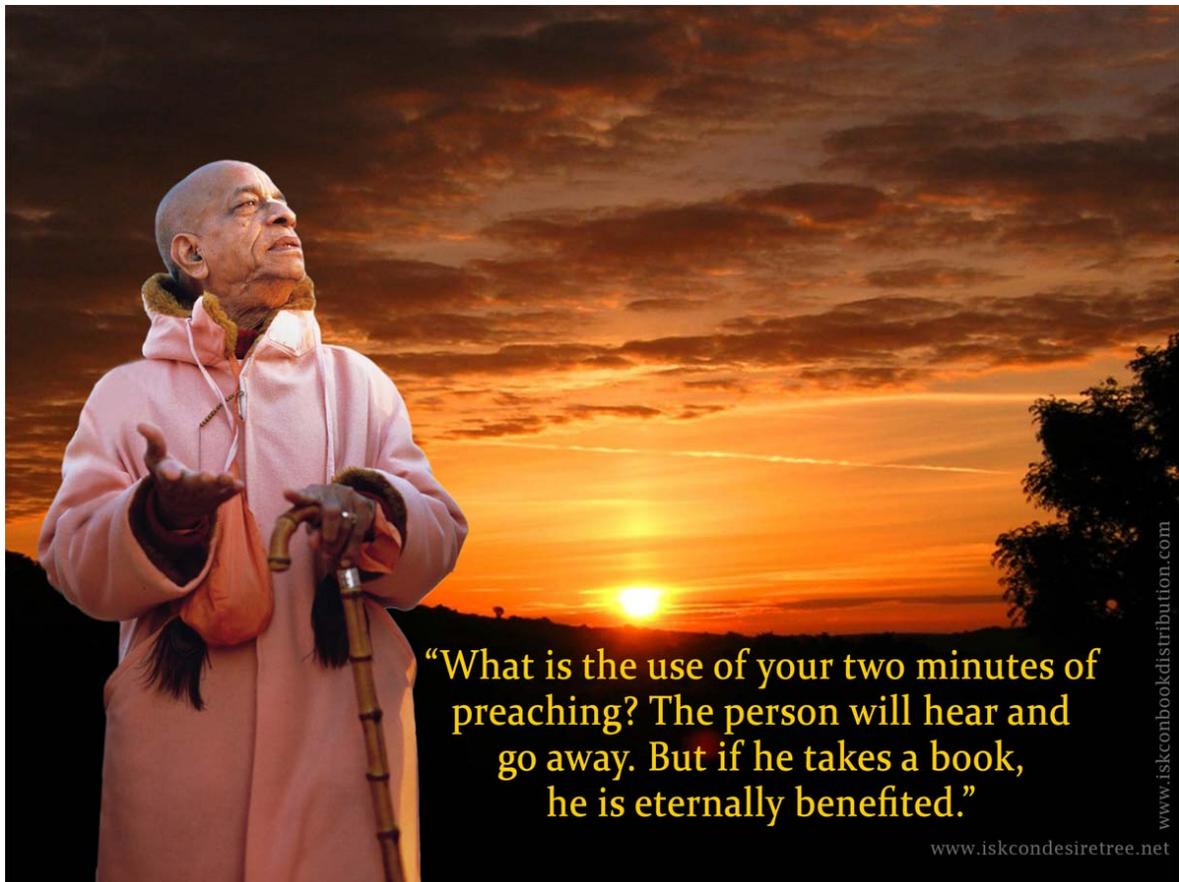
He kept the book—Kṛṣṇa’s mercy.

[End of Chapter Three: “Be Bold for Kṛṣṇa”]



Fight and depend
on Krsna that will
bring you victory.

Letter to Ramesvara, Bombay
27 December, 1976



“What is the use of your two minutes of
preaching? The person will hear and
go away. But if he takes a book,
he is eternally benefited.”

www.iskcondesiretree.net

www.iskconbookdistribution.com

Chapter Four A Change of Heart

It is natural that one undergoes a change of heart after receiving one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. We may not see the change right away, but Prabhupāda said that one who simply touches one of his books will benefit, what to speak of reading it. The whole process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is meant to bring about a change of heart.

Not only do those who receive Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books experience a change of heart, but so do the book distributors. They become more aware of Kṛṣṇa’s presence everywhere, and thus their hearts become purified. In general, book distributors become more Kṛṣṇa conscious. As all distributors will agree, book distribution means taking shelter of Kṛṣṇa, praying to Kṛṣṇa.

When we’re on book distribution we see our *anarthas* as clear as day, as if in a mirror. We see our material attachments, our lust and greed, our envy and pride. I’ve noticed that when I’m not doing *saṅkīrtana* these “rascals” can remain tucked away so that I don’t see them as much. But when they’re visible we can try to eliminate them. Of course, I’m not saying that those who don’t regularly distribute books won’t also see these *anarthas* and eliminate them, but what I’ve found is that in general for book distributors the process is quicker and more intense.

At *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.5.10–11 Sūta Gosvāmī says:

*na yad vacaś citra-pādaṁ harer yaśo
jagat-pavitram pragṛṇīta karhicit
tad vāyasam tīrtham uśanti mānasā
na yatra haṁsā niramanty uśik-kṣayāḥ*

*tad-vāg-visargo janatāgha-viplavo
yasmin prati-ślokaṁ abaddhavaty api
nāmāny anantasya yaśo ’ṅkitāni yat
śṛṅvanti gāyanti gṛṇanti sādhaḥ*

“Those words which do not describe the glories of the Lord, who alone can sanctify the atmosphere of the whole universe, are considered by saintly persons to be like unto a place of pilgrimage for crows. Since the all-perfect persons are inhabitants of the transcendental abode, they do not derive any pleasure there.

“On the other hand, that literature which is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of the name, fame, forms, pastimes, etc., of the unlimited Supreme Lord is a different creation, full of transcendental words directed toward bringing about a revolution in the impious lives of this world’s misdirected civilization. Such transcendental literatures, even though imperfectly composed, are heard, sung and accepted by purified men who are thoroughly honest.”

The knowledge contained in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books brings about a revolution in the heart. It changes those fortunate people who receive it into swans. We come into this world as crows trying to enjoy the garbage of sense gratification, but if we submissively hear the words of Kṛṣṇa and distribute them, then gradually the crow feathers will turn into swan feathers and we’ll fly in the spiritual sky of devotional service.

In His *Śikṣāṣṭaka* Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu has said, “All glories to the *śrī-kṛṣṇa-saṅkīrtana*, which cleanses the heart of all the dirt accumulated for years together.” Hearing about Kṛṣṇa is what will cleanse people’s hearts. Now they are hearing so much nonsense and their hearts are getting dirtier and

Chapter 4: A Change of Heart

dirtier. We want to replace all this literature dear to crows with the literature dear to swans, namely that literature coming from Kṛṣṇa and His devotees.

* * *

Śrīla Prabhupāda letter, 18 November 1972

“The thing is, our main business is to distribute books, either here or there it doesn’t matter. So if there is transcendental competition for increasing sale of books, that is good. If he buys one book his life may be turned, that is best preaching work.”

* * *

His Holiness Devāmrita Swami

A devotee in New Zealand had just received his masters degree in accounting, a degree based on his masters thesis, *Spiritual Accounting*. At the masters and Ph.D. levels accounting means not number crunching but dealing with the precepts underlying the entire accounting system. The new wave of accounting attacks the old school, which concerns itself only with financial profit and loss. The new school says accounting should concern itself not only with financial profit and loss but also with evaluating the costs and benefits relating to the environment and people’s health and inner happiness.

The devotee presented his thesis at an international scholars’ conference and had to defend his openly Vaiṣṇava-based presentation against a top gun in the new school, an Indian lady Māyāvādī who insisted that Kṛṣṇa is fictitious and that the only solution to the global problems is thus to realize that “everything is connected to everything else”—as pure undifferentiated oneness.

Our devotee “contained her” in an appropriately scholarly way and then walked off the podium and into the audience. He went on a “victory tour” among the professors there, distributing Prabhupāda’s *Gītā* to many while asking and getting on-the-spot donations. (I’m amazed at his nerve—to be so bold in such an arena!) His final sale was to the Indian Māyāvādī scholar herself. He told her: “Take a look at a real *Gītā*.” She meekly replied, “How much?”

Amidst international scholarly accolades and urges that he continue the same research as a Ph.D., he has opted, at least for a while, to follow his own dream: to be a simple *brahmacārī* book distributor.

* * *

His Holiness Śivarāma Swami

Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, “If they purchase a book and if they read just one page, their lives will be changed.”

I opened a temple in Minneapolis in 1976, and devotees distributed downtown and at the airport. Minneapolis is world-famous for its Mayo Clinic, which is the best cancer hospital in the world. Thus many people fly there for diagnosis and treatment.

I was the temple president at the time and was distributing at the airport during the marathon. I stopped a couple and gave them a *Gītā*, explaining that the book was about understanding ourselves better, really getting to know who you are. The man was very somber, and his wife appeared sad also. It seemed they were listening to me because they had nothing else to do, and in the end she asked him to buy the book and they went away, almost dejected. I continued to sell books and forgot about them.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

An hour later, as I was speaking to someone, I noticed that the woman had returned with the *Gītā* in her hand. I thought she wanted to return the book and get her money back. After I finished the sale she came up to me and with tears in her eyes said, “I just want to thank you for giving me this book. What I have read in the last half hour means so much to me.”

I asked her to explain. It seems that she had come with her husband to the Mayo Clinic and had been diagnosed with very serious cancer. Perhaps it was terminal. She had been hopeless. “But this book,” she said, “has shown me that it is my body that has cancer and that I, the soul, am neither sick nor will die. That has given me so much strength that I can now live with this disease. I know that even if this body dies I’ll continue to live. Thank you so much.”

Just then her husband came and shook my hand and also thanked me, adding, “You are doing wonderful work with your books. Keep it up. It has meant a lot to my wife.” They then left for their flight, much more peaceful than at our first meeting.

This is the power of transcendental knowledge: It changes peoples lives and is the basis for their future Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Please distribute many books. That is the only hope to bring people relief from this mad, mad world.

There was a person who used to throw rocks at our temple in Los Angeles and harass the devotees. One day a devotee physically chastised him quite heavily. He was so impressed with the devotee that he became a devotee himself. His name was Ruci Dāsa, a successful book distributor.

Śrīla Prabhupāda gives an example of having a positive attitude: A *sādhu* was doing *mādhukarī* door to door and a man gave him ashes. The *sādhu* sincerely thanked him and was turning to leave when the man said, “Why have you thanked me? I gave you only ashes.”

“Because you have begun the process of giving.”

Long ago when I was regularly doing *saṅkīrtana* in the train station, the same policeman would repeatedly kick me out. One day he caught me and said, “Don’t you understand that you should not be here. Today you’re going to jail.”

“Listen,” I said, “my job is to sell these books and yours is to kick me out. You should thank me for giving you employment. If I’m in jail, you will be out of a job.”

The policeman laughed and sent me away. I walked out one door and came back through another. It was a good place for book distribution.

* * *

Ācārya Dāsa

While on traveling *saṅkīrtana*, I approached a middle-aged couple sitting at an outdoor café. They vociferously refused to take the books, and I went somewhere else. After an hour I saw the same man leaning against the wall of the supermarket and asked him, “Are you waiting for me?”

“No, I am waiting for my little one.”

Chapter 4: A Change of Heart

“Well, here,” I said, “we’re showing these to everyone,” and I handed him a *Perfection of Yoga*.

“No, no, I won’t read it.”

“Why? Check it out. It’s just a small book: you can read it very quickly. It’s also a very important book.” Then I handed him *Perfect Questions, Perfect Answers*.

He looked at it and read aloud, “‘*Perfect Questions, Perfect Answers*.’ Actually, I have been looking for answers, but I couldn’t find any for what happened. One week ago my very best friend took a knife and killed himself.” The guy’s eyes filled with tears at this point.

“So, please read it,” I said. “These books answer all the questions you may have in life.”

“Yeah, something is definitely wrong with this world.”

“Yes, you should read the book and see the alternative.”

We talked for a while more and he took both books.

* * *

Aiśvarya Dāsa

I was distributing books in front of a post office in Germany. I tried to show the books to a businessman stepping out of his car. He was in his mid-fifties, well-to-do, and very tense and businesslike.

“You are all cheaters and rascals!” he shouted. “I don’t want to get involved in this. You’re all a bunch of hypocrites. It’s all bogus.”

So I said, “What? What are you talking about? This is the *Bhagavad-gītā*, ancient philosophy from India.”

“Yes, yes, India,” he said. “I know all these yogīs and swamis and gurus, and this is all cheating. Tell me, which guru is the head of your organization?”

“His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda,” I replied.

“Really?” he said. “Swami Prabhupāda? Then I take back everything I said. I have great respect for that man. Show me what books you have.”

I showed him. Then I asked him, “Do you know Śrīla Prabhupāda?”

He said, “I can tell you why I like this man. It’s because I read his book *Life Comes from Life*. In that book he calls modern leaders hogs, dogs, camels, asses, rascals, cheaters, and hypocrites. And he defeats them all—the scientists, the philosophers, the religionists. He tells the truth straight to their face.”

He was very happy with Śrīla Prabhupāda, and he took two books.

A short time later I was distributing in Malaysia. Preaching in Malaysia is more of an art than in most places. In Malaysia, a Muslim country, devotees are not allowed to distribute books to Muslims or preach to them. Anyone else is OK. If someone from another faith converts a Muslim, there can be trouble both for both the converter and the person converted. Even in Lord Caitanya’s day this problem arose with Haridāsa Ṭhākura. He had been born a Muslim but became a great devotee of Kṛṣṇa, and so the Muslim government tried to kill him.

A Muslim lady came across a devotee distributing *Bhagavad-gītās*. She had heard of the *Gītā* and wanted to compare its teachings with those of the Koran, of which she was a very devout follower. The devotee was a little reluctant to give it to her because he knew it could mean trouble, but then he thought, “Kṛṣṇa will protect.”

As she read the *Gītā* over the ensuing days, she would often think, “Yes, this is also in the Koran.” She would read a little further and again find the same teachings as those in the Koran. But as she

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

continued she would also find very interesting concepts not found in the Koran. By the time she finished the *Bhagavad-gītā* she was convinced that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the highest truth.

Now what to do? She decided to become a devotee—a “closet” devotee. In Kuala Lumpur we have the biggest Ratha-yātrā in Malaysia (there are more than twenty a year throughout the county), and this *mātāji* was the main actress in a drama performed after the parade. She was well disguised.

An Orthodox Christian monk in Kiev, Ukraine, became attracted to Kṛṣṇa consciousness after getting a *Bhagavad-gītā*. He tried to live in the temple as a *brahmacārī*, but the lifestyle was too foreign to him. So he went back to live in the Christian monastery while continuing to chant sixteen rounds a day, follow all the regulations, and visit the temple often.

At one point in his life he decided that he wanted to visit India, so he started saving money for the trip. He was a monk, so money was very scarce, but gradually he was getting the fare together. One day someone at the temple announced that there would be a “Śāstra-dāna” meeting in the evening. He found out from the devotees that Śāstra-dāna was a temple department that organizes the distribution of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books to schools, libraries, bookstores, etc. So he went to the meeting, which concluded when a devotee asked if anyone would like to donate for the cause. The Christian devotee who had been saving to go to India reached into his pocket and gave all his savings—seven hundred dollars. He was so inspired to have Prabhupāda’s books distributed that he gave up his cherished desire to go to India and surrendered everything. A fine example of selflessness.

“A pure devotee of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is always thinking of how the fallen, conditioned souls can be delivered. The Supreme Personality of Godhead, influenced by the merciful devotees’ attempt to deliver fallen souls, enlightens the people in general from within by His causeless mercy.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.29.46, purport)

All *saṅkīrtana* devotees cherish this very powerful and deep statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda. This is one way that Kṛṣṇa reciprocates with *saṅkīrtana* devotees. If a devotee sincerely tries to spread the glories of Kṛṣṇa, then Kṛṣṇa inspires people who would otherwise not be interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness to respond to the devotee’s preaching efforts.

It was getting tough, late, and passionate at a concert, but Vaikuṅṭhaloka Prabhu felt compelled to continue. So when he offered two ladies transcendental wisdom, only to have them mouth the oft-repeated noncommittal “I don’t know” line, he resorted to his last resort: silently screaming to Kṛṣṇa for help. “Please, please, please, Kṛṣṇa, let these souls take books. Pleeeeease!!!”

When Vaikuṅṭhaloka looked up he saw that the expression on one of the ladies’ faces had changed from hesitant to excited: “How about \$10 for two?”

I take the dust from Vaikuṅṭhaloka Prabhu’s lotus feet.

Chapter 4: A Change of Heart

The Happy Mantra

Once in Germany Tośana Kṛṣṇa Prabhu stopped a girl on the street and tried to present Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books to her, but she was quite dejected and not interested. She started to talk about the meaninglessness of life.

Tośana Kṛṣṇa said he was a Hare Kṛṣṇa monk and showed her a two-volume *Kṛṣṇa* book set, the German edition of which is subtitled *The Source of All Pleasure*. He explained a little about Kṛṣṇa consciousness and then said, “If you’ll just try to read one story a day, your sadness will disappear very soon.” She decided to check it out, but she told him she had only five euros, which wasn’t enough for both volumes. Tośana was a little hesitant, but his merciful nature prevailed and he gave them to her. Finally he explained a little about chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa—how to do it and how it can make one happy.

She walked off with her books, but after an hour or so she was back. “I’ve been chanting the happy mantra you gave me, and soon after I started I couldn’t control myself—I became so blissful that I couldn’t stop laughing. And I have to confess that I had another ten euros in my wallet that I was planning to by drugs with. But now I don’t need drugs anymore, so here’s the rest of my money.”

But this is not the end of the story.

The same girl came back the next day, still in bliss, and asked Tośana, “How can you spend so many hours on the street every day selling books? I’ve done some advertising on the street, and I know how tough it is to sell stuff on the street.” After listening carefully to the devotee’s explanation about the glories of book distribution, she decided to try it herself. She took a stack of books and began distributing them.

Param vijayate śrī-kṛṣṇa-saṅkīrtanam!!

* * *

Candraśekhara Ācārya Dāsa

One morning in the *Bhāgavatam* class the speaker related the story of a very pious and rich Vaiṣṇava who would always give big donations but who, while doing so, would always be very humble and look kind of ashamed. Once a man came up to him and asked, “Why do you always look so ashamed when you give your donations?”

He replied, “When I give donations people think I’m a very generous and pious man, but actually I’m nothing special, since this money doesn’t belong to me but to God. I’m just His instrument, which He uses in His service.”

I liked that story very much, and after *prasādam* I went out to distribute some books at LAX. I approached a gentleman from Holland who was very nice and receptive but only had one dollar with him. I told him he could have a paperbound book for that and he agreed, took the book, and walked away. I continued distributing. Father half an hour he came back and said to me, “Actually, can you give me back the dollar?” I thought he was a miser and just wanted his money back, so I gave it back to him and he gave me the book in return.

“Now please give me the big book you showed me before,” he said.

“Sure,” I replied, ecstatic about this turn of events. As I handed over the *Bhagavad-gītā*, he gave me a hundred-dollar bill. As I thanked him profusely, what he said next nearly knocked me down: “You don’t have to thank me, young man. You shouldn’t think I’m special, since this money doesn’t belong to me anyway but to God and He’s just using me as His instrument.”

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Chowpatti Book Distribution

Mohan is a very senior officer in the railways of Mumbai. If he would catch a devotee distributing books on the trains, he would heavily fine him, and if the devotee could not pay he would put him behind bars or detain him until the devotee's family members or authorities from the temple came and paid the fine, for which he almost never issued a receipt. With the bribe money he would go to hotel restaurants and pay for expensive meat dishes and liquor.

One day, he had a heart attack and barely survived. The doctors prescribed complete bed rest for three months. His daughter gave him a *Kṛṣṇa* book to read while he recuperated. "God has saved you," she said. "Now please read about Him in this book." Mohan read the entire book. "God is so beautiful and nice," he thought, and from then on he began to pray regularly. "I felt much more peaceful after reading *Kṛṣṇa* book," he says. "I then read the *Bhagavad-gītā* and found that all my suffering was due to my bad karma."

Reading the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Kṛṣṇa* book completely changed Mohan. He gave up his bad activities and began associating with devotees. Everyone was amazed to see such a turnaround in him. Now during the December marathons he makes sure the devotees get all the permission they need to distribute on the trains.

We were distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda's books in the coal mines when we met an officer who was a guide to students working for their Ph.D. in Hindi literature. He had guided six students to their PhDs. He regularly writes for the Gita Press journal and also edits their books. When we showed him the *Bhagavad-gītā* he said, "I have read eight commentaries on the *Bhagavad-gītā*. What will you show me that's new?"

We pressed him to at least look at the book for a few minutes.

"OK," he said, "I will just read the commentary of the first verse." He began reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport to *Bhagavad-gītā* 1.1. After reading for just a few moments he turned to us, "This *Bhagavad-gītā* is really great. It's marvelous. Give me the entire set."

* * *

Dwārakeśa Dāsa

I was distributing in the international terminal at the Los Angeles airport when I approached a man coming down the escalator.

"Excuse me, sir, are you from LA or out of town?"

"Can't you see I'm in a hurry?" he said without stopping. "Don't bother me." And off he went.

Two minutes later he came back and asked, "The books you have—are they spiritual?"

"Sure," I replied.

"Oh, I didn't know! Yes, I would like to have those books."

I gave him three books: *The Science of Self-Realization*, *The Journey of Self-Discovery*, and *The Perfection of Yoga*.

"You know, I'm really lucky I ran into you, since at this point in my life my main interest is in spirituality." Hearing that, I decided to also give him a *Bhagavad-gītā* also. He put all the books in his bag, thanked me, and was about to leave when I said, "Usually people give donations for the books. Could you give a donation?"

Chapter 4: A Change of Heart

“Oh, I don’t have any money on me. Should I give the books back?”

“Are you going to read them?”

“Yes, I’ll definitely read them.”

“OK, here’s my address. If you could send a donation for the books, that would be nice.” I gave him my card with the temple address.

A week later I received a letter from him thanking me for the books, with a check for a hundred dollars.

* * *

Gokula-līlā Devī Dāsī (New Zealand)

I was distributing in the Westfield megamall parking lot and went inside because of rain. There I found that Lord Caitanya had people awaiting Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. One of them was Roy.

When I put the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.1 into his hand, he asked me if I was a Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Rāma. Knowing that only Indians refer to us in this way, I asked him, “Do you have an Indian wife?”

“Wow! How did you know? But no, we’re divorced.”

He told me his horrific experience of being married at age 23 to an Indian lady who demanded more of him than he could give. He had a high position in the corporate world, but it wasn’t good enough for her. He worked very hard, but still the money wasn’t enough.

After divorcing her he developed a strong distaste for material life. He came to the point where he realized that everyone was under the influence of money. In an effort to escape that trap, he literally gave away thousands of dollars to people. He even gave away his bed and would sleep on the floor!

He further expressed his realization about money and relationships, showing distaste. Seemed like he’d never again make such mistakes in life. He liked hearing about Kṛṣṇa conscious solutions.

The exchange was flowing nicely when a beautiful Chinese girl appeared at his side. I thought, “Oh no! Now the exchange will be finished!” Indeed, she took one look at me, Roy, and the book and he turned to jelly.

“You’re not interested in *that* book, are you?” she said with disdain, and he sheepishly placed it back in my hand.

I gave him a look that said, “Hey, you *know* you’re interested. Don’t forget!”

In response to the look he said, “I want to give you some money for the conversation.” He and the girl walked to the ATM a few meters away and were conversing as he pointed toward a few directions of the mall.

I was praying that Kṛṣṇa would kindly sort out the situation so that Roy could take the book, as he desired.

Then I saw something I’d never seen before. With determination to finish the exchange nicely, he put his hands on his girlfriend’s shoulder and turned her in the opposite direction . . . and she gleefully walked away!

Roy returned to me and I said, “You know, maybe your new girlfriend will lead you down the same track you just told me that your ex-wife did.” Roy looked shocked and relieved that someone could see through the illusion. He asked if we could stay in contact. I gave him the contact info for our outreach center in Auckland.

He gave a donation and took the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.1. Then he went in the direction opposite to where his girlfriend had gone to put the book in his car before she saw it.

Saṅkīrtana is like a television show displaying Māyā’s tricks.

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Harāprāṇa Devī Dāśī

Once as I was distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books in a small city in Belgium, I met a woman who listened very emotionally as I showed her a book. “I don’t need the book. I’ve just bought some pills in the pharmacy [she showed them to me] and am going home to commit suicide.”

“Why?!” I asked her, shocked.

“My husband has died and I can’t live without him.”

I told her about reincarnation and explained that committing suicide would not solve her problems. “This knowledge is all in these books,” I explained. “They can be a great help and shelter for you.”

She agreed to read one of the books before taking the pills and asked me to come to her house so she could pay for it. After she had invited me to sit down, we started a conversation. She showed me photos of her husband, and to my amazement I came across some pictures of her and her husband visiting Radhadesh, the main Hare Kṛṣṇa center in Belgium, during a marriage ceremony.

I said, “Hey! That’s where I live! And the girl getting married is my friend; she’s also here in town right now.”

I went to get my devotee friend. As we spoke with the woman, she gradually became more and more enthusiastic and bought all five books we had with us. She promised us she was going to throw the pills away, read the books thoroughly, and keep in contact with the devotees.

She kept her promise. Now she often visits the temple, and she opens her house to any devotee who wants to stay overnight or distribute books from there.

* * *

Juhu Temple Book Distribution

What happens when a new devotee is met by an opponent who tests him? If the devotee can answer the challenger, he may save himself; otherwise the encounter may disturb his faith. Does this mean that one should not preach unless he has completely mastered the philosophy? Or should one just go ahead and depend on Lord Kṛṣṇa? The following story told by Balarāma-līlā Prabhu of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Rasabihārī Temple describes what happened during just such an encounter.

We were distributing books from a stall on the railway bridge during the December marathon. A new devotee joined us for the day. He was very enthusiastic and would earnestly request everyone who stopped at our stall to buy Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. His incomplete understanding of the deeper aspects of the philosophy was more than compensated by his simple and spontaneous service attitude. Then a young Maharashtrian man came to the stall.

“Please take this *Bhagavad-gītā*, sir,” the new devotee said to him.

The man didn’t speak at first, but when requested again he said, “The *Bhagavad-gītā* is flowing in my veins. Why should I buy it from you? I know it inside out.”

Every second Indian will give the same answer to the Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees. It’s nothing new: Indians always consider their knowledge of a few verses of the *Bhagavad-gītā* to comprise a complete knowledge of the *Gītā*’s teachings. Generally they think that the *Gītā*’s message is simply to do one’s duty and not worry about the results. So we try to help them see the *Gītā* from the devotional angle. The new devotee said, “*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* gives the proper meaning of the *Gītā*. Therefore you should buy it.”

The man became a little angry and said, “Are you challenging me? I told you I know the *Bhagavad-gītā* inside out. Come on and ask me anything you want to know.”

Chapter 4: A Change of Heart

The devotee got a little scared at this challenge because he himself was anything but a scholar of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Still he mustered some courage and said, “OK, what is verse 18.66 of the *Bhagavad-gītā*?” This was practically the only *śloka* of the *Gītā* he knew.

The man thought for some moments and then said, “OK, I don’t know this. But do you know?”

“Yes,” the devotee replied and cheerfully recited, “*Sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇam vraja . . .*”

The man had nothing to say. “OK, you defeated me,” he said, “so I have to buy your book. But wait a minute: now I will test you.”

The devotee now realized that he would be exposed. “I hardly know anything else in the *Bhagavad-gītā*,” he thought. “If this man asks me something complex I’m finished. O Lord Kṛṣṇa! Please save me! You are my only hope!” The devotee started praying earnestly for the Lord’s mercy.

The man asked, “Tell me verse number . . . ah, let me think. Ok, tell me 4.34.”

Jubilant, the devotee blurted out, “*Tad viddhi pranīpātena paripraśnena sevayā/ upadekṣyanti te jñānam jñāninas tattva-darśinaḥ*. ‘Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth.’ This was the only other *śloka* he knew from the *Bhagavad-gītā*!”

The man accepted defeat and left with the *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*.

This shows that if devotees sincerely depend upon the mercy of the Lord, they will surely be helped. As Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja says in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, “By the mercy of the Lord a lame man can climb mountains and a dumb man can speak eloquently.” Similarly, even a simple devotee can be empowered to defend the mission of the Lord against the agonistics.

* * *

Madhumāṅgala Dāsa

I approached a man wearing greasy clothes and carrying a vacuum cleaner in one hand and a toolbox in the other. I introduced myself to him, and he abruptly responded: “Sorry, not interested. Besides, I don’t want anything to do with organized religion. I’ve had enough of it!”

I replied, “The books I have are about you and me, the spirit soul.”

But still he refused.

“Real religion is eternal,” I said, “because it has to do with the soul and his relationship with God. There’s so much disunity among different religions because people don’t know the difference between spirit and matter. They’re identifying with the temporary material body, thinking, ‘I’m this Jewish body,’ ‘I’m this Christian body,’ ‘I’m this Islamic body,’ etc. But the soul has none of these identities. His only identity is that he’s a servant of God, the father of everyone. Some people claim to have a monopoly on God, but God is the father of everyone.”

He immediately had a change of heart: “Yes, you’re so right. Now that’s what I like to hear. I thought you were one of those guys who was going to tell me that Jesus was the only way or something like that. But now I can see from what you’re telling me that you’re different. You’re not like that.”

We spoke further about real religion. Then I said, “Please take one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, and if you like you can make a donation.”

“Certainly, I would happy to,” and he handed me twenty rand. I gave him two of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and a big hug. I invited him to the Sunday and Wednesday programs at the temple and told him, “I look forward to seeing you there. Oh, and when you come, bring an appetite and your dancing shoes.”

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

While distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books at the University of Nairobi, I approached a lady, introduced myself, and showed her Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. She told me she was the librarian.

“Well, then, you would be interested to see these books,” I said. She read a little and told me that she did not think she would be interested in them since she was a Christian.

“That’s all right. These books are not about religion. Religion tells you what to do. These books tell you who you are and how to find out for yourself what to do.”

She looked at them again. “I don’t think so,” she said. “I have my own religion.”

I told her that there is only one religion, just as there is only one God, the creator of everyone. She shook her head and looked at her friend and whispered something to him and nodded her head again. I began to explain to her about the soul and its relationship with God. She said something to her friend again and nodded her head.

I said, “When are you going to stop letting fear and doubt rule your life? Don’t be a Doubting Thomas. There are so many things in this life that we’ve not yet learned about. For too long your wings have been clipped. Grow your wings and learn to fly. Become a free spirit and learn to fly above the temporary nature of material existence and be free.”

She kept silent for what seemed like an eternity. Then she said, “You’re right. I’ll take the book.” She then gave me a nice donation.

* * *

Mahātmā Dāsa (Greece)

As I distributed books on one of the Greek islands, I met a lady who had gotten an *Īsopaniṣad* from me on a different island a couple of years earlier. She told me she was convinced it was a very special book, and it had stolen her heart. Here’s why:

Just before meeting me and getting the *Īśo*, she had split up with her husband and was heading for divorce. But after buying that fateful *Īśo* and again meeting her almost ex-husband, she suddenly found they had something in common. Earlier he had also bought an *Īsopaniṣad* from me and, like her, had found it fascinating. Because of that connection, they got back together and are still living happily as I write—putting Kṛṣṇa in the center.

* * *

Nityānanda Caraṇa Dāsa

I distribute books in the local trains of Mumbai. I prefer to directly glorify Lord Kṛṣṇa during my announcements, and most of the time it works. Even if people don’t buy the books, they are very happy to hear about the Lord.

Once I boarded a local train and turned toward the corner compartment, which was very small. Three people were sitting there—an old man, a middle-aged man who was looking out the window, and a student—and two or three people were standing.

The moment I took my first step to enter the compartment, the old man saw me and began waving his arms, indicating “No! No!” First I felt sad at this rejection, but then I felt a rush of determination: “Since he’s rejecting me,” I thought, “I should be even more forceful in my presentation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.” I clenched my jaw and stepped forward. I had *The Perfection of Yoga* with me. Without mentioning anything about yoga, I straightaway began glorifying Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Chapter 4: A Change of Heart

“Here is a book about Lord Kṛṣṇa, who when He was a newborn baby killed Pūtanā, when He was a toddler killed Tṛṇāvartā, and when He was a seven-year-old lifted Govardhana Hill. That same Lord spoke the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and the teachings of that *Bhagavad-gītā* are in this book. Please take it.”

During my announcement the old man kept waving his hands. But as I continued, there was a change: his waving slowed and his expression softened. When I reached the end of my announcement, he completely stopped moving his hands. Then I showed him the book. He took it and brought out a ten-rupee note and handed it to me. The man in the window seat, who had not even looked at me during the entire announcement and seemed completely uninterested, also took out a ten-rupee note and asked for the book. A note came from behind my shoulder and another book was gone. Out of five people in that train compartment, four took a book!

* * *

Nityānanda-Rāma Dāsa

Another devotee and I and were distributing books in Lithuanian villages. In Darbenai, one of the larger villages, I was going to homes that were not much more than huts. I wondered how people could survive in such places. Hardly anyone was interested in the books.

Kṛṣṇa finally brought me to a big house with several good cars in the driveway. I met the son of the owner, and he liked the books but didn't have any money. He suggested I find his mother. So I shouted, “Mistress!” as is usual in such villages. The mistress showed her face at the door. She was a huge woman, and I felt very meek in her presence.

“My son was joking,” she said. “None of us needs Kṛṣṇa. And you look suspicious.”

I convinced her to let me into the house, but she again said, “We don't need Kṛṣṇa.”

She finally decided to get rid of me by taking a book.

The next day I went to the high school. First I met the sports teacher. I told her what the books were about, and she enthusiastically introduced me to other teachers. The group of us gradually made it to the library, and I put the whole set of books in front of the librarian.

“Ha!” she exclaimed. “I've been searching for these books everywhere. How much does the set cost?”

The books are expensive for Lithuania, but the librarian didn't want to lose her chance, so she took us to the director's office.

The director seemed very liberal and said, “Ah, Kṛṣṇa.” He told the teachers, “You decide. If you like them, go to the accountant. She's responsible for finances.”

When the director mentioned the accountant's name, everyone fell silent. I understood there would be problems.

The librarian, the teachers, and I anxiously made our way to the accountant's office. I knocked on the door and opened it—and there stood the same huge woman I had met the day before!

“What are these drunkards doing here?” she shouted. “I already bought a book just out of compassion.”

Trying to be firm, I put the whole set on the table in front of her, with the twenty or so teachers gathered around me.

“We don't need these books! Do you understand? And how dare you come here!”

The teachers tried to pacify her.

“We need these books. Let's—”

“No, we don't need these books! The school doesn't have the money!”

The director looked in at the doorway and mumbled, “So, girls, decide,” and quickly disappeared.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

“We won’t take these books!” decided the accountant.

But then one teacher said, “I’ll take this one,” and she took a book from the pile.

“I’ll take this,” said another.

After a minute there were no books left on the table.

The shocked accountant shouted, “Put them back! We don’t have the money.” Then, after a pause, she said, “Well, maybe it is possible. Let’s try. Okay, I’ll accept responsibility.”

She opened the safe, counted the money, and gave it to me.

Some teachers took books for themselves, and the accountant sat looking at the set in front of her. I thought I should give her something, so I had Mukunda, our driver, bring in a postcard of Mother Yaśodā holding baby Kṛṣṇa.

“This is very old and divine,” I said. “Please meditate on them; they will protect you from all troubles.”

The teachers gathered around to see what it was.

“Oh, they’ll steal it!” exclaimed the accountant. “I’ll take it home. Thank you very much.”

Another time we went to a construction site to distribute books. We found five Russian workers in a hut, preparing for lunch.

“Hello, I have something for you,” I said.

Experience told me I had only a small chance of success. They seemed to be waiting for someone else. Still, I put my set of books on their small table. But under the weight of the books the table tilted, and their lunches started to fall to the floor.

“Get out of here!” they shouted.

Then their leader came in with two bottles of vodka (most Russians can’t imagine having lunch without it), and all the workers started to shout joyfully. I was the only morose one.

“What are you doing here? Get out!” shouted the brigade leader when he saw me in the smoky room.

They all looked at me angrily. Only by the Lord’s mercy was I able to pacify them, and they agreed to listen to my presentation for five minutes. It wasn’t my best performance. And although I tried hard, their eyes still looked the same after several minutes.

“Wait a minute,” said the brigade leader suddenly, as he pointed to one of the books in the pile.

The workers awakened from their dreams and looked at the books.

“What is this book?” the leader asked.

The other men seemed curious now.

I went through the books until I reached *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*.

“Yes, this is the same book!” said the leader, as if he had found an old lost friend. “The same book! Oh, I have it at home!”

My confidence jumped.

But then he shook his head. “Such a difficult book to read. Very difficult.”

My confidence started to sink.

“It’s hard to believe, guys,” he told the men, “but I tried my best for four months and still couldn’t understand anything. Then I had my vacation. I decided to go for several months, and I took this book with me. Instead of completely wasting my time, I tried to study the book. You can’t imagine—every word in this book is like nectar. So much realization. So much truth. You must take the sets for yourself, and I’ll take a set for my family.”

“But we’ll never be able to understand them,” protested one of the workers.

“That doesn’t matter,” the chief said. “Maybe you are fools, but your children will read the books, and they’ll thank you. They’ll appreciate them.”

Chapter 4: A Change of Heart

Turning toward me he said, “Thank you very much. You are doing very important work.”

In Lithuania I went to sell sets of books at a factory where the director was feared by all the employees. The director was like a gangster and would beat people and throw them out of the company. When I came in with the books, the workers told me not to go anywhere near the director. But I wasn't deterred. I went in, showed the director the books, and fearlessly preached to him with determination.

The man looked at the books and read a little. He appreciated that I was taking time to explain the books and talk to him. As the saying goes, “It's lonely at the top.” No one would ever talk with him. He was so lonely.

The director called all the department heads to his office and told them, “Everyone is going to buy a set of these books.”

No one dared say no. The director let me go through the company selling books, with his recommendation. I collected many signatures authorizing payment, and a few days later returned to deliver the books. The director had assembled all the workers and department heads in a large hall. He then gave a speech.

“Today is a very important day, because you all have a chance to get these wonderful books. You may ask yourself why I'm doing this, since you all know I've been an atheist all my life. But since I've met this interesting person and read these books, I'm convinced there's something more than just material life. And I want God—up there—to know that I, Valdimier Zuchenkof, have given His books to the workers of my factory.”

Everyone applauded, and he started handing out the books.

In Siberia there was a burglar who belonged to a gang of thieves. One day he was in an apartment searching for valuables when he heard a noise at the door. Frightened, he began climbing out the window, and out of frustration that all his trouble had come to naught, he quickly grabbed whatever was at hand—a book lying on the kitchen table—and then ran off.

When the burglar arrived home and looked at the book, he saw that the title read “*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*.” He didn't have the slightest interest in such a book, but since he had stolen it he figured he might as well read it, so he opened it and began.

Soon he was becoming more and more interested in philosophy and spiritual life. He started visiting the local temple and gradually began chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. After some time he brought his gang members to the temple and introduced them to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Before long they were all regularly visiting the temple to render services like cleaning and driving. When devotees asked them what they did for a living, they simply answered, “God allows everyone to survive.”

But there was a problem. The burglar's wife became disturbed to see the great change in his character. He was losing interest in his occupation. She worried about their income. To make matters worse, her father was one of the biggest gangsters in town. Infuriated to find his son-in-law breaking with their tradition of thievery, the father-in-law even threatened to kill him if he didn't stop his spiritual practices, which his father-in-law considered an insult to their great heritage.

So the burglar was caught in a real bind. But one day his wife went to visit some relatives in Moscow, and while shopping in a big marketplace she saw a young man carrying a stack of books. He was walking around without approaching anyone. After he had walked past many people, he went straight up to her, gave her a book, and said, “This is the best book in the world. You should read it

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

because you'll really like it." The devotee didn't know her and had no idea her husband was already chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa.

The burglar's wife was intrigued that out of hundreds of people in the marketplace she had been the one the devotee approached. She bought the book, *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*. Then she went home and read it cover to cover. Now convinced about the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, she joined forces with her husband and threw her father out of the house.

The couple started to visit the temple together, and soon the man began going out with the devotees to distribute books. As he became more and more keen to do that service, he realized, "Formerly I would walk by so many mansions thinking how I could enter them and steal something. Now I think, 'Let me go to that house and give the occupants Kṛṣṇa's mercy in the form of Prabhupāda's books.'"

* * *

Oṃkāra Dāsa

On traveling *saṅkīrtana* I met a young man who asked many intelligent questions. He was very curious and liked the philosophy, but he did not want to take a book. I said, "You know, I have a friend who got a *Gītā* but didn't read it for five years. When he was moving and packing up his belongings, he came across the book. So he dusted it off, cracked it open, and began reading it for the first time. The book changed his life, and he was glad he'd gotten it. So even if you forget about the *Gītā* for five years, you'll be glad you got it when you did."

"Well," he replied, "if it's meant to be, then this book will make its way into my life after five years."

"I guarantee this book will be in your possession within the next five years. I promise."

We parted and I forgot about him while distributing to other students. About four hours later he returned and said, "You're Om . . . Aumk . . . Oṃkāra, right?" We started talking again, and again he asked many sincere questions. He was concerned about his life and wanted to make sure he engaged in transcendental activities. After we'd spoken for some time, he was ready to leave. I was very impressed with the sincerity of his questions, and so I told him, "I want you to have these books." I held out a *Bhagavad-gītā* and a *Journey of Self-Discovery*. He thanked me and gave me a donation. Just as he was leaving he said, "I'm sure I'll read these books before five years are up!"

* * *

Raghunātha Dāsa

In June, in Rome, as I entered a big office building, I was suddenly stopped by a young lady who was a security guard. "Who are you?" she barked. "Where are you going?" She seemed quite severe and determined to bar my entry. When I presented myself and explained in a few words about my mission, her demeanor completely changed and she asked, "Don't you need a security guard for your community? I'm tired of working for these people."

"There is an ancient proverb," I replied, "*māre kṛṣṇa rākhe ke, rākhe kṛṣṇa māre ke*. 'If Lord Kṛṣṇa wants to protect you, who can kill you? And if Kṛṣṇa wants to kill you, who can protect you?' So we don't feel the need for security guards."

She smiled and became even more enlivened. But when I asked permission to go see the director, she became serious again and said, "You cannot go if you don't show me those books you're carrying."

I laughed and happily showed her the books. She bought one of every title I had and said she wanted to visit the temple and stay a few days. Of course, she allowed me to go in to see the director, who gave

Chapter 4: A Change of Heart

me permission to distribute in all the offices.

As I came out of the director's office and prepared to go to the workers' offices, I saw the lady security guard again. This time, to my great wonder, she asked me for a string of *japa* beads. She said she wanted to chant some *mantras*. I took the opportunity to explain the *mahā-mantra* and showed her how to chant on my beads. I apologized for not having an extra set of beads I could give her but promised I would send her a set as soon as possible.

At this point I was completely ecstatic and emptied my trolley of books in a couple of hours in the offices.

I think a time will come when a lot of people will run to us looking for Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and *japa-mālās*.

* * *

Ratna-bhūṣaṇa Dāsa

I was distributing books from a book table at a rest stop in California in the early 80s. A man came and saw that we were a spiritual organization. He started telling me how everything began with the Big Bang.

I said, "Earlier this morning there was a pile of rubber and steel on the parking lot here and someone put a stick of dynamite under the pile and blew it up. Now we see that the Mercedes Benz over there has manifested from the explosion."

The man said, "Yeah, right. Funny."

"Well, that's what you're saying about this much more complex creation, with galaxies, suns, moons, humans, animals, aquatics, seasons, etc. Do you really think all this can come from a destructive explosion?"

"Interesting point. I'm going into the store, and maybe I'll get one of your books when I come out."

Ten minutes later he came out and bought a *Bhagavad-gītā*.

* * *

Ṣaḍbhujā Dāsa

I was distributing in a small village in Germany. I had already distributed eighty books, and everything was going well. The whole time, I was distributing in front of a taxi stand, and at one point one of the taxi drivers must have called the police.

So the police came and one of them roughly asked me what I was doing. I told him about the books and said, "I'm a monk, and what I'm doing here is legal." I showed him the *saṅkīrtana* pass we had gotten for this kind of occasion, but he furiously grabbed it and wouldn't give it back to me. He treated me like a hardened criminal. I asked him, "Is your village a part of Germany, or do you have your own laws?" Then I coolly said, "That pass belongs to me, and if you take it away, that's stealing."

That made him more furious, and he threw me into the police car, where another cop was sitting. Some books fell down, and I had a hard time picking them up without getting hurt. "What's wrong with you?" I asked. "Give me back my pass." He just got into the car and began driving to the police station.

"If you keep it up," he yelled while driving, "I'll really hurt you."

I replied, "Then I'll not only press charges for theft but also for police brutality."

That really made him furious.

At the police station he made a big show about the whole thing. I had to wait, and so I told the other policemen about the books and asked, "Why do you have such rough people in your department?" After

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

some time the policeman who arrested me came out of his office. He was now humble—completely changed. “We checked the law, and what you’re doing is allowed.”

I was still fried with him and said, “I told you that already. You should learn more about the law and change your attitude.”

He was agitated but didn’t want to show it. “Ok, we’ll drive you back to the place where we picked you up.”

On the way, the policeman asked, “What are those religious books you’re selling?”

I said, “These are not religious books: they’re beyond mundane religion. They show you how you can connect with your inner self and become more calm in life.”

I continued to describe the books, and somehow he really transformed. When we arrived back in the village he asked, “How much are they?” Then he bought two books, much to the amazement of his colleague and me. He started to talk about his wife—how she was always interested in Indian philosophy and religion. It was really astounding.

* * *

Saṅkīrtana Devī Dāsī

I was in a Wal-Mart parking lot and approached a young man with a *Coming Back*. I asked, “Do you have any opinions on reincarnation?”

“Yes,” he replied, as he eyed the book suspiciously. “Wait a minute. What religion is this?”

“We’re the Hare Kṛṣṇas.”

At once he put his hands out in front of him and said with firm conviction: “I don’t want any cookies!”

“Good,” I said, “because I don’t have any. But what’s wrong with Hare Kṛṣṇa cookies? I’ve been eating them for over twenty-five years.”

“All I know is that whenever any of my friends eat your cookies, their lives change. I don’t need that.”

“What do you mean by ‘change.’”

“I don’t know . . . they’re just never the same.”

I just had to put my arms in the air and say, “Yes! They change in a good way.”

He laughed and agreed, and then he took a book and gave a nice donation.

I was high all day thinking of all the little cookie bombs that have been detonated in so many of the conditioned souls’ hearts around the world, and how those souls are now waiting for the next step. We have to give them these books come hell or high water.

* * *

Śrīdāmā Dāsa

I was distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books from a stall in Malad Station, Mumbai. I would make announcements and people would come and take books. Then a strange thing happened. As I was making my announcement, a middle-aged man came to the stall and began staring at me. I stopped speaking, turned to him, and said, “Sir, please take this *Bhagavad-gītā*. It’s very nice.”

He ignored me. Seeing his indifference, I turned back to my announcement. He didn’t move. Meanwhile a few men came over and I convinced two of them to take books.

Chapter 4: A Change of Heart

The man continued standing with folded arms, looking at me quizzically. “Look, sir,” I said, “these books are the best investment you’ll ever make. They describe Lord Kṛṣṇa’s instructions and pastimes accurately, in modern language. Please take one.”

He smiled, looked at me pityingly, and said, “What is the use of these books to me? These are my *līlās*—I am God! I have created this entire cosmos, I am maintaining it, and I will destroy it. The world runs under my order!”

I shook my head and smiled, thinking, “What depths of ignorance!” I left him alone in his illusory world and continued my announcements. More people came, and I preached to them about the Māyāvāda philosophy and how foolish ordinary humans think they are God. More and more people took the books, but that man stayed there, immersed in his illusion of grandeur. Then suddenly my mike stopped working. All my attempts to mend it failed.

The man was still standing with his royal airs when I, surrounded by a crowd of prospective customers, turned to him and said, “O sir, you claim to be God, the creator of this universe. By your orders the world is working. So please, can you fix this microphone for me? It shouldn’t be a problem for you.”

The man gladly accepted the mike and began fiddling with its various components. I turned to my customers and preached. Ten minutes passed. Even after twisting and pulling and banging the mike, the man could not elicit even a squeak. “Are you done, sir?” I asked him.

Shamefacedly he handed me the mike. “Sorry,” he replied.

“Please understand,” I said, “you’re living in a fool’s paradise. Don’t think that you are God; you’re simply a servant of God. This is our real position. We are parts and parcels of the Lord and cannot claim to be equal to Him in any way. So please give up your misconceptions and take one of these books.”

The man nodded, and after some further discussion he departed with a *Kṛṣṇa* book and a *Bhagavad-gītā*.

* * *

Śrīdhara Dāsa

Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted us to preach to students, which I like to do because they can be very intelligent. While going door to door distributing books, I knocked on one door and a physics student answered. After my presentation he started to laugh, saying, “Come on, who believes in yoga and reincarnation? I think—”

“Who cares what you think?” I interrupted. “I hate to disappoint you, but you’re not the center of the universe; the sun is not orbiting around you.”

He just stood and silently said, “Okay, which books do you recommend for me?” He took two. I have a *rasa* with students: somehow they like to hear someone with a straight and firm attitude.

* * *

Tulasī Devī Dāsī

At the airport, one of the supervisors was famous for his anger. Somehow one day he stopped to ask me about a vegetarian cookbook. He didn’t want to hear about anything else, especially chanting. He just wanted to lose some weight by eating a vegetarian diet for awhile. He loved his meat and had to have it—five hamburgers at a time—but just for a short time, to lose weight, he wanted to eat only a vegetarian diet. So I gave him *The Higher Taste*. I also gave him some *prasādam*, which he loved.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

The next time I saw him he told me that over the last week he had lost ten pounds and that he was having some “strange experiences.” He had seen a deer on the road, but instead of thinking of shooting it (his usual response), he started driving real slow so as to not scare it or hit it. He said he was seeing it as a living entity. His consciousness, he told me, was changing. His perspectives were different from before. He was shocked and said, “How is this possible!?”

Another week passed, and this time when he saw me he told me he was really surprised that now the very idea of ever eating meat again repulsed him. He was seeing everything very differently. While we were talking, other airport supervisors would come by to talk to him. They expressed shock that we had “gotten” him. By this time he was preaching to them how his whole consciousness was changing, how his whole outlook on life was opening up.

After three weeks of his eating only a vegetarian diet, his wife brought home a hamburger for him. But he didn’t want it at all. As he stared at it, though, he thought he’d better not waste it. So he ate it—and got sick as a dog. All night he was throwing up and had diarrhea. Then he knew: that was it, no more meat.

So now he’s still coming along, getting a lot into spiritual philosophy and even chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa a little bit. He even stops strangers in the airport and preaches to them to get a book. What a change! *Prasādam kī jaya! The Higher Taste kī jaya!*

A man in his sixties stopped when I approached him, but when I offered him the *Bhagavad-gītā* he pushed it away, saying, “No, I’m into science. I like books that tell of the future.”

“So,” I said, “I’ll tell you the future. Look at this picture,” and I showed him the changing-bodies illustration in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, pointing to where he was—one of the older men going down. Then I pointed to the dead man and said, “And here’s your future!” He really changed then. He excitedly grabbed the book and said, “Okay, okay, I’ll take it.”

Another time I was training a new *bhaktin*. We were standing next to a bank of pay phones at the airport distributing books. A businessman in his thirties could hear us talking to customers while he talked on the phone. This went on for a half an hour. Periodically I said to him, “Next it’s your turn to get a book, right after you get off the phone.” He would laugh a little and nod. When he finally hung up the phone and was preparing to leave, I said, “Excuse me, we waited especially for you. We would have left by now, but you look like you would appreciate this knowledge. On top of that, I’m training a new girl and she’s really shy and having a hard time. Can you be kind to her and let her practice with you? Be kind. You’re a professional businessman and know how hard it can be to make sales. So help her out; let her practice.”

He softened up and said, “OK, but I’m not going to take a book.”

So I had the *bhaktin* put the book in his hands. “Now open it up,” I told her. “Tell him a few things about the book.” She did, and I kept butting in to preach to him. The next thing you know I was telling him, “Your life is useless; you’re wasting your time. You need to get into self-realization.” I asked him, “How’s your relationship with your wife?” His jaw dropped, and before he could answer I continued: “I’m sure you’re bored with each other by now.” His eyes got big, confirming it. I asked, “Is she at all philosophical?”

“Not really.”

“Well, you have to inspire her. That’s your duty as her husband. Not just to enjoy her until you get so bored with her you trade her in, which may happen, by the way.” He was amazed how I got right into

Chapter 4: A Change of Heart

his life and was preaching to him—nothing like what he expected. He turned to the *bhaktin* and said, “Listen to her. I’m doing this for your benefit. Listen carefully. She’s good.”

I kept speaking to him, “Yes, you need to work toward self-realization and you’d better start now, or else you and your wife will eventually break up. But then the same thing will happen again with the next woman, till you learn.”

I kept on trying to encourage him to take a book. Then he said, “OK, you’re good; I’ll take one. Which one do you recommend? Something I can understand and practice. Tell me what I should stop doing in my life so I can understand this knowledge, and also what I should do to understand.”

I gave him some suggestions, and he took a couple of books and *prasādam*. Then when he was leaving he said, “I used to live near one of your temples years ago and would see the devotees chanting all the time. I like you people.”

* * *

Vāsudeva Dāsa (Padayātrā in Slovenia)

I went to a house as our parade passed by and asked a man on a balcony whether he was interested in yoga and meditation.

“No,” he said, “but my wife is. Knock on the door.”

She answered the door and I showed her the books. She said, “I really want to take your books, but I have no money.”

“Would your husband buy the books for you?” I asked.

“Oh no, are you kidding? If I even ask him, he will throw a fit.”

So I thought, “Might as well try.” I went out again to where he was and said, “Your wife has no money. Would you like to buy her these nice books?”

He said “OK” and gave me 5,000 tollars (\$30).

When I handed the lady her books, she said, “It’s a miracle. I’m shocked. It’s truly a miracle. You Hare Kṛṣṇa people have changed his heart.”

* * *

Vijaya Dāsa

I was speaking to a student about the *Bhagavad-gītā*—that it explains things like meditation, karma, time, nature, the soul, and God.

“Do you believe in God?” I asked him.

“No,” he said, “I’m an atheist.”

“OK, then this book is especially for you.”

“Really?”

“Yes, it will clear up some of your misconceptions.” To my surprise he then gave a donation and took a *Bhagavad-gītā*.

As I distributed books at Orange Coast College in Los Angeles a man came up to my table and asked about the books on display. A Muslim, he said to me, “My family would be very upset if I were to accept these books.”

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

I said, “God is more important than your family. ‘*Bhagavad-gītā*’ means ‘The Song of God.’ It tells us how to know Him and love Him.”

We talked a little longer. A very nice man, he then went on to his classes.

The next day he came back and said, “I’m so happy to see you again. I didn’t think you’d be here again today. You won’t believe what happened. Last night before I went to sleep I was thinking about what you had said about God being more important than my family and how true that statement is. Then I went to sleep and had a dream. My family members had all become evil and very cruel to me. I was shocked. Then this book, the *Bhagavad-gītā*, appeared in the dream—glowing! It was so beautiful.”

“You see?” I said. “This is a clear sign from God that He wants you to read this book.”

Somehow, he was still reluctant.

Then I said, “You want to read this book—you, the soul—and God wants you to read it, but your mind is the problem.”

At that he said, “You’re right. I’ll take it.”

We talked for quite some time after that and I got his e-mail. We’ll be in touch. A special soul.

A lady came up to my book table and said, “Oh, Hare Kṛṣṇa, right?”

I said, “Yes, I’m a member of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement.”

Then she went on to tell me the amazing way she became very favorable to our society. Earlier in her life she had been a Jehovah’s Witness for fourteen years. One of the things the leaders of the Jehovah’s Witnesses do at their meetings is tell all the members about how bad all the other religious groups are. They would especially knock the devotees, claiming that the *Bhagavad-gītā* is all about war and violence, that the people at the top of the Hare Kṛṣṇa organization are getting all the money the ordinary devotees collect, etc., etc. “If you ever see a Hare Kṛṣṇa,” they would warn, “avoid him like the plague.”

“After all this criticism,” she said, “I thought, ‘Let me look into these Hare Kṛṣṇa people. Maybe they have something more than what I have here.’ So I got some books and read them and visited some centers and talked with some devotees, and I found the philosophy to be very practical and the devotees to be very warm and friendly.”

At this point I became pretty ecstatic. Here were the Jehovah’s Witness leaders trying so hard to keep their people away from Kṛṣṇa, but it backfired: she gave up Jehovah’s Witness and now had an attraction to Kṛṣṇa. We both laughed at how ironic it was. She then very happily bought the *Bhagavad-gītā* to give to a friend—she already had one.

While distributing books in the shopping area of Dublin I went back to my box of books to get another *Bhagavad-gītā* and overheard a lady say jokingly to Māyeśvara Prabhu, my *saṅkīrtana* partner: “If I buy this book, my husband will kill me.”

Hearing that, I stuck my head into the conversation and said, “Your husband can’t kill you because you’re eternal.” Then I went to distribute.

A short time later Māyeśvara came to me and said, “It’s good you said that. She wasn’t going to take the book, but when you said that, she started thinking about her daughter, who had recently died. ‘Now I know she’s actually not dead,’ she said, ‘but that she’s living somewhere else. This is such good news.’ Then she bought the book.”

Chapter 4: A Change of Heart

In the early 80s Mr. Khemraj Shah was under tremendous stress at his job in a middle-sized Indian city. His colleagues were plotting against him, and his promotions and even his job were at stake. He needed to identify his enemies and checkmate them. He decided to read the *Bhagavad-gītā* and find out how to defeat his enemies. After reading the first chapter, he identified with Arjuna, who didn't want to fight but who was on a mission to stop his enemies. The second chapter was interesting, and when he finished the fourth he doubted whether he was doing the right thing by plotting against his coworkers. By the time he finished the *Bhagavad-gītā* he didn't care if he received a promotion or not. He became a devotee and has been one for the past twenty-five years.

* * *

Vrajendra-nandana Dāsa

I was speaking to a young man at the LA airport. All of a sudden a Christian woman came and interrupted me, telling him that Jesus is the truth and the light and that the Hare Kṛṣṇas were of the devil. Because of her diatribe the young man left without buying a book. I mildly rebuked the lady and she left. But ten minutes later she came back and asked to see one of the books. I handed her a *Light of the Bhāgavata*. She sat down nearby, looking through the book. Miraculously, she came back a few moments later, apologizing to me profusely and telling me how wonderful the book was. She gave ten dollars and walked away very happy. I was shocked.

* * *

Bhakta Amit

The following event took place during an ISKCON Youth Services yātrā to Naimiṣāranya and Ayodhyā, arranged by Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Gopīnātha Mandir, Chowpatty.

Our train from Chowpatti to the yātrā halted at Ratlam Junction. Since the stop lasted more than twenty minutes, devotees left the train and gathered on the platform to perform *harināma saṅkīrtana*. It was boisterous, with two hundred young men singing and dancing. Many waved to the bewildered onlookers, and some, like Murgesh Prabhu, pulled favorable members of the audience right into the dancing party. Some liked it so much that they danced with us till we had to get back onto the train.

Many of us distributed books in the train and on the platform. Sporting a full head of hair because of my school and work, I entered one compartment and showed books to a young man who looked like a business executive.

“Are you mad!?” he shouted. “Give up this nonsense. These people will make you shaven-headed!”

I explained that I was an engineering student and had plans to enter household life and continue practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and nobody was pressuring me to join the *brahmacārī āśrama* and give up my job and family, much less my hair.

“No,” he persisted, “you have become mad like them. You are too young for it. You should enjoy life, earn money, eat, drink, and be merry. Give up all this.”

I tried reasoning with him, but he became more and more aggressive. I decided to change tactics. Whether he took a book or not, I had to represent ISKCON in the correct light.

I said, “You are talking so much about success in material life, but success in any field is possible when you have controlled your mind and senses. Do you have control over them?”

He fumbled, “No.”

For the first time I was able to puncture his over-confident demeanor.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

“So what mantra of success are you trying to teach me? You are a slave to your mind and senses, and a person with an uncontrolled mind can hardly be successful in any field of life. So if you want to be successful and happy in life, read this book and learn to control your mind and senses.”

He was still confused.

“Sir,” I said as I pointed to the *harināma* party outside, “look there. We have a group of two hundred boys, of which a hundred twenty are engineers and forty are doctors. Do you think they are all fools? Not only are they good students and professionals, but they are also perfect devotees. They balance the material and the spiritual side because they read these books. So don’t hesitate. Take one and you’ll never regret it.”

“I don’t have faith in these shaven-headed people,” he said, “but what you’re saying makes lots of sense to me. OK, give me a book.”

As he handed me the money he said, “I don’t know why I am taking this book. I don’t want it. But what you are saying is affecting my heart. Something from inside is forcing me to buy this book.”

“Don’t worry,” I smiled, “your mind is afraid of losing its independence. But your intelligence understands the benefit of the book.”

* * *

Bhakta Filip

In the course of distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books door to door in a Slovakian village, I entered a butcher shop. A woman saw me in Vaiṣṇava clothes, with books in my hand, and immediately said, “I don’t want any books. A salesman was here last week.”

“I’m not a salesman but a monk.” I showed her some books, but she wasn’t at all interested.

Then I told her, “Madam, it is very important for you to take these books.”

“Why?” she asked.

“You know, that you have this meat shop is not good.”

“But if I weren’t here, people would go hungry.”

“Well, I don’t think you will close the shop because of what I say, but please hear me out. All the animals have some relationship with their owners, but they do not know they are being maintained just to be killed. They are taking shelter, like children taking shelter of their mother. All the killing and pain is so negative. So I think now you should do something positive, spiritually positive.”

She opened the cash register and gave a donation for two books.

Bhakta Mick

In Gorway, a town in western Ireland, I presented a book to a girl who seemed interested. But after I had talked for a couple of minutes she said, “I’m not really convinced. Why should I take this book?”

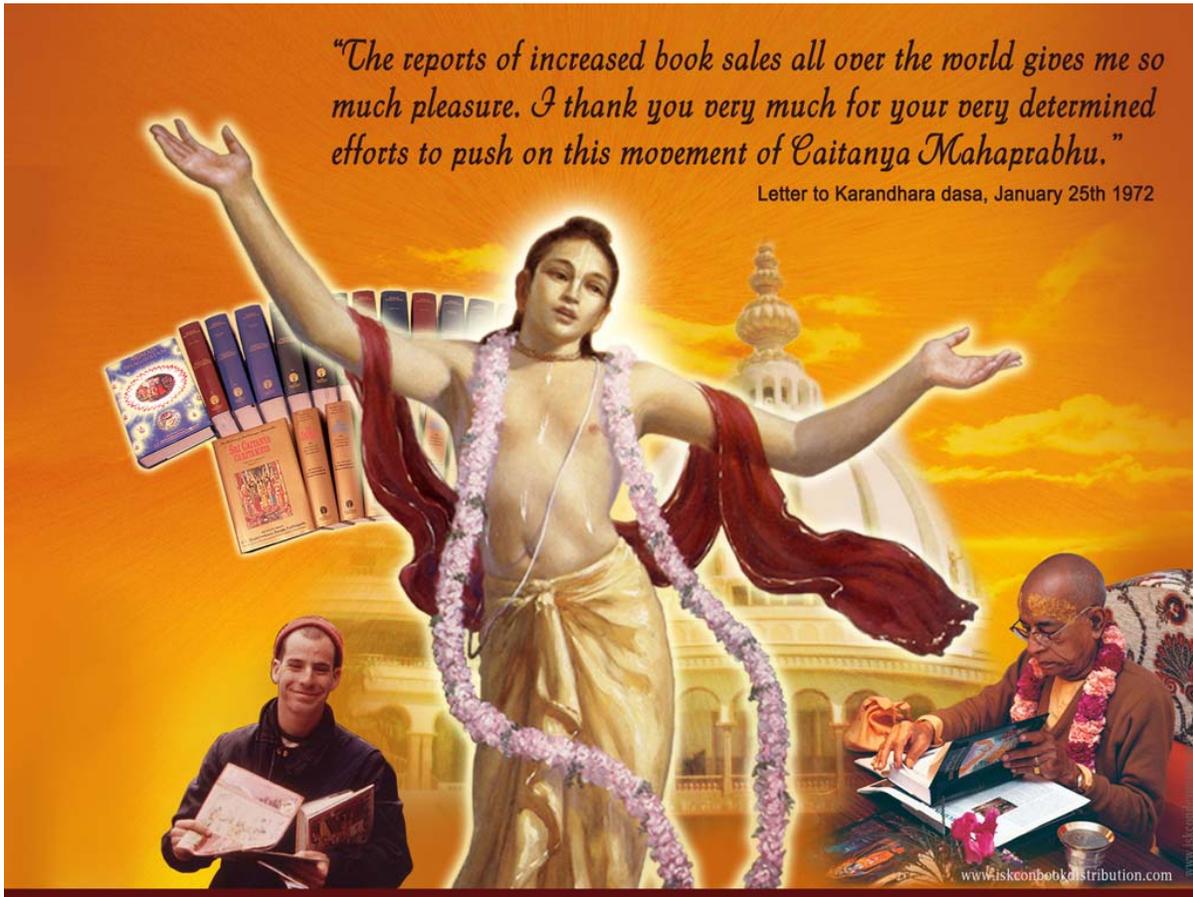
“Well,” I said, “this book is just like a cake. I may say ‘This is a nice cake’ and you may say ‘No, I don’t think so,’ but how will you know unless you taste it? So unless you take the book and read it, you’ll never know how good it is.”

She replied, “You don’t know how relevant that example is. I work in a bakery. Every day people come in and ask, ‘Is this one nice? Is this one nice?’ and it drives me crazy. How much is the book? I’ll take it.”

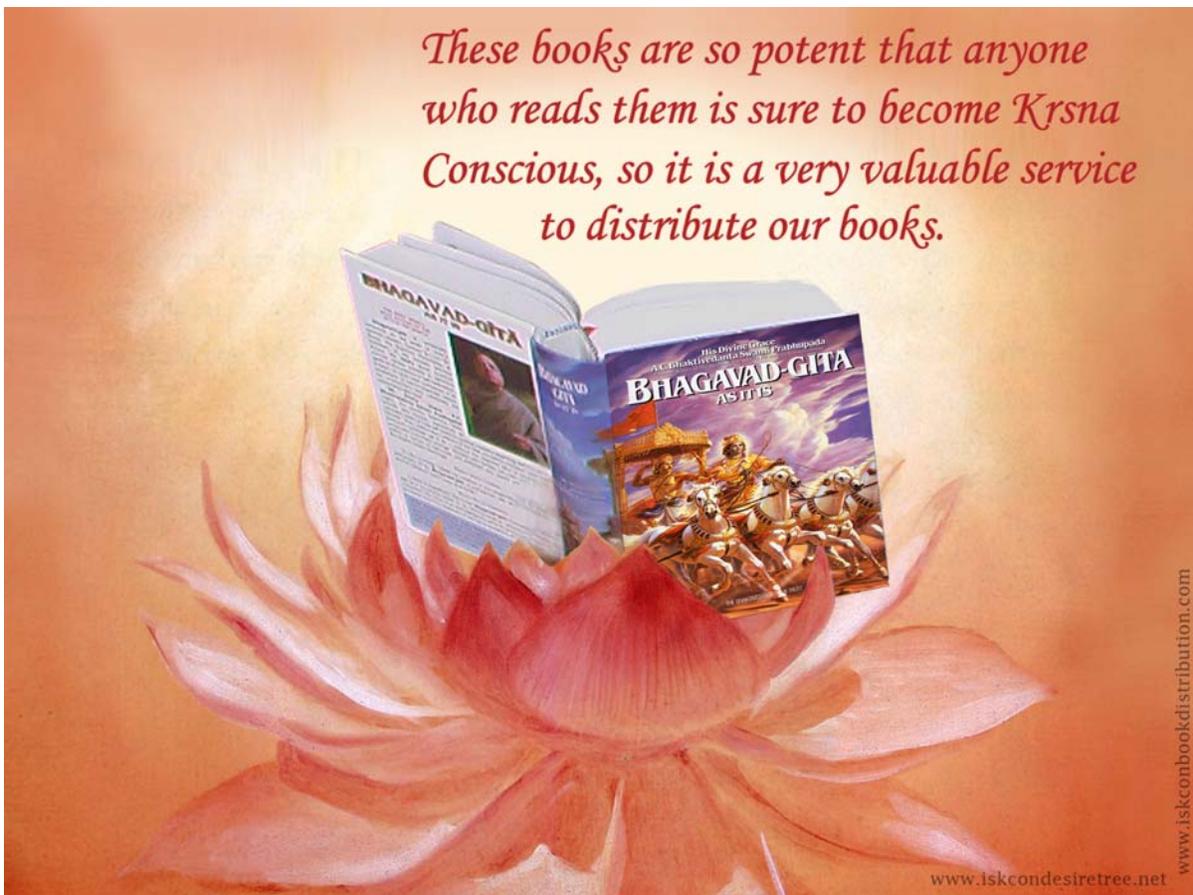
[End of Chapter Four: A Change of Heart]

"The reports of increased book sales all over the world gives me so much pleasure. I thank you very much for your very determined efforts to push on this movement of Caitanya Mahaprabhu."

Letter to Karandhara dasa, January 25th 1972



These books are so potent that anyone who reads them is sure to become Kṛṣṇa Conscious, so it is a very valuable service to distribute our books.



Chapter Five

The Saṅkīrtana Mind-Set

The most important factor determining our success on *saṅkīrtana* is our consciousness. More than ninety percent of our ability to distribute books is in our consciousness. If we go out on *saṅkīrtana* with a mood of service—to please Kṛṣṇa, to give Kṛṣṇa’s mercy to the conditioned souls, to please our spiritual master—that is the right consciousness.

Proper consciousness on *saṅkīrtana* depends on our *sādhana*. If we hear our rounds attentively and regularly and attentively read Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, our consciousness will be on Kṛṣṇa. When we chant our rounds we should try to keep our mind absorbed in the sound of Kṛṣṇa’s holy name. We should train our mind to think of Kṛṣṇa.

From the example of Bhakti Tīrtha Swami I learned how to chant more attentively. When he would chant and find that he was inattentive, he would back up on those beads and chant again. He said that though it took him longer to chant his rounds the quality was better. When I heard that, I started following his example, and it has helped me immensely in improving the quality of my *japa*. When the quality of our *japa* improves, the overall quality of our service improves. When we chant *japa* we are training the mind to think of Kṛṣṇa. The mind doesn’t want to chant. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura once said, “The mind is a nondevotee.” So we’re trying to convert our nondevotee mind into a devotee. The mind is in the *bhakta* program. Also, Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (6.5), “The mind can be our best friend or our worst enemy.” We’re trying to make it our friend. But to do that we have to control the mind with our intelligence so we can hear the mantra.

The goal of our *japa* is to become absorbed in Kṛṣṇa, in a service mood toward Kṛṣṇa. The intelligence is above the mind, so with our intelligence we have to control the mind and even preach to it: “My dear mind, I know you don’t want to hear the names of Kṛṣṇa, but if you don’t hear them attentively you will have to chant more, because then I’ll go back and chant on the beads you were inattentive on.” Then the mind surrenders (sometimes)—but then of course it goes off track again. But this is very good training for the rascal mind.

When we finish our rounds we should have the momentum of going on to think of Kṛṣṇa throughout the day.

Another trick of Māyā is to let us use good *sādhana* to have a bigger book score on *saṅkīrtana* but then induce us to relish the greater name and fame that result. What we should do is pray for the pure desire to serve without interruption or material motivation. This is a high goal, but this is what we should be aspiring for.

Another trick of Māyā and the mind is to infect us with the holier-than-thou mentality, in which we think of the nondevotees as low-class *karmīs*. But Lord Caitanya is Patita-pāvana, the savior of the most fallen, so that makes us more fallen than the *karmīs* because we were somehow chosen to be recipients of Lord Caitanya’s mercy and not them. In His *Śikṣāṣṭaka* Lord Caitanya teaches that one should think oneself lower than the straw in the street, i.e., lower than the people we’re approaching. Humility is so important. In the early days of ISKCON devotees used some aggressive tactics, tricking people into taking books and giving more money than they intended. But the result was that the movement got a bad reputation and many devotees couldn’t keep distributing books. Ultimately it was a lose-lose situation. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura said, “When will I go out to teach the message of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu with a humble heart?”

There is one verse in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that expresses the proper consciousness of a *saṅkīrtana* devotee better than any other verse I’ve found. Svāyambhuva Manu speaks it to Dhruva Mahārāja:

Chapter 5: The Saṅkīrtana Mind-Set

*titikṣayā karuṇayā
maitryā cākhila-jantuṣu
samatvena ca sarvātmā
bhagavān samprasīdati*

“The Lord is very satisfied with His devotee when the devotee greets other people with tolerance, compassion, friendship and equality.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.11.13)

The first quality is tolerance. Tolerance cannot be emphasized enough: it is the foundation upon which book distribution stands. There is so much one has to tolerate on book distribution, the most difficult being our own mind. Sometimes the mind retaliates and refuses to cooperate with the mission of book distribution. The mind is selfish by nature. Wanting immediate gratification, it accepts what it thinks will give it pleasure and rejects what it thinks will not. *Saṅkīrtana* is an austerity, so the mind is not very fond of it. Kṛṣṇa says, “For one who has controlled the mind it is the best friend, but for one who has failed to do so it is the worst enemy.” So we have to control the mind and tolerate its complaints about the austerities of *saṅkīrtana*. By rising early, chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa attentively, following the morning program, and reading from the *sāstras*, we will have a good chance of controlling the mind. But we have to also *want* to control it. As conditioned souls we have a tendency to give in to the mind because it’s powerful. But then we lament. Better to surrender to Kṛṣṇa and take encouragement from this statement of His in the *Bhagavad-gītā*: “No one is more dear to me than he who distributes the knowledge of *Bhagavad-gītā*.” And Śrīla Prabhupāda confirms that the best way to control the mind is to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness:

The mind is restless, always desiring something. . . . So the best policy to control the mind is to desire how to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. . . . This brain taxation—how to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness, how to convince people about Kṛṣṇa—if you go on making plans for spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then your mind is controlled. [Class on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.26.27, Bombay, 4 January 1975]

So if we want to control our mind and fix it on Kṛṣṇa, there is no better way than to go out and try to convince people to take Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. But to do that we have to be tolerant. As Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī once said, “When Bhagavān is merciful to me, He arranges unlimited persons to speak sour words in uncountable ways, simply to teach me tolerance. One who cannot learn to tolerate the cavils of the world is ineligible to chant *harināma*.”

Another big challenge for the book distributor is tolerating rejection from people who aren’t interested in what we have to offer. Nobody likes rejection; we all want people to agree with us, and when they don’t it’s difficult, especially if one receives rejection after rejection over an extended period. Then there is the weather—sometimes it’s very cold, sometimes it’s very hot. A devotee who stays on *saṅkīrtana* for many years learns to be tolerant. It’s not theory any more. Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to two *sannyāsīs*: “If you are not tolerant and humble, you will not be able to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness.”

The next quality in this verse is compassion. We’ve already read in Chapter One how book distribution is the pinnacle of compassion, but more can always be said about this quality. One reason true compassion is rare is because as conditioned souls we are envious and compassion and envy are diametrically opposed. Śrīla Prabhupāda once said that we can purify ourselves of envy by serving those we envy. All our envy begins with our envy of Kṛṣṇa, because Kṛṣṇa has everything we could possibly be envious of. The process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness arouses our intense desire to serve Kṛṣṇa, which negates our envy of Him. The Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is a prayer begging Kṛṣṇa to allow us to serve Him again with love. When we become free of this contamination of envy of Kṛṣṇa, our compassion can manifest. The more we experience the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the more we will have

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

compassion on those who are not Kṛṣṇa conscious. Otherwise, as long as we have envy in our hearts, we won't know what real compassion is.

The next quality is being friendly to everyone. Again, envy blocks this quality. The more we are able to understand that we are the soul within and that everyone is a soul, part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa, and that we are all Kṛṣṇa's servants, the more we can be friendly toward everyone and be free of the obnoxious poison of envy. Then *saṅkīrtana* reaches a very pleasing level, where you feel that everyone you approach is like an old friend. This is the reality: everyone is part of Kṛṣṇa's family, and when we approach people we're inviting them back to the spiritual world, where Kṛṣṇa has His family. The books are invitations for people to come back to their real home, where they will meet Kṛṣṇa, their best friend and intimate relative.

The last quality in this verse is to see everyone equally, as a soul. This is the vision of reality. On book distribution a devotee may be in a place where many people are passing by. In such a circumstance we should use our common sense: if a middle-aged businessman and a young college student are both passing by, obviously you approach the student. As it is said, "It's hard to bend old branches." But if only the businessman is passing by, then you should approach him. Sometimes such a person will take a book. For example, one day I was distributing in the LA airport and it was very slow. A businessman in his fifties came toward me. He was wearing a thousand-dollar suit and looked really sharp. Usually such men pay no attention to us. But there was no one else to approach, and so I approached him and showed him the *Bhagavad-gītā*. I was surprised that he stopped and listened to my whole presentation. Then when I asked for a donation he said, "You know, I'm really into these things, and you'd like me to give you a donation? Sure, I'd love to." I was so surprised. *Saṅkīrtana* is an adventure with a lot of pleasant surprises.

As *saṅkīrtana* devotees, we should be satisfied to know that people are benefiting from receiving Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and that Kṛṣṇa is pleased. As Lord Vāmanadeva says in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (8.19.27):

*yadrcchā-lābha-tuṣṭasya
tejo viprasya vardhate
tat praśāmyaty asantoṣād
ambhasevāśuśukṣaṇiḥ*

"A *brāhmaṇa* who is satisfied with whatever is providentially obtained is increasingly enlightened with spiritual power, but the spiritual potency of a dissatisfied *brāhmaṇa* decreases, as fire diminishes in potency when water is sprinkled upon it."

Sometimes immature *saṅkīrtana* devotees push people to take a book. If people resist taking a book, we can try to convince them in a nice way to take one, but if they still resist then we should thank them for their time and go on to someone who may be more receptive. Vaiśeṣika Prabhu gives the example of an unripe mango: If you want to have a nice, sweet, juicy mango to offer Kṛṣṇa but the mangoes on the tree are green, then what do you do? Let them be until they ripen. Many people aren't "ripe enough" to take a book, so let them be and go to someone who can.

We should pray very intensely to be empowered to distribute books, but we should be satisfied with whatever Kṛṣṇa arranges. Sometimes we can distribute a lot of books, and that is certainly nice service, but sometimes we can't distribute any books. At those difficult times we have to be tolerant. To tolerate difficulty in Kṛṣṇa's service is also service. *Taror api sahiṣṇunā*: Lord Caitanya is pleased if we tolerate difficulties in His service. And it is at these times that we receive the most purification. We see how Kṛṣṇa is in control and we are His menial servants.

One of the pitfalls a *saṅkīrtana* devotee can encounter is in becoming too competitive. Sometimes the competition becomes the main focus and we forget why we're out there: to help people. Competition

Chapter 5: The Saṅkīrtana Mind-Set

can get so intense that sometimes feelings of anger and envy arise. Śrīla Prabhupāda said even in the spiritual world there is competition, but the competition is about who can please Kṛṣṇa the most. Because we're conditioned souls, we sometimes don't appreciate other Vaiṣṇavas' service. Some devotees don't report their individual scores just to avoid such unpleasant feelings of material competition.

Lord Kapiladeva says we can perform devotional service in the mode of goodness, passion, or ignorance. Similarly, one can distribute books in the mode of goodness, passion, or ignorance. If we go out and are rude to people who don't give a donation or give a small donation, or if we envy devotees who are having success or envy nondevotees who are proud of their material position and won't give to our cause, or if when we have some success we think, "I'm the best *saṅkīrtana* devotee," this is book distribution in the mode of ignorance.

If people don't give a donation, it's Kṛṣṇa's arrangement; nothing moves without the sanction of Kṛṣṇa. People give a donation because Kṛṣṇa allows it; people don't give a donation because He doesn't sanction it. If we see *saṅkīrtana* devotees having success, we should appreciate the sincere service they're rendering and pray to Kṛṣṇa that we also may one day please Him in the same way. Lord Caitanya taught us to think oneself lower than the straw in the street, more tolerant than a tree, and ready to offer all respects to others without desiring respect for oneself. If we have some success on book distribution, we should not become proud but should think, "How kind Lord Caitanya is! I am so insignificant, but still He is allowing me to be His instrument in spreading His glories. I don't deserve this mercy, but He is so kind."

One who distributes books but has a separatist attitude, with a desire for material enjoyment, fame, and recognition, is in the mode of passion. If we expect fame or opulence for distributing books, this is a separatist mentality. If we want recognition from other devotees for our book distribution prowess, instead desiring the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa, then instead of becoming purified we're becoming contaminated although we are doing the activity most pleasing to the Lord. Why? Because we're doing it not for Kṛṣṇa but to increase our false prestige. We're using the so-called service of book distribution to enjoy. These are subtle contaminations that we can overcome by being introspective and questioning ourselves: "Am I doing this to please Kṛṣṇa? Or am I just using this service to subtly enjoy?"

Book distribution is in the mode of goodness when a devotee distributes books with the intention of offering the results of his activities to Kṛṣṇa in order to free himself from the clutches of fruitive activities. He wants to be liberated. To do anything without any material motive is difficult because we are conditioned to trying to enjoy the fruits of our actions. With practice, with knowledge of the Absolute Truth, with detachment from sense gratification, and with devotion to Kṛṣṇa we can free ourselves from attachment to the fruits of our actions. A nice aspect of book distribution is that our material attachments become manifest right before our eyes. We see them as clear as day. And when we do, we should pray to Kṛṣṇa to free us from them. Book distribution is very purifying to the heart.

There is also book distribution in a pure goodness, *viśuddha-sattva*. If we distribute books simply to please Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa's representative and to help the conditioned souls, that is book distribution in the mode of pure goodness. Purity is the force. We should pray to Kṛṣṇa to be pure representatives of Prabhupāda so that people will be inspired to receive this special mercy. We have the purest knowledge, so it's natural that we should have the purest people presenting this knowledge. Prabhupāda said, "In the beginning they will laugh at us, then they will hate us, then they will love us." If we distribute with a pure motive—to give Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others and to please Kṛṣṇa and his representatives, they will appreciate the purity, and from that they will come to love us. This will happen if with great sincerity we pray to be free of our old enemies: attachment, lust, greed, anger, etc., and go out to the people to give them an opportunity to meet Śrīla Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa, their long-lost friends.

Finally, we should always be truthful on book distribution. Śrīla Prabhupāda once said, "We should be adored as perfectly honest." And Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (10.38), "Of those who seek

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

victory, I am morality.” If we are strictly ethical on *saṅkīrtana*, surely we will be victorious. To be honest is not an easy thing. Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja was famous because he never told a lie. If someone is famous because he never told a lie, that doesn’t say much for everyone else. I remember hearing about this incident: A lady who was very favorable to the movement once saw a devotee selling paraphernalia and books. When she went up to him, he tried to sell her some paraphernalia. She wasn’t interested in buying what he had. But she asked if he was a Hare Kṛṣṇa devotee. He said, “Well, they believe some of the things we believe,” and he said a few other things that made her scratch her head. When she saw his beads and understood he was a devotee, she asked if he knew where the temple was. A little embarrassed, he told her. She was quite surprised that he wasn’t up front about who he was. Whenever we are asked who we are, we should tell them, with pride: “Yes, I am a Hare Kṛṣṇa devotee.” We see how Śrīla Prabhupāda always walked with his head held high, showing everyone he was proud to be a servant of Kṛṣṇa.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.17.34, purport

The basic principle of religion is truthfulness, and the ultimate goal of all religions is to satisfy the Lord. In this Age of Kali, the greatest common formula of sacrifice is the *saṅkīrtana-yajña*. That is the opinion of the experts who know how to propagate the process of *yajña*. Lord Caitanya preached this method of *yajña*, and it is understood that the sacrificial method of *saṅkīrtana-yajña* may be performed anywhere and everywhere in order to drive away the personality of Kali and save human society from falling prey to the influence of the age.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 9.5.27, purport

The devotee is never satisfied, thinking, “This is the limit of my devotional service.” The more he engages in the service of the Lord, the more service he wants to give. This is the position of a devotee.

* * *

Śrīla Prabhupāda Letter, 25 December 1972

So far this making some false story for collecting money or selling book, of course we may do anything for Krishna, but that is supposed to be reserved for very advanced experts in Krishna Consciousness; they know how to catch the big fish without themselves getting wet. So it is not very much advisable to make lies just to sell book. If we simply stick to describing how wonderful is Krishna, then whatever we may lie or exaggerate, that will not be lie! But other things, lies, they will not help us to train ourselves in truthfulness. Lie to some, not to others, that is not a good philosophy. Rather the brahmanas are always truthful, even to their enemies. There is sufficient merit in our books that if you simply describe them sincerely to anyone, they will buy. That art you must develop, not art of lying. Convince them to give by your preaching the Absolute Truth, not by tricking, that is more mature stage of development of Krishna Consciousness.

* * *

Chapter 5: The Saṅkīrtana Mind-Set

Śrīla Prabhupāda Letter, 27 November 1971

I especially want that my books and literatures should be distributed profusely, but so far I understand this is not being done very perfectly. So I want that you all my students shall very vigorously try for this book distribution. Do not hesitate to use your American and European brains to increase. That is Krishna's special gift to you, now use it.

* * *

Śrīla Prabhupāda Letter, 22 April 1972

Krishna is not as much concerned with what we give to Him as how much we are keeping back for ourselves. There is the story of Kholaveca Sridhara, a devotee of Lord Caitanya, who although he was a very poor man, gave half of his meager income for worshiping Mother Ganges, and by so doing, he greatly pleased the Lord. It is not so much important the quantity of books that we distribute, but that we serve Krishna as best we can, and depend on Him for the results. Transcendental competition is nice, but it should not come to the point of making us lose our Krishna consciousness. When you have these feelings, do not mistake it for enviousness, but take it to be an indirect appreciation of the service done by your other God-brothers. This is spiritual. In the material world, when someone surpasses us in some way we become angry and plan how to stop him, but in the spiritual world when someone does some better service we think, "Oh, he has done so nicely. Let me help him to execute his service." So we should always endeavor to keep this attitude, and serve Lord Krishna to the best of our ability. That will make one advance in spiritual life.

* * *

Śrīla Prabhupāda Lecture, 14 November 1972

So this preaching work, this Kṛṣṇa conscious preaching work, we must be very cautious that those who are preachers, they must be pure Vaiṣṇavas. *Anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam*, not for money sake, not for reputation sake, but only for serving Kṛṣṇa. This is pure Vaiṣṇavism. One has to satisfy Kṛṣṇa, not for any other reason. So this preaching work should be taken by pure Vaiṣṇava, and if the śāstric injunctions, if they are presented as they are, surely there will be effect. It has been proved and it is being proved. So this process we should adopt, and the success of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is assured.

* * *

Śrīla Prabhupāda Morning Walk, 28 October 1975

Anyone who has no information of Kṛṣṇa, who is not Kṛṣṇa conscious, he's a rascal. That's all. That we must know. That is definite. There is no mistaking it. But if you say to people you're preaching to, "You are rascal; there is no mistaking it," then you cannot preach.

If you directly call a rascal a rascal, he'll be angry. To give good instruction to a fool rascal will increase his anger, that's all. Then you'll not be able to preach. So you have to become very humble, *ṭṛṇād api sunīcena*, humbler than the grass. Just like everyone is trampling over the grass. It doesn't protest, "Why you are going, keeping your leg on my head?" But that is the . . . *ṭṛṇād api su-nīcena*. Go on trampling. Hundreds and hundreds of people are trampling over the grass; it doesn't protest. *ṭṛṇād api su-nīcena taror api sahiṣṇunā*. The tree is standing. You sit down. When there is scorching heat, you

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅg

take pleasure by sitting down under the shade. But the reward is that you cut the branches. That is their reward. He gives you shelter, and you cut the branch. You cut the whole tree. This is your gratefulness. You see? Because we are rascals, we do not know what is gratefulness. They are taking milk from the cow and killing. . . .

So Caitanya Mahāprabhu advises, *taror api sahiṣṇunā*—tolerant, humbler than the grass. *Amāninā mānadena*. Don't expect any honor for your person, but to the others give honor: "Oh, you are most exalted person," although he's a rascal. What can be done? Otherwise you cannot preach. If you call a rascal a rascal, immediately your preaching will be stopped. So you have to say that "You are the greatest intelligent man, *sādhu*, most honored. The only request is that you forget what you have learned. That's all. And take this." In this way preaching practical. Otherwise it is not possible. Everyone is thinking he is the most exalted personality, scientist, philosopher, great man. That is material disease. Actually he is being kicked every moment by the urges of the senses, and he is thinking he is very great man. *Go-dāsa*. *Go* means senses. He is always, I mean, curbed down by the sense urges, and he is thinking "independent." Independent means servant of the senses. This is going on.

So you have to understand the real position of the world, and if you want to preach, then you have to be humbler than the tree, humbler than the grass, tolerant than the tree and . . . We know everyone is rascal; still, you have to give him honor. Then it will be possible to say something. Otherwise it is very difficult. We have to deal with all rascals, fools, rogues, ruffians, no good qualifications. You must know these things. You are dealing with all rascals. So if we call them directly "rascal," they will be angry. Your preaching will not be successful. So follow the principles enunciated by Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī and Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

* * *

His Holiness Śivarāma Swami

Just as faith is the essence of devotional service, faith is also the essence of book distribution. Devotees can approach book distribution in two ways: with faith in their own abilities or with faith in Kṛṣṇa's ability to empower them.

If we have faith in our own abilities, then we must depend on our *karma*. If our propensity is to be a good salesman or -woman, then we may be able to sell many books. But if such a salesperson is not humble and devoted, he may fall down by identifying his material ability with Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If we don't have much inherent ability to sell, then our results will be more limited. But if those with less knack or nature for selling, upon hearing how others distribute a hundred books a day, say "I could never do that," they also fall down. That is because they identify material ability with Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The key is to have faith in Kṛṣṇa's ability to empower anyone. If by one's karma one is able to sell books easily, one should have faith that Kṛṣṇa's empowerment is already there, and one should seek to increase that empowerment by pure desire and by being a pure instrument.

If one does not have the karma to sell, one should have faith that Kṛṣṇa can do anything. That then allows Kṛṣṇa's empowerment to become manifest. That means not getting in the way. How, when, and to what degree that empowerment takes place is up to Kṛṣṇa. There is no rigid formula that will automatically empower you to distribute many books. But your proper mentality will attract Kṛṣṇa to empower you to do so.

So let us take to heart Kṛṣṇa's instruction at *Bhagavad-gītā* 18.57: "In all activities just depend upon Me and work always under My protection. In such devotional service, be fully conscious of Me." Then by His grace we will be successful in our effort to glorify Him and distribute many books. Just don't let ability or lack of ability get in the way. He is the ability in man, and His ability is unlimited.

Chapter 5: The Saṅkīrtana Mind-Set

In the mid 70's I was doing the Prabhupāda marathon at the Chicago airport. One afternoon we devotees were so intoxicated by distributing books that we decided to show that one doesn't have to speak to sell books, that book distribution just depends on our state of consciousness. So we didn't speak.

Just after loading my book bag with twenty *mahā* books, I tapped a man on the arm and looked him in the eye. He stopped, expecting me to say something. I didn't. I put a book in his hand, pointed at Prabhupāda's picture, to the Sanskrit inside, and then up to the sky, indicating that the books were meant to elevate you. I remember being absorbed in the desire to give out books, and after looking deep into his eyes again, I slapped my pocket, indicating he should give a donation. He did.

He was a young businessman, obviously heavily stressed out and floundering in the world of consumerism. He held the book appreciatively. As he started to go I held his arm. I wanted him to get more mercy. We locked eyes for a minute, and in my mind I said, "These books will give your life meaning." And I stuck another two books in his hand. Now he had three books. Again I tapped my pocket. Again he gave a donation.

I opened one of the books and pointed to a part of Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport and had him read it. I watched his face. It was obvious Prabhupāda was speaking to him. I tapped his arms and smiled at him, and he smiled at me. Although standing in the middle of the busiest airport in the world, we were somewhere else, in a different land where there was no stress, no noise—our own world of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Then he looked at the other books I was carrying and I knew he wanted more. I gave him a few more books. He gave another donation. By now the total was past \$40.

To impress upon the man what was reality and what was illusion, I waved nonchalantly at the bustle about us and pressed my forefinger to his heart, indicating the soul. I looked at him and thought, "You are not this body. You are spirit soul." He understood. He smiled appreciatively. We then shook hands, and as he turned to go it was as if he was leaving the realm of peace for the world of anxiety. For a minute he hesitated. He didn't want to go. He wanted to remain in that realm of consciousness in which our exchange had taken place. He had been happy. I saw there were tears in his eyes. I touched his hand and tapped the books saying in my mind, "It's all in the books. Don't worry." He nodded, shook my hand, and left.

Neither he nor I had spoken a word, yet we were communicating fully. It was one of many such experiences that afternoon. I was convinced that success in book distribution depends upon our state of consciousness—making soul-to-soul contact with people is the most effective way to sell books. We need to be in the consciousness that we are not this body, that we are Kṛṣṇa's spiritual messengers, and that our mission is to distribute the mercy. Give! Give! Give! That is our *dharma*: Give Kṛṣṇa to others.

* * *

Bhakta Dāsa (ACBSP)

In the middle of 1972 Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote me a letter. At that time, there was no "plainclothes" *saṅkīrtana*. Everyone wore *dhotīs*, saris, and *tilaka* and told people, "We're from Hare Kṛṣṇa. Please read a book about Kṛṣṇa."

In the letter Śrīla Prabhupāda told me, "Make sure you sell books by preaching, not by cheating."

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

I was taken aback. I thought, “What does he mean by this word ‘cheating?’” I wrote and asked him, “Śrīla Prabhupāda, in your letter to me you wrote, ‘Make sure you sell books by preaching, not by cheating.’ What exactly do you mean?”

His reply came on May 2, 1972:

So far the meaning of the word “cheating,” there are only three things to be known: that Krishna is the Supreme Enjoyer, the Supreme Proprietor of everything, and the Supreme Friend of everyone, and we say that honesty is acting upon the knowledge of these three facts. So if one is always acting under these three facts, knowing Krishna to be the Supreme Proprietor, Enjoyer, and Friend, then he is truly honest, and if one is not acting in this knowledge, then he is always cheating or being dishonest. So if you apply this to your techniques for selling literature to persons in the Sankirtana party, then you will understand what is the meaning of the word “cheating.”

* * *

Vaiṣeṣika Dāsa (ACBSP)

So many good qualities develop in devotees who engage in this process of working with faith in Kṛṣṇa and transferring their faith to other people. Book distribution is itself an act of faith; otherwise, why would you bother? You wouldn’t do it if it wasn’t a complete act of faith. Many times when I am on *saṅkīrtana* I ask, “Why am I here? Why am I doing this?” And I realize that if we didn’t believe in the power of the holy name that is written in these books and in the power, the flavor, of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s personality as it comes through his purports, and if we didn’t appreciate how, by divine arrangement, these books have come down to us so beautifully, we wouldn’t have the inspiration to go out on *saṅkīrtana*, to go out on book distribution. This is our basic impetus. I meet with many *saṅkīrtana* devotees, and I become inspired to see how they become inspired themselves.

* * *

Ratneśvar Devī Dāsī (ACBSP)

In the early 1970’s Jayānanda Prabhu would take us out on TSKP, truckloads of women in the van at separate times. If we were sometimes hesitant to get out of the van, there was a nice story he’d tell us: “You know, the cow doesn’t discriminate. As long as there’s some grass, any pasture is fine and the cow will be happy. Similarly, as long as there are some conditioned souls, we should not be hesitant but should just approach them.”

* * *

Vṛndarāṇī Devī Dāsī

While in Atlanta, I had the privilege of accompanying Jīva Goswami Dāsa Prabhu once a week on book distribution. We distributed downtown on Luckie Street. I learned a lot from him about book distribution. He always said, “Don’t worry what people might say or think about you. You know in your

Chapter 5: The Saṅkīrtana Mind-Set

heart that they really need these books. Suppose you're a doctor and your patient needs a certain medicine. Even though it tastes bitter, you still make sure he takes it. Similarly, even though people don't want to take the books, we know they're the only medicine for their disease of illusion, and so we must never feel dejected and with compassion always approach people with this knowledge." I often remind myself of his words when I need motivation to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

On one occasion I saw him talking with great enthusiasm to a homeless lady. He later told me that she took a book from him. She only had three dollars, but she gave him two for the book. I was quite surprised that a homeless person would do that. A few days later the same homeless lady came back to our book table. I really didn't want to be bothered by her (since she already had a book and was homeless), and I was trying to focus on approaching new people.

But she just kept staring at me, so I asked her what she wanted. She said she wanted change for a twenty-dollar bill. I asked Jīva Goswami Prabhu if he had any change and then gave her two tens. Now comes the most amazing part. She immediately handed me back one of the tens and said, "You're all so nice, so I want to give you this for the book I got the other day."

My heart stopped for a second and I felt sooo bad for judging her as I had. Later I pondered over the incident and told myself to never judge anyone by external appearances while distributing books. I thought: "Aren't we all homeless? This material world is not really our true home, so what is the real difference between that lady and me? That I have a house?" Then it hit me. The real difference is that she didn't think twice about giving away fifty percent of her income for that day to Kṛṣṇa, whereas I think about my mortgage and all my other bills before giving to Kṛṣṇa.

* * *

Chowpatti Temple Book Distribution

Often a book distributor develops a sixth sense by which to judge a prospective customer. The way a person listens to the announcement, the way he looks at the devotee and books, his body language—all contain subtle signals an expert book distributor can perceive and pursue to distribute a book. Often how a person looks speaks volumes—whether he's intelligent, worried, spaced out, jolly, curious, suffering, etc. But sometimes looks can be deceiving.

One day Pañca Pāṇḍava Prabhu was distributing books on the local trains in Mumbai. He made his announcement and showed the books to the commuters, and a few of them took books. Then he stood by the exit door, preparing to disembark at the next station. Suddenly a man entered the car and almost stumbled into him. His clothes were disheveled and dirty, his hair was unkempt, his face was unshaven, and his breath reeked of alcohol. Nearby passengers cursed and moved away. Pañca Pāṇḍava cringed at his sight and tried to move around him, but the man blocked the way.

"Hey, show me that book you have!" he demanded.

Pañca Pāṇḍava thought, "Should I show a book to this drunkard? Is he sober enough to recognize the importance of these sacred books? Will he respect them? What will the other passengers think if I speak to him?" Not sure what to do, Pañca Pāṇḍava stood still.

"Don't you hear me, man? I'm interested in these books of God. Show me one."

Pañca Pāṇḍava still had doubts: "Does he have any money to pay for the books?" he thought. "What if he takes the book and runs away? What will I do, fight with this low-class man in a public place?"

The man seemed to read Pañca Pāṇḍava's mind. "You think I have no money? Look!" And he pulled out a wad of notes and shook them in the air. "How much does your book cost?"

Taken aback, Pañca Pāṇḍava could only mutter, "Twenty rupees."

"That's all?" the man said as he pulled out a twenty-rupee note and thumped it into Pañca Pāṇḍava's palm. "Give me my book," the man demanded.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

Pañca Pāṇḍava handed him a small book. The man raised the book close to his eyes and then touched it to his forehead. “I told you I like books of God. See how beautiful Lord Kṛṣṇa looks! OK.”

Holding the prized possession close to his heart, the man fumbled his way out of the train at the next station. The entire incident proved to Pañca Pāṇḍava that he should never judge a person by his looks. As the saying goes, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” Lord Caitanya’s mercy flows freely to both the materially qualified and the materially unqualified. So you never know who may be the next recipient of His causeless mercy. But one thing’s for sure: looks are definitely not the criterion for receiving it.

* * *

Manohara Dāsa

One day a new devotee was trying to distribute books but was very timid. I tried to get him to talk to the people, but he was very nervous and shy. So I told him to just give a book to the next person who came along and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. So he gave a book to an elderly lady and started chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. The lady looked at him and asked what he had said. He replied, “I’m praying to God that you take the book.”

“Oh, then I must take it,” she replied and gave a nice donation. The devotee thus became inspired, and the books began to fly.

* * *

Rūpa-Ragunātha Dāsa

We all have our chalked-out services we perform for the pleasure of Guru and Kṛṣṇa, and so sometimes, when we see other services that need to be done immediately, we may avoid the engagement. We may think, “I am a *saṅkīrtana* devotee,” or “I am a cook,” or “I am a *pūjārī*. I am so busy that I have no time to answer the phone or greet some guests at the temple.”

But according to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 9.18.44, we become first-class devotees when we know what service needs to be done and we do it automatically. Here are some examples of how “doing the needful” often yields surprising results.

One day I was about to leave for book distribution when an Indian couple walked into the temple. My misguided mind told me, “It’s not your duty to take care of them. You have a very important mission at hand, so let the temple devotees look after them.” Then I thought, “No, at least greet them, be friendly, and give them *prasādam*.”

I said, “Hare Kṛṣṇa, nice to meet you.” Immediately the man said he wanted to send a *Gītā* to a friend and would pay for it. I gave him a *Gītā* and was going to ask him for twenty dollars but stopped myself. “No,” I thought, “let me see what he gives.” He pulled out a fifty-dollar bill and said, “Keep the change.” So I gave him a *Quest for Enlightenment* and we were both in ecstasy!

Another day I was preparing to go out when the phone in the temple lobby rang. After defeating my mind, which said, “It’s the job of the receptionist,” I picked up the receiver and said “Hare Kṛṣṇa.” An Indian gentleman responded, saying he wanted to give \$100 for our work. The next day I met him and he gave the \$100, so I gave him some books.

Another time I saw two Indian ladies walking out of the temple after taking *darśana* of the Deities. No one was talking to them, and they hadn’t gotten *prasādam*. I asked them to wait and rushed off to get milk sweets, garlands, and a few small books. I gave them the items and tried to be very personal with them. The mother gave a donation and thanked me for the kindness with great sincerity. Receiving Kṛṣṇa’s mercy brought tears to her eyes.

Chapter 5: The Saṅkīrtana Mind-Set

Even if we don't possess much purity, if we try to show some spiritual care to all those who come in touch with the Society and give them the potent medicine of books and *prasādam*, they can easily have a change of heart. It is essential to befriend our guests by being personal with them and showing them kindness. Because of our impersonal culture, many of them don't even know they should meet devotees and get *prasādam* at the temple.

If we show this personalism and mercy, it could mean the difference between their returning regularly or not coming back for a long time, if ever, since they did not feel touched by Kṛṣṇa's mercy.

* * *

Śrīmān Kṛṣṇa Dasa

Advancing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness means developing humility. Kṛṣṇa is attracted to the devotees' humility because by this humility we can always depend on Kṛṣṇa. When we distribute books, even the tenth-class men of Kali-yuga will just brush us off, thinking us imbeciles who can't get a job. Book distribution forces us to be humble: while approaching people, we can't hide behind a curtain and imagine we are so meek and humble. No imagining. Kṛṣṇa will force us to be humble on *saṅkīrtana*. It doesn't matter if we do big or not; there's always a special purification that comes from book distribution.

* * *

Tulasi Devī Dāsī

I was training up a *bhaktin* on book distribution. The morning before we started I stressed to her that no matter how rude people may be to us we should never be nasty back. We should always be kind and tolerant, wishing them a nice day and offering them a *prasādam* cookie. We should understand that we're just a scapegoat for their problems and frustrations. "If we always try to be kind, understanding how they're suffering and that it's not us they're angry at but their own problems, their hearts will change. I just try to be kind even if a person is nasty to me, and often that person will come back later and apologize and even take a book."

During the day when I wasn't around, she had to deal with just such a circumstance. "A really mean, nasty man came up to me," she told me later. "He was shouting and using vulgar language. Part of me wanted to smack him, and another part wanted to just break down and cry. But then I remembered what you told me this morning, and even though it was so difficult I just smiled, wished him a good day, and offered him a sweet, which he nastily refused. Then he left. But a half hour later he ran up to me and begged for forgiveness. He apologized for being so nasty and said it wasn't my fault, and that in spite of his being so rude to me I had been so kind and he had never experienced such a thing before. He couldn't stop apologizing and ended up buying a book."

* * *

Vijaya Dāsa

One of the most important qualities to cultivate for successful book distribution is a positive attitude. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave this example: Once a man gave ashes to a *sādhu* doing *mādhukarī*. The *sādhu* sincerely thanked him and was turning to leave when the man said, "Why did you thank me? I gave you ashes."

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

The *sādhu* replied, “Because you have begun the process of giving.”

Sometimes when we distribute books people give us very small donations. We should understand that this may be the first time they’ve given service to Kṛṣṇa in many lifetimes, so we should thankfully accept whatever they give.

In Moscow Ambarīṣa Prabhu, an unassuming and humble devotee, has been one of the steadiest book distributors for many years. Every day before going on book distribution he recites the poem Śrīla Prabhupāda composed at Boston Pier in 1965, expressing feelings of helplessness and deep compassion for the fallen souls. Ambarīṣa Prabhu tries to enter into that mood before going out to engage in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mission. Several other book distributors in Moscow have also adopted this practice.

The translation of some of the verses follows:

My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, You are so kind upon this useless soul, but I do not know why You have brought me here. Now You can do whatever You like with me.

But I guess You have some business here; otherwise why would You bring me to this terrible place? Most of the population here is covered by the material modes of ignorance and passion. Absorbed in material life, they think themselves very happy and satisfied, and therefore they have no taste for the transcendental message of Vāsudeva. I do not know how they will be able to understand it. But I know that Your causeless mercy can make anything possible, because You are the most expert mystic.

How will they understand the mellows of devotional service? O Lord, I am simply praying for Your mercy so that I will be able to convince them about Your message. All living entities have come under the control of the illusory energy by Your will, and therefore, if You like, by Your will they can also be released from the clutches of illusion. I wish that You may deliver them. Therefore if You so desire their deliverance, then only will they be able to understand Your message.

How will I make them understand this message of Kṛṣṇa consciousness? I am very unfortunate, unqualified, and the most fallen. Therefore I am seeking Your benediction so that I can convince them, for I am powerless to do so on my own.

Somehow or other, O Lord, You have brought me here to speak about You. Now, my Lord, it is up to You to make me a success or failure, as You like.

O spiritual master of all the worlds! I can simply repeat Your message. So if You like, You can make my power of speaking suitable for their understanding. Only by Your causeless mercy will my words become pure.

I am sure that when this transcendental message penetrates their hearts they will certainly feel gladdened and thus become liberated from all unhappy conditions of life.

O Lord, I am just like a puppet in Your hands. So if You have brought me here to dance, then make me dance, make me dance, O Lord, make me dance as You like.

I have no devotion, nor do I have any knowledge, but I have strong faith in the holy name of Kṛṣṇa. I have been designated as Bhaktivedanta, and now, if You like, You can fulfill the real purport of Bhaktivedanta.

Book distribution means depending on Kṛṣṇa. He’s in control. We can control a little, but Kṛṣṇa is Parameśvara, the Supreme Controller. *saṅkīrtana* is a quick way to realize this aspect of the Absolute Truth. One of my favorite verses to remember on *saṅkīrtana* is the one starting *upadraṣṭānumantā ca* (*Bhagavad-gītā* 13.23). *Upadraṣṭā* indicates that Kṛṣṇa is the overseer, and *anumantā* indicates He is the

Chapter 5: The Saṅkīrtana Mind-Set

permitter. No one can take a book without Kṛṣṇa's sanction, and similarly no one can give a donation without His sanction. When one has this understanding and is detached, then wonderful things happen. People sense the *saṅkīrtana* devotee's confidence and sincerity. We simply want to be Kṛṣṇa's instruments, puppets in His hands, completely dependent on Him, accepting whatever happens as His arrangement. As Kṛṣṇa says at *Bhagavad-gītā* 18.57, "In all activities just depend on Me and always work under My protection."

Book distribution trains us to depend on Kṛṣṇa in all circumstances because we have to depend on him to give out His message successfully. Sometimes it's difficult to distribute books, but a seasoned book distributor will continue trying to distribute despite the difficulty, praying to Kṛṣṇa to purify him and allow the conditioned souls to receive a book. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.19) Kṛṣṇa says, "I withhold and send forth the rain." Similarly, when we are on book distribution it's amazing how sometimes it's so difficult to distribute books but at other times many books go out in a short time. Kṛṣṇa withholds the people who will take books and also sends forth the people who will take books, according to the purity of our consciousness.

[End of Chapter Five: The Saṅkīrtana Mind-set]

Chapter Six Contact Saṅkīrtana: Harvesting the Fruits

Introduction

It is very rare for someone to become a devotee. With the ills of Kali-yuga so all-pervasive, even to find someone interested in spiritual life is rare. There are those special times, however, when we meet people who are seriously interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. When we find those special souls, we shouldn't just let them go and wish them good luck. We should get their e-mail address and phone number. It's so easy now to stay in contact with people through the Internet—Facebook, e-mail, etc. We should take advantage of this facility. I have over eight hundred e-mail addresses of students I've met on college campuses. Every few weeks I send something to them. After every e-mail I receive some appreciative e-mails from them. All the people on my list also have the *Bhagavad-gītā*, so quite often they will write me asking questions about the *Gītā* or another book they've received from me or bought online or at the temple. With really interested people I also get their phone numbers and call them regularly. It's a little more personal.

Śrīla Prabhupāda would sometimes use the phrase “fan the spark.” If you're trying to start a fire by rubbing sticks together, as soon as a spark appears you have to fan it, and then gradually a fire blazes up. Similarly, as soon as we see that someone is showing a slight interest in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we have to fan that spark of interest. If we do it nicely, the fire of desire for Kṛṣṇa becomes manifest in that person's heart and he or she will seek out further association with devotees.

Ratna-bhūṣaṇa Dāsa, a friend of mine, told me what helped him come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness: A devotee who'd contacted him sent him *prasādam* regularly. That really touched his heart, and his tongue appreciated it as well.

Vaiṣeṣika Prabhu sends nice people he meets postcards when he travels. There is nothing better than being personal with people.

Jayapatāka Swami told me that he was once at a pandal program in India to which the leaders of many spiritual groups had been invited to speak. He overheard one leader say something to his friend after seeing Mahārāja: “Oh no, the Hare Kṛṣṇas are here.” The friend replied, “No, the Hare Kṛṣṇas are great. They get people started on the spiritual path, and then we take them.” Then and there Mahārāja decided he would do more to help people stay with Kṛṣṇa consciousness once they showed some interest. So he started the Bhakti-ṛkṣa programs. Now there are Bhakti-ṛkṣa groups all over the world.

Contact *saṅkīrtana* is an aspect of our preaching where there's lots of room for improvement.

* * *

Śrīla Prabhupāda Lecture, 9 December 1975, Vṛndāvana.

One who is inquisitive to understand the absolute truth—he should be given chance. Just like there is a little fire. Fan it. Fanning, fanning, fanning, and it becomes a big fire. So our process is that. Anyone, we pick up anyone, if these persons take shelter of a pure devotee of the Lord, then they become purified by following the injunction of the spiritual master.

* * *

Chapter 6: Contact Saṅkīrtana

His Holiness Śrīdhara Swami

The following letter arrived at the Buenos Aires temple in May of 2001. It was addressed to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda.

May 3, 2001

Dear Sir,

I need your help. I'm from Cordoba. Many years ago, in the city, a young boy gave me a book: "Srimad Bhagavatam." I read it and I knew that God had decided something for me. A lot of years have passed, and life has put me in many difficult situations. Again, and magically, another book came to me: "Bhagavad-Gita As It Is," written by you. In the same way "The Science of Self-Realization" appeared. You are my guru and I love you. I have an altar with Kṛṣṇa's, Caitanya Mahaprabhu's, and your photographs.

My life is different. I feel great spirituality, but I need to continue reading, and I ask you for the rest of the books. Please let me know your new address. I want to meet with a group that feels what I'm feeling, and go on practicing with happiness. I also need spiritual guidance, and just you can give me the light.

Thank you very much,
Hare Krishna.

I suspect there are thousands more like him out there. If we could only keep in touch with people from the start. When people read these books their lives change, and they need association and guidance.

Watering the seeds is just as important as planting them. I don't think many of us could have made real advancement without the association of devotees. *We have to push on contact saṅkīrtana.* We have to develop some method to keep in touch with favorable people who receive a book—over the phone, through e-mail, or in person, or by a combination of all three.

We need a program to help people take up a process of gradual evolution in their spiritual lives. Everything could be standardized and simplified for the book distributors. They could get names by some system and hand them over to the congregational preachers or some entity in between congregational preaching and direct book distribution. Everyone who gets a book and gives us contact info could get a thank-you letter and an invitation to a temple restaurant. They could also get a BBT catalog and a toll-free number they could call if they had questions. They could get a postage-paid ISKCON-addressed postcard with a survey on how they liked the book and what level of interest they had. So many possibilities are there when we are ready to do something.

* * *

Kṛpāmoya Dāsa (ACBSP)

The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement reaches out to others with its message. Part of the movement is engaged in "broadcasting," i.e., disseminating information widely, and part of the movement is engaged in "cultivation," tending the seeds of Kṛṣṇa consciousness planted previously that have sprouted and require further attention. The business of "preaching" must include both these essential actions. Just as a farmer can't reap a harvest if he hasn't both sown seeds and cultivated his crops, so devotees cannot fulfill their mission of helping new people become Kṛṣṇa conscious unless they both plant the seeds of

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

bhakti and tend to the cultivation of the fortunate souls in whose fertile hearts the seeds have begun to sprout.

Although it is a fact that many people in the history of our movement have come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness rather spontaneously, and with hardly any prompting at all, it would be wrong to assume that the majority of our future members will join us in the same fashion. It is the business of the present members to go and find the future members. So we have a task ahead of us if this movement is to keep moving. And any campaign to create an effect within the minds of thinking people, and especially to bring about change, must be composed of carefully planned stages.

After the initial event to create public interest, the next stage of any outreach campaign is to meet up individually—one person at a time—with those who are the most interested. Discussion of philosophy and the ethics, values, and life choices that naturally flow from philosophy is very important. And it's important that it's done individually with a person and that you provide plenty of time for listening.

People like certain things about the Hare Kṛṣṇas. There are also things they find vaguely uncomfortable. There will be some other things they find quite objectionable. Every person will have different items on their list of “likes, dislikes, and objectionables,” and you need to know what those are.

Ideally, your relationship with someone should progress through stages of friendship, and the level of trust should increase to the point when they feel comfortable revealing to you their doubts about the Vaiṣṇava beliefs and practices. At this point doubts are good, and the strongly felt and somewhat animated expression of those doubts even more so. This is not the time for you to express your reluctance to listen to someone's doubts or—worse still—to criticize them for being disrespectful of those beliefs you hold dear. This is the time to actively invite them to describe any contradictions they feel exist between what they hold to be true and what you're telling them.

Many people, no matter how sincere they are, just cannot do this in a room filled with people, even people who are fellow newcomers to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. In Britain it would be regarded as quite rude to begin arguing with someone about religious matters, and many people would be filled with fear at the mere thought of expressing themselves so strongly in public.

After meeting interested people individually over some time, it may be good to bring together three or four people for a small dinner party with a light *kīrtana*, discussion, and *prasādam*. If they all feel comfortable in each other's company, then you can hold the same function again. At some stage a small but important shift in consciousness will take place, where the members feel they have become a “group.” The next important stage is when the existing members feel they are ready and enthusiastic to accept new members. These new members should, of course, already have been through at least a few hours of one-on-one discussion, so that they know what they're joining and are well prepared for it.

* * *

Tejyas Dāsa (ACBSP)

One of the things, if not the main thing, that deeply impressed me about Śrīla Prabhupāda was his unconditional acceptance of each person he encountered and his immediate and spontaneous treatment of that person as being vitally significant to him.

Put simply, if you want someone to be the way you want them to be, you need to see them as being significant and special as a person separate from their material qualities, but if you do not see special and admirable qualities, and do not like the person, what chance will there be of real affection and real friendship and service and love? How could someone love someone they did not even like? Being a devotee, or a servant of a devotee, one will learn to offer respect, to accept wholeheartedly every living being, and to see their intrinsic worth as part of Kṛṣṇa and their potentiality as a devotee. One will then admire their specific qualities, become attracted to them, and desire to interact with them by service.

Chapter 6: Contact Saṅkīrtana

This should be the natural form of relationship that is produced, not out of the mind, but out of the heart of one who is in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Although you cannot take Kṛṣṇa consciousness out of a second of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s life, he did not relate to us from the head or the mind or the intelligence, but he related to us from the heart. Heart to heart. Because he was pure, he really enjoyed meeting each person and dealing with them on a person-to-person basis.

* * *

Jaya Govinda Dāsa

Iraq—As a Christian, Chaplain L. was real big on charity. Service to God meant service to man, so I decided that that was the angle from which I would bring him around to Kṛṣṇa. After all, the best way to preach to someone is through the medium of their own beliefs, for they have no arguments against them.

Sure enough, the topic of charity came up, as it always did, at our next discussion group. The chaplain brought forth various excerpts from the Bible on the importance of charity work, as if to suggest that charity work isn’t an important tenet of our Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy. Little did he know. After he was done I read this purport to him from *Bhagavad-gītā* 5:25:

Only a person who is fully in Kṛṣṇa consciousness can be said to be engaged in welfare work for all living entities. When a person is in knowledge that Kṛṣṇa is the fountainhead of everything, then, when he acts in that spirit, he acts for everyone. The sufferings of humanity are due to forgetfulness of Kṛṣṇa as the supreme enjoyer, the supreme proprietor, and the supreme friend. Therefore, to act to revive this consciousness within the entire human society is the highest welfare work. One cannot be engaged in such first-class welfare work without being liberated in the Supreme. A Kṛṣṇa conscious person has no doubt about the supremacy of Kṛṣṇa. He has no doubt because he is completely freed from all sins. This is the state of divine love.

A person engaged only in ministering to the physical welfare of human society cannot factually help anyone. Temporary relief of the external body and the mind is not satisfactory. The real cause of one’s difficulties in the hard struggle for life may be found in one’s forgetfulness of his relationship with the Supreme Lord. When a man is fully conscious of his relationship with Kṛṣṇa, he is actually a liberated soul, although he may be in the material tabernacle.

He asked, “Well, what can you really do besides just loving your fellow brother and sister and trying to share with them the ‘good word.’ I mean, realistically, what can you do besides just telling people about God?”

So, there it was, the challenge. I replied, “Meet me in front of the PX [military store] in an hour and I’ll show you. Bring some Bibles.”

An hour later the chaplain and I met at our destination. He carried a stack of Bibles, I a stack of *Bhagavad-gītās* and some small books. I proposed we stand there for an hour and distribute the books, alternating between Bibles and *Gītās*. He accepted the challenge, and so began Camp Anaconda’s first book distribution marathon, which ended up lasting well beyond the proposed hour.

As I watched the chaplain distributing Prabhupāda’s *Gītā*, I was simply amazed and awed at what Prabhupāda had accomplished. Who would ever have thought that a Christian minister would be distributing Vedic knowledge in Iraq during a war? And what would I be doing if the devotees had never found me? I’d probably be sitting there laughing at that “silly guy giving out those silly books.” The Captain did not realize the extreme importance of what he was doing, for he had just saved himself.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

I also alternated between the Bibles and *Gītās*, adding a small book with each Bible. Periodically, I'd turn and check on the chaplain, and with each book he handed out his smile grew bigger and brighter. He was getting a taste of ecstasy, and I was humbled by it. By the end we had distributed all our books, which included a dozen hard *Gītās* and a dozen small books. The chaplain rambled on and on about how that was the greatest charity work he had done in Iraq. Indeed it was.

He then told me that if I wanted I could set up a book table outside his office, which many people frequented daily. This was one more preaching avenue that Kṛṣṇa opened up. From then on I referred to the chaplain as Captain Saṅkīrtana, and he was proud of it.

* * *

Bhakta Dave

For years I worked as a full-time “pioneer” for the Jehovah’s Witnesses, doing house-to-house ministry. The Jehovah’s Witnesses are one of the most successful groups at this type of preaching.

One thing I note in ISKCON is that though we give ourselves a big pat on the back for book distribution, we are poor at follow-up. This is a serious failing. Part of the reason is that most books are distributed on the street with little regard for follow-up. But why not a leaflet carefully placed in the book telling of upcoming events at a nearby center? This simple step would be very helpful. Why did I first go to the temple? Because I found an invitation card in the book I’d bought.

When Jehovah’s Witnesses meet someone who’s interested, they take note of the person’s name and contact info, the points raised during the discussion, and any facts the person would like to share concerning family and friends. This personal interest is a good basis for long-term cultivation.

Something we should do as devotees is ask a person about his strengths and skills, how he or she can they be engaged in service. This is vital and, again, often overlooked. The devotees who introduced me to Kṛṣṇa consciousness were very skillful at this aspect of contact *saṅkīrtana*. They made me feel wanted and a part of ISKCON.

Finally, the Jehovah’s Witnesses didn’t keep track of individual book scores. Yes, the local congregation kept records, but there was no focus on high individual book scores. Those who were honored were the preachers who helped bring people into the faith.

ISKCON has more to offer than the Jehovah’s Witnesses, but we could learn from them and from other faiths about practical application of preaching skills.

* * *

Bhakta Edward

Building and maintaining a database of contacts is an essential first step. How many people do we meet who are interested but who never move forward in their Kṛṣṇa consciousness because we fail to get their contact info?

The second step is to follow up with the people we contact—to cultivate them and build up a favorable relationship. This can be done by phone calls, emails, texting, newsletters, home visits, house programs, inviting them to the temple for programs, and any other way we can give them favorable devotee association and help them feel connected to Kṛṣṇa.

The third step is that when someone actually becomes convinced about Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we need to engage them in some appropriate service. They are now *committed* devotees, and if they don’t get devotional service they will begin to get bored and lose enthusiasm. Therefore at this point it’s very

Chapter 6: Contact Saṅkīrtana

important to engage them in *bhakti-vṛkṣa* groups so they get service and proper attention. A few people may find engagement directly in the temple, but even they are usually part of a *bhakti-vṛkṣa* group.

If you follow this system, you will be very successful. We should gather the names and addresses of all the favorable people we come in contact with, and then we should establish some cultivation program to follow up with them. Here's an example from my own life:

I had a very inspiring experience one night when Rūpa-Raghunātha Prabhu and I were going door-to-door in an upmarket area of Adelaide, Australia. We split up to cover opposite ends of the street, and soon I came upon the door of a stately house. As I spoke on the intercom, I fully expected to be rebuked by its highbrow occupants. But the door opened after I had said I was their local Hare Kṛṣṇa monk and that we were out meeting the intellectual community to discuss spirituality.

A woman and her young daughter greeted me and, startled by my *tilaka* and robes, explained that they had never seen a Hare Kṛṣṇa before. It was the young girl who had opened the door, but her mother, Jane, was happy to have me there and invited me in. After she had introduced me to several other members of her family (her husband was still at work), I presented the *Bhagavad-gītā* and three other books. They all seemed happy as they picked up the books and looked through them while I did my best to explain our Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy.

Jane was very receptive and announced that she would take all the books. I was ecstatic, and when she asked if they were all the books I had, I felt I was seeing Kṛṣṇa's mercy I action. I told her I didn't have any more books to give her, but I suggested she could have the Swami and other devotees visit her home and do a program. But she replied that her husband would be very much against the idea. She thanked me for the books, though, and I left her with a schedule of our evening Loft Preaching workshops.

The following week I called to see how she was, and she explained that her family commitments had not permitted her to come to our evening workshops. But she asked if there was any way she could see the Swami during the day. With that, a meeting was arranged at the temple, and Jane drove up in her shiny Mercedes the very next day. I introduced her to Bhaktisiddhānta Mahārāja and Rūpa-Raghunātha, and we all had a nectarean afternoon. Jane enjoyed over three hours of transcendental enlightenment consisting of preaching, *prasādam*, and *kīrtana*. She thought the temple was beautiful and said that she could feel something special about the Deities (Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Śyāmasundara). Mahārāja taught her how to chant *japa* and recommended two rounds a day to start.

Indeed, Jane was a special soul. A lawyer raised in an atheistic family, she had grown unsatisfied with material life and begun questioning everything. Her husband was a prominent Australian businessman, and she herself ranked among the wealthiest women in Adelaide, yet neither of them were happy. Jane revealed her heart to us as we sat in Mahārāja's room. We explained to her how she could add Kṛṣṇa to her life without dropping all her material affairs. As she left the temple to pick up her children from school, she was smiling ear to ear and carrying a package with her new *japa* beads, bead bag, and a photo of the Deities.

From this example we clearly see that even if one has everything materially, the real value lies in Kṛṣṇa. Whereas material opulence is usually a hindrance to spiritual life, we found that Jane was able to use her material facilities to carry on from where she had left off in a previous life and start on the path back to her real home.

All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda!

[End of Chapter Six: Contact Saṅkīrtana]

Chapter Seven Determination on Saṅkīrtana

Throughout history sincere servants of God have met opposition. Millions of years ago Hiranyakaśipu tried to kill his son Prahlāda Mahārāja, a five-year-old boy who was fully God conscious, because he defied his father and was preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness to his classmates. Jesus Christ was crucified because he preached God consciousness. And the Muslim ruler in Bengal ordered Haridāsa Ṭhākura executed because he refused to stop chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, but Lord Caitanya protected him and he was unharmed. More recently, in the 1970s and 80s, Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees in the Soviet Union faced arrest, imprisonment, torture, and even death for practicing and propagating their faith.

By Kṛṣṇa's grace it's rare to hear of such extreme attempts to oppose Kṛṣṇa consciousness today, but that doesn't mean we don't face opposition. The main opposition comes from our own mind and senses. The mind will come up with so many reasons why you shouldn't distribute books: "People don't appreciate them." "The service is too difficult." "I'm not strong enough to do this service." "Hardly anyone becomes a devotee from book distribution anyway, so why waste time?" "Devotees are supposed to spread peace and joy, but I'm disturbing so many people." These are some of objections that come from our own contaminated mind.

To overcome these objections from the mind, we must train it. In the purport to *Bhagavad-gītā* 17.16, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "[The mind] should be so trained that it can be always thinking of doing good for others." There is no greater good than to give Kṛṣṇa to others. For millions of lifetimes the conditioned souls have been suffering the miseries of material life. Now we can stop that cycle by getting them to take a book, or at least start them on the *bhakti* path, which will ultimately take them beyond the life of miseries. Obviously most will not take, but some will. A few visit Tiffany's and buy diamonds, while many visit the mall to buy trinkets. But does that mean diamonds aren't valuable? No, they're the most valuable. But few can pay the price. Similarly, few can pay the price of pure *bhakti*—giving up sense gratification—but some fortunate few can. They're out there; we just have to make ourselves available. To do that we have to control the mind and senses, the main opposition to spreading the glories of Kṛṣṇa.

As mentioned above, we will also sometimes experience external opposition to our activities of book distribution. In the early days of our Society, devotees would sometimes be put in jail because of distributing books. Also, people of other beliefs would sometimes disturb the devotees' efforts to distribute books. That still goes on occasionally.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura said, "I have been shoved around in this world. Without giving the world similar shoves, neither can its ignorance be broken nor its people attracted to the lotus feet of Śrī Caitanya. Those who do not get severely rough-handled by the world cannot worship the Lord."

Queen Kuntī prayed for difficulties because they would give her a chance to take full shelter of Kṛṣṇa, and by taking shelter of Kṛṣṇa she would see Him, and by seeing Kṛṣṇa she would no longer see the repetition of birth and death. But on book distribution we don't have to pray for difficulties: they automatically come. Kṛṣṇa is so kind. If we are sincere, difficulties will increase our devotion, not discourage us, and thus we will grow stronger. When we meet opposition we should pray for strength and sincerity, and certainly Kṛṣṇa will answer our prayers. He's good at that.

When Śrīla Prabhupāda would hear of opposition, he would take it as a favorable sign, as proof that the materialists were seeing us as a serious threat to their materialistic way of life. Otherwise, why would they try to stop us? He once said, "If they knew when I came what I was going to

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

accomplish later, they would have killed me.”

In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Ādi 14.1) Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja writes:

*kathañcana smṛte yasmin
duṣkaram sukaram bhavet
vismṛte viparitam syāt
śrī-caitanyam namāmi tam*

“Things that are very difficult to do become easy to execute if one somehow or other simply remembers Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. But if one does not remember Him, even easy things become very difficult. To this Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu I offer my respectful obeisances.” If we take shelter of Lord Caitanya and are tolerant and patient, we will see amazing things happen—we will see difficulties disappear. Here’s an example from my own life: For many years I have been distributing books at universities from a table. Once I had just set up my table at the campus’s “free-speech area.” Most campuses have something like that because in the USA we have the first amendment right of freedom of religion and freedom of speech. But this time, right after I’d set up my table and was getting ready to distribute, a security guard came over and told me I had to get permission to set up the table. I had to comply. Now, getting permission from a college administration to set up a book table usually entails a lengthy process of finding a favorable student to set up a club, registering the club, and so on—in other words, lots of red tape. But I thought, “Let me at least try.” As I walked to the administration building I constantly chanted the verse quoted above to get the mercy of Lord Caitanya. I went to the school president’s office and asked the secretary if I could speak to her. She said, “No problem.” Five minutes later the president came out and asked what I wanted. I said, “I’d like to set up a table on the campus and distribute *Bhagavad-gītās*.”

“Sure, no problem, go right ahead.” she replied.

I was shocked. Then the secretary said, “You see, that wasn’t so difficult, was it?”

The way she said it was kind of mystical, as if Lord Caitanya were speaking through her, telling me, “You see, simply shelter of Me and I’ll help you.”

One of the main difficulties in book distribution is staying enthusiastic and positive despite getting so many “No’s.” Kṛṣṇa directly deals with this problem in a pastime where He instructs His friends in Vṛndāvana. Once when the cowherd boys were all feeling hungry, Kṛṣṇa told them to go to some *brāhmaṇas* who were performing a sacrifice nearby and ask them for food. The boys did so, but the *brāhmaṇas* just ignored them. When they returned to Kṛṣṇa crestfallen, the Lord explained that one should never be discouraged while begging. Śrīla Prabhupāda describes the scene this way: “After hearing their statements, the Supreme Personality of Godhead smiled. He told them that they should not be sorry for being refused by the *brāhmaṇas*, because that is the way of begging. He convinced them that one who is engaged in collecting or begging should not think that he will be successful everywhere. He may be unsuccessful in some places, but that should not be cause for disappointment.”

In fact, the rejection we experience on book distribution is actually good for us: it helps us become detached from the result. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (5.20) Kṛṣṇa says:

*na prahr̥ṣyet priyam prāpya
nodvijet prāpya cāpriyam
sthira-buddhir asammūḍho
brahma-vid brahmaṇi sthitaḥ*

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

“A person who neither rejoices upon achieving something pleasant nor laments upon obtaining something unpleasant, who is self-intelligent, who is unbewildered, and who knows the science of God, is already situated in transcendence.”

We should not be disturbed when the results don't come, nor should we become overly joyful when we achieve exceptional results. Let's say I get a big donation. I may become really happy and think, “Boy! Was I empowered that time! I'm so sincere.” But the flip side of that happiness is the distress I will feel when the inevitable rejections come. I remember once in Miami a devotee approached a man who was very interested and gave a substantial donation. The devotee became so happy that he started dancing and shouting “Haribol!” But then it became difficult for him to distribute and he lamented. Jubilation and lamentation—they go hand in hand.

If success comes, we should see it as Kṛṣṇa's mercy, thinking, “I have no ability. He is the ability in man.” And if the good result does not come, that is also Kṛṣṇa's mercy. We should try just to be good instruments and distribute as many books as possible. The result will be that we will get the mercy of Kṛṣṇa. We will actually feel satisfied. Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.31):

*nāyaṁ loko 'sty ayajñasya
kuto 'nyaḥ kuru-sattama*

“O best of the Kuru dynasty, without sacrifice one can never live happily on this planet or in this life: what then of the next?” Sacrifice entails austerity, so in order to be satisfied, undergoing the austerities of the *saṅkīrtana-yajña* is essential.

But book distribution is an austerity only in the beginning. Eventually it becomes the most ecstatic experience. Book distribution is by far the most ecstatic experience I have ever had. When you feel that you are just a soul approaching other souls to help them in the most profound way, and that Kṛṣṇa is overseeing the whole encounter, it just becomes so wonderful.

Another interesting point is illustrated by one of Kṛṣṇa's many pastimes. When Kṛṣṇa was in Hastināpura to negotiate peace with the Kurus, he visited Vidura. Vidura didn't want Kṛṣṇa to go to the assembly of the Kurus because Vidura knew they wouldn't take Kṛṣṇa's advice. The Lord then said to Vidura, “The wise have said that if a person attempts a virtuous act with all sincerity but fails, he will still receive the merit of that act.” Even if you fail to distribute a book to someone, you still get the merit. By performing this austerity we can only benefit.

In the following excerpts from two morning walks in Melbourne, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains the value of anxiety and determination on book distribution:

Devotee: When we are distributing books, Śrīla Prabhupāda, and we are not doing so good and we are in anxiety, that is also spiritual?

Prabhupāda: For selling books, anxiety is Kṛṣṇa anxiety. If you become very anxious how to sell more books, that is Kṛṣṇa anxiety. That is not trade anxiety; that is Kṛṣṇa anxiety.

Devotee: So some [devotees] say, “When I go on *saṅkīrtana* to sell books I become in too much anxiety if I'm not doing well, so I'd rather not do it.”

Prabhupāda: No, that is Kṛṣṇa anxiety. He does not know. Let him know that that is Kṛṣṇa anxiety. Yaśodā, Mother Yaśodā, became mother of Kṛṣṇa so that she would always remain in anxiety for Kṛṣṇa, whether Kṛṣṇa is safe. That is mother's anxiety. Therefore she became mother. How to become in Kṛṣṇa anxiety? This philosophy nobody knows. Everyone takes Kṛṣṇa as the father. Father means I'm anxietyless: “Father, You supply my wants.” And to become father of Kṛṣṇa means to purchase anxiety for Kṛṣṇa. This philosophy they do not

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

know. [Morning Walk, 26 April 1976, Melbourne]

.....

Prabhupāda: No, that is missionary activities, that they do not understand but you have to make them understand. They are not calling you, “I am suffering, please come,” but it is your business to go and let them know that “You are suffering; You take this method.” That is the way of becoming very quickly recognized by Kṛṣṇa. Otherwise, if you think, “They are not understanding; what is the use of going there? Let me sleep,” that is not good. They are not understanding; still, you have to go. Then Kṛṣṇa will take that “He is laboring so hard for My sake.” Never mind he is successful. It doesn’t matter. But you are working hard for Kṛṣṇa. That is noted down. So our business is to be recognized by Kṛṣṇa. Whether one man is converted or not converted, that is not our business. We shall try our best. But Kṛṣṇa must see that I am giving service to Kṛṣṇa. That’s all. That is wanted. Not that you have to judge that you have approached so many men, nobody became Kṛṣṇa conscious. That doesn’t matter. But you have gone there. You have endeavored your sincere effort. That is recognized by Kṛṣṇa. That is the order of Caitanya Mahāprabhu. [Morning Walk, 20 May 1975, Melbourne]

Sometimes there is even opposition from devotees. When Prabhupāda was here there was a senior devotee in charge of a *yātrā* who took the devotees off book distribution because he said the book distributors were disturbing the public. Prabhupāda’s response was “If you have a better way then show it, but don’t stop book distribution.”

Another idea among some devotees is “We are *kaniṣṭha-adhikārīs*, so who will take us seriously? Better we go to Vṛndāvana, do *bhajan*, get purified, and then go out and preach. What good will we do if we are still under the modes of material nature? No one will listen to us.” However, this is not what Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us. He knew we were *kaniṣṭha-adhikārīs*, but he still sent us out on book distribution. He said, “You will be recognized by Kṛṣṇa by this book distribution.” Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted everyone to get a book. In a famous letter he wrote:

There is no doubt about it, to distribute books is our most important activity. The temple is a place not for eating and sleeping, but as a base from which we send out our soldiers to fight with maya. Fight with maya means to drop thousand and millions of books into the lap of the conditioned souls. Just like during war time the Bombs are raining from the sky like anything. [Letter to Rameśvara, 3 August 1973]

When we go out on book distribution, not only are the people who take one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books benefited, but we are also benefited because we are distributing the message Kṛṣṇa came to give the world. Śrīla Prabhupāda was so much into book distribution that during his last days on this planet the only letters he wanted to hear read to him were ones that contained the book-distribution scores—and not just the temple scores but every individual score. Prabhupāda knew that people would benefit by reading his books, and therefore he stressed it. He once wrote to all temples: “I’ll visit the temple that is distributing the most books.”

In the last paragraph of the last chapter of *Kṛṣṇa* book he writes, “There is no need to be envious of the devotees who are engaged in preaching the glories of the Lord. We have practical experience of being advised by the so-called *bābājīs* in Vṛndāvana that there is no need to preach

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

and that it is better to live in Vṛndāvana in a solitary place and chant the holy name.”

Some say, “We don’t say ‘Don’t go out and preach,’ but we say ‘Go to Vṛndāvana and chant the holy names, and when you are purified go and preach.’” But who’s to say when one is purified enough to preach? To his disciples Prabhupāda instructed, “Throughout the year distribute books, and then once a year go to Māyāpur and Vṛndāvana. Become inspired there and go back to preach.”

In a lecture on 5 January 1976, he said, “Our first business is this book distribution. There is no need of any other business. If this book distribution is managed properly, pushed on with great enthusiasm and determination, and at the same time if our men keep spiritually strong, then the whole world will become Kṛṣṇa conscious.”

Prabhupāda never instructed any of his disciples to stay in Vṛndāvana and just chant and get purified, and to then go out and preach.

Regarding your question, actually it is a fact that ultimately everyone should preach and distribute books if they want to please me in the best way. Book distribution must be given stress always. If you do this sincerely, it is a fact that Kṛṣṇa will supply everything else required. I blindly follow my guru maharaj. I do not know what is the result. So I am stressing on this point of book distribution. He told me this personally.

Book distribution is bhagavata marga and temple worship is pancaratrici viddhi. Both are important for cultivating Vaisnavism but comparatively speaking bhagavata marga is more important than pancaratrici viddhi. As far as possible both should go on in parallel lines but still bhagavata marga is more important than the other. So you are all intelligent boys, so you should judge the desire of my guru maharaj and help me in that way. [Letter December 6, 1974]

* * *

Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 4.187

[Translation:] “This is the natural result of intense love of Godhead. The devotee does not consider personal inconveniences or impediments. In all circumstances he wants to serve the Supreme Personality of Godhead.”

[Purport:] It is natural for those who have developed intense love for Kṛṣṇa not to care for personal inconvenience and impediments. Such devotees are simply determined to execute the order of the Supreme Personality of Godhead or His representative, the spiritual master. In all circumstances, even amidst the greatest dangers, they undeviatingly carry on with the greatest determination. This definitely proves the intense love of the servitor. As stated in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.14.8), *tat te ’nukampām su-samīkṣamāṇaḥ*: those who seriously desire to get free from the clutches of material existence, who have developed intense love for Kṛṣṇa, are worthy candidates for going back home, back to Godhead. An intense lover of Kṛṣṇa does not care for any number of material discomforts, scarcity, impediments or unhappiness. It is said that when one sees apparent unhappiness or distress in a perfect Vaiṣṇava, it is not at all unhappiness for him; rather, it is transcendental bliss. In the *Śikṣāṣṭaka* (8), Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu has also instructed, *āśliṣya vā pāda-ratām pinaṣṭu mām*. The intense lover of Kṛṣṇa is never deviated from his service, despite all difficulties and impediments brought before him.

* * *

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā 1.3–4, purport

If one wants to benefit the entire world, he will certainly find persons like hogs and pigs who will put forward many impediments. That is natural. But if a devotee seeks shelter at the lotus feet of the Six Gosvāmīs, the merciful Gosvāmīs will certainly give the Lord's servitor all protection. It is not astonishing that impediments are placed before those who are spreading the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement all over the world. Nevertheless, if we adhere to the lotus feet of the Six Gosvāmīs and pray for their mercy, all impediments will be annihilated, and the transcendental devotional desire to serve the Supreme Lord will be fulfilled.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.1.4, purport

Forgetful men do not know the right path for peace and prosperity. However, the sages know it well, and therefore for the good of all men they are always anxious to perform acts which may bring about peace in the world. They are sincere friends to all living entities, and at the risk of great personal inconvenience they are always engaged in the service of the Lord for the good of all people.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 2.8.21, purport

The favorable conditions for discharging devotional service are that one should be very enthusiastic in serving the Lord. The Lord in His form of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu wanted the cult of devotional service to the Lord to be preached all over the world, in every nook and corner, and therefore a pure devotee's duty is to discharge this order as far as possible. Every devotee should be very enthusiastic, not only in performing his daily rituals of devotional service but in trying to preach the cult peacefully by following in the footsteps of Lord Caitanya. If he is not superficially successful in such an attempt, he should not be deterred from the discharge of his duty. Success or failure has no meaning for a pure devotee because he is a soldier in the field. Preaching the cult of devotional service is something like declaring war against materialistic life.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 5.14.29, purport

Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, has left behind Him *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Bhagavad-gītā*. Not referring to these authorized scriptures, rascals take shelter of man-made scriptures and try to compete with Lord Kṛṣṇa. That is the greatest difficulty one encounters when trying to promote spiritual consciousness in human society. The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is trying its best to bring people back to Kṛṣṇa consciousness in its pure form, but the *pāṣaṇḍīs* and atheists, who are cheaters, are so numerous that sometimes we become perplexed and wonder how to push this movement forward. In any case, we cannot accept the unauthorized ways of so-called incarnations, gods, cheaters, and bluffers, who are described here as crows, vultures,

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

buzzards, and herons.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.8.51, purport

To spread the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, devotees have to face many dangers and impediments all over the world, but a faithful servant who preaches with great devotion to the Lord must know that Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva is always his protector.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 8.5.47, purport

The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is not very popular with the *karmīs* because this movement recommends that one refrain from illicit sex, meat-eating, gambling, and intoxication. These are restrictions that *karmīs* very much dislike. Nonetheless, in the presence of so many enemies, this movement is progressing, going forward without impediments. If the devotees continue to spread this movement, dedicating life and soul to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, no one will be able to check it. The movement will go forward without limits. Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa!

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 9.4.27, purport

[O]ne must constantly be engaged in various activities, and the hard labor involved is certainly an austerity. Similarly, the hard labor involved in preaching, preparing literature, preaching to atheistic men, and distributing literature door to door is of course an austerity (*tapo-yuktena*). *Tapo divyaṃ putrakā*. Such austerity is necessary. *Yena sattvaṃ śuddhyet*. By such austerity in devotional service, one is purified of material existence (*kāmān śanair jahau*). Indeed, such austerity leads one to the constitutional position of devotional service. In this way one can give up material desires, and as soon as one is freed from material desires, he is free from the repetition of birth and death, old age and disease.

* * *

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.11.27, purport

A devotee desires only that he may execute devotional service undisturbed. Actually we see, however, that even during the presence of Kṛṣṇa, when Nanda Mahārāja and the other cowherd men had the Supreme Personality of Godhead in their presence, there were disturbances. Of course, in every case Kṛṣṇa came out victorious. The instruction we may derive from this is that we should not be disturbed by so-called disturbances. There have been so many disturbances to our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, but we cannot give up our forward march. On the contrary, people are receiving this movement very enthusiastically all over the world, and they are purchasing literature about Kṛṣṇa consciousness with redoubled energy. Thus there are both encouragements

Chapter 7: Determination on Sankīrtana

and disturbances. This was so even in Kṛṣṇa's time.

* * *

Śrīla Prabhupāda letter to Jagadīśa, 27 March 1972

I am so glad to hear how you are expanding the book distribution program so rapidly. The more this literature is read and distributed, the more the world will be filled with auspiciousness. Please continue this program with ever-increasing enthusiasm and this will please my Guru Maharaja very much.

If we simply repeat this philosophy exactly as it is, without any misrepresentation or adulteration, then this movement will never be checked, and we will conquer the world. So please train up all these boys and girls in the philosophy and brahminical culture and they will become useful tools in the hands of Lord Kṛṣṇa for saving all the fallen souls in this age.

* * *

Śrīla Prabhupāda letter to Uttamaśloka, 11 December 1975

Europe and America are in great danger, this Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is enveloping them. The Sankīrtana devotees are very very dear to Kṛṣṇa. Because you are doing the field work of book distribution, Kṛṣṇa has immediately recognized them as true servants. Just like during war time, a farm boy or ordinary clerk who goes to fight for his country on the front immediately becomes a national hero for his sincere effort. So Kṛṣṇa immediately recognizes a preacher of Kṛṣṇa consciousness who takes all risks to deliver his message.

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

In this letter Prabhupāda states that going out to distribute books is a risk. What is the risk? The risk is that on book distribution you're on the front lines in the battle against Māyā, and naturally she'll try to bring her enemy down. There are many instances of book distributors becoming seduced by the opposite sex, both male and female. Women have expressed their selfish material interest in me many times on *sankīrtana*, but by Kṛṣṇa's mercy I haven't been deterred from my determination to distribute Prabhupāda's books.

On the other side, devotees are often verbally and sometimes even physically attacked by someone thickly covered by the modes of nature. But we have to carry on despite all temptations and opposition that may come on our path. This is determination. As Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Do not be disturbed by so-called disturbances; continue the forward march."

* * *

Śrīla Prabhupāda letter to German disciples, 6 May 1977

My dear beloved disciples,

Please accept my blessings. I know that over the past years you have suffered so many

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

tribulations to push forward Kṛṣṇa consciousness in Germany. But this has not stopped you from your determination to serve the cause of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. A devotee is pleased when there is difficulty, for in these difficulties he is forced to remember Kṛṣṇa. We cannot expect that the people of Kali-yuga will welcome our attempt to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It is just like a lunatic asylum: The patients are running around madly and when the doctor tries to give them treatment, they insist that they are not crazy. Sometimes the patient even strikes the doctor. So our task is like that. We cannot stand to see people suffering due to ignorance. What is that ignorance? They do not know that they are not their body. This Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is meant to deliver people to the proper understanding that they are not their body, that they are pure spirit soul. We may or may not be appreciated, that is not our concern. We must execute the order of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu which is:

*yare dekha, tare kaha kṛṣṇa-upadesa
amara ajnaya guru hana tara ei desa*

“Whomever you meet, instruct them to follow the orders of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as they are given in the Bhagavad-gīta and Śrīmad-Bhagavatam. In this way by My order become a spiritual master and try to liberate everyone in this land.”

So our business is to satisfy the *acaryas* and Kṛṣṇa. If they are pleased then we know our work is successful.

Go on spreading the *sankīrtana* movement more and more. I am only one person, but because all of you have kindly cooperated with me, this movement has now become a success all over the world. Be assured that there is no more direct way to preach than to distribute Kṛṣṇa conscious books. Whoever gets a book is benefited. If he reads the book he is benefited still more, or if he gives the book to someone else for reading, both he and the other person are benefited. Even if one does not read the book but simply holds it and sees it, he is benefited. If he simply gives small donation towards the work of Kṛṣṇa consciousness he is benefited. And anyone who distributes these transcendental literatures, he is also benefited. Therefore *sankīrtana* is the prime benediction for the age:

*kṛṣṇa-varṇam tvisakṛṣṇam sangopangastra-parsadam
yajñaih sankīrtana-prayair yajanti hi su-medhasah*

Hoping this meets you all well.

Your ever well-wisher,

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

* * *

Śrīla Prabhupāda morning walk, 19 February 1976, Māyāpur

Prabhupāda: This preaching work is a great fight, struggle.

Devotee: It is very big struggle.

Prabhupāda: So you are all soldiers. Even if you lay down your life by fighting, you are recognized by Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa will see that “This devotee has laid down his life.” So let us go on fighting. Even we die, what is that? We are going back to Godhead. A Vaiṣṇava, either he lives or dies, he is

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

under the protection of Kṛṣṇa.

* * *

Śrīla Prabhupāda Līlā: “A Visit to Boston”

“What if people don’t want to hear our message?” Pradyumna asked.

“The people might not understand our message, but Kṛṣṇa will be pleased,” Prabhupāda replied. “And that is our mission. They thought Jesus Christ’s mission was stopped. They killed him. But his mission was attained. He preached three years only, but so many followers. He pleased Kṛṣṇa. We must not be disappointed that no one is hearing Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We will say it to the moon and stars and all directions. We will cry in the wilderness, because Kṛṣṇa is everywhere. We want to get a certificate from Kṛṣṇa that ‘This man has done something for Me.’ Not popularity. If a pack of asses says you are good, what is that? We have to please Kṛṣṇa’s senses with purified senses.”

* * *

His Holiness Bhakti Vikāsa Swami

While hearing book distribution scores being read out at ISKCON’s Moscow center, I was surprised that an especially appreciative cheer went up when the name of Nitya Kṛṣṇa Prabhu was announced, as his score was not among the highest. On inquiry I discovered that Nitya Kṛṣṇa Prabhu was the blind devotee I had seen a few times at ISKCON Moscow, and that he somehow or other goes out alone daily for book distribution, either to apartment blocks or on the streets, and that, unaided, every day he also cleans the shoe rack at the entrance to the temple.

* * *

His Holiness Bhaktisiddhānta Swami

One day the Los Angeles book distribution crew went to one of the Warp Tour concerts near San Diego, and after the cars had all come in and there was a lull of several hours, Bhṛḡupati Prabhu and I decided to visit a devotee named Rādhānātha Dāsa, who had become a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda at the age of sixteen.

Rādhānātha lived off the beaten path up in the mountains next to the Cleveland National Forest, near a cluster of Indian reservations. For twenty years he had been nearly paralyzed from the neck down, and he maneuvered about within his field of service in a motorized semibed/wheelchair.

Our plan was to do a home program after the concert and give some association to this devotee, ministering to whatever congregation he could muster up at his house. Then we would leave the following day. Honestly speaking, I wasn’t so keen about this foray into the wild. It had been a long day and I was tired, but Bhṛḡupati kept tricking and pushing me, and, surprisingly, what transpired became an unforgettable event.

By talking to him before the program, we realized that we were conversing with a highly determined sage living in house custom-made for handicapped habitation. Behind him was a complete arsenal of Śrīla Prabhupāda books, videos, and tapes and a complementary array of

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

computer paraphernalia. Seeing his condition amidst all this, we kept thinking, “What keeps him pushing on despite the obstacles? Why not just hang up the holster, go to the holy *dhāma*, and hear and chant until departure time?” The reason for his focus was that he had a unique addiction: he was obsessed with the distribution of Prabhupāda’s books and contact cultivation.

Anyone who saw the struggles this devotee underwent in accomplishing ordinary bodily affairs, and also saw that despite such obstacles he still distributed Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books daily, would become ashamed of all the excuses he had come up with to avoid book distribution in his own life. Without any financial support he went out six days a week, alternating between different Target department stores. He sat next to the entrance selling flowers and presenting various petitions for people to sign concerning the environment or local interests (any solicitation was illegal unless one was in a booth). When the right person came up, he would sneak the *Bhagavad-gītā* into the exchange. He could tell who was receptive with such accuracy that everyone he presented the *Gītā* took a book, and in this way he would distribute from fifteen to twenty books in a six-hour day. The store managers would occasionally try to stand in front of him and break up his sales because they just didn’t want him there, but he was “legal and determined,” and eventually they resigned themselves to the fact that he was there to stay.

Rādhānātha Prabhu’s condition acted like a natural screen that attracted persons of real character, persons who related with him, admired him, and were not condescending. Through email he nourished his special friends, and they would visit him and render service. He gave *Gītā* classes once a week on his day off, with up to half a dozen visitors attending. People might first visit him because of his environmental concerns and his nonthreatening presence, but in time they would become entwined within a captivating web of *bhakti*. The appearance of the book *bhāgavata* followed by the exemplary person *bhāgavata* softened hearts, and soon these “Friends of Kṛṣṇa” were ready to be brought to the more traditional grounds, the local San Diego temple.

Here we have the proof of where character attracts character. Bhṛgupati and I were astonished at how Kṛṣṇa had unveiled before us such a rare sample of a flourishing *bhakti* group in the middle of nowhere. Here was another example of how the seeds of the books can sprout and develop into the blossoms of *bhakti* when carefully cultivated in the field of the heart

The next morning Nṛsimha Dāsa, Rādhānātha’s able caregiver, gave us a tour of the grounds, which had perfect facilities to accommodate Rādhānātha’s special needs. Then Nṛsimha whipped up “the green drink,” a veggie juice mix that was Rādhānātha’s breakfast, and next Nṛsimha prepared the beat-up Ford Econoline van for *saṅkīrtana*. As he pushed Rādhānātha along a makeshift ramp of rickety planks into the waiting chariot, Rādhānātha offered a few final words to Bhṛgupati and me, who were basking amidst the mountain scenery (it was our day off, after all). Wearing his helmetlike beanie, he nonchalantly waved to us as he was jostled along the ramp and then secured in the vehicle. I felt like I was watching a *sādhu* whose actions said to me, “All right, enough is enough, now it’s time to get back to the ecstasy of preaching work. Someday you’ll get such a taste.”

Bhṛgupati and I stood there with gaping mouths. So few devotees were coming out to see him at his remote location, and yet even though the world-number-one Śrīla Prabhupāda disciple doing book distribution and a sidekick swami had come out to visit him, he just gave us a wave and, maintaining his schedule, left us standing there as he went out on book distribution! As the rundown van maneuvered along the dirt road and then went out of sight, and the resulting dust particles sparkled in the morning sun and settled around us, our mouths were still open.

His Grace Rādhānātha Prabhu *kī jaya!*

* * *

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

His Holiness Hridayānanda dāsa Goswami

Due to the false ego, one may find book distribution difficult, but don't give up the book distribution, give up the false ego. The difficulties one undergoes in one's service are the price one pays for pure devotional service.

* * *

His Holiness Śivarāma Swami

Cold weather, sore feet, an aching back, and indifferent people are some of the hardships we accept to distribute books. That service pleases Gaura and Prabhupāda the most. We do what they want. This attitude is the fertile soil in which love grows. Every book is watering your seed of love. Be patient, determined, and tolerant. One day Kṛṣṇa's blessings will come and it will have all been more than worthwhile.

Book distribution is not easy. At least I did not find it so. And in my years in ISKCON I have found only a few devotees who did it without strain. For most devotees it requires self-discipline and sacrifice. But then that is what *yajña*, *sāṅkīrtana-yajña*, is all about. For those who persevere despite the difficulties, there is a wonderful reward to be had during the day and at the end of the day: the confidence of knowing, without doubt, that whatever the result, your energies were fully utilized in pleasing guru and Kṛṣṇa in the best possible way. The best possible way. And the result of that sacrifice is often an inner bliss that *jñānīs* and *yogīs* can never hope to taste.

In the winter, a major difficulty *sāṅkīrtana* devotees experience in the north is the cold. In Montreal, where minus 20C (-4F) was the average winter temperature, *sāṅkīrtana* devotees would just freeze permanently for the winter, and in the spring we would thaw out. I recall standing under a warm shower one spring evening and feeling the sensation of touch returning to my hands. It had not fully been there for a few months. But the austerity was worth it, because it had attracted Lord Caitanya's mercy.

Here is an example of such reciprocation from Lord Caitanya:

I was in front of a store in Winnipeg, where minus 20 was a warm winter day. Because I was doing well, I couldn't use gloves, since I was always taking money and giving change. Then my hands froze stiff—I couldn't move them. I prayed to Lord Caitanya, "How can I distribute books if I can't move my fingers?" All of a sudden I felt a warmth enter my hands; they thawed and the fingers unlocked. It was like that all day long. It was wonderful. It was a miracle. I was so elated that I just laughed while selling books. I was experiencing how the Lord protects His devotee. I thought, "Let me always suffer all kinds of hardships, but let me always feel the mercy of Lord Caitanya, and let me try not to get in the way of Lord Caitanya's mercy."

There are hardships in doing *sāṅkīrtana*, but tolerating those hardships is as much service as the distribution of books. This material world is a place of difficulty. By continuing to do *sāṅkīrtana* despite the difficulties, we will find that the dualities of happiness and distress diminish. With this

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

vision there are no obstacles to book distribution, just different steps to perfection and Kṛṣṇa. See the snow, cold, fatigue, hunger, rejection, and criticism in this way, and you will see Kṛṣṇa always.

* * *

Maṇidhara Dāsa (ACBSP)

In the early 70s I was distributing in a town in South Germany called Freiburg. Late in the afternoon I heard screams coming from down the street, and soon I saw a totally insane man running around half naked and beating people at random with a large leather belt that had a big buckle at the end. I made my way out of there, but since I was in a *dhoti* the lunatic easily spotted me and made his way toward me. Being a new *bhakta*, I thought this might be my first test of faith, so I turned my back to him and handed a book to the next lady passing by. He jumped me from behind and threw me to the ground.

As I lay there on my back looking up at his crazy face, I saw that he had raised his arm and was about to strike me with the big buckle at the end of the belt. “*Namas te narasimhāya!*” I screamed as loud as I could, and continued reciting the Nṛsiṃha prayers at the top of my lungs.

An amazing thing happened. The man couldn’t bring his arm down; it was as if he were paralyzed. He couldn’t move—he couldn’t hit me and he couldn’t go anywhere. He just stood over me shouting “Stop it!” But I didn’t stop reciting the prayers, and Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva wouldn’t let him move.

After a few moments a police van rolled up and screeched to a halt. Five policemen jumped out, grabbed the madman, dragged him off, and stuck him into the van. Then they drove off the way they came. The whole incident was over in a few minutes.

I stood up, collected the books that had fallen on the ground, and announced to the people who had gathered to watch, as if at some sort of circus performance, that “The show is over. We thank you for the applause, and here we have these wonderful books for you to take home.” Some people laughed, and some indeed bought a book, thinking “A praying monk lying in front of a monster trying to attack him but not able to, and then being rescued by the police, was a rather unusual event and worth giving a donation to find out what it’s all about.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda once said, “Work now, *samādhi* later.” Without austerity, there is no nectar and no taste. But actually, what kind of austerity is this book distribution? Can it be compared to the austerity of the *karmīs* and *vikarmīs*, who work so hard but are never satisfied? Can it be compared to the horrifying association they get and to the karmic reactions that will eventually hunt them down? The book distributors’ austerity is minor if you compare them. Another question to ask is, Where is that company which allows its workers to try out a job, and even if they don’t produce any result right away they will be well fed and housed and encouraged to try the job again the next day? That’s not how the material world works, as any hard-working family man can confirm. Many of our new book distributors would be fired in one week at an ordinary job.

Finally, success on *saṅkīrtana* does not depend on the number of books distributed but on the sincere effort of the devotee to please the Supreme Lord. As the ultimate manager of His “firm,” He never forgets even the smallest service rendered by His devotee. That fact can be easily

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

experienced on *sāṅkīrtana*. And out of this realization grows the devotee’s gratitude toward the Supreme Lord, and this gratitude enthuses him to serve more and more. Then Kṛṣṇa gives him this realization: “Where is the austerity on *sāṅkīrtana*? If I understand that my eternal nature and the eternal nature of everyone else is to be a servant of Kṛṣṇa, it is simply bliss to go soul to soul every day to help them understand who they are.” *Sāṅkīrtana* is austere only when we think we’re the material body.

* * *

Premārṇava Dāsa

A young woman on the periphery of our Stockholm congregation came into the boutique at our downtown Hare Kṛṣṇa Center to buy something. She mentioned to me that she had just returned home from India, where she had seen ISKCON devotees on the street in Delhi selling books in the 45-degree-Celsius(113-Fahrenheit) heat.

This reminded me of a passage in *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, from the chapter entitled “New Delhi—Crying Alone in the Wilderness”:

Summer came, and the 110-degree heat made it almost intolerable to spend time out of doors. Hot, dust-laden winds blew in the city streets. Streetside hawkers closed their businesses during the day. In early May, during 112-degree heat, a man collapsed in the street and died of heatstroke. But Abhay ignored the heat and the ordinary limitations of the body.

One day while delivering *Back to Godhead* to various addresses in the city, Abhay suddenly began reeling, half unconscious, overcome by the heat. At that very moment, an acquaintance of his, a man he had approached during his preaching, happened to be passing by in his car, and he took Abhay to a doctor. The doctor diagnosed him as a victim of heatstroke and ordered him to rest.

Comment by Vijaya Dāsa

It’s good to remember this story when we’re having a difficult time on book distribution. Śrīla Prabhupāda was ready to give his life to help people enter the path of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Because he did give his life to help us, we are participating in this most sublime process of *bhakti-yoga*. To show him our gratitude, we should follow in his footsteps and try to give as much of our life as we can to help others start on the royal path back to Godhead. Book distribution can be difficult. But this difficulty is called “the fire of ordeal.” To purify gold one must heat it until all the impurities come out; same with ghee. *Sāṅkīrtana* is like that: when we go on book distribution, we get purified until the only desire left in our heart is the desire to serve Kṛṣṇa. So any difficulty we experience on *sāṅkīrtana* is very good—it’s purifying. When there is difficulty, what do you do? You take shelter of Kṛṣṇa.

In America there is a saying that “There are no atheists in the foxholes.” When a war is going on, the infantry soldiers dig ditches and hunker down in them to avoid the bullets flying over their heads. Practically all the soldiers are praying to God because they’re in great danger. So difficulties undertaken in the service of Kṛṣṇa are good. As Queen Kuntī prayed, “O Lord, please give me difficulties again and again.” Why? Today people would think she should see a psychiatrist. But the reason she prays that way is because difficulties undertaken in Kṛṣṇa’s service force us to take

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

shelter of Him.

The *Bhāgavatam* contains a fascinating historical account of a devotee king named Rantideva. Once he fasted for forty-eight days. He was just getting ready to break his fast when a *brāhmaṇa* came in and said, “O king, I’m hungry. Please, can you feed me?”

The king replied, “Yes, yes, please come.” And he fed him sumptuously.

Rantideva was again getting ready to break his fast when a *sūdra* appeared on the scene and said, “O king, I’m really hungry. Can you please feed me?”

The king replied, “Yes, yes, please come,” and he fed him sumptuously.

Again Rantideva prepared to break his fast, but just then another man entered, surrounded by his dogs. He said, “O king, I and my company of dogs are very hungry. Please give us something to eat.”

“Sure, please come,” said Rantideva, and then with great respect he gave the remaining food to the man and his dogs.

At that point all that was left was enough water for one person, but when Rantideva prepared to drink it, a *caṇḍāla* arrived and said, “O king, although I’m lowborn, kindly give me some water to drink.”

Aggrieved at the pitiable words of the *caṇḍāla*, the king replied, “Certainly,” and gave him the last of his water to drink.

Then the king made a very powerful statement:

I do not pray to the Supreme Personality of Godhead for the eight perfections of mystic yoga, nor for salvation from repeated birth and death. I want only to stay among all the living entities and suffer all distresses on their behalf, so that they may be freed from suffering. [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 9.21.12]

When I first read this I thought, “That’s an amazing statement, and something a *sāṅkīrtana* devotee can meditate on and imbibe.” This is actually the mood of a devotee preacher. Preaching is difficult, but this difficulty is for a great cause, namely, to deliver the conditioned souls from the deep well of material existence. So although book distribution may be difficult, it is a glorious difficulty. Austerity is the wealth of the *brāhmaṇas*. Book distribution can be very austere, but this is good—it’s medicine for the soul. If everyone we approached took a book and gave a nice donation, where would the austerity be? Where would the purification be? It’s good that it’s austere. As Śrīla Prabhupāda once said, “For one who desires a comfortable life in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, advancement is very slow.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda has left us a mission: to help others become free of suffering. The other part of the mission he gave us is internal—to become purified and advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that 99% of our advancement in spiritual life comes from chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. Chanting the *mahā-mantra* is the internal cleansing. And chanting this mantra gives us the *śakti* necessary to succeed in the external mission of book distribution and so many other services.

* * *

Sureśa Dāsa (ACBSP)

In the beginning we sold *Kṛṣṇa* books door to door. I remember one day I went out and at every door I sold a book. The secret to being a successful book distributor, I found, was to be an

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

avid reader of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

But when I first started, all the other devotees were selling books quite easily but I couldn't sell any. I tried everything. Then I remembered reading in *The Nectar of Devotion* that if we truly wish to earn Kṛṣṇa's service, we must cry for it. As an experiment, I went to a place in the temple where no one would see or hear me (so I wouldn't be branded as a fake), and cried again and again for permission to sell Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. Gradually, day by day, I was permitted to sell some books.

One day I was selling books door to door in the Hollywood Hills when I came to a house way out in the woods. Before ringing the doorbell I said a prayer admitting that I was completely unqualified for serving Śrīla Prabhupāda. I frankly admitted I didn't have any ability to speak effectively or to properly represent the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. I begged to be empowered to say something significant and to continue being allowed to sell Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. I rang the doorbell, and an elderly woman answered the door. She burst into tears when she saw me. She said that she was old and practically invalid but that she had been begging Kṛṣṇa to send a devotee to her home because, being way out in the woods, she couldn't visit our temple. She bought all my books.

On another day I met a hippie in the hills near Santa Cruz. I tried to sell him a *Nectar of Devotion*, but he was broke and had no money for the book. I continued selling door to door for the next several hours and collected a little extra money to pay for his book. I hitchhiked several miles back to his house and gave him the NOD. It touched him so much that I would care about him and give him that book that he read it, later moved into the temple, became an initiated disciple, and eventually took *brāhmaṇa* initiation.

* * *

Vaiśeṣika Dāsa (ACBSP)

Sometimes devotees are afraid to go out on book distribution because they think so many horrible things may happen, but if we overcome the tricks of the mind and just go out, we'll find that so many wonderful things will happen.

* * *

Nidrā Devī Dāsī (ACBSP)

There may be some discomfort for the gross and subtle body by distributing books, but the spiritual pleasures are very relishable. As soon as we try to get off the bodily/mental platform, tolerate, and make the mind a friend, then we taste the nectar of how our soul and other souls feel happy in a Kṛṣṇa conscious exchange (a glimpse of loving exchange appears. What is so-called poisonous in the beginning is nectar in the end. Why not engage in some *tapasya* for the sake of doing the highest welfare work? It is worth some austerity to save ourselves and others from drowning. It may seem difficult to help others and keep ourselves afloat at the same time, but when we and the souls again begin to experience real life (after eons of drowning in material consciousness, we feel relief and can appreciate the higher taste that comes from engaging in austerity for the pleasure of Guru-Gaurāṅga.

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

Aiśvarya Dāsa

Sometimes in movies something appears out of the bottom of the screen that surprises the audience. In my movie I'm talking to a couple of big Texas boys, one of whom is wearing a "Rancid" T-shirt, when all of a sudden out of the bottom of my screen comes a humongous dark brown chicken. For some reason I had missed it when I had approached them; otherwise I would not have. The unholy thing careers up, barely missing me, and sticks to Rancid-priya's face. As the Neanderthal man is ferociously gorging himself on his freshly killed dinosaur chicken leg, I brace myself to somehow or other keep his concentration focused on the main task at hand. To add to the torture, his friend now reveals the poor creature's other galactic limb, and they both engage in ravaging the kill. But somehow or other, even though their oral cavities are fully engaged, their eyes remain focused on me, and while still banqueting they manage to eventually pass over donations.

Later on Rancid-priya happens on by and enthusiastically thanks me for the book. At that time I am engaging one hesitant lady, and Rancid-priya gloriously says, "It's a great book! Get it." Thus he becomes the missing link that helps her decide to also take a book. Progressive!

* * *

Aja Govinda Dāsa

We were distributing books in Boise, Idaho, downtown. Three of us. Every Wednesday there's a "live after five" concert there. We tried about fifty people but nobody would even listen. We were very much disheartened. Almost everyone was drunk. We prayed hard to Rādhārāṇī for Her blessings. Then miracles started happening—one book after another was going out. All of us were engaged, talking to different people. We were busy distributing and at the same time trying to hide what we were doing from the security personnel, who were patrolling the event.

Suddenly a policewoman called me over. Her face looked tough. I prayed to Rādhārāṇī and also to Lord Nṛsimhadeva, who never fails to protect His devotees. She gruffly asked, "What are you doing? What do you have in your hands?"

Almost trembling and collecting all my strength, I boldly said, "We're Hare Kṛṣṇas. We're distributing these transcendental books for the benefit of mankind. These books will save humanity from suffering in the cycle of repeated birth and death."

As I looked into her eyes, they softened, and to my surprise she said, "Yes, you can distribute these books without fear."

Since that day, on the authority of this policewoman, whom Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī sent to endorse and encourage our book distribution, we boldly and freely distribute books in downtown concerts.

All glories to Rādhārāṇī, who sent Her messenger to help us! Devotees of ISKCON, please do not fear or hesitate. From my personal experience I can assure you that Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is with us.

* * *

Ambarīṣa Dāsa (Russia)

Positively, we can see from history that Jesus Christ personally spread his teachings for only

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

a short time and gathered a few followers, and people really started to join a few hundred years later. Negatively, Karl Marx tried to spread his teachings but was not at all successful, but years after he died a big movement manifested, unfortunately.

We don't know what the ultimate result will be of Śrīla Prabhupāda's going to the West, starting ISKCON, and writing his books, and of all the books that have been distributed since then. In our lifetimes we may not see what Kṛṣṇa arranges. Our duty is simply to carry out the order of Lord Caitanya to instruct all the people we meet about the teachings of Lord Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. This is what will liberate them and us.

* * *

Candraśekhara Ācārya Dāsa

I once asked Padmanābha Prabhu, a veteran traveling book distributor of more than twenty years, from the Juhu Beach temple, “What is the secret to doing book distribution for all these years?”

“We are servants of Kṛṣṇa,” he replied, “so that means *service*. Śrīla Prabhupāda once said that the most important service is book distribution. And Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that one who preaches His message is the most dear to Him. So guru and Kṛṣṇa are saying this.” He added: “The reason why I am still doing TSKP is because I always pray to Lord Kṛṣṇa and Lord Nṛsimhadeva that I can keep doing this service. I have seen so many devotees come and go. I've seen so many problems with the van drivers, with the party, with the police—but I've always prayed to stay in this service, and I'm still at it!”

Ayodhyā Dāsa, a devotee of Indian descent, joined ISKCON in 1976 in Detroit and was initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda in 1977. While in Detroit he distributed books while serving in the life membership department. But for many years he wanted to go to Vṛndāvana. In 1995 Kṛṣṇa made the arrangement. That year his brother-in-law passed away in India, and he was asked to attend the funeral ceremony because he was the only surviving male in the family. He took the opportunity to visit Vṛndāvana. He loved Vṛndāvana and decided he would move there.

Dīna Bandhu Prabhu told Ayodhyā that Prabhupāda wanted his books distributed on the trains, and Dīna Bandhu encouraged him to try it. He did, and though he didn't distribute many books, he got a taste for book distribution. He was also going shop to shop in Vṛndāvana and various nearby towns, but then he started distributing exclusively on the trains. He liked the trains for three reasons: one, because the people had *lakṣmī*; two, because they were sitting there with nothing to do; and three, because there were different people every day. He began traveling from Mathurā to Delhi and back every day.

Every morning he looks forward to going out again to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. He doesn't take a day off. He even goes out on Janmāṣṭamī—and he's 76 years old! But in the summer he goes to the West because it's so hot in India and his wife and family are there. He's especially inspired by Śrīla Prabhupāda's statement “If you want to please me, then distribute my books.” Upon hearing that for the first time, he thought, “This is something I can do. There are not many other things I can do, so it's Kṛṣṇa's mercy that I can do something that is pleasing to Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa.” Ayodhyā Prabhu likes to recall how he sold a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* volume to an Indian gentleman who was later initiated as Rasarāja Prabhu, one of the leaders of

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

the Bhaktivedanta Institute.

When Ayodhyā distributes the *Bhagavad-gītā* he tells the person, “This *Bhagavad-gītā* is no ordinary book. Although it is five thousand years old, it is still famous all over the world, and although so many *Bhagavad-gītās* had been translated into other languages and read all over the world before this one, no one became a devotee of Kṛṣṇa. But this *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* has made thousands of devotees of Kṛṣṇa all over the world.”

Sometimes he tells the customer, “I don’t think you are going to buy this book, but at least look at the quality of the printing and the artwork.” When they look at the nice quality of the book, they quite often buy it. Reverse psychology. Ayodhyā Prabhu says, “To distribute books is not easy. You have to be humble, tolerant, and patient. Once I showed a book to a Muslim. I was detached, but I was trying. The man said, ‘I’m a Muslim. I’m not interested in this book. But because of your gentle behavior, I will buy this book from you.’”

Ayodhyā Prabhu has dedicated his life to book distribution and wants other devotees to also get the mercy by distributing books. He says, “Devotees who retire can go to India or anywhere and distribute books. What good is playing with the grandchildren and all that? To distribute books is austere, but it is also very sweet. The austerity brings the satisfaction. Book distribution is very nice. Prabhupāda once said, ‘You can hire a cook, you can hire a *pūjārī*, you can hire a cleaner, but a preacher you cannot hire, because that comes from the heart.’”

* * *

Chowpatti, India

Madhu Priyā Mātājī had a simple and effective formula. She would always carry several *Bhagavad-gītās* with her each time she stepped out of her apartment. While in the elevator, coming down from and going up to her tenth-floor residence, she never lost a chance to preach and show books to whoever was in the elevator with her. The unsuspecting residents of the building were simply wonderstruck at the simple but terse message she persuasively conveyed in just a few seconds. Often her cogent plea compelled them to take a book. During these brief sojourns in the lift, she would unfailingly distribute two or three *Bhagavad-gītās* each time she went out, thereby transmitting Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mercy in a unique way.

On one occasion she and a devotee friend went to the nearby Mahālakṣmī temple. They stood at the entrance during a torrid noontime and approached many in the crowd, but their attempts to distribute books were unsuccessful. As hours passed, the apathy of the huge crowd and the sultry weather sank their morale. Desperately, Madhu Priyā said aloud, to no one in particular: “No one seems to be understanding the value of these books. Life is passing away. These books alone can bring respite to the suffering souls.” A handicapped beggar, who had been quietly observing the duo, became more interested. As the *mātājīs* began to take the surging crowd to task, this beggar became convinced of their message. After collecting all the loose change he had accumulated throughout the day, he had just enough money for one book. Without the slightest hesitation he paid up and took a copy. As he left, he cheerfully promised to study the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

Reminiscing about these ecstatic experiences, Madhu Priyā concludes that the keys to her success on book distribution are perseverance and sincere prayers to guru. With all humility she said, “If a simple housewife like me, with no special qualifications, can become an active book distributor, then anyone can take part in this transcendental *saṅkīrtana*.”

* * *

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

Gokula-līlā Devī Dāśī

While speaking with a boy who'd recently taken up *bhakti-yoga*, I realized how important purity and Vaiṣṇava character are for distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and inspiring people to take up devotional service.

The boy was named Anchal. He had recently come to New Zealand from India, supposedly to further his studies but actually to meet his guru. He related to me how four months after his arrival here he had met a *brahmacārī* distributing books on the street in Auckland. He had thought to himself, "If this person is really spiritual, a lover of God, then even if I provoke him he will surely be very patient and display his saintly character." Anchal described how he had tried to provoke the devotee this way and that, but how the devotee had remained very patient with him and never lost his cool. Anchal was so impressed with the *brahmacārī* that he thought, "I've never met anyone so wonderful in my life!" Soon thereafter Anchal met Devāmṛta Swami, and during their first meeting he accepted him as his guru. Anchal is now chanting sixteen rounds.

Good character is the most important factor in distributing Kṛṣṇa consciousness—more than our joking ability, our hairstyle, the spot we're given to distribute in, some new *sāṅkīrtana* lines, etc. We don't know the future of those we meet on *sāṅkīrtana*, and so we should always display the highest Vaiṣṇava behavior, even if someone tries to provoke us.

* * *

Govinda Dāsa

Some of the most exciting book distribution incidents have taken place at the Mumbai Central Railway station. It all began in the mid 80s, when book distribution as a part of regular service in the temple was in its nascent stage. With very few devotees distributing, nobody had ever thought of going to the railway station. One day Kṛṣṇānanda Prabhu decided to take the initiative and told me to accompany him.

I had just joined the temple. As a teenager coming from a small town, I found the big city overwhelming. I was definitely nervous, and one glance at the confident, smart-looking men of Mumbai, always on the move, really put me off. I was convinced I couldn't do book distribution. Impossible.

But Kṛṣṇānanda Prabhu was adamant. He was the temple commander, and since he had ordered me to pack my book bag, I had no choice but to comply. For a new *bhakta*, there was no question of personal likes or dislikes. As we reached the platform, Kṛṣṇānanda Prabhu was in his element. He tapped a traveler on the shoulder and introduced himself as a MSc. Mtech from the U.S.A. The smart English-speaking *sādhu* fascinated all of them, and many took one of Prabhupāda's books.

Well, he could distribute in that style with good success, but for me, this was a nightmare. My worst fears came true when all of a sudden he put a few books in my hand and, after we'd entered a train waiting to depart, pushed me inside a coach. "Go," he said, "just give Prabhupāda's books to all. Come on!" As I heard his assertive and firm voice, I almost fainted. Kṛṣṇānanda Prabhu then went into another coach to distribute.

I trembled as I looked out at the passengers seated in my coach, with all eyes on me. I was on the verge of tears. Not able to muster up enough strength, I gave up, went to a vacant seat in a corner, and sat all alone, sighing. "Why is Kṛṣṇa doing this to me?" I thought. "Please, Kṛṣṇa, take me out of this mess!"

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

With no one to share my tale of woe, I was miserable. Just then a complete stranger came up to me, smiled, sat down next to me, and asked, “What do you have in your bag?” Clumsily repositioning myself, I showed him the books. He exclaimed, “Oh! I know these books. They’re wonderful!” And immediately he took a few big books and a dozen small books.

I was ecstatic. I ran looking for Kṛṣṇānanda Prabhu, hardly able to contain my excitement. Sharing my joy and seeing the sparkle in my eyes, he commented, “Your days are numbered. You will be hooked on this.”

Today, two decades later, I am. And I’m not alone. Book distribution is one of the main activities of the Chowpatti temple, with three bus parties going out during the winter marathon and many devotees engaged full-time in book distribution.

* * *

Jayānanda Dāsa

Once I was distributing books in Munich with Varāha Mūrti Prabhu, a stalwart German book distributor for many years. We were in the midst of several weeks of very successful distribution, and on this particular day he was making an extra effort to distribute a hundred hardbound big books.

As evening arrived and it began to get dark, Varāha had just about reached his goal (he had distributed 97 big books). Then a big demon came and started following him around the shopping street, breaking up any conversation Varāha tried to initiate. After several aborted attempts, Varāha, in the mood of total dependence on Kṛṣṇa (as well as a bit of transcendental frustration), began to yell the Nṛsimhadeva *mantras* directly at this man.

Suddenly, from around the corner came Jāhnavā Priyā Mātāji, a disciple of Jayapatāka Swami. Jāhnavā Priyā is by no means small and timid. She’s at least six feet tall and has a very athletic build. She also worked as an agent for the FBI in Atlanta. She came up and pushed this man across the shopping street and began to chastise him very severely, enabling Varāha to finally escape and distribute 103 hardbound books. All glories to our *kṣatriya mātājis!*

* * *

Karuṇā-dhāriṇī Devī Dāsī

The bad days are just as valuable as the good days. Failure is the pillar of success. For strength, be sure to chant your rounds from beginning to end, without interruption, before you go out. And ask yourself, “Have I behaved pleasingly with the Vaiṣṇavas in my community?” Kṛṣṇa is not much inclined to help a devotee preach if that devotee does not interact with Vaiṣṇavas in a way that pleases Him.

* * *

Lomāncita Dāsa

As on many other days, I was distributing door to door. But today it was already past noon and I hadn’t distributed any books. So I prayed to Lord Kṛṣṇa very intensely: “My Lord, I am completely helpless, but with Your permission maybe I can distribute a few books to these people.”

Chapter 7: Determination on Sankīrtana

When I rang the bell at the next door, a nice lady took two books. “Thank You, my Lord,” I thought. At the next door a math instructor took four books. A few doors later I meet a very interesting lady. She had already read *The Path of Perfection* and liked it very much. After a pleasant talk and my presentation of the whole set, I asked her for a donation: “Some people give 100 euros,” I said. She then started to take out big bills—20 euros, another 20 euros, another 20 euros. As I watched I thought, “This is generous.” Then the lady puts out the fourth and also the fifth bill—altogether 100 euros. “Yep, this is enough to give her more books,” I say to myself, smiling within.

“This is all I have. Is it enough?” she asks.

“Yes, of course. Very generous of you. I didn’t expect so much. Just wait a moment and I will bring you all the books.”

As I ran down the stairs I calculated in my head how many books I could give her for 100 euros: one full set, three mini sets, plus one *Bhagavad-gītā*—altogether 19 books. Unbelievable!

I retrieved the books from the van, and as I carried them the stack reached above my head. As I entered her apartment she said, “Oh, Santa Claus has come!” I described to her a little about the books she was getting and told her she might want to give the three extra mini sets as presents to friends. We separated in a completely transcendental atmosphere, wishing each other all the best. I felt like I was flying in the air. This episode was all due to the mercy of all-merciful Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Quite often they amaze me.

It was around noon when I came to big house surrounded by a high fence with locked iron gates. I rang the bell, hoping someone would come to the gates. Usually in this kind of circumstance people kick you out from a “safe” distance, but I was counting on the mercy of guru, Kṛṣṇa, and the Vaiṣṇavas, and especially Śrīla Prabhupāda. Finally a big woman opened the door at the top of some stairs and shouted, “What do you want?”

I shouted back, “Delivery! Today everyone receives something.”

She came down the stairs and I presented the books to her through the bars of the gates, which remained locked. After a short conversation she took a *Bhagavad-gītā* and a *Bhāgavatam* 1.1.

I continued along the street and stopped a passing car. The driver smiled as I made my pitch, and the conversation revealed that the lady whom I had last visited was his wife. I offered him more books, and he took the *Bhāgavatam* 1.2.

But the tale is not over yet. In the evening he parked his car right in from of me in another part of town, and so we met again. I asked him if his wife was happy with the books, and he nodded with a smile. He said he wanted some more books for his son. “No problem,” I said, and off we went to his store to transact some transcendental business.

In this way Lord Kṛṣṇa showed this family His mercy three times in a single day.

* * *

Madhumaṅgala Dāsa

One day I was distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books on Garnet Avenue in San Diego, a few blocks from the temple and a few blocks from the beach. This avenue is frequented daily by throngs of tourists and those born to shop. There are many surfing stores, pizza takeouts, bars,

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

restaurants, and tattoo parlors. Just about everyone ignored me, saying “No money” or “I’m in a hurry.” . . . Frustrating for me.

Then at one corner I approached a serious-looking young man wearing a worn-out leather jacket. He also ignored me, but after he passed me I called to him in desperation: “Don’t go; yes, I’m calling you.”

He turned around, and if looks could kill I think I would have been dead.

“You talking to me? What you want?” He came right up to me, glaring.

For a second I thought, “*This guy is going to give it to me straight in my face.*” I replied, “Look, I know it hasn’t been easy for you, I know there have been times when you’ve been crying inside. I’m not trying to patronize you. What I am saying to you, I am saying out of compassion. It is the material energy that is causing all the problems in your life.”

To my astonishment, he looked down and then looked up at me and nodded. I showed him the books, and he told me he had seen them and already had some. I asked him, “When was the last time a person said ‘I love you’ to you?”

He became silent, looked up, and said sadly, “About three years ago.”

“Well, I love you very much,” I said, and gave him a big hug while whispering in his ear: “You are a very special soul. Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare!”

He told me I was right, and with a warm smile he said, “I think I’ll take that one,” pointing to *Śrī Īsopaniṣad*. I gave him an invitation to the Sunday program and told him I looked forward to seeing him again.

We should take the compassion Śrīla Prabhupāda has kindly bestowed upon us and give it to the fallen, conditioned souls. Then we will be recognized by Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu and will make progress toward going home, back to Godhead. Śrīla Prabhupāda *kī jaya!*

When I’m struggling and only a few people are taking Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, I often pray in desperation for Prabhupāda’s mercy. In that mood I’ll introduce myself and say, “My spiritual master has told me to distribute these books. He told me that if I distribute these books sincerely to whomever I meet, I will attain spiritual perfection. I’m just sincerely trying to follow his orders to the best of my ability.”

Often, upon hearing what I say the person will become interested in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, take some, and give a nice donation.

Often I’ll turn to the back cover and show them Śrīla Prabhupāda’s picture and say, “This is my spiritual grandfather. In these books he has presented Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. These books have made people from all over the world devotees of Kṛṣṇa.” Many people like to hear that and automatically become interested in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. Then I’ll say, “Is it not wonderful that two people who do not know each other from a bar of soap can be the best of friends? Today you and I have proved to the rest of the world that friendship costs nothing. Would the world not be a better place if more people could be like you and me?” They agree and become very sincere. After I have given them Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, I give them a big hug and whisper into their ears, “How did you become such a special spirit soul?”

Each fortunate person who takes one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books is a very rare soul. I try to show my appreciation for the little service they have done for him.

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

* * *

Oṁkāra Dāsa

I was distributing books in the LA airport on a Monday and it had become really tough for me. For some reason the rest of the *sāṅkīrtana* team did well but I really struggled. Every day that week I went out to the airport, and distribution kept getting more and more difficult, until Saturday came. On Saturday nobody would even talk to me. I became very frustrated and felt miserable. I was having the poignant realization of how I completely lacked the qualification to even attempt to engage in Śrī Kṛṣṇa's service. I felt like I wanted to die because my body was useless for serving Kṛṣṇa, but I knew I would go to the lower planets to suffer more if I left my body like that.

Feeling like a riven cloud, I asked Kṛṣṇa from the bottom of my heart to have mercy on me. The next person I saw I approached, and he actually showed some interest! I showed him the *Bhagavad-gītā* and asked for a donation. He asked if he could have the book and I told him, "Of course!" I was so excited he was even talking to me that I would have given him the book for free. He pulled a bill out of his wallet and handed it to me. Without looking I put it right in my pocket. I was so happy that I also gave him a *Quest for Enlightenment*, a *Śrī Īsopaniṣad*, and an invitation card.

After he departed and was some distance away, I wondered what he had given me. I pulled the note out of my pocket and saw that it was a \$20 bill, but there was something inside. I unfolded the bill to see another 20. I could tell there was still one more bill there, and so I took a look and saw yet another 20! "Kṛṣṇa is so kind," I thought, "our best well-wisher."

The next person I saw I approached, and he eagerly took a book and gave \$20. The next person did the same. I was in Vaikuṅṭha! The rest of the day I looked for people to give books to, and everyone gave a nice donation until I ran out of books.

The next day I realized why all this had happened. Siddhānta Prabhu had been reading from his memories book during breakfast when he read a story from Bhakta Dāsa. At the time he was a temple president and was noticing that he was having a hard time remembering Kṛṣṇa throughout his service. He had to travel somewhere and noticed he was able to remember Kṛṣṇa better while traveling. So he wrote Śrīla Prabhupāda asking if it was better to do more service for Kṛṣṇa and remember Him less, or to do less service for Kṛṣṇa and remember Him more. Śrīla Prabhupāda replied that it is our mission to remember Kṛṣṇa as much as possible. But Bhakta Dāsa should not quit being temple president. Rather, he should realize that he had no qualification to be president and to beg Kṛṣṇa to give him the qualification to properly execute his service. In that way he would remember Kṛṣṇa at all times.

I realized then that I was not thinking of Kṛṣṇa enough the previous week, and that that was why I was having so much difficulty. As soon as I started turning to Kṛṣṇa, then Kṛṣṇa reciprocated wonderfully. After hearing that story from Siddhānta, I meditated on those instructions during *sāṅkīrtana* and had a blissful day. We must always remember Kṛṣṇa and never forget Him. After all, this is the *Kṛṣṇa consciousness* movement!

* * *

Prabodhānanda Dāsa

It had been a most disappointing day. We had been trying to distribute books for more than two hours without anyone even looking at a single book, let alone taking one. It was becoming

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

more austere as temperatures soared in the summer heat of Mumbai.

Now it was late afternoon and we were exhausted. We began praying intensely, desperately hoping our bags would lose some weight, for we'd been dragging them through the dense crowd of passengers for quite a long time now. Just as we were planning to call it a day, I picked up two SSRs and desperately ran toward two young men seated near a window. I placed the books in their hands and told them about them. They didn't even bother to give me a second look, absorbed as they were in conversation. Dejected, with one final burst of energy I frantically turned the pages and pointed to a picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda. "Do you know who he is? He's Śrīla Prabhupāda. He gave his life for you and me. He is your real friend."

What we couldn't do for so long, Śrīla Prabhupāda did in a moment.

As they gazed at Śrīla Prabhupāda's picture, they simultaneously drew out money from their wallets and bought the two SSRs, all the while inquiring about "the Swami."

I learned an essential lesson: It's Śrīla Prabhupāda's intense desire and compassion to deliver the fallen souls that make people take these books, while we are nothing more than his simple instruments. As this truth dawned on me, I regained my zest for distribution, and a till-then disappointing afternoon ended in a most satisfying and ecstatic day of book distribution.

* * *

Saṅjaya Dāsa

I remember when I went out on book distribution for the first time alone. My mind gave me a hard time, but I tried to do it for the pleasure of Śrīla Prabhupāda, Śrī Śrī Nitāi-Gaurasundara, Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and Their devotees. For a long time no one responded. But I knew that if I persisted Kṛṣṇa would surely reciprocate. Also, we were told that we should not be attached to the results: "Just perform your duty." *Karmaṇy evādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana*: "You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you're not entitled to the fruits of action." *Saṅkīrtana* is the practical means of applying this philosophy.

We learn many things during book distribution. We see how Kṛṣṇa's mercy flows. We may think that a certain person surely won't take a book—but he takes one and gives a nice donation. On book distribution we have to approach people in a very humble state of mind, disregarding their bodily designation and just seeing everyone as a spirit soul. We have to present each book as an offering to the Paramātmā sitting within the person's heart. We have to pray to the Paramātmā to please inspire the person to take a book.

Humility means to work boldly for Kṛṣṇa—to have confidence that we're offering people the highest of all things. And then just see how Kṛṣṇa reciprocates! Initially book distribution may be very difficult, but somehow Kṛṣṇa helps. Just blissfully present the book to as many people as possible. Do not get disturbed if someone shuns you or insults you or starts blaspheming. Just ignore them and approach the innocent ones. As His Holiness Tamāl Krishna Goswami once said, "We do not have the potency of Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu or Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura or Śrīla Prabhupāda to convince the most fallen."

Try to convince, but stay away from arguments, because if you argue then passion and ignorance may overcome you. His Holiness Kavicandra Swami once said, "Book distribution is like cycling uphill. The moment you lose enthusiasm, you glide downwards. So it is a constant ecstatic struggle. The more people you approach, the higher the probability of quality people taking a book from you."

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

* * *

Sthānu Dāsa

I was distributing in a small town named Yambol, Bulgaria. I had been running all day with a big bag full of books, but I'd distributed only one or two books. My mind was very disturbed because it was soooo difficult.

Then I had a realization: “The problem is in my consciousness.”

Completely exhausted at the end of the day, I stood in front of a restaurant in the center of town and prayed to Kṛṣṇa: “Please forgive me for my lack of proper consciousness and help me be Your surrendered instrument in this restaurant.”

The two security guards were very compassionate when they saw me lugging around my bag of books, so they each purchased one and let me in. But they said, “Here no one will take a book; the customers are not very philosophical.”

“Let me try.”

At the first table an old couple took two *Bhāgavatam* volumes. At the second table a group of people took a whole set of books—thirteen in all! I was in ecstasy seeing Kṛṣṇa's mercy in action. Table three took three books. Within a few minutes I distributed more than thirty books. As I looked over the restaurant, I saw that everyone was looking through the books and talking about the beautiful pictures. It became a Vaikuṅṭha restaurant!

Now all I had left was a set of thirteen books. I approached a strange-looking man who said he was a magician. He offered me a seat at his table and some herbal tea. Then he asked me to explain the books. I quickly told him what was in every one of them. Then he thought a moment and said, “These books are very dangerous! You must stop distributing them!”

“Thank you for the tea, but I'll go on with my service. Goodbye.” I quickly arose from my seat, remembering some verses from the sixteenth chapter of the *Gītā* about the qualities of the demons.

There was one more table left, but the people there had no interest.

As I was about to leave, the magician came up to me and asked, “Hey, boy, how much do all the books cost?” I told him the price, and to my surprise he paid it and took all thirteen books, saying, “I will make a war with you guys, so I want to study the enemy.”

“Good luck!” I replied happily and left.

This all happened fifteen years ago, and we never heard from the magician. There was no war against our movement; I think Kṛṣṇa tricked him.

Kṛṣṇa is amazing! We just have to surrender and allow Him to use us as an instrument: *nimitta-mātraṁ bhava savya-sācin* (*Bhagavad-gītā* 11.33).

* * *

Tulasī Devī Dāsī

While I was distributing books in the airport in North Carolina, a man came up while I was speaking to someone and disrupted the conversation. He was so nasty and obnoxious—criticizing and using foul language—that the person I was speaking to left.

Then the man became even more obnoxious. He was so loud that everyone in the airport lobby and at the ticket counter, gift shop, and restaurant was looking. A real foulmouth. I considered leaving, but then I thought, “This is a really good spot and if I leave I'll miss out on some good

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

distribution.” So I decided to just sorta deal with him humorously.

One thing that came out in between his insults and blasphemy was how he didn’t believe in reincarnation and we did. So, with a lot of people now watching, I decided to tease him about that: “I wonder what you’re going to be in your next life,” I said to him with a smile.

To my surprise, he started softening up when he saw I wasn’t intimidated by him. Then I got him to eat a cookie, after he’d first refused it, saying I was probably trying to kill him. Suddenly he took it and began to munch, cussing at me between bites.

Then all of a sudden he started revealing his mind. “A few months ago my best friend since childhood was killed in a car accident. And a couple of weeks ago I had a dream. My friend came to me and told me not to worry—he’d been reincarnated. He assured me he was alive and happy. I asked him where he was and what he was doing. He told me he was living in a beautiful forest with a big meadow. In the morning he would wake up and eat a healthy, natural breakfast. Then he would go for a walk and sometimes a run, getting a lot of fresh air and exercise in the beautiful meadow, with the early-morning sun beaming down and the birds singing. He then said, ‘Don’t worry about me. I’m happily living in Canada. I’ve been reincarnated as a moose.’”

After the man told me about this dream, he looked bewildered—obviously because our belief in reincarnation was the main thing he was agitated about, along with our being “cheaters,” “frauds,” etc. So I said to him, “The reason you’re objecting so much to reincarnation is because you don’t want to face the fact that you’re responsible for all your activities—the law of karma. Your dream was no accident; your friend was trying to help you, and ultimately God is trying to help you.”

Suddenly, to the amazement of me and all the onlookers, he bought a book! But even as he walked away, book in hand, his conflicted ideas and emotions came out: “Cheating! . . . Really, that’s what happened to my friend?” He was pretty blissful by then.

Whew! What a scene! Afterward, many employees and passengers and even a policeman came and apologized that I had to be confronted with such a low-class horrible person.

And the story’s not over yet. To my surprise, the person I was speaking to when the horrible man came and interrupted us came through the airport again two weeks later and apologized for leaving suddenly. I then showed him the books, and he took a few.

Book distribution is a constant adventure.

* * *

Uddhava Dāsa

It was September 15, 2000, when we assembled our phalanx of book-distributing warriors one block away from the site where the Sydney Summer Olympics would be held. Tens of thousands of people would attend this carnival celebrating bodily consciousness.

Rūpa Raghunātha Prabhu, Australia’s Bhīṣmadeva of *saṅkīrtana*, led the advance because he was the most experienced and was the only one who had been to an Olympics before. I felt excited as I observed our little *saṅkīrtana* army all ready to give up their (material) lives for Śrīla Prabhupāda. The assembled warriors included the small but dangerous Hrīmān Kṛṣṇa Prabhu, the young and enthusiastic *gurukuli* Mādhavendra Purī Prabhu, the stunned-in-ecstasy Stambha Bhāva Prabhu, the silent but transcendently aggressive Śāstra-kṛta Prabhu, the *mahā-ratha* Rūpa Raghunātha Prabhu with his faithful sidekick, Amṛtānanda Prabhu, and myself.

A continuous stream of out-of-control sense enjoyers made their way from the train station to the carnival grounds. We decided that Sergeant Stambha and Mad Maddy would give them some purification before they even got into the stadium, while Rūpa, Hrīmān, Śāstra, and I would

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

infiltrate behind enemy lines. I wondered, “How on earth will we get in unnoticed with all these book trolleys.” Suddenly I realized I had no real faith in Kṛṣṇa. Any real devotee knows that with the help of Yogamāyā Vāsudeva snuck Baby Kṛṣṇa out of Kaṁsa’s prison right under the guards’ noses and safely carried Him all the way to Vraja. So, taking shelter of Kṛṣṇa, with our fully loaded trolleys we just followed the crowds in, purchased our tickets, and entered through the front gate, straight past all the guards. We were too obvious to be discovered! So we stashed our ammunition behind the soft drink machines and dove right into the nectar, distributing to the masses.

The battle was joined. I had never seen anything like it before in my life! Thousands of conditioned souls were flooded into the stadium. The roadway we were on was about twenty meters wide and was totally packed with people! So Hrīmān and I just went mad. I felt like I was on the Battlefield of Kurukṣetra! Bang! “Please take a book, please give a donation.” Duck and weave, slash and dash. Bang! “Please take, please help!” The boxes were emptying so fast we had to call Stambha outside the gates to bring us more ammunition.

After some time Mādhavendra Purī bought a ticket and joined us because it had died down outside. Every now and then a security guard would stroll past and I would hide behind the vendors. Once when I was getting more books from behind the soft drink machines I saw a security guard looking curiously at my boxes. So I just pretended I knew nothing of the boxes and walked straight past him. Then there was one of those moments: I looked back at him and saw he was looking right at me! But I easily played the part of an ignorant pleasure-seeker while Kṛṣṇa’s *yogamāyā* potency covered him. The guards didn’t cause us any problems for a few more hours.

Then Śāstra-kṛta arrived on the scene and told us how he’d been caught and escorted out of the grounds by two guards playing good cop, bad cop. Śāstra had been distributing with Rūpa somewhere on the other side of the grounds and had returned to retrieve his books.

Soon Rūpa also arrived because their cover had been blown on the other side. Four of us were now distributing in the same area, and the crowds were dying down, so the envious shop owners could easily see our enthusiasm as we took all their customers’ money and gave it to Kṛṣṇa. Eventually the security guards caught on. They came to our five trolleys lined up behind the drink machines and kindly but sternly ordered us all to leave.

On the way I preached to the guard giving us a royal escort out of the grounds. He was a nice guy. He explained that even though he liked our mission, the shop owners had complained, and so he had to bust us.

It was still very busy outside, so we all continued to distribute there. Then a guard came flying over in his little golf buggy. “You can’t do that anywhere near the grounds,” he barked. “You must go.”

So we walked around the corner and waited for Stambha Bhāva to bring the car. I just couldn’t help myself—I kept trying to distribute Prabhupāda’s books. There were a few taxi drivers standing beside one of their taxis, talking. I approached them. They were Middle Eastern. I said, “These books will help the crazy people you pick up at night.” One driver told the other to take the books. The other said, “OK, I’ll take the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Perfect Escape*, and I’ll leave them in my cab for the people to read.”

Just after he gave a donation another security guard came running over and said, “We have cameras everywhere. You must stop or I will fine you.”

“We’re just waiting for our ride and will be gone soon.”

The guard left. When he was out of sight I quickly ran across the road and distributed one more *Gītā* to an Indian taxi driver just as our books were being loaded into our car. All the cab drivers were favorable to us and told us the guards had been rude to them. They also told us some good spots we could distribute. We all jumped into the *sāṅkīrtana* chariot and made a swift getaway

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

after distributing hundreds of books.

What an amazing battle! Fighting for Kṛṣṇa on the battlefield of book distribution is the most exciting way to engage the fighting propensity.

* * *

Vāsudeva Datta Dāsa (TSKP Slovenia)

I was so ill that I couldn't go out on *saṅkīrtana*. I felt completely useless. I thought, "I'm just spacing out here in the temple like a ghost. I have no desire to go out." Then I realized that every day on *saṅkīrtana* is very special and is actually the mercy of Lord Caitanya. So I started to pray like anything: "Please, Kṛṣṇa, allow me to do *saṅkīrtana*. Please give me the desire to go out."

An hour later Mṛgendra Prabhu asked me if I would join him the next day at an event where many vegetarian groups from around country would gather. Mṛgendra Prabhu would make propaganda for his vegetarian courses and distribute *halvā*, and I would have a book stall. I agreed wholeheartedly, seeing this opportunity as an answer to my prayer.

The organizers forbade any religious books, so we were supposed to have only cookbooks at the stall. But we put *Bhagavad-gītā*s and some *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* volumes on the table also. No one objected. People were mad after *halvā* throughout the course of the morning and early afternoon, and they also took a lot of cookbooks and a few *Bhagavad-gītā*s.

But then at one point late in the afternoon all the visitors became very excited and started to look in one direction. I noticed a crowd of photographers snapping pictures, and also some TV cameras. Mṛgendra shouted, "Look! President Drnovsek is over there and is coming toward us." We had already distributed all the *halavā*. What to do? I was the only devotee in *dhotī* and *tilaka*, and the president came right up to me and shook my hand. He told me he knew of our *prasādam* distribution in the country. Then Mṛgendra Prabhu introduced his project of vegetarian cooking classes. We apologized to the president for not having any *halavā* to offer him. "I know all about *halavā*," he replied in a jolly mood. "It's great that you've distributed all the *halavā* to the other guests."

We were all laughing, and the onlookers were amazed at how relaxed the president was with the devotees. We conversed a few minutes more, and then he told his secretary that he would like to have our cookbook. He explained that he'd already gotten our *Bhagavad-gītā* on another occasion. So I took the cookbook, called *Krishna's Kitchen*, and an SSR and gave them to the president as a gift. Reporters snapped photos as he happily thanked us. Then he proceeded further into the fair without stopping at any other stall. He just went to the main stage, where he prepared to give a speech in support of vegetarianism, since he is a vegetarian. But then suddenly rain started pouring down and the whole function came to an end. So we packed up our things and went back to the temple.

The next day Mṛgendra received a phone call from the president's office. It was his secretary. She said that they were very impressed by our presentation, and that she would like to enroll in Mṛgendra's cooking class. She also said that the president would like come and take lunch at our temple.

Lord Kṛṣṇa is really amazing. A few days earlier I had felt completely useless, unable to do *saṅkīrtana*. I desperately prayed to Śrī Śrī Pañca-tattva to somehow or other engage me in their preaching mission. And then the next day Kṛṣṇa sent the president of Slovenia to our book stall! Kṛṣṇa is really God and can do anything if we take shelter of Him.

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

* * *

Vijaya Dāsa

A few years ago I learned firsthand that distributing books in Ukraine is difficult because the people are very poor. The average worker makes about \$50 a month. At that time Ukraine had one traveling party, with five devotees who traveled around the country in a twenty-one-year-old Russian station wagon. I was amazed to hear of the austerities they had to undergo. When it rained, which was quite often, all five devotees slept in the car. And even when the weather was clear, one slept outside while four slept inside. I asked the *sāṅkīrtana* leader, “Why don’t you get a van?”

“We pray for one every day,” he replied. I promised I would get a van for them, and by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa and some nice devotee donors, two years later they had a nice *sāṅkīrtana* vehicle.

One of the devotees on this party is a doctor, who shortly after beginning his medical practice received a book from a devotee. After understanding that the body is just a dress for the soul and that the soul is who we really are, he thought, “Why should I be so concerned with helping the body? Better I help cure the root of the problem—the diseased soul.” Another devotee on this party used to be a detective on the police force. Now he’s the *sāṅkīrtana* leader.

In the USA we have a government that is as corrupt as any, probably more so. But our Constitution contains something called the Bill of Rights, which consists of the first ten amendments, and the first one of these contains a statement that is very encouraging for all *sāṅkīrtana* devotees in the USA: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech. . . .” Sometimes, however, the authorities at the colleges I visit forget this amendment. I like to remind them.

At one college I set up a table with *Bhagavad-gītās*, JSDs, SSRs, and several other books. After awhile an administrator approached the table and said, “Our policy is that you have to buy a permit to sell books on this campus. So you’ll have to pack up and leave. Now!”

I said, “This is not private property. This is public property, on which we have the right to exercise our first amendment right to freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Therefore you can’t tell me to leave. However, if you can convince a policeman that what I’m doing is illegal, then I’ll certainly leave. If a policeman does ask me to leave, however, then my lawyer will contact your lawyer and you may very well find yourself in court.”

“Oh, okay,” she replied meekly.

I never heard from her again.

Every day I distributed around thirty books to the students at that college. As per my usual practice, I got the email address of any student who took a book and added it to my email list. Yesterday I received an email from a student at that college who said, “Your letters are a great inspiration to me. I always look forward to reading them.”

All glories to the American founding fathers who wrote the First Amendment!

When we go on book distribution, we’re declaring war on Māyā. Just as fighting in a shooting war is dangerous, so going on book distribution can be spiritually dangerous. Sometimes book

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

distributors are tested by Māyā, and if they fail the test they become her victims. So we have to be careful, just as a man on a battlefield has to be very careful, remaining alert to the threats of an enemy who can attack at any moment.

Once a *brahmacārī* who was distributing books met a nice lady who was interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He got her email address and kept in touch with her for several years. Then one day he left the temple without saying a word to anyone. Later the devotees learned that he'd run off with that lady and given up Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Two years later he came back to visit the devotees and admitted that he'd made a mistake. He had married the lady, but a year and a half later they'd divorced.

That we go on distributing books year after year, during both the hard times and the nectar times, is a sign of love. A devotee who does this is sure to receive the mercy of Kṛṣṇa. As Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.9.24:

In executing penance, one must be determined to return home, back to Godhead, and must decide to undergo all types of tribulations for that end. Even for material prosperity, name and fame, one has to undergo severe types of penance; otherwise no one can become an important figure in this material world. Why, then, are there severe types of penance for the perfection of devotional service? An easygoing life and attainment of perfection in transcendental realization cannot go together. The Lord is more clever than any living entity; therefore He wants to see how painstaking the devotee is in devotional service. The order is received from the Lord, either directly or through the bona fide spiritual master, and to execute that order, however painstaking, is the severe type of penance. One who follows the principle rigidly is sure to achieve success in attaining the Lord's mercy.

* * *

Bhakta Ari

I took blessings from Cāru-candra Prabhu, a leading North American book distributor, and launched into my best, most enthusiastic book distribution session I can remember. For half an hour down in our home base, the Broadway-Lafayette subway station in New York City, I was in the flow. And then—Kṛṣṇa just pulled the plug.

I couldn't understand why. I didn't feel particularly prideful or independent-minded. I was grateful and happy to be serving Śrīla Prabhupāda. But for whatever reason, my torment continued. I began to suffer more and more from the pain of rejection, and from the contrast with my previous success.

I wondered whether in Kṛṣṇa consciousness there was such a thing as suffering without meaning. Wasn't that the difference between material and spiritual suffering? But alas, I could not understand why Kṛṣṇa was treating me in this seemingly arbitrary way. Kṛṣṇaaa! How could I approach people with any kind of confidence when I could predict exactly what words of rejection each one was going to say before he even opened his mouth? I felt stymied.

After a while my friend Doyal Gaurāṅga Prabhu showed up on the scene. When he asked me how I was doing, I told him the truth, but by then my attitude had subtly shifted. Bewilderment and frustration had turned to acceptance and realization. It occurred to me that for the last forty-five minutes or so I'd not really minded the suffering. I'd somehow entered a kind of liberated state without my even noticing! Delighted and enlivened, I told Doyal Gaurāṅga how I felt that

Chapter 7: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

Kṛṣṇa had been working on me, sculpting me without my slightest awareness.

My results remained as meager as before, but my consciousness had cleaned up. By Kṛṣṇa's special mercy I felt a kind of tranquil acceptance that I appreciated all the more because of my previous distress. Then suddenly, *again* Kṛṣṇa pulled the plug! Dissatisfaction and anxiety began to subtly seep through the cracks of my consciousness. And as they reached a crescendo, I called out with fervor, "Kṛṣṇaaa! No one wants Your books out here! No one! What am I supposed to do? You can compel people to take them better than I. But You're not doing anything. Kṛṣṇaaa! Is this really what You want?"

Just after this outburst I approached a young bearded man who had an air of hipness. "Hey," I said, "I'm from Long Island. Where're you from?"

"Alabama."

"We're just showing these books to nice folks. Check it out. It's a classic of Eastern wisdom. You've heard of karma, right? What goes around comes around? These ideas originate in this book. Thoreau and Emerson said this book changed their lives. Gandhi said it gave him inspiration in his darkest hour. I'm a monk. My name's Ari. What's yours?"

We spoke for but a moment before he exclaimed, "You know, I've been looking for this." He took a *Gītā* and gave me a generous donation. As he walked into the train that had arrived on the platform, he turned to me slightly and said, "What you're doing—it's not easy." He paused a moment. "Keep doing it."

And then the train swept him away.

My jaw dropped, but I wasn't surprised. It's said in *saṅkīrtana* circles that if you perform the service long enough you meet Kṛṣṇa out there. It's unavoidable.

* * *

Bhakta Uddhava

In the heart of Sydney's hustle and bustle, with all my might I was trying to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. After half an hour, nothing was happening. I could hardly even get someone to stop, let alone take a book.

Heavily governed by the mode of passion, I was losing my enthusiasm, and I still had the whole day ahead of me. So I cried out loudly, "Kṛṣṇa! Help me! Nityānanda! Gaurāṅga!!" Many people turned to look, startled.

I felt instant relief and kept trying.

Five minutes later a nice Nepalese student stopped. "*Tapai Neapalio?*" ("Are you from Nepal?"), I said. He took a *Bhagavad-gītā* and gave me his contact info. As we were talking I heard a voice from behind me: "Maharaja!" a man said while tapping me on the shoulder. I turned around and he shoved a note into my hand. "Oh, thank you," I said as I took what I thought was a \$5 bill. (For the record, I'm not a Mahārāja. I'm not even initiated yet. Just *dāsa-dāsa-anudāsa*.) It's quite common here in Australia that people just walk up to us and give a donation out of appreciation for the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. I took a second look at the note. It was \$100! I couldn't believe it. This had never happened to me before.

I tried to show my appreciation by giving him a stack of books, but he firmly declined and said he had all the books already. He was carrying a gun on his belt and wearing a uniform indicating that he was a security guard who helped transport money from banks, etc., in armored vehicles. I begged him to please take something and gave him a copy of *Searching for Vedic India*, a book by my *gurudeva*, His Holiness Devāmṛta Swami, who I'm aspiring to take initiation from. When

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

he saw the name of the author he was satisfied, as if he'd heard him speak before. He was a very mysterious man. I'd never seen him before. He was like an undercover devotee or a demigod or something. He accepted the book, respectfully said goodbye, and left me and the Nepalese student at a loss for words.

The student asked me, "How did that happen?"

Right then I realized how, and so I told him that it was because I cried out to Kṛṣṇa to help about five minutes earlier.

So Kṛṣṇa gave me some encouragement by sending both the nice Nepalese student and the kind donor. The rest of the day was wonderful: I drowned in the waves of *sāṅkīrtana* nectar.

We are not alone on the streets. Whether we are having an easy time or a difficult time, Kṛṣṇa is right there with us, and whatever happens is all for our purification and the upliftment of the conditioned souls.

End of Chapter Seven: Determination on Sāṅkīrtana

If we simply present Krishna Consciousness in a serious and attractive way, without need to resort to fashionable slogans or tricks that is sufficient.

Our unique asset is our purity.
No one anywhere can match it.

Letter to: Yogesvara, Bombay
28 December, 1971

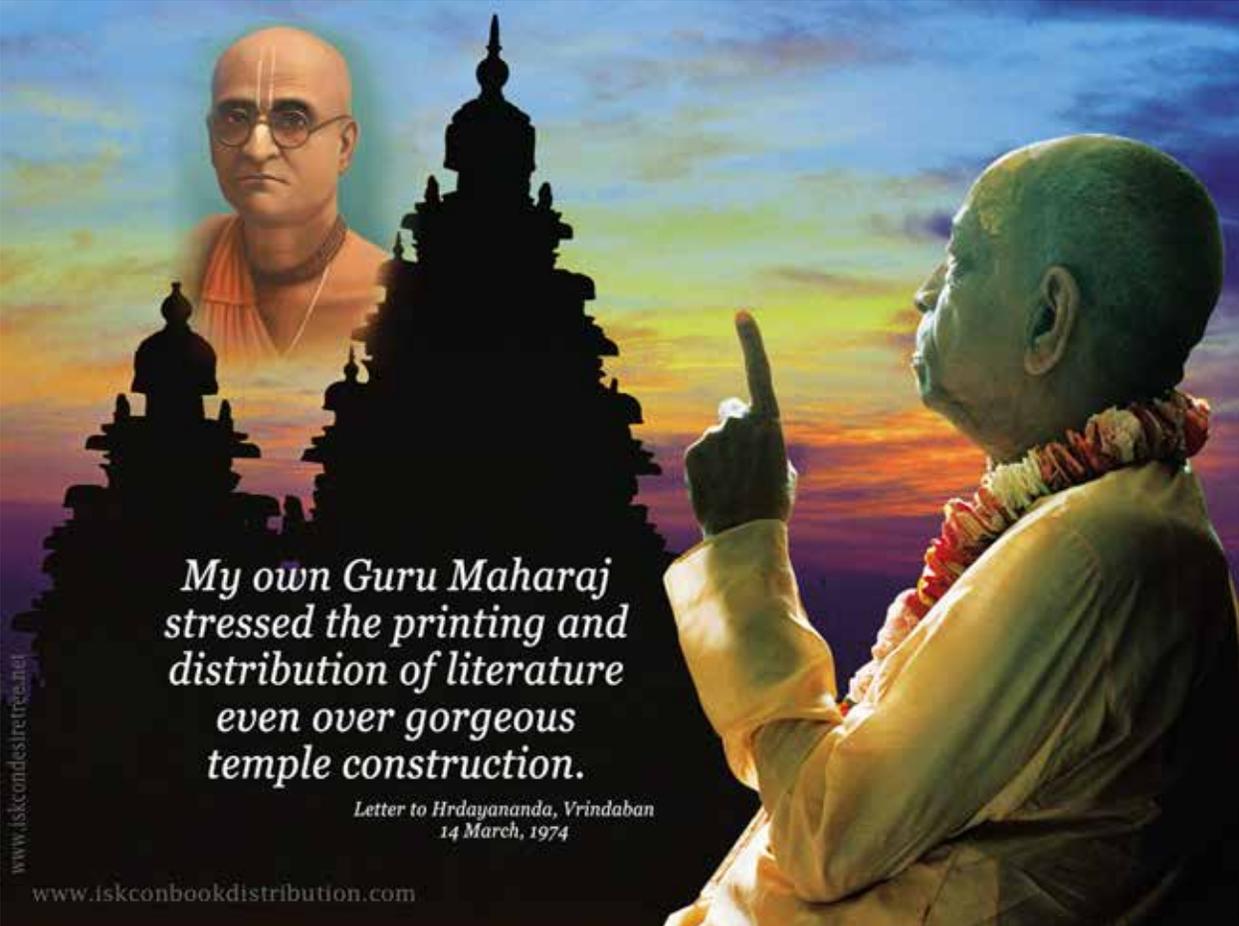


www.iskconbookdistribution.com

www.iskcondesiretree.net

My own Guru Maharaj stressed the printing and distribution of literature even over gorgeous temple construction.

Letter to Hridayananda, Vrindaban
14 March, 1974



www.iskcondesiretree.net

www.iskconbookdistribution.com

Chapter Eight Ecstatic Encounters

Book distribution is my favorite activity. I love it. It really does give one a higher taste. Everyone wants to experience happiness, and what I've found is that the greatest happiness can be found in distributing books. I've experienced by far the happiest moments of my life while distributing books. Some devotees have been distributing books for over forty years because they enjoy giving Kṛṣṇa to others; they know how much the people benefit and how much they themselves benefit.

We meet so many interesting people who appreciate Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. Many devotees I've spoken to who used to be book distributors say that the best years of their life were when they were distributing Prabhupāda's books. One may ask, "Why is that?" After all, book distribution is not easy. So few devotees are able to stay with it over the long haul. So why is it so universally appreciated by those who've done it? Because you really feel you're doing the right thing when distributing books. You experience the purification and the positive reciprocation with the people and with Kṛṣṇa. To do it you have to be sincere and devoted, and you have to have exemplary *sādhana*. Sure, book distribution may be painful in the beginning, but as Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.37, 38), "That which is like poison in the beginning and nectar in the end is happiness in the mood of goodness. That which is like nectar in the beginning and poison in the end is happiness in the mood of passion." Sometimes devotees do book distribution for only a short time and thus experience only the "poison" part, but if they were to continue they would experience the nectar part as well.

When I joined in Miami in 1978, the main activity was book distribution. The temple was vibrant with activity, all based on book distribution. There was life and the temple was attractive. I feel greatly blessed by Kṛṣṇa that right at the beginning of my devotional life I was introduced to book distribution—and the greater blessing is that I'm still doing it.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has written a beautiful verse in which one *gopī* tells another that if she wants to enjoy family life she should not go to see Govinda on a beautiful moonlit night at Keśīghāṭa. Similarly, if you want to enjoy material life, then don't go out on book distribution regularly, because you'll lose your taste for material sense gratification by getting the higher taste of giving Kṛṣṇa to others.

Here are some accounts of ecstatic encounters devotees around the world have experienced on book distribution.

* * *

His Holiness Indradyumna Swami

Poland—We had chanted on the beach in the morning, but around noon it began raining, bringing an end to the longest period of good weather on the coast in living memory. Everyone on the beach had to find shelter, but even though the skies cleared in the late afternoon, no one went back there.

They all came to the Festival of India.

Every tourist in town must have come. I was sure of that because, as on the beach, it was difficult to walk through the festival grounds. People were everywhere—the restaurant, the shops, the booths, crowded in front of the stage. Of particular interest was our towering Ratha-yātrā cart, which we had placed near the stage. Toward evening we put a light inside the canopy, making the cart look like a gigantic lantern. It was a real crowd-pleaser. People lined up to get photos of

Chapter 8: Ecstatic Encounters

themselves taken in front of it.

At one point I noticed a man standing in front of the cart, looking at it, shaking his head as if in disbelief. I wondered what he might be thinking, so I went up to him with Rāma Acyuta Dāsa. “Is there some problem, sir?” I asked.

He kept his eyes fixed on the huge cart. “I can’t believe it,” he said. “It’s the real thing. It’s a Ratha-yātrā cart.”

I was surprised he even knew the right name. “How do you know what a Ratha-yātrā cart is?” I asked.

He turned to me for a brief moment and then looked back at the cart. “Nine years ago I worked in a coal mine in the south,” he said. “It was a dismal job, and dangerous too. Once some of my colleagues were killed when a mine shaft caved in. I didn’t go back into that black hole again. I quit my job and stayed home, praying to God to deliver me from this horrible world.

“One day I decided to go to the town library and look for books about spiritual life. As I searched through the shelves, I found the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, translated by Bhaktivedanta Swami. There were nine volumes. I glanced through the first one, but I couldn’t understand a thing. I decided to check it out anyway and take it home. When I went to the desk, the librarian smiled. She said the book had been there for years and I was the first person to take it out.

“I was desperate for spiritual knowledge, and I read the book over and over. Gradually I began to understand it. Two weeks later, I went back for the second volume, and a week later, for the third. I didn’t do anything but read day and night. After several months I had read all nine volumes at least twice.

“I learned a lot. I was amazed by Lord Caitanya, an incarnation of God. And there was the explanation of the five ways to love God. I had never imagined that spiritual life could be so profound, so deep.

“My favorite part was the description of the Ratha-yātrā festival, where Caitanya sang and danced with His people. I lamented that I had been born too late to take part in those historic times.

“Sometimes Swami mentioned a movement that was spreading all over the world, a movement whose followers sang Hare Kṛṣṇa, as Caitanya did. I wrote to the addresses in the books but never received a reply. I prayed to God to help me find the movement, but to no avail.

“Then this morning, as I lay on the beach after a swim, I suddenly heard people singing Hare Kṛṣṇa. I sat up with a start. I couldn’t believe my eyes. There must have been a hundred people, many with drums and cymbals. It was as if the books I’d read about Caitanya were coming to life.

“But one thing confused me: there was no Ratha-yātrā cart. For this to be real, there had to be a Ratha-yātrā cart. At first I thought you people were doing a theatrical performance, but then I thought, ‘Maybe this is the movement the Swami wrote about. Is God finally answering my prayers?’

“I took an invitation, and when it started to rain I went back to my hotel. I was waiting anxiously for the festival to begin. When the time came, I walked quickly from my hotel. When I came near the festival site and heard the singing, I started to run, and I soon found myself at the entrance. But there was such a crowd! I couldn’t see anything. I pushed my way through the people and made it onto the field.

“I was stunned by it all: the colorful tents, the big stage, the singing. But was it real? Was it Caitanya’s movement? Then suddenly, to my amazement, I saw the Ratha-yātrā cart. I walked over here and touched it. The Lord has answered my prayers. I have found Caitanya’s movement.”

Several devotees had gathered to listen, and when he finished we were all speechless. I was overwhelmed by his story and the mercy of Lord Caitanya.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

He was still looking at the cart. “Excuse me if I seem a little emotional,” he said. “I hope you understand.”

“I do understand,” I said.

He turned to me with tears in his eyes. “What do I do now?” he said slowly.

I took his hand. “You weren’t born too late,” I said. “You’ve come at the perfect time. You can help us spread this movement. The saints say that Lord Caitanya is present wherever His devotees are serving Him.”

*rathārūḍhasyārād adhipadavi nīlācala-pater
adabhra-premormi-sphurita-naṭanollāsa-vivaśaḥ
sa-harṣaṁ gāyadbhiḥ parivrta-tanur vaiṣṇava-janaiḥ
sa caitanyaḥ kiṁ me punar api dṛśor yāsyati padam*

“Śrī Caitanya Mahaprabhu danced down the main road in great ecstasy before Lord Jagannātha, the master of Nīlācala, who was sitting on His car. Overwhelmed by the transcendental bliss of dancing, and surrounded by Vaiṣṇavas who sang the holy names, He manifested waves of ecstatic love of Godhead. Will He again become visible before the path of my eyes?”

* * *

His Holiness Śivarāma Swami

When a devotee distributes books, Kṛṣṇa, who is within the heart of the book distributor, is most pleased, and as His pleasure potency expands through the devotee’s heart, that potency intoxicates him with its effects.

I’m sure all book distributors have felt the intoxicating effects of *saṅkīrtana* bliss. On occasion I was also fortunate enough to be blessed in this way. It didn’t happen every day, but when it did, I found it difficult to stop *saṅkīrtana*. Although I may have been tired, I had to do just one more book, to get one more blessing from Kṛṣṇa. And that phrase — “Just one more” — became a *saṅkīrtana* mantra. When a *saṅkīrtana* party was ready to go back to the temple, there was always one devotee floating in bliss who would say, “Just one more.” Sometimes we waited for him, and sometimes we just left him behind, knowing he would stop only when he became too tired or ran out of books.

One Saturday in Montreal the devotees left me behind. I had to do just one more book. It felt too good to stop. There is no happiness like the happiness a devotee feels when Kṛṣṇa and Prabhupāda are pleased with him. I was walking on clouds.

I wandered the shopping streets on this pleasant summer evening, selling books until all the shops closed. But the taste of book distribution was so addictive that I had to do just one more. I went into a large hotel lobby and sold books until they threw me out. I went into another hotel and went door to door until I got caught. Back on the street, I thought, “Where will I go now?” I was standing on a street with many popular nightclubs and bars, and since by that time it was after 8 pm, the area started to fill up. So I walked around selling books to people going to or leaving the clubs.

The nature of *saṅkīrtana* bliss is that whoever you speak to can also taste it. So as I approached couples who were already intoxicated from drinking, they would also feel some of what I was feeling, and that was almost all they needed to buy a book.

By eleven o’clock I was down to a few *Bhāgavatam* volumes (Second Canto). I approached a

Chapter 8: Ecstatic Encounters

group of maybe four well-dressed couples. They were all drunk. I stopped them and placed all my books in their hands. Lord Caitanya must have thought of Jagāi and Mādhāi at that moment, since I felt such a surge of happiness that I just stood in the middle of the group, rocking on my heels, smiling at them.

At first they laughed and looked at the books. I was just standing there beaming as they exchanged amused glances, until one of them asked, “Are you high on something?” Everyone laughed. Then they all started asking the same question, which brought me back to my senses. I replied, “I’m high on the natural happiness of the soul, which comes through *yoga*. Read about it in these books. Please give a donation.” They bought all the books, and with nothing to sell I went back to the temple. It was past midnight.

Since Sunday was a day of rest and the Love Feast, it became my habit to stay out till midnight on Saturdays to do “just one more.” When we did airports, almost every day was like Saturday. When we lay down at night and noticed one devotee hadn’t returned from *saṅkīrtana*, we knew he was blissed out, walking around in the terminal doing “just one more.”

[The following is excerpted from an homage Śivarāma Swami wrote for Śrīla Prabhupāda’s 1994 *Vyāsa-pūjā* book.]

Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda,

Please accept my humble obeisances at your divine lotus feet. All glories to you on the celebration of your appearance day.

While planning a composition for your offering, I was attending to my regular correspondence. One letter stood out among the others. I enclose it here, translated into English, for your pleasure.

Dear Śivarāma Swami,

Hare Kṛṣṇa. Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda. I hope you do not mind my writing to you. I have never written to a spiritual master before. You do not know me. My name is Bhaktin Dora and I live in Pecs [Hungary]. I am 14 years old, and I live at home with my mother and older sister.

In 1992 I went to the Hare Krishna Festival with a friend. I was not very interested, but I enjoyed the chanting and dancing at the end. After it was over I bought a book, *The Science of Self-Realization*. I do not know why—generally I never read. I think it was because of the chanting.

I took the book home and forgot about it. One day my mother found it and was very angry with me. She thought that I was reading this kind of thing. You see, our family members are all very strict Catholics. They thought Kṛṣṇa consciousness was some kind of “brainwashing.” Actually, I wasn’t reading the book—I had forgotten all about it. Somehow it just “appeared.” Anyway, my mother was going to throw it away.

My grandmother, who is 68, was in the kitchen at that time. She lives in the apartment upstairs. She came in and took the book. She looked at it and scolded me in a very heavy way. I thought that that would be the end of it. I did not mind so much, as I was in a lot of *māyā* at the time.

About a week later I overheard a conversation between my mother and grandmother. Granny was saying that this was not some ordinary book. She said that what Prabhupāda was saying is what Jesus Christ said and that Kṛṣṇa is God. I was very surprised. She said

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

that we should listen to what Prabhupāda said and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa because that was the religion for this age. There was a lot talk about how Christianity was no more, and no one was following the Bible, but what Prabhupāda had said was pure and perfect.

Things really took a turn from there. One day my grandmother visited the *nāma-haṭṭa* center here and began to chant on beads. She also began to buy Prabhupāda's books one by one. She was spending her whole pension on buying what she called the "beautiful, holy *Bhāgavatam*." Sometimes she could only afford to eat potatoes, but she kept buying the books. The devotees even came to her flat and helped her set up an altar. When I went upstairs, they had taken all her old pictures down, and there were Kṛṣṇa pictures everywhere.

That was really the beginning. One night granny had a dream about Prabhupāda. Something really amazing happened to her then. I don't know what it was, but she began to get very enthusiastic. Next she began to get the whole family involved—I mean, not just me and my mother and sister, but her two sons, their wives and six children, as well as her brothers, sisters, and relatives. Before she used to carry a Bible with her and quote Jesus Christ. Now she has a *Bhagavad-gītā* and quotes "the good Lord Prabhupāda." She has become a veritable transcendental terror. Everyone in the family has to chant at least one round a day. In addition, Granny has made everyone become a vegetarian, including my dog Sikra, and we offer our food to a picture of Prabhupāda and Lord Caitanya.

Now I am also getting out of *māyā* and chanting and reading a little also. Where I go to school my friends inquire about Kṛṣṇa, as they know I am a devotee. The whole family goes to the *nāma-haṭṭa*—all sixteen of us. During the Christmas Marathon we all tried to distribute Prabhupāda's books. Even Granny would take books with her to the market and sell them to the vendors. Everyone is afraid of her because she is fearless. They all think she has gone crazy, but she doesn't care.

Now she is saving to go to Budapest to see the newly installed Deities. She has heard that Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda "have come to Hungary" and are being worshiped in Budapest by the devotees. She says she wants to see God just once in this life.

At this year's Hare Kṛṣṇa festival you spoke to the guests after the *kīrtana*. You must remember my grandmother because she came and sat right beside you and asked so many questions. At the end, when you stood to leave, she even kissed your hand. Remember? I also wanted to ask a question, but I was shy. Could I please ask you now? I hope you do not mind, Mahārāja.

I want to know what kind of man Śrīla Prabhupāda was. He must be so dear to Kṛṣṇa to have spread this message all over the world. What are these books that changed my family so much? How is it possible that he can speak so powerfully through them? You must feel very fortunate to be his disciple. How great a man he is! Sometimes when my granny chants in front of a picture of Kṛṣṇa, she cries. How does Prabhupāda do that? I want to cry like that too. Granny dreams of Prabhupāda, and sometimes she talks to his picture. Although it says on the cover of the book that he passed away, is Prabhupāda really dead, or is he still alive? Do you think I can meet him some day?

I'm sorry that I've gone on so. I would like to be a good devotee one day and help you and Prabhupāda spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Please could you answer my questions?

Your servant,
Bhaktin Dora

Chapter 8: Ecstatic Encounters

Śrīla Prabhupāda, this is one letter, from one girl who came in contact with you through one of your books. How many millions of such souls are there who have yet to write, who are directly experiencing your mercy daily, who read your books with implicit faith, whom you talk to in dreams and pictures, whose lives you change abruptly and reward with tears when chanting the holy name? How many people cross the boundaries of rules and regulations by the strong boat of your mercy and practice and taste Kṛṣṇa consciousness in a realm beyond logic and argument? I think these people are meeting you every day.

* * *

Praghoṣa Dāsa (ACBSP)

In his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya* 24.277, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

When a touchstone touches iron, it turns the iron to gold. Parvata Muni called Nārada Muni a touchstone because by his touch the hunter, who was the lowest among men, became an elevated and perfect Vaiṣṇava. Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura said that the position of a Vaiṣṇava can be tested by seeing how good a touchstone he is—that is, by seeing how many Vaiṣṇavas he has made during his life. A Vaiṣṇava should be a touchstone so that he can convert others to Vaiṣṇavism by his preaching, even though people may be fallen like the hunter. There are many so-called advanced devotees who sit in a secluded place for their personal benefit. They do not go out to preach and convert others into Vaiṣṇavas, and therefore they certainly cannot be called *sparsa-maṇi*, advanced devotees. *Kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* devotees cannot turn others into Vaiṣṇavas, but a *madhyama-adhikārī* Vaiṣṇava can do so by preaching. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu advised His followers to increase the numbers of Vaiṣṇavas.

*yāre dekha, tāre kaha 'kṛṣṇa'-upadeśa
āmāra ājñāya guru hañā tāra' ei deśa
(Cc. Madhya 7.128)*

It is Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's wish that everyone should become a Vaiṣṇava and *guru*. Following the instructions of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His disciplic succession, one can become a spiritual master, for the process is very easy. One can go everywhere and anywhere to preach the instructions of Kṛṣṇa. The *Bhagavad-gītā* is Kṛṣṇa's instructions; therefore the duty of every Vaiṣṇava is to travel and preach the *Bhagavad-gītā*, either in his country or a foreign country. This is the test of *sparsa-maṇi*, following in the footsteps of Nārada Muni.

Last Christmas I gave a copy of *Beyond Birth and Death* to a very senior lady while on *sankīrtana* at Rockefeller Center in New York City. She was no less than 75 years old. She was with her family and was clearly experiencing ill health. Her hair was gone, and she wore a cap to cover her head. Ignoring the balance of the group for a moment, I asked her, “Are you presently confronted with

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

the difficulties of cancer and the side effects of chemo?”

She was somewhat taken aback but instantly smiled and said, “Yes, I am.”

“Been there, done that,” I said softly, smiling. “I can relate.” Then jokingly I said, “You up for a little skating?” (There’s a famous skating rink at Rockefeller Center.) “My treat, of course. We could have them put on ‘Bolero’ and do our best imitation of Torville and Dean! We win, we go to Disneyland! Together!”

She laughed at my suggestion, but she was clearly loving the attention!

Her family kept walking, but she stayed. I said, “I’ve heard it through the grapevine that you want this Christmas to be extra special.”

“You bet!” she instantly shot back. “Could be my last!”

“At least in this body, eh?” I replied.

Then without any prompting she opened her coat and showed me that she had lost her breast and an arm to surgery during the treatment, as well as two ribs.

I said, “Well in my opinion, after years of marriage, breasts and arms can be overrated.”

She fell in love with me on the spot!

I then got serious, not wanting to waste her trip to NY with idle chatter. Taking the cue she’d handed me, I said, “Speaking of this body, I’m going to make this Christmas special for you. Here’s something beyond special.” I handed her a copy of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *Beyond Birth and Death* and said, “This very book was my savior while I went through my own confrontation with cancer.”

Her eyes widened like a child’s.

I gave her a brief synopsis of the book and asked her sweetly to please try to read it as soon as possible.

“Ok,” I said, “we better cut this short, or I’m gonna be arrested for excessive flirting with a Gorgeous Granny. They’re pretty strict about that here in the Big Apple, darlin’.”

She was ready to elope with me if I’d asked her!

We hugged like dear friends and she walked off with a beautiful smile.

One would think this encounter ended there, right?

Nope, it gets infinitely better.

Two hours later I’m working away, talking with an interested group, when I look to my left and who’s standing there patiently, waiting for me to finish?

Yep, Gorgeous Granny.

I cut my work short with the group I was with, turned, and said, “Couldn’t stay away, eh? You bring your skates?”

But she was not laughing. She said, “I’m so deeply grateful to you for this book. I read it cover to cover in the last two hours, sitting in Dean and Deluca’s restaurant. My family thought I was losing it. I told them they should just go do their shopping and I would be there when they got back. I cannot tell you how much this book has affected me.”

Then she very humbly said, “I do not have long in this world. How do you pronounce this word for God? KER-SNA?”

I said, “KRISH-NA. It’s the oldest and most wonderful name of God. It is His actual name. In the spiritual world, everyone calls Him that. It means ‘The most beautiful person’ in every way.”

“Oh, that is just marvelous,” she said. “Just marvelous!”

Then she said something that I will never forget until the day I leave this world.

“Will Kṛṣṇa accept me when I leave this world? Do you think He will welcome me?”

I did not hesitate. I opened the book and showed her the last paragraph, which begins with this sentence: “Merely by chanting [the Holy Name], one can enjoy all the benefits of the personal association of the Lord.”

Chapter 8: Ecstatic Encounters

I then turned her attention to the *mahā-mantra*, which Śrīla Prabhupāda gives in the book in numerous places.

I said, “So from now on every day try to remember to recite this very simple *mantra*, or prayer, and Kṛṣṇa will indeed accept you. Not just when you leave your body, but right now.” Then I chanted the whole *mantra* with her and she smiled like my son Vāṇī when he beats me at checkers.

I tapped her on the head with affection and said, “Consider yourself accepted!”

She was ecstatic!

If I had a dollar for every experience like this that the *saṅkīrtana* devotees have had over the years, right now I would be sitting on the banks of the Gaṅgā in Māyāpur, without a financial care in the world!

We must all pray that we never miss a single golden opportunity to bring the fallen souls into even the briefest contact with Lord Kṛṣṇa’s Holy Name and His most wonderful and amazing touchstone, His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda, through his books. Just as one sneeze on the subway can set in motion an entire epidemic, so one recitation of the name of Lord Kṛṣṇa by any devotee or one distributed book can set in motion a sequence of events of “epidemic” proportions, which even the most faithful could scarcely believe.

* * *

Aiśvarya Dāsa

Christmas Eve in the malls is pure, unalloyed passion. Too much of the mode of passion can bring a person to the lowest common denominator. At this point something interesting happens.

A couple of short snippets:

Mathurādhīśa hands two books to a normal-looking couple and explains them. The boy tells him, “I’m lost.” When Mathurā offers that these books will help him, the girl stands up and affirms sincerely, “He’s lost! Which is the best book for him?” He got a *Journey of Self-Discovery* to point him in the right direction.

I stopped a couple from Santa Cruz and handed them a *Light of the Bhāgavata*. The girl told me her friend had the book and was very attached to it. She clung on to it too. The boy also knew the book and asked me if I’ve heard of *The Nectar of Instruction*. It happened that I had that book in my bag, and when I handed it to him he held it to his heart and, with a tear in his eye, loudly proclaimed to everyone within earshot: “This is the best book in the world!” *The Nectar of Instruction!* He had had it before and had consulted it during all his times of woe. It had remained with him for years, but somehow he’d recently lost it. Now he’d been reunited with his old friend. In all the years I’ve distributed books, I’ve never seen anyone react to a book with that much emotion.

Maybe that’s why I keep coming back to this service of distributing books. Maybe that’s why this service is more important to me than all my troubles and problems.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

Not Christmas eve . . .

It's all in the Holy Names. If I could make the Holy Name my only shelter, then my life would be successful. Everything else is circumstantial.

But circumstances happen! And favorable circumstances are affected by how Kṛṣṇa conscious we are. Among many subconclusions, we can logically deduce that since Kṛṣṇa knows past, present, and future, and since serving Kṛṣṇa brings us knowledge, it will naturally follow that devotional service includes knowledge of all times. Get this . . .

At the end of a particularly exhilarating day of book distribution in Thessaloniki (the second largest city in Greece), Tāra Prabhu was wandering in bliss toward the van. It's hard to describe this kind of bliss to someone who has not distributed books, for it's a special ecstasy that's organic to this particular type of sacrifice.

Amazing things happen, and so it happened that on this particular evening one chubby, joyful, local Thessalonikian walked across our hero's path. What does one in the trance of ecstasy do when such things occur? The answer: loudly call out the Holy Name of the Lord in an animated way, which, as uttered by Tāra, sounded like the Greek word for "Excuse me!"

When such things happen, it is almost like one can see the future, as Kṛṣṇa mercifully gives his servant the ability to see what is going to happen and, as in this case, what has happened in the past.

Vasilis turned, put his arms up in the air, and roared his approval and recognition: "Hey!" He walked over to Tāra, shook hands, and after a moment of contemplation asked the obvious question: "So, where do I know you from?"

"What do you mean, 'Where do you know me from?'? I was your uncle Louie in our last life." In order to fully appreciate the sweet exchange that is about to take place, you have to imagine Tāra engaging his famous New York Italian accent in the Lord's eternal service.

Vasilis began to recollect: "Oh, yeah, that's right, Uncle Louie."

It is truly amazing how by the mercy of a devotee one can see right through the fog of illusion and grasp the eternality of the soul. At this point Tāra (Uncle Louie) initiated the following past-life-regression session:

"Yeah, we were close in our last life. You remember Italy?"

"That must be why I love spaghetti so much in this lifetime," Vasilis stated.

"Yeah, of course. You remember—we were partners in crime there. We were in the mob together."

Vasilis began to see the logic in this. "It's all now making sense. When *The Godfather* came out on DVD, I ran to the store to buy it. Now, meeting you, I can understand why I was so attracted to Italian things. They sure were the good old days, huh Louie?"

"So what are you doing this lifetime?" asked Louie.

"Well, I've been doing a lot of writing. I'm a writer. And what are you up to?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I've been living in India as a monk for many years. I've been teaching Eastern philosophy and meditation. I came back to see you because I had to give you one of these books."

"No kidding!" exclaimed Vasilis. "I've been studying a lot of religious books myself lately. I've studied books from all different traditions."

At this point Vasilis thought it proper to give some charity and take a book. After all, you don't

Chapter 8: Ecstatic Encounters

meet Uncle Louie every lifetime. “It was great to meet you again,” he proclaimed before returning to Greece.

Tāra was soon talking with a lady from Macedonia about a book, but during the conversation her friend Maria showed up. Luckily, at that time Tāra was still employing his New York Italian accent, and so Uncle Louie was easily channeled to the rescue.

“Well, it’s about time you got here! You finally showed up back here to get the book.”

The Macedonian lady’s friend looked curious and asked, “You know me?”

“Maria, right?” Tāra suggested. (Lucky guess!)

“Yes, I’m Maria. How did you know my name?”

“What do you mean ‘How did I know your name?’? You don’t recognize me?”

“No.”

“Anyway, don’t worry about it. I’ll forgive you this time.”

In case you were wondering, Uncle Louie is the same Louie that Tāra Prabhu would remind people about in the Los Angeles airport. Tāra would hand someone a book and tell him to pass it on to Louie. He’s the same Louie that one person became very emotional about after being reminded of his Uncle Louie by Tāra. In tears he asked, “How did you know my Uncle Louie just died and I’m on the way to his funeral?”

So Louie has performed exceptional devotional service over the years, and he was not ready to retire just yet.

“So, where do we know each other from?” asked Maria.

“I was your Uncle Louie in the last lifetime. You don’t recognize me? What’s the matter with you? Anyway, keep the book. We’re just asking a small donation today.”

Both ladies took books with smiles on their faces, but Maria just had to add, “You’re really scaring me, you know that?”

So throw out those old astrology books. Give away those past-life–regression videos. If you want to really know about the past, present, and future, pick up your old book bag and get out there. Uncle Louie’s still waiting for you!

* * *

Caitanya-līlā Devī Dāsī

I was distributing books in a small parking lot and looked at my watch. Still twenty minutes to go, and I had only two *Kṛṣṇa* books left in my bag. It had been a good day, I thought. Little did I know how special it was about to become . . .

A young man approached and I presented him with a book. He was interested and without a word gave me twenty euros. I began asking him some questions, and he opened up. He said he’d had *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* for fifteen years and studied it regularly. He’d also bought several other books by Śrīla Prabhupāda online. But he’d never seen a devotee before we’d met! He was a dentist in search of the purpose of life. Śrīla Prabhupāda books were his only reading matter.

Then I had an idea. “You know,” I said, “you can’t imagine what I have for you—the greatest literary work in the world: a full set of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatams*.” As I explained the *Bhāgavatam* to him, his eyes became wider and wider. We both went to the van, and when I opened the box containing the *Bhāgavatam* set its radiance made the gray parking lot effulgent. I said to my new friend, “I know you’re vegetarian, but are you also offering

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

your food to Kṛṣṇa?”

“Oh, yes. I have pictures of Lord Caitanya and Kṛṣṇa on my altar.”

I was shocked. We were both laughing out of happiness. Then I said, “You know, I have another set of books called the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Śrīla Prabhupāda told us it is the postgraduate study after the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.”

“Really? Yes, yes I will take all of them!”

As a present I gave him some other books he didn’t have yet. I also gave him the telephone number of a devotee living nearby and the address of the nearest temple.

Śrīla Prabhupāda does miracles. His books alone are making devotees. We just have to go out and find them.

* * *

Candraśekhara Ācārya Dāsa

I was standing on the street at the entrance of a very large and busy electronics/music/book store in Paris called “La FNAC.” One young man with a ponytail walked by me, heading inside the store. I stopped him and showed him a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* volume. His eyes widened and he exclaimed, “I can’t believe this! I can’t believe it! I was just going into this store to buy a copy of the *Rāmāyaṇa*! I’m very, very much interested in Hare Kṛṣṇa. In fact, I met you guys sometime back in Scotland. Then I also saw you in Peru. I’m going to India in a month, and I have a lot of questions I want to ask.”

Sure enough, Keveen, who is half American, bought three books. As a gift I gave him the DVD documentary of the installation of the Māyāpur Pañca-tattva deities. I also invited him to visit us at the Māyāpur festival in late February. Keveen wrote me the following words a few days later:

“Dear Chandra, I’ll be in India on the 24th in Bombay, then bumming around with my bike. I hope I’ll get the opportunity to cycle to your place [Māyāpur] and enjoy your rich spiritual life. Ps: I have started the first book you gave me. Wow dude; it’s great!”

* * *

Carṣaṇī Devī Dāsī

New Age people love the term *synchronicity*. It means when two related incidents happen apparently by coincidence in a short space of time. I had this experience while doing book distribution in Broome, a small tourist town up in the isolated northwest of Australia.

While going door-to-door with Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, I entered a New Age gift store and, as I do wherever I go, displayed the books to the manager and told her a bit about them. Being quite spiritually inclined, she was interested and picked them up to get a better look. When she picked up the *Bhagavad-gītā* and turned it over, she gasped in surprise. “I know about this man!” she exclaimed, looking at the picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda. “I read about him just last night in a book about ascended masters!” She had a bit of trouble pronouncing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s name, but she remembered quite a bit about his life and proceeded to tell me what she could remember—especially how he had come to the West to preach, to fulfill the order of his spiritual master. She was so excited about the “synchronicity,” the apparent coincidence of me turning up with Śrīla

Chapter 8: Ecstatic Encounters

Prabhupāda's books so soon after she had been reading about him, and she was so convinced that it was an auspicious spiritual sign, that she purchased everything I was carrying, six books!

* * *

Cārucandra Dāsa

Once at the Los Angeles Airport I stopped two young girls. One of them had a nose ring, so I asked her, "Do you know where nose rings originated?"

"India?" she ventured.

"Yes, very good," I replied, "but I have the suitable philosophy to go with the nose ring," and I handed her and her friend copies of SSR. When they opened the books they saw the *samsāra* picture and enthusiastically told me they had this picture on a wall in their room (they were roommates). When I explained to them what the book was about they were completely in ecstasy, but since they had no cash they asked me if I accepted checks and I said yes. While one girl looked in her backpack for the checkbook, the other wanted to see the other books I had with me. So I showed her all eight books I had, and she wanted all of them. I told her the price was around \$50. She asked me which books she should read first, and I told her the exact sequence to read the books, which she carefully wrote down.

After they'd received the books, one of the girls asked me which mantras I was chanting. "Well, since I'm a Hare Kṛṣṇa monk, I chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra."

"I chant *om*," she replied.

I opened the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and showed her the first verse, with the *om* in *om namo bhagavate vāsudevaya*, and explained to her the meaning of *om*: "Oh my Lord!"

She was overwhelmed to hear that. She wanted to know which other *mantras* she could chant, and I said, "The best mantra is the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare."

She began jumping up and down in ecstasy and shouted: "I always wanted to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa!"

I was startled, to say the least.

She gave me her name and address and I promised to mail her a tape with a recording of the *mahā-mantra* on it and to keep in contact with her and her friend. They walked away blissed out, with a stack of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

* * *

Jagannātha Dāsa

I was walking down a street in downtown Kansas City when I suddenly felt an incredible force inside me, pushing me to give a book to a woman walking on my left. I handed her a *Science of Self-Realization* and told her what the book was about. She said, "Sure I'll buy this book. Let me give you a donation." As she handed me five dollars she said, "Actually, I'm a Christian, see? [She pointed to a little cross hanging around her neck.] I was just praying to Jesus that I want to love God more than anything else in my life. At that time I felt a more intense connection with God than I've ever felt in my life. I thought, 'What's going to happen next?' Then I walked out here and you handed me this book!"

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

I was having a really tough time, having gotten forty cold no's in a row. I thought, "I can't go on; this is too difficult." But I fought the current of my mind and just kept going, depending on Kṛṣṇa's mercy. Just then I saw a new-age-looking lady pushing a shopping cart out of a supermarket. Thinking "She'll never take a book," I walked right past her. Suddenly I heard her call out, "Hey, let me see what you have there." I turned around, walked a few steps, and handed her an SSR. She'd caught me so off guard that I forgot my mantra: "Uh, um," I stammered, "it's about yoga."

"Great!" she said. "I've been wanting to read a book like this." She then handed me twenty dollars and told me to keep the change. "God bless you for what you're doing."

I smiled to myself as she drove away, marveling at Kṛṣṇa's arrangement. I learned something there: Don't judge a book by its cover.

* * *

Karuṇā-dhārinī Devī Dāśī

There is a lot of fun and realization in book distribution. Quite often students come to our table to take books, and some offer comments. "This picture is sooo beautiful," one girl said, about the painting of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on the cover of the *Gītā*. Another said, "I got a *Science of Self-Realization* and loved that book. Which book should I read next?" Once a boy said, "'As soon as a man is born, he dies at every moment.' When I read that it blew me away!" Then, calling his friend's attention to Śrīla Prabhupāda's picture on the back of the *Gītā*, he said, "Man, this is the guy who wrote that! He is so cool." Still another student said, "I read your *Higher Taste*, and it changed my whole life."

* * *

Lilā-Mādhava Dāśa

I was distributing on a sidewalk at an intersection in Barcelona, Spain. Every day I would try to stop the same young lady, but she would ignore me. One day I walked with her a few meters, pleading with her in a friendly way: "Come on! Just take one book!" Pointing to the *Teachings of Queen Kuntī* I was holding, I said, "Here, please take the teachings of the queen!"

But to no avail; she wouldn't stop.

However, the next day when I saw here she humbly approached me and asked, "Can I buy the *Teachings of Queen Kuntī*?"

Surprised, I replied, "How did you know the name of the queen?"

I clearly remembered *not* having mentioned Queen Kuntī's name to her but saying only "Please take the teachings of the queen." But here she was, asking explicitly for the *Teachings of Queen Kuntī*. She replied, "Actually, I had a dream of this Queen Kuntī last night. She told me, 'Go buy my book from that man.'" Queen Kuntī *kī jaya!*

The young lady gave such a nice donation that I also handed her a *Bhagavad-gītā*. When she saw it, she exclaimed, "The *Bhagavad-gītā*! I can't believe it! My boyfriend has been telling me about this book for a whole year!" Then I showed her all the books I had. She gave even more

Chapter 8: Ecstatic Encounters

lakṣmī and ended up buying my entire selection.

Book distribution is mystical.

* * *

Madhumaṅgala Dāsa

Kampala, Uganda—The sun was blazing hot on this day in Kampala (it’s right on the equator), and I knew it was going to be a particularly slow day. Sure enough, after more than an hour I had distributed only three of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. I entered a small sporting goods shop and introduced myself to a young Indian man who looked to be the proprietor. “Are you from Kampala,” I asked.

“No, I’m originally from Punjab, in India.”

I noticed he was wearing a silver band on his wrist, the kind that Sikhs wear. I pointed to the wristband and said, “Oh, I see you’re a *kṣatriya*, a warrior.” He nodded in affirmation. I showed him Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, which he looked at with great interest. I said, “These books are not about religion. Religion tells you what to do. These books tell you who you are and how you can live a life true to your real self.”

“Can you tell me my future?” he asked. “I’ve always wanted someone to tell me my future.”

“Show me your hand,” I said. When he did so I pointed to the lines on his palm and said, “You see that line? It tells your future. I will tell you your future.” I took a book out of my cart and put a *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* in front of him on the counter. “This is your future. This book is about Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Do you know who He is?”

He nodded yes.

“If you read this book, study it, take it into your heart, follow its teachings and principles, and apply them in your daily life, your future will be that you’ll go back to Vaikuṅṭha and live eternally with Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. You’ll never have to come back to this temporary material world.” I pointed outside the door and said, “That’s not our real home, this place so full of miseries. Read this book and your future will be to go back home, back to Godhead.”

He opened up the cash drawer and gave me a 20,000-Ugandan-shilling note (worth about US\$10). “Raise your arms,” I said to him. He did so and I said, “Now repeat after me: *Jaya Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Prabhu Nityānanda, Śrī Advaita, Gadādhara, Śrīvasādi Gaura Bhakta Vṛnda!*” He repeated the names as he looked at me with wide eyes. I started chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and dancing and took his hands. He danced with me as we both laughed.

I told him, “You must have been a devotee in your last life. You see, all your life you’ve been waiting for someone to tell you your future, and now you know your future. It’s described in the book I’ve given you. The seed has been planted in your heart. Your material life is over. You’re on your way back to the spiritual sky!” I embraced him and chanted in his ear: “Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.”

He exclaimed, “*Jaya Śrī Kṛṣṇa!*”

Our most auspicious future is in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. Each and every page we read is a step back home, back to Godhead.

* * *

Oṃkāra Dasa

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

At a Coachella music festival I decided to stay late on Sunday night, through the end of the show, till about midnight, when all eighty-five thousand people leave the venue at once. This is known as “the blow-out.” I told the other members of our *saṅkīrtana* team of my plan, and Parameśvara Prabhu and Bhakta Joe volunteered to stay late with me. Neither Parameśvara nor Bhakta Joe had had much experience with the blow-out. We were all a little nervous, being on our own, but we wanted to do something extra for Kṛṣṇa.

Once the blow-out stampede started, I was doing as Bhakta Phil had trained me to do a year earlier: I stood close to the gates where the people were flooding out of the stadium and offered the books like a newspaper vendor on a street corner. “Check it out! Cool books on yoga and meditation!” Sometimes people would take right there, and others would hear me and then come up a little later.

Yet I was having a really tough time. “What’s the use?” I thought. “Nobody’s taking. I’m so insignificant and incompetent. But still, these people have gone through so many countless lives before getting this human life, and they’re simply squandering it. Let me at least give them a chance” I knew I couldn’t give up.

So, by the mercy of Lord Nṛsimhadeva, I took shelter of Him. With one big book in each hand, I began loudly singing the Nṛsimha prayers. With my eyes closed, meditating on the beautiful form of Śrī Śrī Lakṣmī-Nṛsimha as I sang, I felt someone touch the book. As I turned and looked, someone asked me what this book was all about. I gave a brief explanation and they gave twenty dollars for the book! I grabbed another book and started singing again. When I got to “*Jaya Prahlāda Mahārāja!*” two more people came up to me and took some more books. Feeling inspired, I grabbed some more books and started singing again. This time four people came, and they all got books. When I ask for a donation, I never ask for an amount. I always say, “Just give from the heart; do the best you can.” So one person was only going to give one dollar, even though he had many tens and twenties. As he was fumbling in his wallet to pull the one out, I meditated on how merciful Lakṣmī-devī is to Kṛṣṇa’s aspiring devotees. The person then immediately went for a ten and said, “How about one of these instead?”

The rest of the night I spent in ecstasy as I sang for the Lord. Kṛṣṇa was so kind to give me such a slight glimpse of what it means to depend on Him. On my own I couldn’t do anything, but when I depended on Kṛṣṇa, so many books went out with ease. Before I knew it it was two in the morning, so we called it a day—a big day for Kṛṣṇa.

* * *

Parameśvara Dāsa

One guy I approached was really tuned in. He touched the book and flipped out, saying, “The vibration is unbelievable.”

“That’s because your touching God,” I replied. He gave a nice donation.

* * *

Rakṣit Dāsa

Chapter 8: Ecstatic Encounters

I offered a book to a young man and he said, “I’m sorry, I don’t have any money. Actually I want to buy a book, but unfortunately I can’t.” These are standard excuses offered by many reluctant people during book distribution.

I was therefore surprised when a half hour later I heard him calling to me from behind. As he approached, I saw he was panting and sweating, having run a long distance.

“Take it easy; don’t get excited,” I said to him. As I calmed him down he caught his breath and said, “Please give me a copy of all the books you have.”

“But earlier you said you didn’t have any money,” I said, surprised at his newfound eagerness.

“Well, I liked them so much when you showed them to me that I ran to my older brother’s house and got these rupees from him.”

That’s not all. After he bought the books he pleaded with us to let him join us in distributing. He began running from person to person, showing them books, just as I was doing. This was his first encounter with the Hare Kṛṣṇas, and he was hooked on book distribution right away.

Mahad, a small town on the Konkan belt of Western India, has a few thriving industries. One Birla-group company looked prosperous and seemed a good prospect for our bus party. As I initiated the formalities, I was pleasantly surprised at the warmth and courtesy exuding from the company employees, especially the general manager. I was curious, as he had revealed his orthodox Catholic upbringing. I humbly put forward our request for permission to put up book tables and distribute Vedic books on the company premises. Not only did he instantly agree, but he also volunteered to provide whatever help we needed in our efforts to distribute the *Bhagavad-gītā* at their establishment. He spoke excitedly about why he wanted us there: “A few weeks ago, in our company’s housing colony, an elderly resident breathed his last. A few minutes before the end, his eldest son, desiring to read the *Bhagavad-gītā* to him, asked his neighbors for a copy. They didn’t have one. Panicking, he ran to each of the sixty houses, but surprisingly no one had a copy of this most sacred book. Finally, as a last resort he came to me, knowing fully well that a Catholic house is the most unlikely place to find a *Bhagavad-gītā*. But to his great elation, I had not one but two copies of *Bhagavad-gītā As it Is*. He grabbed one, ran to his departing father, and read Kṛṣṇa’s immortal words and Śrīla Prabhupāda’s hope-giving purports to his father as he left the world. To me, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s presentation of the *Gītā* is the most lucid, and it’s the one I always give as a gift. It will be great if all our employees can now avail themselves of this treasure you provide.”

We were only too glad to comply, and not surprisingly, the book distribution scores at this company were some of the best we’ve ever had.

* * *

Rūpa-Raghunātha Dāsa

Sydney, Australia

It was Monday morning. I had to do some banking and other errands. It was nearly lunchtime, so I went home for an early lunch, thinking I would go on book distribution after lunch.

But Kṛṣṇa had other plans.

A young lady knocked on the door, taking a survey. I answered her questions in two

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

minutes and then invited her in for *prasādam*. She happily agreed.

Afterwards I showed her some books. She became so mesmerized — asking questions and reading the books — that she forgot the time. Before either of us noticed, it was 5pm and she had been getting the mercy for 4 hours! Realizing she was late to meet her boss, she bought an SSR and a *Your Ever Well-Wisher*, expressed an interest to come back, and left.

I thought I would spend what was left of the day with my wife and newborn child. But Kṛṣṇa did not seem to like this idea. I had to buy some groceries, so I drove to the store. But as soon as I jumped out of the van, people started to approach me. (This is the benefit of dressing in *dhotī* and *kurtā* and having Hare Kṛṣṇa signs on the side of your van.) The first couple asked me about programs and bought a big First Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, a *Your Ever Well-Wisher*, and some neckbeads, all for \$50. The lady in the car next to me said she had been vegetarian her whole life. She bought a *Gītā*, a *Your Ever Well-Wisher*, and a cookbook for \$40. Then a lady approached me saying she wanted to speak to me when I was free. It turned out she ran the Fitness First shop close by. She bought three cookbooks and a *Your Ever Well-Wisher* for \$100 and then said, “I could display a variety of philosophy books and cookbooks for sale in my shop.”

Moral: we should see every situation as an opportunity to give the conditioned souls the wonderful gifts of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books.

* * *

Śāstra-kṛta Dāsa

I was advised by a health specialist to go to a sauna and sweat, so I went to a pool near the Los Angeles temple, where I reside. I was sitting in the sauna with a friend; it was full.

All of a sudden an African-American man in his late 40s addressed me: “Excuse me. Can I ask you a question? Do you know Sanskrit?”

“I don’t speak it,” I replied, “but I’m learning.” I asked him his name and he told me it was Matt, and then I asked him why he cares about Sanskrit.

“I’m reading the *Bhagavad-gītā*,” he replied, “and there are many words I can’t pronounce, so I’m asking any Indian I come across if they can help me with my pronunciation.”

I said, “I teach the *Bhagavad-gītā* at the nearby Hare Kṛṣṇa temple, and I can surely help you with your pronunciation.” Matt was sooo happy to hear that. I couldn’t believe I had met him, and he couldn’t believe he’d met me. We were both in ecstasy.

Then Matt started saying some names from the *Gītā*: Kurukṣetra, Sañjaya, Madhusūdana, etc. “Your pronunciation is great,” I told him. “You’re a natural. Must be from your past life.” We both laughed.

When I asked him whose *Gītā* he was reading, he told me it was Paramahansa Yogananda’s. So I explained to him who Śrīla Prabhupāda was and how his amazing commentary on the *Gītā* explains that we’re all individual souls, that Kṛṣṇa is also an individual, and that Kṛṣṇa is after our love, nothing else.

By now everyone in the sauna was listening to our conversation. All of a sudden a man asked, “What’s the main religion in India?” I told him it was the Hindu religion, and then he asked, “What’s the name of God in India?” I told him “Kṛṣṇa.” Another guy said, “I just became vegetarian and I love Indian food.” So I told him about our Govinda’s Buffet at the temple. Another guy asked me if I teach yoga. I told him that I teach *bhakti-yoga* and that others in our community teach *hatha-*

Chapter 8: Ecstatic Encounters

yoga and that I could introduce him to them.

In this way everyone in the sauna was so enthusiastic to find out about Kṛṣṇa! It was amazing. I was feeling dehydrated and exhausted from the heat, but the questions were so good that I prayed to Kṛṣṇa for more energy.

Matt asked me if I could introduce him to a guru. I told him that my *gurudeva* would be visiting LA in a few weeks and that I could arrange a meeting with him, and that there are many other gurus also. Matt was so happy to hear that.

Finally, with great enthusiasm Matt asked me where he could find Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. I told him I had some in my car that I could give him right away.

So I ran to my car and got him a *Science of Self-Realization*, and we exchanged emails and phone numbers. Matt was so happy that he gave me a big bear hug and said, “My friend, you have no idea how much our meeting and this book [*The Science of Self-Realization*] mean to me at this point in my life. I’m so grateful, so grateful.” He was speaking so loud that everyone in our section of the gym was looking at me.

*brahmāṇḍa bhramite kona bhāgyavān jīva
guru-kṛṣṇa-prasāde pāya bhakti-latā-bīja*

“After wandering throughout the universe, by the mercy of both Kṛṣṇa and the spiritual master a fortunate person receives the seed of the creeper of devotional service.”

I was distributing books with Sachitanoy Prabhu at the University of California in Irvine when I saw a young lady nearby sitting and reading something. I looked closely and to my surprise saw she was reading *Kṛṣṇa, the Reservoir of Pleasure*. I saw that she had a huge smile on her face.

She finished the pamphlet, and as she was leaving I asked her, “Did you like what you were reading?”

She was surprised that I knew what she was reading and said, “Yes, I did, every word that the author wrote made sense, and I really want to get more books by him.”

“Well,” I said, “today is your lucky day because I have about five titles by the same author in this bag I’m carrying.”

She showed so much excitement and surprise that I brought out all the titles I had and she gave me a \$20 donation for them.

After the exchange I asked her where she’d gotten the pamphlet. I thought she must have gotten it from Sachitanoy, but to my surprise she said she’d gotten it ages ago and just kept it in her bag. She’d just seen it that day and decided to read it while I was next to her. Paramātmā does it again.

* * *

Sthānu Dāsa

I was the chairman of our *brāhmaṇas’* council and *saṅkīrtana* leader of our small *yātrā* in Sofia, Bulgaria. I was so busy that I could rarely go out and distribute books myself, and when I did so it was only for a short time. I began to think, “What kind of example am I setting for the other devotees with my paltry book scores?” It happened that World

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

Enlightenment Day was coming up, so I thought, “At least let me call up some devotees I know and invite them to participate in that enlivening day. I’ll also distribute some books myself, and then everyone can come to the temple in the evening and have a big feast.”

One of my calls was to Bhaktin Galya, but to my surprise, when I called I found that the Galya I had reached was another Galya, from the city of Varna, which was more than five hundred km from Sofia! I spoke to her about Prabhupāda’s books, and even though it was the wrong Galya I invited her to join us for World Enlightenment Day.

She replied very enthusiastically, “We are five families, and we want all of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books!” She ordered five full sets of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatams*, *Bhagavad-gītās*, *Kṛṣṇa* books, and a few others. I was shocked. All together Galya’s people purchased ninety-five *mahā* big books!

The next day I took a train ride for eight hours, delivered the books, and returned to Sofia in the evening amazed by Kṛṣṇa’s unlimited mercy. It was not a telephone mistake—there are no mistakes—it was Kṛṣṇa’s arrangement. Unbelievable: I call a lady by “mistake” and she ends up buying ninety-five books!

* * *

Vāsudeva Datta Dāsa

Recently we did *saṅkīrtana* in my hometown in Slovenia. Before going there, I had to go through a strenuous purification of my mind. My false ego was flipping out: “What will happen if I meet this relative and that professor or exgirlfriend?! How will all these people react when they see me in this strange dress selling books?!”

I preached to myself that this was all nonsense and the mental platform. Actually, I was forced to go much deeper and ask, “Who am I? What I am doing?” I got a nice realization that I am not really spiritually advanced. So I prayed to Guru and the Pañca-tattva like anything to please remove this bodily concept of life.

Then I surrendered and “jumped into the ocean,” going directly into the center of my “sweet hometown.” By the mercy of Guru and Kṛṣṇa, all the people were very nice. I went door to door. Many people immediately recognized me and invited me in; they usually took a book or two as “old friends.” One heavy professor from my high school was very surprised when he opened the door. I told him, “Dear sir, this is for you. To repay you for my being so naughty in high school.” The professor immediately went for some *lakṣmī* and took the book. He was so moved that he shook my hand and thanked me. Actually, most of my exprofessors took *Bhagavad-gītās*; many of them thought I’d come just to see them.

At first I was afraid of how people who knew me would react, but soon I saw that their familiarity with me was an advantage on book distribution. After awhile the Lord gave me even more mercy and courage, and I started saying a new *mantra* to all the people I didn’t know: “Are you from this town?”

“Yes.”

“Then you must know my mother Ida, who works at the government office.” (Everyone knows my mother.)

Usually this would melt their hearts. They would remember me when I was small, holding my mother by the hand. When they would be most excited I would just smile and give them a book. How could they refuse!?

In this way I did *saṅkīrtana* for a full week in my hometown. These were some of the most

Chapter 8: Ecstatic Encounters

blissful days in my *saṅkīrtana* career. Many people asked me to please visit them again and spend a little more time with them. So I'm planning to go back and take them some *prasādam*, incense, and more books.

Doing *saṅkīrtana* in my hometown left a great impression on my heart. I feel that Guru and Kṛṣṇa blessed me to more deeply identify myself as a devotee of Kṛṣṇa. Since that time I've worn only *dhotī* and *kurtā*, even to visit my parents' home. And they accept me as a devotee.

Back home, back to Godhead (our real home), *kī jaya!*

* * *

Vijaya Dasa

I was on a *harināma* in Bonn, Germany, about a forty-five-minute drive from Koln. Seventy devotees attended this transcendental gathering, and I really have to say it was ecstatic. The very blissful *sannyāsīs* Śacīnandana Swami and Bhaktibhūṣaṇa Swami were leading the way. While staying in one place for awhile I noticed two ladies trying to chant but not quite making it, so I went over to them and gave them a couple of mantra cards. While they were chanting very enthusiastically, I thought, "These inspired souls should get some books." They were just as enthusiastic to get the books as they were to chant the mantra. Just after we finished the exchange, the party began leaving, and one of the ladies said, "Hey, they're leaving; we have to catch up!" And off they went, leaving me behind to distribute a couple of more books to other onlookers. Then I rushed to catch up, to catch the mercy of the age, the holy name of Kṛṣṇa.

While I was distributing books at the Los Angeles airport, a lady came up to me and asked, "Where is Kṛṣṇa from?"

"Goloka Vṛndāvana," I replied, "a planet far beyond this material universe." Then I showed her the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

"Is that the *Bhagavad-gītā*?" she eagerly asked. "I would like to have the *Bhagavad-gītā* and give you a donation."

It turns out that one of her good friends had just become a devotee. The lady was going through some hard times and wanted something that would give her some guidance. She received the greatest guide, Kṛṣṇa. It's not every day that someone we stop asks, "Where is Kṛṣṇa from?"

During one of my visits to Kansas City, Mūrti Dāsa, a *saṅkīrtana* devotee there, told me that the rock band called Phish was coming to town, and he invited me to distribute books at the concert. I knew that this band would attract more than thirty thousand people and that a lot of books could be distributed. Hearing of this event brought back memories of years gone by, when during the summer we had as many as ten vans traveling around the US distributing books at concerts such as these. Sometimes there would be twenty-five devotees traveling around with one concert tour, and thousands of books would be distributed in one day. Thinking of all these fond memories, I decided to go. I also thought it would be a good idea if all the devotees in the temple came along, since there would be so many people. I gave a *saṅkīrtana* talk, and they all went out

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

to get and give some mercy.

At the concert, books were being distributed so easily that a couple of times people came up to me asking what I had, and after I'd explained what they were about, they enthusiastically gave donations and took books. The last person I spoke to had a perfect *śikhā*. I said with a smile, "We have the same hair style," and showed him mine. I told him that in India people offer respects to saintly people who wear *śikhās* because they're a sign of renunciation. "So, if you're feeling you're not getting enough respect here, just go to India with your *śikhā*." He laughed, took the book, and gave a nice donation along with a bear hug.

At the end of the day, all the devotees were excited and enlivened by all the books they'd distributed. Some had had their best day ever. As the devotees moved the empty book boxes around to find places to sit, I said, "One of the most pleasant sounds for a *saṅkīrtana* devotee is the sound of empty book boxes being moved about." At the Boston temple in the 1970s, after the Śrīla Prabhupāda marathon was over on December 31st, the devotees would get all the empty book boxes and, just before the last *ārati*, place them in the temple room as an offering to Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa likes empty book boxes also.

I tried to stop a guy at a festival in Washington, D.C., by putting my hand out to shake his as he was walking by, but he kept going. I kept my hand out, and he also kept his out but kept walking. We both had our hands out to shake, but because he kept walking our hands were getting further and further apart, till we were separated by about twenty feet. Finally I called to him, "Hey, don't leave me hanging here!" Then he saw the cover of the book I was showing with my other hand—*The Journey of Self-Discovery* — and came back. He shook my hand and said, "That could be interesting." I showed him the book, and he liked it so much he gave \$20.

A man came up to my table and saw the *Bhagavad-gītā* and said, "Were you people just in Minnesota? I saw this book there last month."

"I wasn't there, but some of my friends were. Did you get the book from them?"

"No, I didn't."

"Well, then I think it's no accident that this book is in front of you again. It may be a good idea to look into it."

"Yeah, it's pretty amazing that I'm seeing it again. All right, I'll take it."

One fellow at a shopping mall in Denton came along and I handed him a *Śrī Īsopaniṣad* to look at. He turned it over and began reading the copy: "The Sanskrit words *Śrī Īsopaniṣad* mean 'the knowledge that brings one nearer to the Supreme Person, Kṛṣṇa.'" When he read the Lord's holy name he gazed off in the distance thoughtfully and said, "'Kṛṣṇa.' *Hmmm*, where have I heard that before? 'Kṛṣṇa.' Sounds familiar, but I just can't put my finger on it 'Kṛṣṇa.'" After he'd said "Kṛṣṇa" for the third time, he'd undergone so much purification that he readily handed me a \$10 bill, allowing me to give him a *Bhagavad-gītā* along with the *Īso*. He strolled off, reading as he walked, totally absorbed in Kṛṣṇa's association. "Kṛṣṇa." *Hmm*.

Chapter 8: Ecstatic Encounters

While distributing books in the Los Angeles Airport, I approached an Indian gentleman and presented him with the *Bhagavad-gītā*. After I'd shown him some of the text and a few illustrations, he said, "Now I have something to show you." He then reached into his bag and brought out—a Bible!

"That's fantastic!" I said.

He then showed me how much of it he'd read and told me he was finding it quite interesting.

"Look at the symmetry," I said. "I'm American, you're Indian. I'm showing you the *Bhagavad-gītā*, you're showing me the Bible. I've read the Bible, but have you read the *Gītā*?"

"No, I haven't," he confessed.

"Then this is your opportunity to read the most important book of India." With enthusiasm he took the *Gītā* and gave a nice donation.

I approached a man and his wife. He looked to be at least six feet five inches (over two meters). Big! Usually these big guys just shrug us off when we approach them. I approached him anyway.

I presented the *Bhagavad-gītā* to him and he said, "Not interested, but she is," referring to his wife. I then showed the book to her. When she saw it her eyes opened wide and she exclaimed, "I can't believe it! Just yesterday my yoga teacher said to me, 'If you ever get the chance, read the *Bhagavad-gītā*.' And now you're offering it to me! This is amazing."

"You know there are no accidents, right?" I said.

"Yes, I'm realizing that more and more every day. Can I give you a donation for this?"

She then gave a nice donation and received her *Bhagavad-gītā* and a card inviting her to the temple.

Yaśodeva Dāsa

Central Train Station, Sydney, Australia . . .

We were behind enemy lines in the train station complex, dropping bombs in the form of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books with a haphazard frenzy. Like timed explosives, they were killing the materialistic tendencies of every conditioned soul who ventured near.

Sentries deployed, motion sensors fully activated, acquiring target . . .

A young couple who just finished high school: The girl likes yoga, the boy likes Buddha. Too easy . . . They both get a book. Now their sense gratification is doomed because it's only a matter of time before the book blows up, shattering the curtain of *māyā*.

No one is spared from the *sankīrtana* missiles raining like fire on a world inundated by illusion!

I've apprehended a tall, dark man with aviator sunglasses and a rigid disposition. A few moments into the interrogation reveals that he's a Christian pretending to be an innocent inquirer. Two-timing double agent spy! I was just about to retreat from the battle when I noticed in the reflection of his sunglasses that there were three armed security

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

guards with even more rigid dispositions waiting behind me. I knew that if they caught me I'd be forced to swear allegiance to their totalitarian regime or face removal from the stronghold. Desperate times call for desperate measures . . .

I turn up the heat on the Christian and raise my voice considerably: "God is a person! He has form! He has qualities! He has activities!"

The security guards are apprehensive. I can see in the reflection of the sunglasses that they're too scared to enter such a heated discussion. Meanwhile, the Christian thinks I must have very deep convictions, since I'm looking directly into his eyes with such intensity! Time for the secret weapon . . .

"We don't care about heaven or hell! Nothing can stop us from serving Lord Kṛṣṇa!"

The guards are backing off. They must be thinking, "Either he's crazy or he's a Hare Kṛṣṇa. Best to leave him be."

Now for the *coup de grâce*. With a bright smile I hand the Christian the *Bhagavad-gītā* and employ Rāmadasa Prabhu's perfect tactical maneuver:

"Please take one. Christians always give the best donations."

Either his heart had been melted or his intelligence bewildered because he eagerly gave twenty dollars and took the book.

"I can see you're very, very convinced," he said. "Thank you so much."

Another perfect casualty, smothered by Prabhupāda's mercy.

Saṅkīrtana is so much fun.

* * *

Bhakta Eben

I was distributing at an Ozzfest concert in Virginia. I approached a car to show the occupants some of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. As they were checking out the literature, a girl in the front seat began to tell me a story she was reminded of by seeing the books.

She told me that the previous July 4th she'd been in Washington, D.C., at the National Mall and had seen these guys in dresses dancing around chanting and playing "bongo drums." I realized she'd been at the DC Ratha-yātrā and said to her: "Ok, I confess. We Hare Kṛṣṇas are the guilty party. Did you like the festival?"

At that she got really excited and told me she'd hung out there for about an hour and was totally amazed by the chanting and dancing and the whole vibe of the scene. She even had a piece of *prasādam* cake but put it down after one bite because she felt like she was tripping on drugs from eating it. Must have been some pretty potent *prasādam*!

Meanwhile all her friends in the car were listening in and getting very excited as the conversation got more animated. She then got even more animated and told me "I even climbed up onto the altar and fanned—" Just then I opened one of the books and showed her a picture of Prabhupāda. "That's him!" she shouted. "I fanned him!"

Everyone in the car went nuts, but then I had to tell her that it wasn't Śrīla Prabhupāda himself but a lifelike statue. Still, doing some service for the pure devotee had its effect, and everyone in the car went home with one of Prabhupāda's books and an invitation to visit the festival again next 4th of July.

* * *

Chapter 8: Ecstatic Encounters

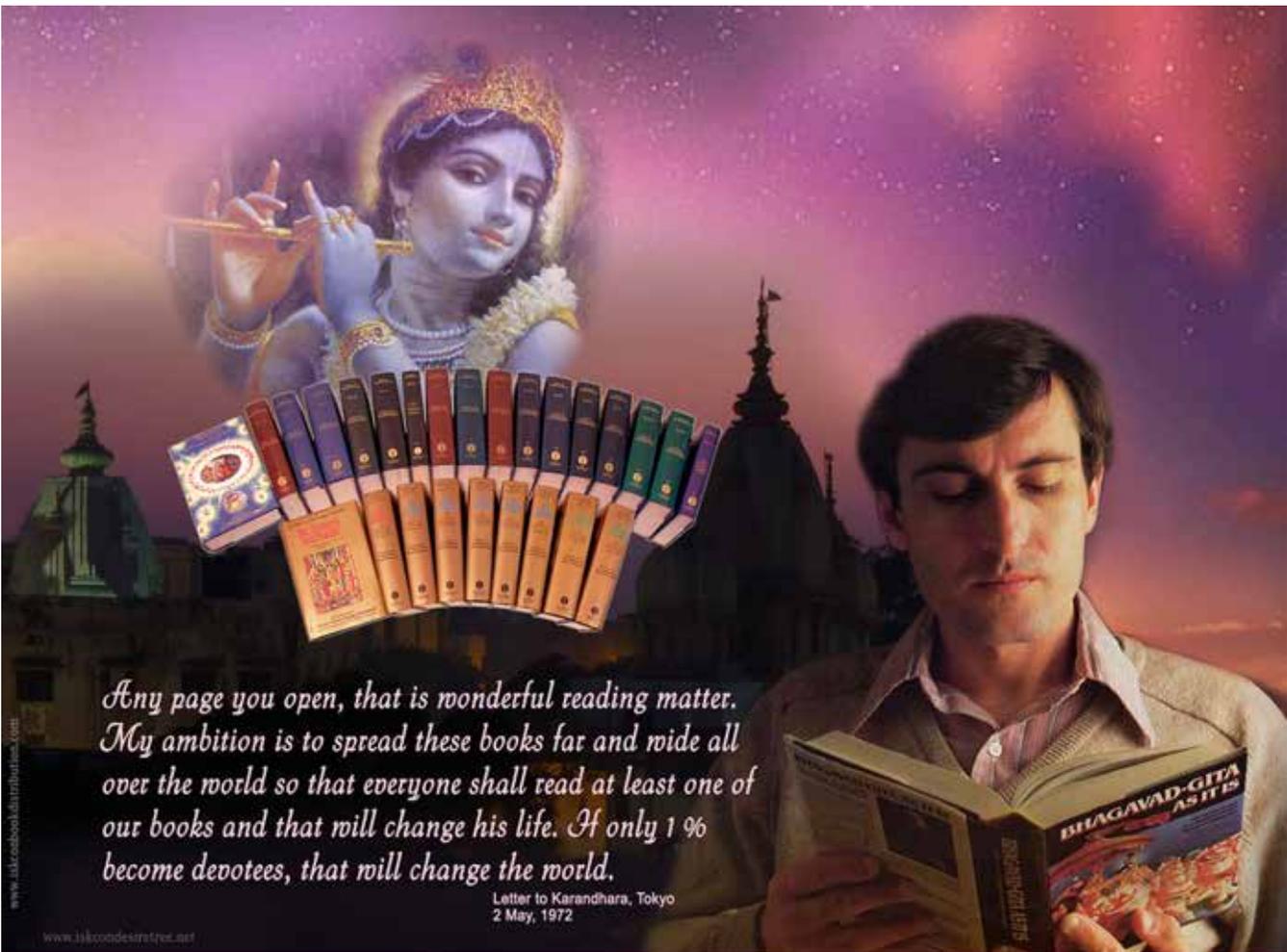
Bhakta Edward (Perth, Australia)

I was out on books when I met a young guy who, like many of today's youth, was completely uninterested in being part of the materialistic society but hadn't yet been introduced to the alternative Śrīla Prabhupāda has so mercifully provided. I put a copy of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.1 in his hand and began explaining the authenticity of it by pointing out the original Sanskrit and word-for-word translation. He immediately became very enlivened and started telling me about his own *sādhana*. He explained how he was into t'ai chi, *hatha-yoga*, and a few other practices I wasn't familiar with. Then he said that his new yoga teacher was teaching him something called "go-run-ga meditation" and that he found it especially good for keeping his mind focused. Surprised and delighted, I asked him to repeat the special word for me. With a slight air of mysticism he replied, "Goooo-Ruun-Gaaa."

Needless to say, the transaction got really sweet after that. For a while he was trying to convince me that I should try it myself. I asked him what this meditation involved, and he explained that he was taught to chant the word "go-run-ga" over and over again and try to fix his mind on the sound vibration. I asked him if he knew what "gorunga" meant and he was slightly embarrassed to admit he didn't. What nectar it was to flip the pages of the book he was holding to a bright, shining picture of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and let him hear the good news. When he saw Lord Caitanya's picture, his face lit up as if he'd just seen a long-lost friend. He then asked what other books I had, so I showed him a *Light of the Bhāgavata*, for which he was more than happy to give a nice donation. Then I watched him walk away with a look on his face that revealed he knew he had just purchased something very significant for his life.

* * *

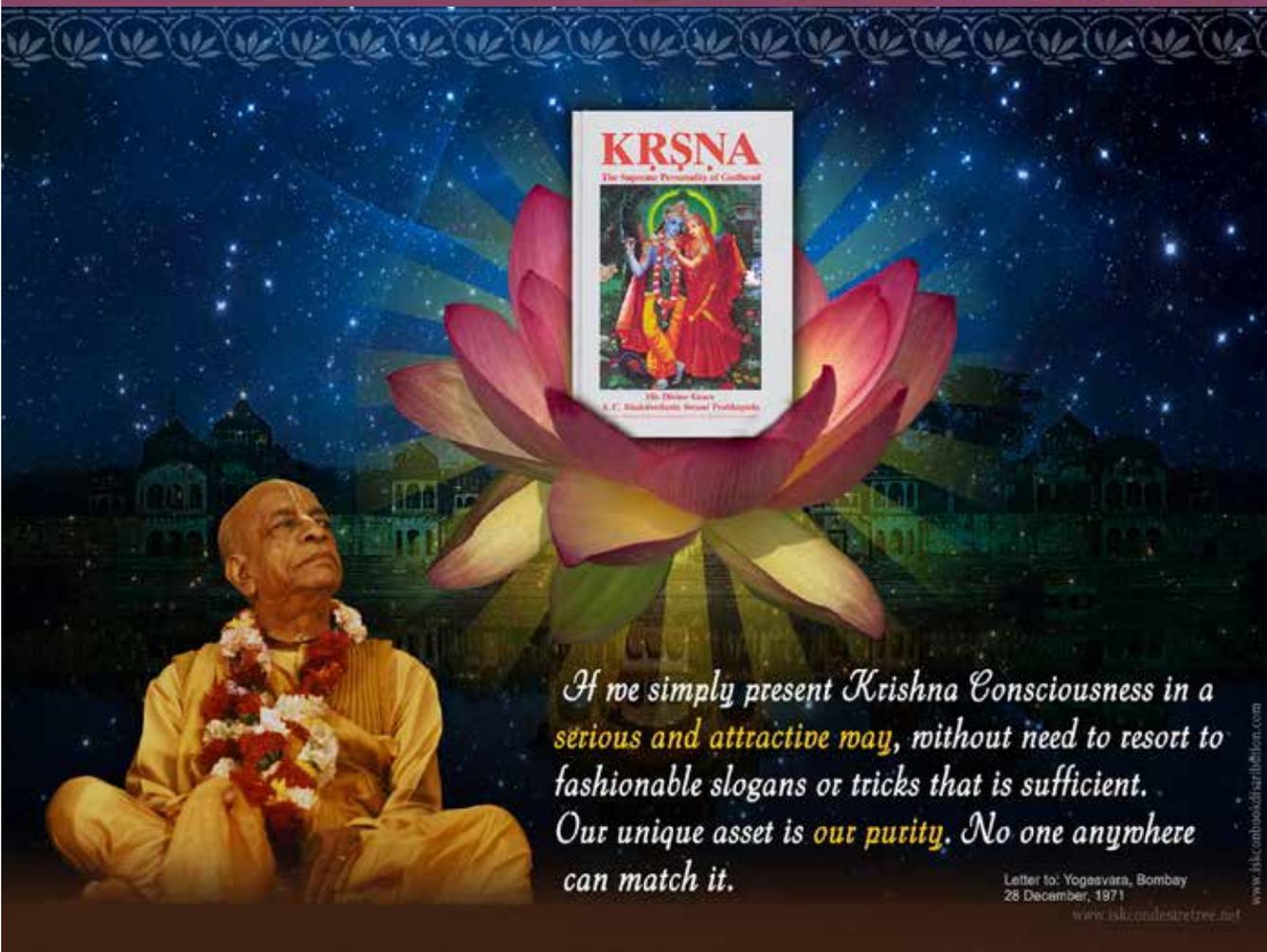
End of Chapter Eight: Ecstatic Encounters



Any page you open, that is wonderful reading matter. My ambition is to spread these books far and wide all over the world so that everyone shall read at least one of our books and that will change his life. If only 1 % become devotees, that will change the world.

Letter to Karandhara, Tokyo
2 May, 1972

www.iskcondesiretree.net



If we simply present Krishna Consciousness in a serious and attractive way, without need to resort to fashionable slogans or tricks that is sufficient. Our unique asset is our purity. No one anywhere can match it.

Letter to: Yogesvara, Bombay
28 December, 1971

www.iskcondesiretree.net

www.iskcondesiretree.net

Chapter Nine Familiar with Kṛṣṇa

Quite often we meet people who know something about the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement and are favorable. Which is understandable, since we have a nice movement: our philosophy is sublime, we have great *prasādam*, and the devotees are ladies and gentlemen (most of them). This latter feature is one of the reasons I joined.

I remember when I first went to the temple in Miami. I was so excited—I'd read the *Bhagavad-gītā* and was chanting. From performing these two services I was, by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, quite blissful. So I wanted to meet the devotees and see the temple so much. When I did meet them I wasn't disappointed. They were wonderful. What impressed me the most was their speech.

Nondevotees also recognize the devotees special speech, as the following incident will show. Before coming to the temple I wasn't wearing glasses, though I needed them. My previous pair had broken, and since I felt I'd entered into a life of detachment, I didn't bother replacing them. As in every temple, during the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class devotees would chant the verse of the day by reading it off a chalkboard. One day one of the senior devotees encouraged me to also chant the verse, but I couldn't read it without glasses. I told him this, and later he told me I should get some. So I called up the optometrist and made an appointment to have my eyes checked for a pair of glasses. After we'd made the appointment she asked me, "Are you a Hare Kṛṣṇa?"

"Yes," I replied. "How did you know?"

"You people are all so mellow."

After she said that I thought, "I joined the right movement." The speech of the devotees had impressed me the most, and by their association maybe a little of it had already rubbed off on me. There were two million people in Miami, but the optometrist's secretary was able to know I was a devotee just by hearing my voice. She had become familiar with the devotees by hearing their voices. When I went to the optometrist I showed her some of our books and she eagerly took some, saying, "Maybe if I read these books, I'll also become mellow."

* * *

Candraśekhara Ācārya Dāsa

In 1992 I met a lady with her two young daughters in a parking lot in San Francisco. I showed her the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and when she saw the picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda she said, "Oh, I saw this man once!" I politely told her that maybe she was mistaking him for someone else, since Śrīla Prabhupāda had passed away many years ago. But she insisted: "No, I met him. I was six years old. My parents were hippies in the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco. It was so wild at that time, in 1967, that my parents would forget to feed me and my sister. So she and I would often go to the Hare Kṛṣṇa temple and eat your wonderful vegetarian food. I specially remember one young lady—she was sooooo nice to me and my sister; her name was Melanie. So one day your spiritual master arrived from New York. I remember the temple room was full of incense and people. He came in and sat down and chanted for a while, and then he spoke to us a little bit. I remember it very vividly. Just by my speaking to you, all these memories are coming back."

Then this nice lady showed the picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda in the book to her little daughter and told her, "You see, this is Swamiji." She then gave me \$30 for the *Gītā* and told me I could visit her at her home any time.

A few weeks later I saw Mālatī Devī Dāsī (an early disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda who is now on

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

the GBC) in Arizona. I knew that she had been in San Francisco in the early days. When I asked her what her legal name was, sure enough, she told me it was Melanie.

How wonderful it is that twenty-five years later a woman who was then six years old still remembered the name of a Hare Kṛṣṇa devotee who was “sooooo nice to me and my sister.” Twenty-five years later she bought the *Bhagavad-gītā*!

While doing door to door in a university dormitory in Montpellier, France, I knocked at one door and a young lady opened. When I showed her the books, she said, “Oh, my boyfriend is really into Kṛṣṇa.”

Sometimes, we hear things like “Oh, my friend is really into India,” or “My friend is really into Eastern philosophy,” or “My friend is really into meditation and yoga,” but rarely do we hear, “My friend is into *Kṛṣṇa*.” She added, “His room is two doors down. Let’s go see him.”

Sure enough, when Lionel opened the door, I immediately noticed half a dozen BBT posters of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa on his walls.

“*How could this be?*” I thought. “*We have no devotees in this area. Nobody has distributed books here in ages.*”

He invited me in and told me his story. A few months earlier he’d gone to Pune, India, on a school project. While visiting New Delhi he’d seen an ISKCON *saṅkīrtana* van parked on the side of the street with its back open wide and a book table displaying Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. He approached the van and bought several books, including an English-language *Kṛṣṇa* book, which I noticed on his shelf. Now he was back in nowhere-land in southern France, but his room was filled with BBT posters (which he’d also bought at the *saṅkīrtana* van), as well as Prabhupāda’s books.

This proves yet again that although there may be no devotees in a particular geographical location, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books have a transcendental mind of their own, being nondifferent from the supremely independent Lord, and they go where they choose to go. I realized, “Whoa—books are being distributed to French people with or *without* book distributors in France!”

It made me think of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statement, “It cannot stop. It is too late. The books are already distributed!” All glories to the *bṛhat-mṛdaṅga*!

* * *

Cārucandra Dāsa

Once at LAX I approached a hippie with a beard and long hair. He was kind of aggressive and asked me gruffly, “What you got there?”

“I’m a monk,” I replied, “and these are books on yoga and meditation.”

As soon as he saw the books he changed completely and asked if I was a Hare Kṛṣṇa. I said yes, and he told me that he’d come in contact with devotees fifteen years earlier but had lost touch.

I showed him the books and told him what they were all about, and he was completely enthralled. He wanted to see all the books I had, and when I showed him *Your Ever Well-wisher* he returned the other two books and told me that that was the book he wanted. He gave me a nice donation and I gave him two books.

Then he told me that he had had a serious car accident a couple of years earlier and couldn’t concentrate properly since then, but that as soon as he thought of Kṛṣṇa his mind was completely fixed. When he told me that, I remembered I had some extra japa beads with me. I pulled them

Chapter 9: Familiar with Kṛṣṇa

out, complete with bead bag, and as soon as he saw them he firmly asked, “How much does that cost?”

I asked him for another small donation, which he willingly gave, and I showed him how to chant on the beads with his hand in the bead bag. Then he walked away through the middle of LAX, heading toward his gate to catch his plane, with a couple of books in his left hand and his right hand in his bead bag, chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa.

* * *

Chowpatti Book Distribution Party

Often a new book distributor thinks he or she needs to know many techniques to impress the customer and make the sale. Some basic knowledge of the operation may be needed, but the most important ingredient of success is the willingness to go out. Success and failure are in the hands of Kṛṣṇa, as revealed by this story narrated by Gaur Kirtana Prabhu, a member of the bus party of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Gopīnātha Mandir, Chowpatty:

During a December marathon we went to an area with lots of textile mills. We were distributing sets of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books on credit: the workers would simply sign their names and the payment was later deducted from their salary. Each set had a *Kṛṣṇa* book, a *Bhagavad-gītā*, an SSR, and some medium and small books. We were doing nicely when one day we reached a special company. “O Mahārājas, welcome, welcome,” exclaimed the chief security officer upon seeing us. He was a tall, well-built man in his mid-thirties, with a big moustache and triple stars on his uniform. He introduced himself as Mohan Singh.

We showed him our permission letter and our books. He was delighted to see our books and was the first one to sign and take a set. He said to his secretary, “O Bhairon Singh, keep these books in my office and bring hot tea for the Mahārājas.”

“No, sir, we don’t take tea.”

“What! No tea? No problem. Milk is ok?”

We said yes and he ordered fruits and milk for us.

“Don’t worry, Mahārāja, I will make sure everyone takes your books,” he said, and then he set our table right inside the exit route. We couldn’t have asked for a better spot.

The siren blew, announcing the end of the shift. We were ready with our sets and credit book. As soon as the masses of workers arrived, we began our announcements, but drowning out all our voices was the lone voice of our new friend, Mohan Singh.

“O Sohan,” he boomed, “O Bhagwat, O Billu, come and take these books. Very nice. Keep them carefully at home.” The booming, authoritative voice of Mohan Singh stopped the workers and pulled them to our table. When anyone showed no interest, Mohan Singh ridiculed him to such an extent that he couldn’t even stand there. Then Mohan Singh did the unthinkable.

“O Bhairon Singh, lock the gate. Don’t let anyone out without a set.” The burly, mustached Bhairon Singh jumped at the order, locked the gate, and allowed only those who had the sets to leave. The empty-handed workers stood in a corner while the proud owners of sets gleefully displayed their newly acquired treasure before them, thus changing the minds of many who were planning not to buy.

The pace was frantic. Jagannāth Prabhu, Śrī Caitanya Prabhu, our driver Sunil Prabhu, and I were just ripping open carton after carton. Mahānand Prabhu and Mohan Singh were simultaneously making entries in two credit books while Pañcapāṇḍava Prabhu stood on top of the table shouting

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

at the top of his voice. We didn't even bother to pack the books. We just counted out the books before the customer and handed him a plastic bag to pack them himself. The workers stood in line and simply came, said their name, and signed the credit book.

In two hours we did 220 sets, i.e., 440 mahā-big books plus many more.

Later Mohan Singh told us his story. In his youth he had left home to join the ashram of a *bābā* who lived near his village, but after his father died he had to return home to take care of his family. "When I saw you," he said, "I remembered my earlier days. I thought, 'I couldn't lead the renounced life then, but at least let me help these sādhus.' And when I saw your books about Kṛṣṇa, I was convinced you are working for the right cause."

* * *

Devakī-nandana Dāsa

I went right into the heart of the Sydney with *Beyond Birth and Death*. Who wouldn't be interested in such a book? I approached a girl from England. She said that before she came to Australia she had met a devotee from Scotland who was distributing books in England to collect donations for milk. She purchased a book from him. She also got a book from me. Then she asked me what the word is that devotees try to get people to say. I said Hare Kṛṣṇa, but she said, "No, it's 'Gaurāṅga!'" Then she very loudly exclaimed "Gaurāṅga!" and was on her way.

How amazing! I'm on a street in Sydney, Australia, the land down under, and a lady from England is chanting "Gaurāṅga!", which she learned from a Scottish devotee. How amazing! The Holy Name will surely be sung and heard in every town and village.

* * *

Dhanusakhi Dāsa

Once I met a very interesting Christian, whose story of how he came to Kṛṣṇa proves the potency of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

He was a leader of the Seventh Day Adventists, but he was very favorable toward Śrīla Prabhupāda and his books. Several times he even defended the books from his fanatical godbrothers, who claimed they were sectarian, dangerous, etc. Most amazing is his story:

Five years before I met him he was a chronic drunkard and was suffering from cancer. He happened to get a *Bhagavad-gītā* and a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, First Canto, part one. He read them very carefully and was inspired to change his life completely. The first step was to begin meditating on the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* (he even repeated it before me). Then he became a vegetarian, got married, and stopped drinking. After some time he met the Seventh Day Adventists and became one of their followers, but all the time Śrīla Prabhupāda's books remained his guides (as he said: "God is speaking in the *Bhagavad-gītā*!"). After some time he visited his doctor, who was amazed: his body was without any trace of cancer! "Why are you so astonished?" he asked his doctor. "God is the greatest doctor."

He has a Lithuanian friend who also reads our books and also was a bit into the Seventh Day Adventist theories. He became mentally ill and was put into a lunatic asylum. One day our protagonist visited his friend and suggested he take up meditation. "Chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*," he advised, "don't take any of their medicines, and you'll be cured." His friend did as he was told, and after several days the doctors began to complain that he wasn't taking his medicines

Chapter 9: Familiar with Kṛṣṇa

and was just chanting this strange *mantra* the whole day.

After some time the doctors checked him, and to their surprise his disease had been cured without any medication. After being released from the lunatic asylum, he asked, “How can I progress in spiritual life without the help of a spiritual master? Don’t I need a spiritual master?”

“Go to the Hare Kṛṣṇa temple in Vilnius [Lithuania],” our Christian hero replied. “The people there will help you.”

* * *

Dhruva Dāsa

Lamenting a little from recently having had surgery and being a little restricted in my movements, I stayed back at the temple as the other *saṅkīrtana* devotees went out for the first day of the marathon. I tried to content myself with other services. Then the phone rang, and the gentleman on the other end asked if we had any sets of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* available!

“Yes” I told him. “In three days you could have both sets.”

“My mother died recently, and I have plenty of money to buy the books. I’ve been living on the streets for the last three years, and every day I’ve been chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa to help me with my alcoholism.” He’d been reading a volume of the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* that a devotee had donated to a local library, and now he was ready to read the remaining volumes. During the days after I placed his order with the BBT, he rang me five times asking if the books had arrived yet.

Yesterday I drove an hour and forty-five minutes to his home to deliver the books. He had purchased a brand new bookcase for them, and I happily placed them there. He truly felt as if the Lord had come to his home to help him. Thankfully, he lives near Govinda’s Cafe, and now has a full set of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and beads to chant on.

* * *

Madhumaṅgala Dāsa

As I walked along the busy street with many shops, I saw a short lady approaching wearing dark glasses and a patterned blanket jacket. She looked like she was in a time-warp from the hippie era. I went up to her and said, “Good day. Can I ask you a question please? How did you become such a peaceful person? I’m a traveling monk and have been sent to give you these,” and I handed her several of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. Pointing to a golden OM sign hanging around her neck, I asked, “Where did you get that from? It’s amazing.”

She told me that she was a follower of Śivānanda. As she looked through Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books she asked me, “Who sent you?”

“Śrīla Prabhupāda,” I replied.

“Oh, I know Śrīla Prabhupāda. I’ve met him and spoken to him.”

A bolt of electricity ran through my body.

“Where did you meet Śrīla Prabhupāda?”

“Back in 1966 I and several others picked him up in Manhattan and took him to Dr. Mishra’s Ananda Ashram for a program.”

“I’m indeed fortunate to have met you! It’s so rare to meet someone who’s had direct association with Śrīla Prabhupāda.”

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

“Oh, these are Hare Kṛṣṇa books. I know the devotees.” Then she began to glorify them. She told me that she was from Montreal and that she sometimes went to the center there. She thanked me and took a *Dharma: The Way of Transcendence*, giving me a donation and her card.

Śrīla Prabhupāda *kī jaya!* Direct memories of Śrīla Prabhupāda never die in the hearts and minds of those fortunate souls who have met him. He lives forever with them, bestowing his mercy upon them through his teachings.

* * *

Oṃkāra Dāsa

I had to pick up my spiritual master from the airport and do a few other things, so I was only able to distribute books for a couple of hours. I prayed to Kṛṣṇa that I could do a full day’s worth of books in this time. By the mercy of my spiritual master, just about everyone I met was eager for a book. One of the first persons I met was a nice young man from New Zealand. He was very interested in the *Gītā* and at the slightest hint of a donation he gave \$50. I told him about the ISKCON centers we have all over the world and instructed him in the chanting of the *mahā-mantra*. I also gave him an SSR and told him, “I want you to have this one also because you are such a nice person.” After that he was smiling from ear to ear. I’ve been finding great inspiration on *saṅkīrtana* from teaching people how to pronounce the *mahā-mantra* and chant *japa*. I can feel Lord Caitanya’s reciprocation when I take the extra time to share this with the nice people I meet.

Later in the evening I met a group of Indians living in Bali, Indonesia. One person on the fringe took an SSR and gave a donation. So, feeling encouraged, I approached the core of the group. I ended up talking with the guy who spoke English the best, and it turned out he was the most interested also. He gave a donation and took an SSR. Three other people also gave donations when they saw him give one. The interested fellow who took an SSR was intrigued how a Westerner could be interested in “Hindu” teachings and also know more about the subject than he did, although he was a Hindu. I politely explained that what we practice is not Hinduism but Vaiṣṇavism. One of the other guys piped up and said, “Yeah, this Hare Kṛṣṇa stuff is the pure form. This is where the real potency is.”

I felt very enlivened to hear this, and we talked for about twenty minutes. I emphasized to them the importance of chanting the *mahā-mantra* and told them how, since they are from Bhārata-bhūmi, it is their responsibility to take up Kṛṣṇa consciousness very seriously. One of them was so inspired by the talk that he gave another donation. Another said that he had been drifting away from his Hindu roots but that now he felt very inspired to seek out the Hare Kṛṣṇas when he returned to Bali. He said, “Who knows, I may shave my head and wear *tilaka* and *dhoti* when I go back!”

* * *

Taruṅ Kṛṣṇa Dasa

Once I met a lady on book distribution who told me an amazing story. She had been to our temples in the seventies and seen Śrīla Prabhupāda. Although she was not practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness, she still had great affection for Śrīla Prabhupāda. In fact, she had tears in her eyes when talking about him.

She told me that once she was living in Brazil with devotees in an area that was very dangerous

Chapter 9: Familiar with Kṛṣṇa

because of being infested with many poisonous snakes that would sometimes bite and kill people. One night as she was lying down to take rest in the *āśrama*, with everyone else asleep, she suddenly saw a huge snake enter the room and slither among the sleeping devotees. She was petrified and didn't know what to do. She stared at the snake as it meandered among the sleeping devotees and made its way up to their small altar at the end of the room. It then mounted the altar and went straight for Śrīla Prabhupāda's picture, around which it lovingly wrapped itself, leaving only space for the lady to see Prabhupāda's face. There the snake remained there for some time, until it uncoiled itself and left the room.

After telling me this story the lady gave me ten pounds, took a book, and smilingly went on her way.

* * *

Vijaya Dāsa

I was distributing in Boston and saw a young man approaching with his mother and father. He looked like a prime candidate for receiving one of Prabhupāda's books, but it wasn't likely he'd get one with his mother and father guarding him. He was walking a step behind them, so after the parents walked by I whispered to him, "Excuse me." He came over and I showed him the *Bhagavad-gītā*. The parents, noticing that their son was no longer with them, stopped and looked back at us. I thought, "That's the end of this engagement."

But when the father saw the book he exclaimed, "Oh, the *Bhagavad-gītā*!" I couldn't have said it with more affection. What a surprise! I called the parents over and showed all of them the book. Then I asked the young man for a donation. He said, "I have no money." But the father said, "I would be happy to give a donation for such a nice book." You never know in whose heart faith in Kṛṣṇa will manifest.

When we go out on *saṅkīrtana*, it's very common to meet people who've already had some contact with devotees, and usually a very nice exchange ensues. But sometimes meet people who are familiar with us but are unfavorable.

Once I was distributing in the Miami airport with several other devotees when a man saw us and basically went nuts. He started shouting at us and calling us all kinds of names. After a minute or so he went on his way.

But he wasn't through with us. He watched us distribute, and after a person had received a book he would approach him and ask if he wanted it. After he found a person who didn't want the book, he asked him for it, walked over to us, and ripped it up in front of us. After he did that a second time I couldn't take it anymore. I went and found a friend of mine in the airport and told him what was happening. He said, "Show me where he is." I brought him over and the person ripping up books immediately walked over to my friend and said, "Don't buy a book from him! they're with a cult!"

At that, my friend pulled out his police badge (he was an undercover policeman!) and told the man, "You have five seconds to get out of my sight and leave these people alone, or I'm going to arrest you for disturbing the peace!" The man's jaw dropped and he left the area in a big hurry. The undercover cop, who had many of our books, was familiar with us, and so was the envious man. One benefited and the other got his appropriate reactions.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

One of the best places in the world to distribute books is in the holiest place in the world, Vṛndāvana. Many devotees distribute books in front of the temple and get very good results. I also do it when I visit the *dhāma*. It's interesting to distributing books to *vraja-vāsīs*. Who knows who these pious, fortunate souls are? Only Kṛṣṇa? Another interesting thing is that when we distribute books in the West, people come up with all kinds of excuses to not take a book: "It's too heavy," "No money," "I'll be back," "No time," etc. But in Vṛndāvana the people would mostly say, "I'll come back and get one after *darśana* of Rādhā-Śyāmasundara." What can you say to that but "Jaya!"

I was distributing at Venice Beach, in Los Angeles. It was one of those nectar days when you meet a lot of nice people who happily take a book and give a donation. Then to top it off, when I got back to the temple a devotee approached me and asked if he could have a word with me. He went on to tell me a pretty amazing event that had recently taken place:

A few *gurukulīs* and a friend of theirs named Ryan went to have some fun by diving into a river from a rather high cliff. At one point Ryan jumped off the cliff, was pulled under, and started to be swiftly pulled toward a waterfall. No one saw him coming up, so the devotees rushed down to the river to try to help. Suddenly a devotee named Rāma saw him come up. When Ryan saw Rāma, he raised his arm and called out, "Rāma, save me! Rāma, save me!" Then Ryan was pulled under, never to be seen again. He left this world calling out "Rāma, save me!"

Before Ryan had gone for his fatal swim, he had asked a devotee to hold \$60 for him. After Ryan's sudden demise, the devotee who had the \$60 thought it would be best if the money could be used in Kṛṣṇa's service, so he gave it to a temple devotee. The devotee who told me about this incredible event is the one who was given the \$60. He gave me the \$60 and asked that it be used to distribute books. If I met a sincere person who wanted a book but couldn't afford one, I should give it to him and tell him, "This is for you in memory of a very fortunate soul named Ryan." Fortunate because he left this world calling out "Rāma, save me!"

We were early at a Nine Inch Nails music concert in Atlanta, waiting for the people to arrive. Suddenly a car pulled up and a man got out. He was huge, sporting tattoos all over his arms and wearing a muscle shirt. He looked like a member of a motorcycle gang.

Since there was no one else around, despite his rough appearance I decided to see if he was a candidate for receiving Lord Caitanya's mercy.

I approached him with my opening line: "Hey, how are you? I'm from California; where're you from?"

"I'm from Atlanta."

"Well here, check this out." I handed him the *Bhagavad-gītā* and then showed him the pictures while briefly explaining each one. When I got to the picture of the cow-man slaughtering the man-cow, he said, "*Ugra-karma!*"

"How do you know those words?" I asked.

"I used to be in a band in Scandinavia. That was the name of the band."

"So you're a little familiar with these books?"

"Yes, and I'd love to have the *Bhagavad-gītā*."

Chapter 9: Familiar with Kṛṣṇa

He then gave a nice donation, and I invited him to the temple.
We never know who is a candidate for the mercy of Lord Gaurāṅga.

* * *

Tulasī Devī Dāsī

I approached a lady whose brother and sister-in-law are devotees in the Brooklyn temple. After we'd talked for a few minutes, she told me what really impressed her: "When my brother and his wife joined the temple, they couldn't keep their big dog in the temple, so they left it with me, our mother, and our little brother in North Carolina. But the dog immediately ran away, and for days no one could find him. They looked everywhere. Then my little brother figured it out. He went into the forest loudly singing 'Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa' just as my brother and his wife would. Then lo and behold, the dog started barking and ran to him. So now everyone has to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa or the dog becomes miserable and runs away."

She was impressed. This experience helped her get some realization of our philosophy. The dog is not a dog but a spirit soul, and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is not material. She bought a book and a music CD, which she said she was going to play for the dog. She also took some *prasādam* for herself and her devotee dog.

* * *

Bhakta Ricardo

In the midst of a really crazy day at the airport, I approached a man in his mid twenties who told me, "Get lost!" I still showed him the cover of *The Science of Self-Realization* as he was walking away, and when he saw it he stopped immediately. He came back to me and humbly asked, "Are you a Hare Kṛṣṇa?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Oh, please forgive me. Let me tell you something. When I was about nine years old, my dad began taking me to your Sunday Feast every week. He liked you guys a lot. A few years later he died, but the last day I spent with my dad was a Sunday, and when we walked out of the temple room after the feast, he affectionately grabbed me by the shoulders, looked me straight in the face, and told me, 'When you grow up, whenever you see a Hare Kṛṣṇa, you offer your respects to him because they are really good people.' I never forgot this instruction of my father's, although I've never been to a temple since. Since my father was a good man and he liked you people, I really respect you guys."

"Have you read any of our books?" I asked.

"No," he replied.

"Would you like to?"

He happily said yes and bought *The Science of Self-Realization* and *Your Ever Well-Wisher* for twenty dollars, and promised he would go to the Denver temple for the Sunday Feasts.

* * *

Bhakta Tim

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

I was distributing books in Melbourne, just outside the Food for Life center. I saw a man in his early 30's approaching, so I called him over. His name was Christian, and in the course of our exchange he told me that he'd been associating with devotees for about fourteen years via Gopal's, Food for Life, the temple, etc. I asked, "How did you first come into contact with the devotees?"

He replied, "I used to be interested in martial arts, weightlifting, and so on. I would show off my strength by ripping thick telephone books in half. One day I found a softbound book called *The Science of Self-Realization* and thought, 'Ha, this book will be easy to rip.' Then with all my strength I tried to rip the book in two—but I couldn't! Even with all my might I couldn't slightly rip the pages of that book. Finally I realized it wasn't an ordinary book, so I began to read it. That was the beginning of my Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

After relating this story, Christian noticed I had a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Part One, with me. "You have some of the cantos with you?" he asked.

"Yes, you've read some before?"

"Parts one and two," he replied.

"Well, how about getting a full set?"

"All right."

I arranged to meet Christian after the weekend and show him a set of *Bhāgavatams*. He was excited when I met him on Monday, and he agreed to make a hundred-dollar deposit and pay \$100 monthly until he'd paid for the full set. He also expressed interest in reading the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* because his mother had just read the *Bhagavad-gītā* and was thinking about Kṛṣṇa consciousness more seriously.

I like book distribution because you never know who you're going to meet. Each exchange always deepens my understanding that Prabhupāda's books are deeply affecting society's consciousness.

End of Chapter Nine: Familiar with Kṛṣṇa



Follow the line laid down by Prahlada Maharaja and try to take every one back to home, back to godhead. And this is done by distributing our literature. I am so much pleased upon each and every one of you for helping me this way to push on this great movement.

Letter to Vamanadeva, Bombay
3 December, 1972

www.iskconbookdistribution.com

www.iskcondesiretree.net



www.iskcondesiretree.net

www.iskconbookdistribution.com

Chapter Ten The Marathon

The marathon began “by accident” in 1972. A few days before Christmas, the devotees in Los Angeles had enormous results, which prompted them to spend more time on *saṅkīrtana*. Every night they would stay out till around midnight, and in three days they distributed over 17,000 pieces of literature. Astounding. Never before had so many books been distributed in three days. Śrīla Prabhupāda was very pleased by such big results and encouraged them every year in “the marathon.” The year-end big push for book distribution became known as “the Christmas Marathon” because it occurred around Christmastime, but so many places in the world don’t celebrate Christmas, nor do we, so the GBC renamed it “the Prabhupāda Marathon.”

The Prabhupāda Marathon is a time to become absorbed in the mission of Lord Caitanya, which is to give Kṛṣṇa to others. People are buying more gifts than at any other time of the year, and what better gift is there than one of Prabhupāda’s books?

Often when I distribute books people ask, “Why are you doing this?” I tell them, “The only thing lacking in society is wisdom. That’s why I’m distributing these books. We’re on a mission to increase wisdom in society.” Everyone appreciates this statement because they know it’s so true, and then they usually take a book. The devotees’ motto is *sarve sukhino bhavantu* “May everyone be happy.” We’re on a marathon to relieve the suffering of the people and give them an opportunity to experience the happiness of the soul’s connection to Kṛṣṇa.

Lord Caitanya was in so much anxiety about the suffering condition of the people that he said to Haridāsa Ṭhākura, “My dear Haridāsa, in this Age of Kali most people are bereft of Vedic culture, and therefore they are called *yavanas*. They’re concerned only with killing cows and brahminical culture. In this way they all engage in sinful acts.”

Haridāsa Ṭhākura replied, “My dear Lord, do not be in anxiety.”

Prabhupāda’s purport: “This is service. Everyone should adopt the cause of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu to try to relieve Him from the anxiety He feels. This is actually service to the Lord. One who tries to relieve Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s anxiety for the fallen souls is certainly a most dear and confidential devotee of the Lord.”

Happy are the *saṅkīrtana* devotees to whom Prabhupāda Marathons come unsought, opening for them the doors to the spiritual world!

At the start of the marathon the mind and senses may not appreciate it so much, but after a while you’ll find that even they’re into it. After you’ve been in the fire for a few days, you may be surprised to find that as you’re taking lunch *prasādam* your mind will say, “Hurry up! So many people are going by who could be getting books!” This is a common occurrence with Bhṛgupati Prabhu, who while taking *prasādam* near his distribution spot will sometimes see a receptive-looking person walking by, put down his plate of *prasādam*, sell him a book, and then return to his *prasādam sevā*.

Or, when you’re out distributing books and your attention gets diverted by something like a TV playing in a store window, your purified mind will chastise you, “You nonsense! Why are you wasting your time with that garbage when we’ve got more important business to attend to?!” The marathon intensifies our desire to be strict.

In a letter Prabhupāda said, “Our first business is this book distribution. There is no need of any other business. If this book distribution is managed properly, pushed on with great enthusiasm and determination, and at the same time if our men keep spiritually strong, then the whole world will become Kṛṣṇa conscious.”

In this letter Prabhupāda gives us the key to success: staying spiritually strong. Purity is the

Chapter 10: The Marathon

force. It is this purity that inspires the people to take a book, and it is this purity that allows the book distributor to continue year after year, marathon after marathon.

Recently I came across a sentence in the purport to to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.13.55 that was very inspiring. There Śrīla Prabhupāda says of the pure devotee, “His so-called material body does not exist, being surcharged with the spiritual current of the Lord’s identical interest.” If we can make our interests one with Kṛṣṇa’s interests, one of which is to disseminate transcendental knowledge throughout society, then we’ve crossed over the ocean of material existence.

One nice thing about our transcendental book distribution competition is that everyone is a winner. If someone goes out to distribute books and gives everything he or she has, although they may not come in first, second, or third place and may not produce much result, they get the reward of Kṛṣṇa’s satisfaction and thus their own, and everyone wins.

Another nice aspect of the marathon is that due to prolonged absorption in book distribution one’s realizations about book distribution increase, and thus one’s determination to distribute throughout the year also increases.

Because Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books contain the combined teachings of Kṛṣṇa and His pure servant, they’re very attractive, like diamonds set in gold. The pure teachings in these books are helping more and more people appreciate the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. I met a man who said, “If a book has something in it about Kṛṣṇa consciousness, I’m for it.” An hour later I handed a man the *Bhagavad-gītā*. He held it in his hands with great respect and said, “Ah, the *Bhagavad-gītā*.” Responding to his mood, I kind of stood back, looked admiringly at the book, and said, “Yes, the famous *Bhagavad-gītā*.” Then he said, “What a great book of wisdom.” I agreed: “Yes, wisdom—the only thing lacking in society.” He had often heard of the *Bhagavad-gītā* and had read excerpts from it, but he’d never actually owned one. Now he was very happy he did.

Daivī-śakti Devī Dāsī had an exchange with Prabhupāda that placed her in what you could say was a “Lifetime Marathon” to distribute books. She said, “Once in Māyāpur I told Prabhupāda that wherever we go in India, as soon as I open one of his books a whole crowd of people gathers because his books are the most beautiful books in the world. Prabhupāda lit up with such a wonderful smile; at that moment it was as if I finally understood what *koṭī-candra* [millions of moons] meant—Prabhupāda’s smile was so effulgent. He then lifted his hand and said, ‘Wherever she goes she must distribute my books.’ He then showered me with a lifetime of instructions on book distribution, which I am daily trying to fulfill. He told me to see that his books are distributed in the schools and libraries in India, and in the embassies. He told me to see that his books are stocked and distributed in Māyāpur and Vṛndāvana. He told me to lecture in the colleges, explaining that because we are foreigners everyone will want to hear us speak. He then called for his secretary, Brahmānanda Swami, and asked him to read the inventory of books that had just arrived in Bombay. After hearing the list, Prabhupāda said, ‘Let us see if she can clear the stock!’ So I am still trying to clear the stock, and it keeps filling up. It is a transcendental anxiety.”

* * *

His Holiness Bhakti Chāru Swami

The instructions of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu are the most important message for this world, and they have been presented in a most systematic and scientific way by Śrīla Prabhupāda. The world is facing immense degradation, which is leading to inconceivable misery. The only solution to this problem is Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, the distribution of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

books is of the utmost importance. From our own practical experience, we have seen how Śrīla Prabhupāda's books have transformed our lives and freed us from the miserable influence of the Age of Kali. This individual effect, if applied in a larger sphere, can grant inconceivable collective results. It is therefore essential that the entire world has the opportunity to receive the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda, and the most effective way to deliver it is through Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

In Vṛndāvana in 1977, when Śrīla Prabhupāda was enacting his final pastimes, he appeared very sick. For weeks on end he would eat practically nothing. Only once in a while would he take a little fruit juice or diluted milk. But Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja, who was Śrīla Prabhupāda's secretary at that time, used to read him the letters various devotees had written to him. Śrīla Prabhupāda would become very enlivened with the news of book distribution. During this time he said that profuse distribution of his books "gives me life." Tamal Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja wrote to all the devotees in all the temples of the world about how the news of book distribution was giving life to Śrīla Prabhupāda. And so to show their love for Śrīla Prabhupāda the devotees started to distribute books with renewed enthusiasm and dedication.

In this way I personally saw how dear book distribution was to Śrīla Prabhupāda. You can be sure that for him book distribution was the most important preaching work. He knew that through book distribution the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement would spread. Śrīla Prabhupāda's main concern was that this movement spread and that people take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and become part of this movement. Therefore it is very enlivening to see how the devotees, to display their love for Śrīla Prabhupāda and their loyalty to him, are continuing to distribute his books.

Actually, the marathon time is a very special time for us. But we must remember that our entire *life* is a marathon. We must distribute books not just during a particular time of the year but but all year round.

Śrīla Prabhupāda very emphatically taught us that book distribution is the best means to make devotees. As someone gets one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books in his or her hands, that person has the opportunity to recognize their eternal relationship with Kṛṣṇa and become His devotee.

Śrīla Prabhupāda is still present. It is not that because we cannot see him he is not here anymore. Śrīla Prabhupāda is here. We are not able to see him, but Prabhupāda is seeing us. And when he sees that we are sincerely trying to distribute his books, that we are trying to make devotees, then he becomes pleased. And when Śrīla Prabhupāda becomes pleased, Kṛṣṇa becomes pleased, and that is the way we are going to make spiritual advancement.

Our main objective is to become good devotees. How? By developing our relationship with Kṛṣṇa. And our relationship with Kṛṣṇa develops because of Śrīla Prabhupāda's pleasure. In this connection Kṛṣṇa says, "Those who say they are My devotees are not My devotees. Those who are the devotees of My devotees are actually My devotees." So when Śrīla Prabhupāda is pleased, Kṛṣṇa will be pleased. If we therefore try to please Śrīla Prabhupāda, knowing well what will please him the most, knowing well that the distribution of his books is going to give him the greatest pleasure, and if we continue to distribute books, Śrīla Prabhupāda will be pleased, and the result will be that we will see that we are making rapid spiritual advancement.

In the history of ISKCON we have seen that those who regularly distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books generally don't have many problems in their spiritual life. Those who don't distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, who don't preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness, often have difficulties.

So please rest assured that Śrīla Prabhupāda's pleasure will enhance your spiritual advancement, and that the best way to please Śrīla Prabhupāda is to distribute his books.

I feel very happy that so many devotees have committed themselves to distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, and it goes without saying that while distributing books you experience joy. So if you have experienced that joy, would you not want to experience that joy again and again?

Chapter 10: The Marathon

So please continue to distribute books.

While you are distributing books, please cultivate those you are distributing books to. Often we hear how people remember the book distributors. Some people remember, “At the time I met the devotee, I didn’t really think much about the book, but because I was so impressed with that person, I decided to take the book. And when I started to read the book, I saw how precious this gift is.”

So please continue to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. Please continue to please Śrīla Prabhupāda and make rapid spiritual advancement.

* * *

His Holiness Devāmrita Swami

Sometimes one may wonder, “What is this all about? Why do we go through so much endeavor for the book distribution marathon.” Sometimes devotees forget what this book distribution is all about.

In every *yuga* there is some system of *yajña*, performance of sacrifice for the pleasure of the Supreme Lord. That *yajña* is the scientific process for connecting with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. And *yajñas* are performed regardless of the resources required. In the Age of Kali we don’t have an unlimited quantity of valuable items to offer to the Supreme Lord. So therefore we need to have some other kind of *yajña*. Śrīla Prabhupāda realized that this is the missing thing in civilization today: some way to perform mass *yajña*. In other words, the Vedic sacrifices aren’t just for a few people; everyone is supposed to be involved. In previous *yugas* you had kings like Rāmacandra and Parikṣit Mahārāja, and through their expert organization they made it so that every kind of person in the kingdom could participate in the *yajña*. The *kṣatriyas* organized the sacrifices, the *brāhmaṇas* performed them, the *vaiśyas* provided all the materials, and the *śūdras* provided the labor. Now, where in the present society do you have an organized arrangement for *yajña* so that everyone can take part in it? That was Śrīla Prabhupāda’s vision for this *saṅkīrtana yajña* of book distribution: a system, an organized effort, for performing a *yajña* that everyone can participate in. Therefore there is the book production, which is the big, *bṛhat mṛdaṅga*, and now everyone has a chance to participate in that *yajña*, or *kīrtana* caused by the *bṛhat mṛdaṅga*. Everyone has a chance to become involved in hearing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, in distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, in encouraging others to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, and in reading them. In this way we can produce a sanctified atmosphere throughout the whole world. *Yajña* is very simple in that it is an organized method for pleasing the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

What does it really mean that we are participating in *yajña*? Kṛṣṇa simply wants that we give some effort and that we make a sacrifice. That is what makes Kṛṣṇa consciousness very tasty: the sacrifice. When you sacrifice something for the Supreme Lord, you get to taste the nectar of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The understanding of *yajña* is that *yajña* must be performed. *Yajña vai viṣṇu* (sacrifice for the satisfaction of Viṣṇu), and everything else works from that. The extraordinary potency of what is going on is that everyone is involved in Vedic sacrifice as Śrīla Prabhupāda desired.

It is not that book distribution is some activity of a bygone era. It is not that it is just something we go through the motions doing because Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “Distribute books.” No, it is actually the topmost method for pleasing the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

Both Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted book distribution to be performed in an organized way for the benefit of the whole world. One can practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness just for oneself. One can simply become concerned with “What about my own nectar? What about my own *rasa*?” But that is not what Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura had in mind. It is not what Śrīla Prabhupāda had in mind. Their plan is that we get Kṛṣṇa by giving Kṛṣṇa to others in as much of an organized way as possible. That is what Śrīla Prabhupāda desired. Sometimes we may look at this organized effort and think, “Ah, the real nectar will be when I will be just reading about Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.” That is nectar, but you won’t taste it unless you satisfy the *ācāryas*. In order to satisfy the *ācāryas*, we have to fulfill their wishes. So this *saṅkīrtana-yajña*—this book distribution, this organized effort—is a humble attempt to satisfy the *ācāryas*. So don’t become too familiar with it, thinking, “Ah, another year, another marathon. Here we go again, everyone scurrying about, making all these arrangements. Ah, I’ve seen it all before.” You may have seen it all before, but are you really seeing what is happening with spiritual vision? That should be our prayer for the marathon and all the time: “How can I actually see what Kṛṣṇa is doing, what Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is doing?”

Of course, even one who does the marathon mechanically will get some credit. There is no doubt about that. But if you really want to taste the depth of the book distribution nectar, you must beg the Supreme Lord, “Please give me a vision of what is really going on from Your point of view.” That is what makes the marathon exciting.

When someone cares for you, they are very happy when you ask them, “Please let me see how You are doing things.” So if you pray to Kṛṣṇa, “Please let me see how You are doing things through this *saṅkīrtana-yajña*,” Kṛṣṇa will be very happy and let you have a vision of what is going on. In this way we can perform the *saṅkīrtana* service in a way that we will be fully enlivened. That opportunity is always there.

But sometimes we do not enter into the *saṅkīrtana-yajña* fully in terms of begging Lord Caitanya. You may just take it in a mechanical way: “I’ll give this one a book, that one a book.” Still you will get credit; we don’t criticize devotees who just go out and hand people books without thinking deeply about it. They will get credit. They will satisfy Kṛṣṇa. But there are different degrees of satisfaction, and you do not have to be a full-time devotee to taste the deeper realizations of *saṅkīrtana*. You simply have to beg Kṛṣṇa. He is very eager to show you what is going on. Why? Because the more people who see what is going on in the *saṅkīrtana-yajña*, the more the flood of love of Godhead increases. And it is such a taste that you won’t forget it for your whole life! So it is in Kṛṣṇa’s interest to give you a vision of what is going on, but you have to ask for it. If you don’t ask, you may not get it.

Of course, Lord Caitanya can give you such a vision even if you don’t ask. But it is much quicker if you ask. You should beg Kṛṣṇa, “Let me get an insight into how Lord Caitanya is doing things. What is the real secret of this book distribution? Why did Śrīla Prabhupāda insist upon it so much?” Don’t say, “Haven’t people gotten enough books already? We’ve distributed millions of books in America, and so what?” This is a material analysis. I don’t think you’ll hear it coming from any of the *ācāryas* in our line. No. We are distributing books because we please Kṛṣṇa’s senses by doing so; that’s it. We can do that better and better, wider and wider, but still the basic fact is there: we are distributing books to please the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Occasionally someone would ask Śrīla Prabhupāda, “What is the goal of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa?” He would answer, “The goal of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is to chant more Hare Kṛṣṇa.” The means is the same as the end. Similarly, why do we distribute books? We distribute books so that we can distribute more books. It is our prayer that the people get one book and that they’ll then want another book and another book and another book, and that some of them will join and become

Chapter 10: The Marathon

book distributors themselves.

* * *

His Holiness Girirāj Swami

In the course of service to the spiritual master, to Śrīla Prabhupāda, we are sometimes placed in situations that are not very congenial for our material comfort. But in those situations we may feel the connection with the spiritual master even more, and when we do, we feel even more ecstatic in Kṛṣṇa consciousness than when we are in more comfortable situations.

Last year His Holiness Śācīnandana Swami gave a beautiful talk in which he made an especially powerful point: When you receive an order from the spiritual master and try to execute it, wonderful things happen—Kṛṣṇa works. In his book *The Art of Transformation*, Mahārāja states,

Do something in your devotional service for Kṛṣṇa. Take a little risk. Stay away from your *laukika-śraddhā*, the worldly *śraddhā* based on sensual experience and what other people say. Trust in the scriptures. You will see that wonders can happen. I want to tell you about one of these wonders. Devotees told me, “Go out and distribute books!”

I thought, “No, please not this service. Any other, but not this, please. I joined very young, and I am a little sensitive. I can’t meet with these tigers and lions on the street.”

“No, no, have a little faith,” said the devotees. “If you surrender to Kṛṣṇa, He will give you whatever you need and maintain what you have.” And I remember I did so. I distributed books, and Kṛṣṇa came to help.

In different parts of the world many devotees are taking risks to further the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. And some countries may not be favorable to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mission. Still, the devotees are meeting so many people who otherwise would not have been exposed to this process, and they are inducing them to chant the holy names of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Many of these people are becoming *kṛṣṇa-bhaktas*. For their sake, devotees sacrifice their personal comfort. And they take risks, risking even their very lives.

These things are actually going on right now. So if you take the mission of the spiritual master to heart and take risks for the mission of the spiritual master, Kṛṣṇa will help in wonderful ways that you would never expect.

And Kṛṣṇa will provide. I am reminded of my godbrother Amogha-līlā Prabhu. After being a *brahmacārī* for many years, he got married and had to support his family. He got a PhD, and for two or three years he taught as an adjunct professor. On the weekends he would distribute books because that was still in him from his young *brahmacārī* days.

After a while he realized he was making more per day doing books than lecturing at the university. And he liked the book distribution a lot more. So he finally decided, “Well, let’s skip the professor business and just do book distribution.” At first his wife was a little skeptical because she didn’t think it sounded very dignified, but he was making so much more money on the street than he was as a professor, that she got into it. And he is always fired up. He is always fired up because he is always preaching and distributing books.

So, during the December marathon we should try to come out of our comfort zones and take a little risk and distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. Just take a little risk for Śrīla Prabhupāda, for Lord Kṛṣṇa, and the results will be all-auspicious and glorious.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

* * *

His Holiness Mahāviṣṇu Swami

One evening during the marathon I was distributing door to door in Reservoir Hills, a wealthy, high-security residential area of Durban, South Africa. By chance I knocked on the door of the house where the gentleman lives who donates all of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Rādhānātha's daily fruits from his chain of supermarkets. I sat and talked with him for about half an hour. He already had everything—BTGs, books, Life Membership, etc. I asked him to sponsor some *Bhagavad-gītās* for schoolchildren. He said that his brother did all the donating for the family's company.

I took the brother's name and later rang him up, and we arranged to meet at the temple one morning. His brother was a devotee, and he agreed to sponsor a hundred *Bhagavad-gītās*. Later he sent the *lakṣmī* for the *Gītās*. That is how I got a hundred *Bhagavad-gītās* sponsored. Those books still have to be handed out to a particular school when we hold a program there. I certainly felt like I was acting as Kṛṣṇa's instrument when I got those books sponsored, but I still hankered to do straight books on the street again.

Going out on the street was a humbling and purifying experience for me, though, and the first day was especially hard, since I was too shy to approach the people on the street. "Here comes the guru!", yet the shopkeeper ignores me purposely or is irritated I have come. He waves his hand to put me off—"We already gave," "We have the books already," "Please don't bother us," or just "Get lost!" As my big ego was ground down by these common rebuffs, I began to feel my connection with Śrīla Prabhupāda strengthen. How many times had Śrīla Prabhupāda been rebuffed in India and the USA? I'm very fruitive: When someone takes a book I feel ecstatic and confident and get more momentum to do more books, but when books don't go out I start getting introspective and begin praying. I oscillate between the two states. I'm still a *saṅkīrtana* baby, but I hope to grow up with more practice.

I was going out in devotee clothes and found that sometimes middle-aged people with white hair had some natural trust in me because of my own white hairs. Once I met a rather distressed-looking British tourist my age and got to talking with him. He was living in the Channel Islands, avoiding the UK taxes. His sister had cancer and would die soon. I opened up the *Gītā* to the second chapter and read him the translation about the soul giving up old bodies like worn-out clothes and taking on new ones. After hearing a few more verses about the soul he became transformed. He exclaimed, "I want that book! How much?" He gave me a hundred rands, and so I also gave him a set of *Kṛṣṇa* books. He gave me another hundred rands—"For you," he said. He shook my hand and thanked me very much for spending time to help him. When I came back to the temple, Bhakti Caitanya Swami rewarded me with a cup of frozen yogurt.

* * *

His Holiness Nirañjana Swami

In previous years in Boston, when we used to go out on book distribution marathons, we took all the empty boxes of the books that had been distributed and placed them in front of Śrīla Prabhupāda's *vyāsāsana*. That was our offering to him. Every day we would come back and place all the empty boxes in front of him. Once we filled up the whole temple room with empty boxes.

When devotees go out with a desire to somehow please Śrīla Prabhupāda by distributing his

Chapter 10: The Marathon

books, there is a certain special mercy that becomes manifest. Śrīla Prabhupāda gives his extra special mercy. In 1975 I was the *saṅkīrtana* leader in Boston. We heard that Śrīla Prabhupāda had said, “The devotees who go out in vans and distribute my books get my extra special mercy.” I was in ecstasy—I was going out every day in a van distributing books, and Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “They get *extra* special mercy.” I thought, “I’m already getting so much mercy, but Śrīla Prabhupāda said those who go out in vans get *extra special mercy!*” I remember making this my meditation: “I want it—that *extra* special mercy! I gotta get it!!”

The day we heard that quote from Śrīla Prabhupāda, I actually prayed to him, “Śrīla Prabhupāda, please don’t ever let me do anything else but simply be the leader of this *saṅkīrtana* party in this white Dodge van so that I can go out and distribute your books every day and get your extra special mercy.” Of course, my service didn’t continue in that way forever—Kṛṣṇa had some other plans for me. But Śrīla Prabhupāda will give that mercy.

For me book distribution was always very difficult. Right from the very first day I moved into the temple, the very first engagement my temple president gave me was to go to Providence, Rhodes Island, with a newspaper bag full of BTG magazines and stand in the middle of the sidewalk and distribute them. It was so hard; I was so bewildered. But still I knew book distribution was something very pleasing to Śrīla Prabhupāda. And after all, hadn’t I come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness as a result of getting one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books?

For years I would struggle. Sometimes I would stand there with tears in my eyes; it was so difficult I would literally cry. People would walk by me as I stood on a street corner and wonder, “What’s going on with this guy?” I was not crying tears of ecstasy or tears of compassion. I was crying because it was so difficult to face some stranger on the street and try to convince him to take a book. But still I continued.

Sometimes I would stop and sit down on the curb. I wasn’t producing many results on book distribution. Sometimes the temple president would bring me back to the temple and give me some other engagement because it was just too difficult. Then I would say, “Let me try just one more time,” and he would send me out again.

It was like that for a couple of years. And then I went out on traveling *saṅkīrtana*, and I got a realization that if I was going to stay a devotee I just had to continue distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. I thought, “This is my only hope. If I ever want to become a devotee and not turn into a demon, book distribution is my only hope.” I prayed really hard to succeed on book distribution.

Then all of a sudden, on that very day, I got a phone call from the temple president: “I want you to come back to the temple to cook.”

I thought, “What is this? How is it possible?” I said to him, “How can you do such a thing? I *have* to distribute books; I *have* to.”

“No, you’re the only *brāhmaṇa* right now; we need a *brāhmaṇa* to cook for the Deities.”

I protested: “I won’t live; I won’t be able to survive. I have to do this.”

“Well, you’re not getting so many results.”

“I know I’m not getting so many results. But still, you don’t understand: I *have* to do this.”

But the temple president forced me to surrender, and I went back to the temple to cook.

As soon as I got back I found out that the temple president’s plan was for me to cook four offerings a day. So I was in the kitchen for about ten hours a day, cooking. I had to cook breakfast and lunch for all the devotees, make milk sweets, and prepare the afternoon fruit offering. I would finish at around 4 in the afternoon. The temple president told me, “After you finish your duties in the kitchen, you should go out on *harināma*.” I thought, “How is it possible? How can I go out on *harināma*? If I have to go out, I have to go out to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. He brought me back here to be a cook; all right, I’ll do my cooking, but instead of going out on *harināma* I’ll

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

go out on book distribution.”

So before going down to the kitchen every day, I would take my *karmī* clothes to the basement. After finishing cooking, I would change downstairs and then sneak out the back door so the temple president wouldn't see me. Then I would go out and distribute books for a couple of hours. I was distributing in the most difficult place in all of Boston—Harvard Square. That's where all the Harvard students and professors would go. They were so puffed up. And so again I would find myself on the street, crying. It was so difficult. But I forced myself to do it.

Then one day I had the most amazing experience. I'm sure every devotee who distributes books has had such an experience; it wasn't something new or unknown, or some mystery. Of course, it is a mystery how Śrīla Prabhupāda gives us so much mercy if we simply try to do something that pleases him.

Anyway, while struggling to distribute books I suddenly got the most wonderful taste, a taste I'd never experienced before. It was just so profound. As I stood in the middle of Harvard Square, I felt so blissful just to have an opportunity to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. I came back to the temple that night feeling so blissful. This was an experience I hadn't had for years, and it continued day after day. Till then *saṅkīrtana* had usually been tears, misery, and suffering. Sometimes I had lain awake all night, not wanting to go to sleep, because I knew that if I slept the morning would come very fast and I would have to go out and distribute books again. So to make the night last longer I would lie wide awake, looking at the ceiling. That is how difficult book distribution was for me.

But then I got this taste. After that the temple president would see me walking through the temple in the evening completely blissed out, and he would ask me, “Why are you so blissful?” I didn't want to tell him what I was doing, because I was supposed to be going out on *harināma*. So I told him, “It is very nice cooking for Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Gopīvallabha.”

But after some time he found out that I was actually sneaking out and going on book distribution every day. This was after about four or five weeks of my cooking and going out. So one day he called me up to his office and said, “I found out why you're so blissful. All right, I've decided to put somebody else in the kitchen. Here are the keys to the van.” He not only gave me the keys to the van, but he also gave me four devotees and said, “Now get out of here and go distribute books!”

That was it. I was gone the same day. We used to load so many books into that van that when we left the temple there was no room to sleep in the van at night. The only way we could sleep in the van was if we stopped somewhere and distributed enough books to open up enough space for us to squeeze into the van at night. We filled up that whole van with books, left the temple, and distributed books. I stayed out for years. And that was the white Dodge van I wanted to be the leader of for the rest of my life. Kṛṣṇa at least gave it to me for a few more years.

* * *

His Holiness Rādhānātha Swami

The internal substance of our movement will be recognized to the degree that the devotees actually live by what Śrīla Prabhupāda has taught us, and live by the example he has set. That is where the real integrity will manifest. Prabhupāda wanted us to distribute his books by the millions. The Prabhupāda marathon is the best time for us to focus on fulfilling his desire. How wonderful it is that we have the opportunity to actually accept inconveniences, tolerate the dualities, and approach every type of person to try to give them Kṛṣṇa. That sacrifice is so dear to Kṛṣṇa. So let us distribute as many books as humanly possible.

Chapter 10: The Marathon

* * *

His Holiness Śivarāma Swami

As a *saṅkīrtana* devotee, *saṅkīrtana* leader, and temple president, I would read this poem to myself and others to remind us of what winning in a marathon is really about: Continuing to do your best, however you are doing. (It was written by a Dr. D. H. Groberg.)

The Race

A children's race—young boys, young men—
How I remember well.
Excitement, sure! But also fear:
It wasn't hard to tell.

They all lined up so full of hope,
Each thought to win that race,
Or tie for first, or if not that,
At least take second place.

And fathers watched from off the side,
Each cheering for his son,
And each boy hoped to show his dad
That he would be the one

The whistle blew and off they went,
Young hearts and hopes afire,
To win and be the hero there
Was each young boy's desire.

And one boy in particular,
Whose dad was in the crowd,
Was running in the lead and thought:
“My dad will be so proud!”

But as they speeded down the field,
Across a shallow dip,
The little boy who thought to win
Lost his step and slipped.

Trying hard to catch himself,
His hands flew out to brace,
And mid the laughter of the crowd

The Treasure of the Br̥hat-mṛdaṅga

He fell flat on his face.

So down he fell, and with him hope—
He couldn't win it now—
Embarrassed, sad, he only wished
To disappear somehow.

But as he fell his dad stood up
And showed his anxious face,
Which to the boy so clearly said:
“Get up and win the race.”
He quickly rose, no damage done—
Behind a bit that's all—
And ran with all his mind and might
To make up for his fall.

So anxious to restore himself—
To catch up and to win—
His mind went faster than his legs:
He slipped and fell again!

He wished then that he'd quit before
With only one disgrace.
“I'm hopeless as a runner now;
I shouldn't try to race.”

But in the laughing crowd he searched
And found his father's face;
That steady look that said again
“Get up and win the race!”

So up he jumped to try again—
Ten yards behind the last—
“If I'm to gain those yards,” he thought,
“I've got to move real fast.”

Exerting everything he had,
He gained eight or ten,
But trying hard to catch the lead
He slipped and fell again!

Defeat! He lay there silently—
A tear dropped from his eye—
“There's no sense running anymore—
Three strikes: I'm out, why try!”
The will to rise had disappeared,
All hope had fled away.

Chapter 10: The Marathon

So far behind, so error prone;
A loser all the way.

“I’ve lost, so what’s the use,” he thought,
“I’ll live with my disgrace.”
But then he thought about his dad,
Who soon he’d have to face.

“Get up,” an echo sounded low,
“Get up and take your place;
You were not meant for failure here.
Get up and win the race.”

“With borrowed will, get up,” it said,
“You haven’t lost at all,
For winning is no more than this:
To rise each time you fall.”

So up he rose to run once more,
And with a new commit,
He resolved that win or lose
At least he wouldn’t quit.

So far behind the others now—
The most he’d ever been—
Still he gave it all he had
And ran as though to win.

Three times he’d fallen, stumbling;
Three times he rose again;
Too far behind to hope to win,
He still ran to the end.

They cheered the winning runner
As he crossed the line first place,
Head high, and proud, and happy;
No falling, no disgrace.

But when the fallen youngster
Crossed the line last place,
The crowd gave him the greater cheer,
For finishing the race.

And even though he came in last

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

With head bowed low, unproud,
You would have thought he'd won the race
To listen to the crowd.

And to his dad he sadly said,
“I didn't do too well.”
“To me, you won,” his father said.
“You rose each time you fell.”

And now when things seem dark and hard
And difficult to face,
The memory of that little boy
Helps me in my race.

For all of life is like that race,
With ups and downs and all.
And all you have to do to win
Is rise each time you fall.

Purity is attained by constantly chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, day and night—between every person we approach, while honoring *prasādam*, before going to sleep, and, if possible, in our dreams. Decoration of the altar is the books distributed: We must offer lotus garland upon lotus garland of sold books to Kṛṣṇa, by the hour. The regular offerings are the conditioned souls engaged and saved. Their hearts' devotion will be the great feast of *bhoga* that we offer. And the constant *abhiṣeka* will be our tears of happiness and sorrow, mixed with our exhaustion and exhilaration, scented with our labor of love. Then Lord Caitanya will appear resplendent in our hearts, smile sweetly, and say, “Thank you!” And lost in bliss, all the devotees will think, “Why has this marathon come to an end!”

* * *

Bhṛghupati Dāsa (ACBSP)

In the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad-gītā* Kṛṣṇa encourages Arjuna to fight with these words: “Therefore get up. Prepare to fight and win glory. Conquer your enemies and enjoy a flourishing kingdom. They are already put to death by My arrangement, and you, O Savyasācī, can be but an instrument in the fight.” (BG 11.33)

When I was a new devotee, I used to hear other devotees say, “Just as Kṛṣṇa says that the soldiers are already put to death by His arrangement and that Arjuna can take the credit for killing them, so the books are already distributed and we simply have to go out there and take the credit.” This is the correct way to think.

Indeed, because it is the desire of Lord Caitanya, this movement has already spread throughout the world. It is already successful. Now it is a question of who will get the credit. Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna, “These guys are already put to death by My arrangement. If you surrender and fight, you

Chapter 10: The Marathon

will get the credit for being the big hero of the battle. But if you decline to fight, I will arrange for another devotee who is prepared to surrender to come forward and carry out My instruction, and he is going to get the credit for winning the Battle of Kuruksetra instead of you. I am the doer, you see? You are not the doer.”

In the same way, the books have already been distributed by Lord Chaitanya’s desire and arrangement, and it is up to us, the devotees of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, to be but instruments in this distribution.

Kṛṣṇa goes on to say, “Droṇa, Bhīṣma, Jayadratha, Karṇa, and other great warriors have already been destroyed by Me. Therefore kill them and do not be disturbed. Simply fight, and you will vanquish your enemies in battle.” (BG 11.34)

Similarly, we can say, “Simply go out and make the effort to distribute books, and you will witness so many books going out and so many people becoming Kṛṣṇa conscious.”

So those who really imbibe this marathon mindset will experience how wonderfully Kṛṣṇa reciprocates with them. One may not be the top distributor, but everyone who wholeheartedly participates in the marathons will experience amazing reciprocation from Kṛṣṇa. Indeed, anybody who surrenders to the marathon will experience incredible things happening in their devotional service.

Śrīla Prabhupāda goes on to say I the purport to BG 11.34: “Every plan is made by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, but He is so kind and merciful to His devotees that He wants to give the credit to His devotees who carry out His plan according to His desire.”

This is the nature of Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that a father who has a BA from a university wants to see his son receive an MA or a PhD. The father naturally wants to see his child surpass him. If the person is *not* his child, if he’s someone who is not in an intimate loving relationship with the father, the father will see him as a competitor who wants to surpass him. But if the person is his son, the father will be pleased to see him surpass him. Kṛṣṇa is that the Supreme Father. He has so much affection for us, His children, that He wants to see us surpass Him. Kṛṣṇa did not want the credit for being the hero of the Battle of Kuruksetra. He wanted Ajuna to become famous as the hero. That is Kṛṣṇa.

It’s the same thing with *saṅkīrtana*. Lord Caitanya predicted that His name would be heard in every town and village. Śrīla Prabhupāda also said, “Print and distribute these books.” It is therefore a foregone conclusion that the *saṅkīrtana* mission will be successful. It is just a question of who will get the credit. We simply have to come forward. With full faith that distributing books is the desire of Lord Kṛṣṇa, of Lord Caitanya, and of Śrīla Prabhupāda, we should fully participate in the whole marathon. Then it will be revealed to us how all these statements are actually true.

Statements like “the books have already been distributed” may sound unbelievable, but they are true, and their accuracy will be revealed to us if we surrender. This is Kṛṣṇa consciousness, where we have to walk the talk. Then everything becomes revealed. As it is stated, *ataḥ śrī-kṛṣṇa-nāmādi na bhaved grāhyam indriyaiḥ*. Kṛṣṇa cannot be understood by the blunt material senses, but He reveals Himself to the surrendered soul. With our mundane mind and senses we cannot understand either how Lord Caitanya’s names will be chanted in every town and village on earth or how Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books have already been distributed and we simply have to go out there and let Kṛṣṇa work through us as His instruments. But when we surrender, Kṛṣṇa reveals the truth of all these statements to us. And then we understand.

At *Bhagavad-gītā* 18.55 Kṛṣṇa says, *bhaktiā māṁ abhijānāti yāvān yaś cāsmi tattvataḥ*: “I am understood in truth only by devotional service.” That is the point: All the realization is in the service. The ecstasy is in the service. If we surrender to the service, Kṛṣṇa reciprocates in such a way that everything is clearly revealed. We then understand, “Oh, yes, it is all true.” But without

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

that surrender to the service, it remains ideas and words. It does not become a living reality for us unless we actually make the decision to really surrender and participate wholeheartedly in the actual process and activity of devotional service. If and when we do, we get the realization of what the marathon actually is and what the mercy of the spiritual master and Lord Caitanya are.

* * *

Praghoṣa Dāsa (ACBSP)

Saṅkīrtana—book distribution and *harināma*—is where the rubber meets the road, so to speak, in our collective efforts to share what we have all been given by His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda. That is where our philosophy ceases to be mere doctrine and becomes realized action. Śrīla Prabhupāda considered every soul on the planet absolutely significant because he knew our eternal connection to the Lord Himself.

Serious in the extreme was how he took the task of transforming our unfortunate condition to one of absolute good fortune. He did this one soul at a time. Each of us was individually made eternally fortunate by Śrīla Prabhupāda. There is a wonderful parable I have always loved that illustrates Śrīla Prabhupāda’s tenacious determination to make Kṛṣṇa consciousness available to as many as he possibly could.

One morning long ago an old man walked near the shore of the vast ocean. He was hobbled and crooked, and even his breathing was labored. He looked up and noted that there were thousands of starfish—large and small—stranded on the beach by the outgoing tide. They were too far from the roiling waves to save themselves and faced suffocation, along with intense heat from quickly rising sun. He began to slowly walk down the beach and, bending over painfully, pick up one starfish at a time, walk to the shore, and then hurl the starfish back to the safety of the cool waves. A young boy of ten spied the old-timer and studied his actions for some time. In due course he approached the old man, who was so absorbed in the task at hand that he failed to notice the boy.

“Hey, mister, what’re you doing?” the boy queried.

The old man noted a slight smirk on the boy’s face and said, “What does it look like I’m doing? I’m returning these starfish back to the sea before they all die here on the shore.”

The boy looked down the beach and saw stranded starfish as far as the eye could see.

“Hmppf!” puffed the lad. “Old man, I don’t want to discourage you, but did you happen to see just how many of these critters there are out here?”

“What’s your point, young fella?” the old timer said as he paused to look the lad up and down.

“Well, do you really think what you’re doing is gonna make a difference?”

The old man paused, looked at the boy with a twinkle in his eye, slowly bent over with a groan, and picked up another starfish. He paused, then slowly walked to the shore, and hurled the starfish out to sea as far as he could. He walked back to where the boy was standing, still staring in disbelief at the efforts of the old man.

“Well,” the old man said, smiling wryly, “it sure made a difference to *that one*, didn’t it?!”

The boy smiled, nodded his head in agreement, and then bent over and joined the old man in his efforts.

By spectacularly pushing on the mission of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Śrīla Prabhupāda has arranged for all the “stranded starfish” of this material world to be given the golden opportunity of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He showed the example and set about saving us all—individually, one at a time. Each of us has our own beautiful recollection of how we found the shelter of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Śrīla Prabhupāda, and his devotees.

Chapter 10: The Marathon

This shelter remains fully available to any sincere soul. Thousands are experiencing this shelter all over the world, every day. Anyone can participate. Anyone can—like that young lad who took to helping the old man rescue as many starfish as possible—roll up his or her sleeves and just dive into the task “full bore” and help Śrīla Prabhupāda in his efforts to make a difference in the lives of as many souls as possible. Can’t you practically see His Divine Grace, with a twinkle in his beautiful gaze, chuckling with delight as his books pass from our humble hands into the hands of the suffering souls gasping and suffocating in this world due to ignorance?

During the marathons and nonmarathons, let us all keep our eyes fixed on the individual standing directly in front of us on *saṅkīrtana*. Let us “make a difference for at least that one.” Then let us move to the next and again “make a difference for at least that one.” Then at the end of each day we can tally up all those individuals for whom we made a difference and offer those results to His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda, knowing full well how much he will delight in our efforts.

And for those who are unable for whatever reason to participate directly in the Marathon, my sincere suggestion is that you kindly go to your local temple president and ask him how you can assist with the marathon in your local region. Remember, you too can help make a difference for at least one soul during the marathon. Let nothing in your mind or another’s prevent you from making that difference—for at least that one soul. Offer your time, your money, or your assistance to the men and women going out each day during the marathon. Trust me, *you will make a difference*, even if for only one soul. And remember, once upon a time in the not-too-distant past, that one soul *was you!*

* * *

Vaiśeṣika Dāsa (ACBSP)

Worries about terrorism, escalating healthcare and living costs, global warming, nuclear proliferation, and widespread violence are just a few of the concerns that plague people around the world. People everywhere are looking for peace, prosperity, and happiness, but in Kali-yuga these things are hard to find.

Fortunately, however, everyone can get relief from all material pangs by participating in Lord Caitanya’s *saṅkīrtana* movement. *Saṅkīrtana*, the congregational chanting of the holy names and the distribution of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, simultaneously cleanses one’s heart and vanquishes suffering, while giving even beginners a taste of real happiness.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam tells us that the root of all worldly afflictions is forgetfulness of Kṛṣṇa. The remedy is *saṅkīrtana*. Therefore Lord Caitanaya ordered every human being within this universe to accept the process and to help Him spread it everywhere (Cc *Ādi* 9.36).

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja describes the wonderful effects of *saṅkīrtana* thus:

The fruit of love of Godhead distributed by Caitanya Mahaprabhu is such a great intoxicant that anyone who eats it, filling his belly, immediately becomes maddened by it, and automatically he chants, dances, laughs, and enjoys. When Śrī Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the great gardener, sees that people are chanting, dancing, and laughing and that some of them are rolling on the floor and some are making loud humming sounds, He smiles with great pleasure. [Cc *Ādi* 9.49–50]

Another *muni*, Karabhājana, who lived thousands of years ago, described the importance of *saṅkīrtana* like this:

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

Those who are actually advanced in knowledge are able to appreciate the essential value of this Age of Kali. Such enlightened persons worship Kali-yuga because in this fallen age all perfection of life can easily be achieved by the performance of *saṅkīrtana*. [SB 11.5.36]

Yet even with these benefits, devotees often find themselves too busy or distracted to personally perform *saṅkīrtana*. However, in December there's a good opportunity for everyone to take part.

During the holidays, people tend to embrace—or at least ponder—spiritual values like generosity and kindness. In this mood they more readily accept *prasādam*, books, and spiritual association, and they reciprocate generously with donations and words of appreciation for our work.

In addition, more people than usual come out of their homes and businesses at this time of year to shop and to attend social events.

For these reasons, the Prabhupāda Book Distribution Marathon has endured for many decades.

Śrīla Prabhupāda always took special notice of the book scores from around the world, and he was particularly pleased to hear that his followers were increasing book sales and sending money to the BBT. Clearly, he was also aware that December was an especially good month for selling books. This is evident in the following response he wrote to Bali Mardan Prabhu, the president of the New York temple in 1972, who had sent him a favorable *saṅkīrtana* report. On December 31 Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote:

Now December is finished and I think in your country this month is the best month for spending, being the Christmas season, so I shall be anxious to see what was your books distributed, your collection for December and what was your net savings. I note also that your expenses have remained almost constant for so many months, except for the money paid to book fund, which is increasing more and more, so that is the best system: pay to the books fund larger and larger sums, keep other expenses constant as much as possible or reduce.

Śrīla Prabhupāda loved to hear that the devotees were distributing large numbers of his books and he consistently encouraged them to sell more of them. He once wrote:

These books and magazines are our most important propaganda weapons to defeat the ignorance of maya's army, and the more we produce such literature and sell them profusely all over the world, the more we shall deliver the world from the suicide course. [Letter to Jayadvaita, 18 November 1972]

So, have some real fun and make your plans to distribute books, *prasādam*, and the holy names. Organize your family, yourself, or your temple, so that you're ready for this once-a-year opportunity.

* * *

Devakī-nandana Dāsa

One of my fondest memories is of the 1994 Marathon. Nirguṇa Dāsa and I traveled in his van

Chapter 10: The Marathon

around the southeast of the US for the month of December. It was very cold, with frequent snow and icy rain. We would go to a town, find the WalMart or Kmart and distribute all day in the cold till night. Then we would drive to the next town and try to find a hotel owned by an Indian and plead with him to let us stay for free since we were American Vaiṣṇavas. Usually it worked. On a few occasions they even brought out their Deities to show us. One man even had met Śrīla Prabhupāda in 1971 in Surat.

Nirguṇa Prabhu was a very dear disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda who distributed books most of his life. He left his body in 2007 in Māyāpur, reuniting with him in the spiritual world. Nirguṇa Prabhu was one of the most inspiring devotees I ever met. Without his association, I don't think I would've made it in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

One evening during the 1994 marathon, after Nirguṇa and I had been out late distributing in southeastern Kentucky, we found a motel and took rest. The next day was the coldest yet. Our cooker wasn't working, so we couldn't cook. In the cold it's important to have hot *kichari* or something similar to keep you strong. Plus, the motel owner was harassing us to leave early because someone wanted to rent the room.

We went to a laundromat and did some laundry while finishing our rounds, and I cooked up some *kichari* outside on the sidewalk, using an electrical outlet I found out front. We finally took *prasādam* about 2:00 and were ready for *saṅkīrtana* around 2:30. We were sure we were going to have a terrible day, considering how inauspiciously it had started and how late it was already. Plus a mixtue of rain and snow was falling, and we were tired—it was near the end of December and we'd already worked about twenty days straight.

Anyway, we got to the Walmart parking lot in a small town called London and started distributing. We put our books in big plastic bags inside shopping carts, propped up an umbrella in the cart, and approached people at their cars after they'd shopped. We didn't expect to distribute many books, but because we surrendered to Kṛṣṇa despite all obstacles, miracles happened that day. Almost everyone took a book.

I still remember the first guy I approached. I went to his truck and saw he had a big gun rack in the back with a huge rifle mounted on it. His name was Elmer. I showed him the *Bhagavad-gītā* and told him it was about meditation and ancient Indian knowledge. Some sort of light went on in his primitive country brain, and he pulled out ten dollars and grabbed that *Gītā* like there was no tomorrow. It pretty much went on like that until around 11 pm. I remember seeing Nirguṇa Prabhu blissfully running around the parking lot with big boots on, all wrapped up in warm clothes. By about ten thirty I had distributed 26 hardbound *Gītās* and an assortment of small books. At that point I was just too exhausted to continue and went back to the van. But Nirguṇa was so fired up that he went on for another half hour or so, and when he returned to the van he had distributed 44 hardbound *Gītās* and had around \$450. I remember driving around late trying to find a motel and telling stories and laughing about the day's events.

When I fully surrender on *saṅkīrtana* like that I can't think of anything that even compares. Sometimes the nectar is so thick on *saṅkīrtana* you can cut it with a knife.

* * *

Śyāmananda Dāsa

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

Girirāja Prabhu is a doctor who works in the Bhaktivedanta Hospital in Mumbai. One day during the Marathon he was distributing books during at the Vasai railway station. It was about time to close the bookstall when he saw two gentlemen talking about the Hare Kṛṣṇas distributing books in public places. One man said loudly, “These people should not be allowed to preach religion in public places. I wonder what their motivation is?” Upon hearing this remark, Girirāja Prabhu felt a strong inner impulse to approach the man. So he took a set of Marathi *Kṛṣṇa* books, went over to the man, and said, “Sir, I am a doctor working at the Bhaktivedanta Hospital, and all these people with me are respectable members of society. Our only motivation in setting up a bookstall here after working hard for eight hours is to enable Lord Kṛṣṇa to enter your house and purify it.”

Girirāja’s straightforward statement surprised the man completely, and he said, “OK, I will take a set, but I don’t have any money with me. Please come to my office.”

Girirāja Prabhu gladly walked to the man’s office, which turned out to be the office of the Chief Superintendent of the Railway Police of Vasai Railway Station. Now Girirāja has full permission for all book distribution in the man’s jurisdiction.

* * *

Vijaya Dāsa

As followers of Śrīla Prabhupāda, we have a great responsibility to help the conditioned souls lost in the abyss of illusion. Marathons are an opportunity to set aside our ordinary course of activities and help some unfortunate souls become fortunate. Many devotees in our movement are *mahārathi* book distributors who have been distributing for years or even decades. All glories to their service and determination! Other devotees have pressing responsibilities that make it difficult for them give out the mercy in the form of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. It used to be (in the good old days) that the Prabhupāda marathon was a special time when devotees who normally don’t go out go out at least for some time—everyone would spend some time directly distributing books. How auspicious it would be if everyone in our movement would go out and distribute at least one book a day during the month of December! In this way everyone can help the effort to bless the conditioned souls by distributing Prabhupāda’s books, an activity he found so pleasing.

Book distribution is so nice, as this story will demonstrate. I was sitting at a table on the campus of Los Angeles City College when a girl came to the table with her friend and asked excitedly: “Do you have the book I lost two years ago?!” Not seeing it on the table, she started looking in my box. “Yes! I see it!” As I flipped through the books in the box, I pulled out the one I thought she was looking at. “No, no,” she said, “the silver one!” I pulled out a copy of *Coming Back*. She grabbed it and started hugging it as she said, “Two years ago I got this book and was reading it. I got half way through and then lost it. I was devastated—it’s sooo interesting.” I then showed her the *Bhagavad-gītā*, for which she also enthusiastically gave a donation. Her friend got caught up in her joy and bought a book as well.

* * *

Anonymous

Chapter 10: The Marathon

Śrīla Prabhupāda's book distribution is a long-range program to bring as many conditioned souls as possible back to Godhead. The more book distribution goes on, the more people will understand Kṛṣṇa. Planting the seed of *bhakti-yoga* is important work because it gives people a chance to become Kṛṣṇa conscious.

In past ages there were no books; there was only transcendental sound vibration. These sound vibrations are still vibrating—they are eternal, and they do not deteriorate. Śrīla Prabhupāda has captured the transcendental sound vibration in his books. His books contain the same eternal message that Kṛṣṇa explained to Arjuna, that Śukadeva Gosvāmī explained to Mahārāja Parīkṣit, and that the other *mahājanas* have explained to the devotees of the Lord since time immemorial. When these deep concepts from Kṛṣṇa go into the hearts of the living entities, the living entities become absorbed little by little in love of Godhead.

Kṛṣṇa's pure devotee, Śrīla Prabhupāda, said that simply by distributing his books we can change the world. His words will not prove false. Kṛṣṇa has proven time and time again that the words of a pure devotee are always true. Kṛṣṇa Himself always makes them true.

On a personal level, I have seen that whenever someone is having difficulties in his spiritual life, if he goes out and distributes books, especially during the marathon, his whole life immediately transforms into a blissful *saṅkīrtana-yajña*. Distributing books is so refreshing and relaxing, and it frees one from intense mental problems because it is a transcendental activity. So by all means we should wholeheartedly engage in the distribution of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books in the Prabhupāda Marathons.

End of Chapter Ten: The Marathon

ONE
*Krishna Book
 sold means
 we go forward one step
 in our Krishna Consciousness.
 We should always remember this.*

(S.P.L. to Visnujana Maharaja 4th April 1971)

KRṢṂA
 The Supreme Personality of Godhead
 His Divine Grace
 A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
 A Guide to the Philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita

www.iskconbookdistribution.com

*Please continue to print & distribute books
 for the benefit of suffering, misdirected humanity.*

Letter to Puranjana, Honolulu
 4 May, 1978

www.iskconbookdistribution.com

Chapter Eleven Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

There are many surprises in this material world, where Māyā has such a strong hold on society. But the biggest surprise for Maya is that Śrīla Prabhupāda came to the West and convinced thousands of Westerners to give up their sinful lives and give their lives to Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda himself sometimes expressed surprise at the success he found. That some of this Society's members who had previously engaged in most sinful, abominable activities have gone out for decades to give this transcendental knowledge to people all over the world is another big surprise. How fortunate we are to have the opportunity to be Śrīla Prabhupāda's instruments in his mission of spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world! It is certainly the mercy of Kṛṣṇa.

Book distribution is filled with many pleasant surprises. We never know what Kṛṣṇa is going to arrange. This chapter tells of some interesting encounters people have had with Prabhupāda's books and introduces us to some of the many people whose hands they mysteriously end up in.

* * *

Morning Walk, June 5, 1976, Los Angeles

Dānavīr: I'm in charge of the new bhakta program in Los Angeles. Yesterday a boy called up the temple. He's seventeen years old. He said, "Five years ago, when I was coming out of a store, I received a *Back to Godhead* magazine. So I took it home and began reading it. I read six pages. But my mother—she's a strict Baptist—took it away. I couldn't read it again. I never saw devotees again until a few days ago." Yesterday he came and joined the temple and became your disciple.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: [chuckles]

Rāmeśvara: Just by reading one word of your books.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: What is that word?

Rāmeśvara: Any word. [laughter] "Surrender to Kṛṣṇa!" We are making almost ten devotees every month. And they're all coming from your books, from reading your books. Every one of them.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Therefore I am insisting, "Spread books."

Dānavīr: Śrīla Prabhupāda, there was one boy who just joined a few months ago—he had been reading your books, and he came to join the temple. He had graduated from college and had been to law school. We found out after some time that his father is Dr. Royal McClain, a very, very big preacher in the South. He has his own television program. He is a very strict Christian, and his son joined our movement. So the father calls up the son: "How could you desert our religion and join this Kṛṣṇa movement?" His son explained how he was actually feeling real love of God now for the first time in his life.

Rāmeśvara: He convinced his father that he should stay in our movement.

* * *

His Holiness Badrinārāyaṇ Swami

Once in San Diego a devotee was distributing small books in a parking lot. As he approached

The Treasure of the Br̥hat-mṛdaṅga

a car he saw a young man sitting in the driver’s seat. When the devotee knocked on the window, the man shouted, “Look, just leave me alone! Get outta here!”

The devotee went on his way, but then he thought, “This guy’s pretty bad off. He needs a book.” So the devotee returned and stuck a small book under the windshield wiper.

Later the young man showed up at the San Diego temple and told this story:

“When the devotee saw me, I was very morose. I was frustrated about school and felt no inspiration in life. My parents had sent me to a psychologist, but he was no help, and I became even more depressed. I thought there must be something wrong with me. I saw how my friends were so enthusiastic about going to school, getting jobs, making money. I concluded that everyone else was okay and I was just messed up, a total failure.

“So I decided to kill myself. I ran a tube from the exhaust pipe through the trunk into my car, rolled up the windows, and started the engine. I thought this would be a good way to end all my misery and pain.

“The car was quickly filling up with carbon monoxide when someone walked up holding a big stack of books on his arm and knocked on the window. I told him to get lost. I thought he was a crazy fanatic—especially when he came back and put one of his books under my windshield wiper.

“But then I began to get bored and thought, ‘Well, what would be the harm if I read something before I die?’ So I rolled down the window, reached out, and grabbed the little book. The title looked interesting—*Civilization and Transcendence*. I started to read.

“In that book I found that Śrīla Prabhupāda directly points out the defects of modern civilization and gives people an alternative, the Kṛṣṇa conscious way of life. Suddenly I realized, ‘Hey, I’m not crazy. Everyone else is!’

“So I rolled down the windows, disconnected the tube from my exhaust, and drove home. After reading the book cover to cover, I’ve come to the temple to become a devotee.” The young man stayed in the temple and became a very nice devotee.

* * *

His Holiness Rasānanda Swami

I was distributing books on the buses in Sao Paulo, Brazil. I became very tired, so I stopped at a bus stop and lay down on a bench for awhile. After a few minutes I heard a loud voice calling from a bus that had stopped in front of me. It was so loud I was scared.

The driver said, “Hey, Hare Kṛṣṇa, come on, what are you waiting for? Get on the bus and distribute your books.” Then the driver said to the passengers, “Please help these Hare Kṛṣṇa people. They’re very nice.”

Almost everybody on that bus took books!

* * *

His Holiness Suhotra Swami

I was distributing door to door in the early 1970s, wearing *dhoti*, *tilaka*, and shaved head. I knocked on a door and a man called from behind it: “Who are you?” I explained who I was and why I was at the door. Then I heard a woman say, “Open the door. Let’s have a look at him.” In an instant the door swung open with a bang and I found myself face to face with a man aiming a

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

revolver at my head! His wife hid behind him. I started preaching. Gradually the man lowered his gun, and finally he gave me a donation for a *Kṛṣṇa* book.

I was so happy because I had a great story to tell Viṣṇujana Mahārāja when I got back to the bus!

* * *

Cāru Dāsa (ACBSP)

Mom was a stern Christian. She made that very clear to me when I tried to stop her as she walked with her daughter, who looked about fifteen. The daughter, however, adamantly declared that *she* was *not* a Christian, and she asked me, “What are you guys doing out here?” After I explained a little of what we are doing, she took a book, to the profound horror of Mom, who couldn’t do anything about it.

* * *

Vaiśeṣika Dāsa (ACBSP)

One of my standard mottos is “The more you show, the more you sell.” In other words, the books usually don’t sell themselves—you’ve got to show them to the people. But sometimes it does happen.

Praghoṣa Prabhu was distributing in the airport. At one point he became tired and went to take a little nap. As he rested, a person nudged him awake and asked, “Can I give you something for the books you have here, stacked up next to you. I saw them and they look very interesting.” Sometimes, without any effort on our part, the books sell themselves.

There’s no experience quite like distributing a *Bhagavad-gītā*. The *Bhagavad-gītā* is unique because it directly emanates from the lotus mouth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. It attracts all kinds of people. It is sufficient in itself for God realization.

*gītā su-gītā kartavyā kim anyaiḥ śāstra-vistaraiḥ
yā svayaṁ padmanābhasya mukha-padmād viniḥṣṛtā*

Because *Bhagavad-gītā* is spoken by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one need not read any other Vedic literature. One need only attentively and regularly hear and read *Bhagavad-gītā*. In the present age, people are so absorbed in mundane activities that it is not possible for them to read all the Vedic literatures. But this is not necessary. This one book, *Bhagavad-gītā*, will suffice, because it is the essence of all Vedic literatures and especially because it is spoken by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. (*Gītā-māhātmya* 4)

In the San Francisco airport I was distributing books, mostly hardback *Bhagavad-gītās* and *Bhagavad-gītā* CD ROMs. I saw a couple of young men who looked to be in their mid or late

The Treasure of the Br̥hat-mṛdaṅga

twenties. They were casually dressed in khaki pants and button-down shirts. “Java” badges dangled from their carry-on bags, tipping me off that they were computer engineers (an easy guess, since they were young, on business in San Francisco, and appeared to be from India).

I gave them each a *Bhagavad-gītā* CD ROM and told them that since Indian people already know everything about the *Bhagavad-gītā* and most of them have one in their home, we’ve specially produced this high-tech version of the *Gītā* for today’s Indians. In fact, I noted, it is perfect for the modern Indian engineer.

I offered them my observation that in today’s world many people believe that if they could just get hold of a million dollars they would become happy. But most people intuitively know this is not true. The *Bhagavad-gītā* teaches, I continued, that real happiness comes from the re-awakening of our spiritual nature through introspection. Finally, I informed them that we accept donations to continue the work of spreading this knowledge around the world. They both happily—and without hesitation—donated.

Before parting, I asked them what part of India they were from. “We’re actually not from India,” one of them said with a slight smile. “We’re from Pakistan.” They were Muslims! He then patted the *Bhagavad-gītā* CD ROM he had tucked under his arm and said, “This is important work you’re doing. Thank you very much.”

Distributing in the San Francisco airport, I met a woman from Australia. I stopped her and put a book in her hands, but before I could say a word, she handed it back. She said she was tired from flying and short of time, and with many apologies she hurried off toward her gate.

About thirty minutes later, as I continued distributing, I saw the woman again. She had come back and was watching me from a few yards away as I distributed a book to a family headed for the Philippines. She saw me give them a book and them hand me money and must have overheard me say “God bless you!” as they walked away.

She came over to me and said, “Oh, I didn’t know that this was religious and that you were taking donations.” She had five dollars ready in her hand, which she gave to me.

She told me that she was a Christian. She explained that when she got to her gate she realized that she had more time than she thought and had asked an airport employee if there was a house of worship inside the airport that she could visit.

The employee had sent her to the airport chapel, which happened to be near where I was distributing. Then she said, “As I walked back toward you on my way to find the chapel, something inside my heart told me, ‘Talk to the man with the books.’”

After she dutifully handed me the five dollars, I dutifully handed her a *Light of the Bhāgavata*. I saw her face change slightly when she saw Śrīla Prabhupāda’s picture inside the front cover. She squinted, showing uncertainty, and in a voice that seemed to beg me to convince her that looking at the book wasn’t a sin, she asked, “Do you know that I’m a Christian?”

“That’s great!” I said. “Then you’ll love this book!” I explained that the subject of the book is *bhakti-yoga*, which advocates that the ultimate purpose of a person’s life is to rediscover her pure love for God. I told her that in *bhakti-yoga* the main process for the practitioner to reconnect with God is by praying and by singing or praising God’s divine name. I went on to suggest that Jesus taught the very same thing as does the Old Testament of the Bible.

By the mercy of the Lord in the heart (the same Lord who had directed this woman to come back in my direction and give a donation), she began to accept what I was saying. (If you’ve met any Christians on SKP over the years, you know I’m talking about something very rare.) We

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

talked for a while, and I ended up giving her *The Science of Self-Realization* to go with the *Light of the Bhāgavata*. At the end of our conversation we were both feeling blissful, as if something life-changing had happened.

Book distribution is such a wonderful and mystical process. The act itself allows direct communion with the Lord. It requires faith to stand out there, explaining to strangers why you believe in the book and why they should believe in it too and why you don't have "a normal job like normal people."

It's not easy to get up and out the door. It requires faith to get out there and battle the mind and the elements. But it's worth it. Kṛṣṇa does reciprocate.

We have a program in Berlingham, California, in which once a month all the devotees in the congregation observe a day called Bring a Friend on *Saṅkīrtana* Day.

On one of these days I brought out a friend who hadn't been out on book distribution in twenty years. His name was Dayānidhi Prabhu. The first person he spoke to began arguing with him. Finally the man shouted, "I'm God!"

Dayānidhi shouted back, "You can be godlike, but you cannot be God!"

And so it went, on and on . . . After a lot of heated talk, he left.

Twenty minutes later he came back, humbled, and said, "I take back every word I said. Can I have one of those books?" He then took a *Bhagavad-gītā* and gave twenty-one dollars.

Dayānidhi, shocked, was inspired to continue swimming in the ocean of the nectar of book distribution for the rest of the day.

* * *

Aiśvarya Dāsa

While approaching many people on book distribution, I met Muhammad, possibly in his forties and looking as if he'd been working hard all his life. When I placed a couple of books in his rough hands, he looked up at me and told me straight up that he had a problem with religion. "I was born in a Muslim family, but I also looked at other religions. I know about them all, but none are for me." Muhammad paused while he looked back down at the books in his hands. I stayed quiet. What could I say in reply to a statement like that? Then Muhammad looked back up at me he simply said, "But this intrigues me." Somehow he was attracted to Kṛṣṇa and took three books.

Jeff Baker was into Kṛṣṇa—a little bit. He liked the food and the incense, and he thought the *kīrtana* was pretty cool too. He had tried chanting on beads, but not for long. Jeff was an avid reader with an inquiring mind, so he bought a copy of the *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* and read bits of it from time to time. As happens quite often, Jeff couldn't get his head around the deeper aspects of the teachings, and because there was no one nearby to answer his questions, he took the *Gītā* off the shelf less and less frequently as the months went by. One September day he decided to clear out all the old books he no longer read and take them to the charity book shop in town. The *Gītā* was among them.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

Eight months later, Jeff changed jobs and moved two hundred miles away to a big city, into an apartment on the third floor of a complex. He happily settled into his new job and his new life. Though he was still interested in Kṛṣṇa a little bit, looking into Kṛṣṇa consciousness was not very high on his to-do list.

One Saturday he was looking out a window of his apartment, down into the parking lot below, when he saw a neighbor emptying a box of old household items into a big trash bin. He spotted some books among the trash, and thinking there might be a good read just being thrown away, he went downstairs to have a look. While looking through the discarded books he discovered a copy of Prabhupāda's *Bhagavad-gītā*. Smiling to himself as he mused that maybe this was a sign from Kṛṣṇa that now was the right time for him to finally make an effort to read this book, Jeff grabbed the *Gītā* and a couple of paperback novels and went upstairs.

When he sat down and opened the cover of the *Gītā*, his mouth fell open in amazement, for there, penned on the first page, was his name: Jeff Baker! It was the very book he had donated to the charity book shop so many months earlier! The person who threw it away must have lived in the same town he had moved from, bought it at the shop, found it wasn't for him, and thrown it away. Now Jeff firmly decided it was time to read it. He thought, "After Kṛṣṇa pulled that one, how can I not read it?"

We enter the parking lot to find Eileen, who gives us our passes for the concert. But a guy collecting \$3 for parking confronts us. Ekacakra tells him we're working at the concert. Our friend gets a little stern and asks whom exactly we work for. He adds, "I'm sorry, guys, but I have to ask these things to make sure." I say, "We're the Hare Kṛṣṇas," to which our friend spontaneously throws up his hands, as if he's just unnecessarily delayed the President of the US on his way to an important meeting, and says "Oh, Ok. You should have told me that in the first place." Was I just dreaming, or are things changing?

A group of five girls comes out of the concert. When Parama approaches them and explains what he's doing, they all become very interested and ask many questions. But what kind of questions do they ask poor old Parama? Whether he has sex or not, etc, etc. By the way, why is it that people ask monks questions they would never dare ask anyone else? Parama eventually gets back on the path of perfection and gets to the point: "Please take these books and give a donation."

One of the ladies feels bad that she hasn't any money, so she comes up with a startling plan: she'll help Parama distribute the books! She takes some small books, and off she goes. After approaching a group of concert-goers and failing to get the message across, she tells Parama, "Hey, this is a lot harder than it looks." So in the mood of a seasoned book distributor she changes tactics in midstream to get the upper hand. She approaches some boys and says, "These books will give you good karma, so that in your next life you will get lots of girls." The gentlemen begin frantically diving into their pockets looking for cash but can muster up only a few coins. Then one of them finds five dollars and gets the book.

So, she didn't exactly present the book quite on its merits, but hey, she's new. After all, the boys got the book and she got the mercy of being a book distributor.

Kṛṣṇa is working in hearts of all people, including, dare I say it, Buddhist monks. Actually, these days Buddhism is so watered down that many of its adherents believe in God. Needless to

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

say, in their minds God is Buddha, and by a funny twist of fate they're right.

While in Taiwan I was showing a *Bhagavad-gītā* to a Tibetan Buddhist monk. We were both shaved up, standing at the edge of a parking lot—he in his traditional sleeveless *kurtā* and dark red *lungi*, I sporting a saffron *dhoti* with only a dark-brown woolen chaddar on top, wrapped over one shoulder *pūjārī* style. He had told me how he had escaped Tibet twelve years earlier by illegally crossing the border into Nepal.

Since his escape he'd been traveling the world (avoiding China), doing the monk thing. He was very respectful to the picture of Śrīla Prabhupāda in the *Gītā*. For any Buddhist, the guru is a big part of his life, and he will respect a guru from any tradition. Even though as personalists we disagree on which rung of the back-to-Godhead ladder Buddhism sits, we can still find some fundamental principles common to Vaiṣṇavas and Buddhists. So, when my Buddhist friend respected Śrīla Prabhupāda's picture, I felt he was heading in a positive direction, and it became really positive when he purchased one of Prabhupāda's books.

It's funny that in Taiwan most monks are in fact nuns. The nuns there also shave their heads, wear the traditional gray robes worn by male monks, and receive respect from everyone—except male monks. Apparently there is a lot of discrimination within the spiritual orders. So when one Bhikkuni (female monk) reciprocated with me by buying a *Science of Self-Realization* and offering me full obeisances, I reciprocated by offering obeisances too. She got up off the ground with a look of complete surprise and then respectfully clutched Śrīla Prabhupāda's book even tighter. She was deeply moved by that gesture.

The whole Western monk thing seemed very strange for the Taiwanese. Not only the monk thing but also the style and color of Vaiṣṇava dress would throw them for a loop. They often commented in that endearing Chinese English, "You look very special." So even though Hinduism, let alone Vaiṣṇavism, is very foreign in this part of Asia, I am sometimes surprised to see how far and wide the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement has penetrated all parts of the globe by the sincere efforts of very special devotees.

* * *

Brajabihārī Dāsa

At the Dadar railway station, the busiest in Mumbai, around eighty devotees competed with hawkers for space on the bridge. With the constant announcements over the public address system and thousands of Mumbaits rushing back home from work, it was a challenge to grab the attention of the crowd. Historically it has been seen that the go-getters of Mumbai, always on the move, hardly stop for anything, especially at the stations where catching their train is priority number one.

But this was Gītā Jayanti, the anniversary of the day Kṛṣṇa spoke the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and the devotees were more inspired than ever to distribute the Lord's sacred book. They'd strategically stationed themselves all around the bridge, and each one was loudly calling out to the crowd, imploring them to take a copy of the *Bhagavad-gītā* at a specially discounted price. Although hundreds of billboards enticed and distracted the masses of commuters, the devotees bombarded them with catchy phrases and slogans and attracted the attention of a few. As soon as a person climbed the bridge, he would see a devotee imploring him to take a *Bhagavad-gītā*. If he would refuse the first one, he would be confronted by another devotee just a few steps ahead, and then another and another, until he descended the stairs from the bridge and came upon a book table put up by the *mātājīs*, who were also calling out loudly to the hordes of commuters headed home.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

Besides strategically placing themselves at the various parts of the bridge, devotees had also put up four book tables—one each by the *brahmacārīs*, congregational men, *mātājīs*, and boys of the ISKCON Youth Sangha.

Dāmodar Dulāl Prabhu preached to one of the men hawking electronic gadgets. Convinced of the importance of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, he packed up his table and joined the devotees in distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books!

One man refused a book offered by a few devotees, but eventually he took a book at the last table and revealed why: “I said to a few of your guys that I already have the book, but later I felt guilty about lying to such nice, well-dressed, and well-mannered devotees. As I came down the stairs I resolved: I will make up for my lies the next time I see one of you. As soon as I came down, I saw you here, and I had to take a book.”

The event became glorious because it was spontaneous and no one planned or imagined the way things turned out. Hṛṣīkeśānanda Prabhu announced that sales at all the book tables at various corners in Mumbai that day should total up to 1008 *Bhagavad-gītās* distributed. But Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda had other plans. Initially only a handful of devotees struggled at the book tables, vying for space with many hawkers. Soon a few other devotees joined them, and then many devotees returning home from work became inspired. They left other engagements and decided to join the fun. This enthusiasm was contagious, and it was amazing to see the usually reticent and shy devotees also shout loudly and preach enthusiastically. As the last train left for the night, the total *just at the Dadar train station* on Gītā Jayanti day was 1,100 *Bhagavad-gītās*!

As devotees packed up the tables at night, none of them had any voice left. The shouting and preaching had left them ecstatically exhausted. Returning home, the devotees celebrate Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mercy, having seen first-hand that even in a crazy city like Mumbai, where traditional values are fast eroding, Lord Kṛṣṇa’s message still has takers.

* * *

Chowpatti Saṅkīrtana

During book distribution in villages in India, we generally set up a stall by 7:30 a.m., and after engaging the early-morning shoppers we move to the next village. In this way we cover four or five villages a day.

One day we had good book distribution in a village. By 9 a.m. we were ready to leave. On the way to the next big village there was a smaller one, which I decide to skip. “Better spend more time in the bigger village,” I thought. While passing through the small village we came to the place where the village people, under the guidance of their *sarpanch* (village head), were repairing the road. I was surprised to see that the village was prosperous. As our bus approached, everyone stopped work and began staring at us. Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *kīrtana* tune was airing from the bus’s public address system, the bus itself was brightly painted, and it was filled with cheerful devotees enthusiastically having *kīrtana*. Everything was mesmerizing for simple village folk.

The *sarpanch* waved at us to stop.

“What do you have?” he asked.

“We distribute *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*,” I replied.

“Where will you set up your stall in our village?”

“We’re not setting up our stall here. We’re going to the next village. It’s bigger.”

“Are we so sinful that you are not stopping in our village? Please stop here. I will personally

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

come with you and help everyone take a book.”

He climbed onto our bus while the workers cleared heaps of mud from the road and made way for our bus. As we slowly moved along, an eager crowd began to follow us. At the village market we stopped the bus, and the *sarpanch* was the first person to take books, several volumes of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

I immediately thought of the *Gītā* verse starting *yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhas tat tad evetaro janaḥ*: “Whatever action great men do, common men follow.”

The *sarpanch* then requested everyone to buy a book. “If you don’t have any money,” he declared, “I will lend you some. You can repay it tomorrow.” He lent around two thousand rupees to the villagers, all of whom he knew personally.

In that village of around a hundred people, about 60% took books. I learned an important lesson: never prejudge a place because of its material features. It was a small village with a large heart.

The entrance at Malad Station in Mumbai is quite small, and our book table occupied a prominent place there. In the late afternoon we witnessed a constant commotion of trains arriving and then leaving after disgorging their hordes of commuters eager to race home after a day’s work. Frustrated auto wallas spewed expletives all around. Honking two-wheelers and taxis blasted their ear-splitting horns. In the narrow lanes just outside the station, haggling fruit sellers vied for space and customers. Occasionally a constable would come running, waving his stick and blowing his whistle to intervene in the frequent squabbles. With so many devotees standing near the gate and ticket counter displaying the *Bhagavad-gītā* and trying to get the attention of the rushing commuters, it was indeed an intense evening of book distribution.

Suddenly I turned to face a tall bearded fellow with unkempt hair and sullen eyes that were staring straight through me. He pushed closer. I pulled back reflexively, repelled by his whole persona as well as the stink of alcohol on his breath. His trousers looked like they’d seen a dozen summers without being washed, and his shirt was jazzily incongruent with his dreary personality. Wanting to avoid an embarrassing confrontation, I gave him a half-nervous smile, hoping he would retrace his steps when he realized he wouldn’t get anything even remotely resembling what he was looking for. But however much I tried to ignore, he kept inching forward.

“What could this drunkard possibly want from us?” As this thought raced across my mind, he finally spoke up, “Sir, I want to thank you very much.”

His voice was too polite. Still suspicious, I paid no heed. He continued, “I’m a fugitive from a nearby state, having three murder cases on my head.”

I was stunned to see him pull out a long dagger from inside his shirt. Before I could turn to the other devotees, he broke down crying and said, “I was on my way to kill another man last night. But as I came out of the station I was stopped dead in my tracks by the sight of so many devotees chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and displaying *Bhagavad-gītās*. Seeing all of you wearing beautiful *tilaka* and displaying this book, I was struck numb and motionless. A few minutes later I went ahead with my assigned task. As I picked a quarrel with my target, my standard practice, I found myself unable to pull out my knife. A familiar voice pierced through my conscience and implored me to refrain from the heinous act. The chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa constantly rang in my ears, and again and again I kept recalling the blissfully smiling faces of all you devotees. I apologized to the man I had come

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

to kill and returned home. Since then I've been restless like never before. I finally mustered up enough courage to come up to you and make this confession and thank you for stopping me from committing a terrible sin.”

This was incredible! As devotees gathered around, we were simply wonderstruck by what the man said. He then picked up a *Gītā*, but upon learning that it costs Rs 70/-, he reluctantly put it back. He said he had only Rs 15/-, which he needed for his daily quota of liquor. I had to act fast. If I let him walk off with his money, he was again going to engage in sin. I immediately gave him a *Laws of Nature* and said it was only 15 rupees. He was happy to take the book and said he would read it.

As we celebrated the remarkable encounter later that evening, we reflected upon the wonderful gift Śrīla Prabhupāda has given the whole world. We all assumed we'd seen the last of our reformed drunkard and murderer. So three days later we were all pleasantly surprised to see him again at our bookstall, this time looking sober, cheerful, fresh, and clean. He said he had indeed read the *Laws of Nature* and promised to give up drinking, meat-eating, and other sinful habits. “I'm convinced,” he said, “that I have to give up this sinful life of mine. I promise to mend my ways. I'm immediately leaving for my hometown so I can surrender to the state police. After my term in prison, I promise to lead a more responsible life and do good to myself and others. And for all this I have you devotees to thank.”

This incident is not only uncommon and spectacular, but it also reveals the extent to which Śrīla Prabhupāda's compassion can embrace the fallen souls, giving new hope and meaning to their misguided lives. We don't see such miracles daily, but we can rest assured that these books have the potency to transform the whole human civilization and bring about a revolution in human society. The least we can do is go out and present the books to all, hoping and praying that we will be allowed to continue serving in this sacred mission.

Bhakta Rahul, a dentist, who is member of the Brahmachārī Trainee Group at the Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Gopinātha Mandir in Chowpatty, recalls this interesting experience:

I was distributing books in the local trains when two men started making fun of me, mimicking my announcement. I ignored them and tried to focus on the announcement. But when no one took a book after the announcement and there was still time before we arrived at the next station, I decided to have a talk with those fellows.

I went to them and held a *Bhagavad-gītā* before them. They giggled. One said to the other, “You look,” and the other said, “No, no. You look.” They were mocking me again.

“Don't worry” I said, “I'll show both of you the book.”

I opened to the painting depicting hellish punishments for specific sins—how a meat-eater is boiled in oil, a man who indulges in illicit sex must embrace a fiery woman's body, and those who indulge in intoxication and gambling must suffer similar horrifying punishments. I described the meaning of the painting briefly, and the result was devastating. Their smiles evaporated, they stared with unblinking eyes, and they became very serious. One of them took the *Bhagavad-gītā* in his hands and turned a few pages, and the other paid the money.

Now it was my turn to smile.

* * *

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

Citrālekḥā Devī Dāsī

I was in Auckland distributing books, feeling a little dazed from trying to catch people's attention as they rushed past me in every direction. I noticed two big, burly, rather simpleminded-looking road workers standing near me, and thinking "After all, they're spirit souls," handed the slightly smarter-looking one a book. He immediately refused, so I handed it to his friend, trying to present it as simply and as interestingly as I could. He took the book and muttered, "This is Indian?"

"No, no this is not Indian; it's for everyone. I'm French! *Parlez vous francais?* [Do you speak French?]" He looked at me quizzically for a few moments as I said, "You know, this book is the best book on earth. It gives the answers to all the questions of life in a very real and practical way, and it helps you focus the mind."

"Really?" he said.

"For sure! Otherwise why would I come to this cold, windy street?!"

"How much?"

"A donation with from heart."

He pulls out \$20. I give him another book and then hand a little book to his friend, saying, "This one's for you."

The one who already has two books says, "No, it's for me!" and hands me another \$20. Then I show him the *Gītā* and he says, "When will you be back?"

"On Thursday."

"OK, I'll come and get some more from you then."

As he happily walked off with his three books, I reflected, "So much for my mundane vision!"

* * *

Dhruvānanda Dāsa

I was working "cloak and dagger" inside a mall in New Papatoetoe, a suburb of Auckland. I managed to stop an intense-looking Kiwi fellow who looked as if he'd just gotten out of prison that very day. Despite his grisly appearance and demeanor, I managed engage him in a riveting conversation about his religious sentiments. When I noticed the ominous black figure approaching us from the side, I knew instantly he was a private security guard, a sworn enemy of honest *sāṅkīrtana* devotees everywhere. He invited himself into our conversation and asked nicely that I take the whole exchange outside, since I was not allowed to sell books inside the mall.

Much to my surprise, the grisly fellow snapped at him: "Hey, mate, we're talking over here. Why don't you just sit down and wait until we're finished!?" Our security-guard friend wasn't prepared to argue with such a tough fellow, so he sat down and patiently waited until the man purchased a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* volume and left. Although the guard was still a bit confused by the whole ordeal, he escorted me out of the mall. As we we're leaving, he told me that he was just in the staff room reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Īsopaniṣad* when the order came in for him to ask me to leave. It turned out that he was a frequent visitor to the local ISKCON temple.

I told him about the importance of book distribution and asked if he'd like to give a donation and take a book. He kindly contributed but refused to take another book because he already owned most of Prabhupāda's books already.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

* * *

Dvijamaṇi Gaura Dāsa

One day during the 2010 fall semester at Louisiana State University, I learned from someone who had no prior experience the proper mood for distributing transcendental books.

As I stood on campus late one afternoon, I prayed to Śrī Gurudeva for inspiration to try harder to give others Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. Suddenly I noticed a fellow approaching wearing a tie-dyed shirt and quickly recognized him as the same student who’d just taken a soft *Gītā* a few minutes earlier. “Oh, great,” I thought, “he looks like he’s in the mood to chat. Can’t he see I’m busy and it’s getting late?”

“Hey, any luck with those books?”

“Yeah,” I replied. “Thanks again.” I turned away, hoping he would keep walking. Still, a voice in my heart told me to remain open to talking to him. Maybe he would sincerely want to know more about Kṛṣṇa’s teachings.

“Why do you sell these books?” he asked. I told him, in a nutshell, the story of how I came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Listening closely and holding the *Bhagavad-gītā* in his hand, he seemed confident and enlivened. I learned that his name was Derek and that he studied nuclear physics. He had recently been accepted into an elite program where he would be trained as a specialist for the Navy, a career that would take him all over the world.

“Can I come along with you and help?” he proposed. By now I got it through my thick head that this was Kṛṣṇa’s plan. Perhaps I should try not to get in the way.

“Sure! Follow me and try to catch on.”

We walked into the student union, where I presented a book to a boy who listened to my presentation but wasn’t interested. I assessed my attempt and told Derek my conclusion.

“If you stop them purposefully,” I explained, “they become more receptive.”

“Can I try that one?” Derek asked, smiling and pointing to the hardcover *Bhagavad-gītā* in my hand. He took it and immediately approached the first person he saw standing by the cafeteria entrance.

“Do you want to learn about Hare Kṛṣṇa today?” he asked the young lady. She was quiet and stand-offish. He continued: “This is an important book because it teaches the real religion. Even the Catholic God comes from Hare Kṛṣṇa, so this is the most original scripture, not the Bible.”

When she showed no interest and started to leave, he asked, “You have time to read the menu posted on the wall, but not this great book?”

As she walked away, he didn’t seem at all disappointed but rather more enthusiastic to try again.

“Where did you learn to preach like that?” I asked Derek.

“Well,” he replied, “the Baptists are more in-your-face than that, right? Why not tell the people how it is?”

As we continued touring the premises, it seemed that each person Derek approached would stop, at once become pleasant, and offer his or her attention. Stepping outside the student union, Derek led us toward a young lady sipping a coffee she held in one hand while reading a book she held in the other.

“This is Shannon,” he said to me. “Shannon, do you want to learn about Hare Kṛṣṇa today?” He quickly convinced her to hear my presentation and take a book. She gave a donation and decided to join our newly formed preaching *yātrā*. The three of us ventured toward the student

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

apartments, stopping students along the way.

We met Derek's roommate on his way to the gym and spoke to him about our books and the importance of spiritual education. Our real religion, we explained, is to live simply, without artificial "necessities," to use our energy for God's service, and to depend on God in all circumstances. He agreed that this is how one learns to become honest and tolerant, and tears of appreciation welled up in his eyes.

Next Derek stopped a Christian girl who claimed she was very devoted to studying only the Bible. He told her that Hare Kṛṣṇa is actually what she was searching for, and then he looked to me for further explanation. I thanked her for worshiping the Lord and told her that the *Bhagavad-gītā* would enrich her understanding of God's personality, which would be a great service to Christ. She agreed and gave a nice donation.

In this way, by the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda, the books quickly found their way into the hands of so many different types of students. What brought us together was the urgent desire of Derek to wake up the sleeping souls at his school. We glimpsed the mood of Caitanya Mahāprabhu's *nagara-saṅkīrtana* in Śrī Navadvīpa-dhāma: selfless, focused endeavor for spreading Kṛṣṇa's glories.

After Derek sold more books than I did, emptying my bag, he, Shannon, and I walked back to the *saṅkīrtana* bus and enjoyed some light *prasādam* and *kīrtana*, and I taught them how to chant *japa*. At the end of the day, Derek and Shannon walked back to the campus in a blissful mood while we drove away to the next engagement.

* * *

Ekeśvara Dāsa

I had some time off from the shooting of *Abhay Charan* in London, so I went out with Śrīla Prabhupāda's books on Carneby Street, near the Soho Street temple.

As I passed the corner I saw a couple sitting at a cafe, smoking cigarettes. They both looked to be in their late forties, she dressed like a prostitute, all in black, and he dressed also in black, with yellow teeth and looking like a junkie. Still, I showed them the books as I passed by.

"Can I ask you a question?" he said.

Fearfully, but depending on Kṛṣṇa, I said, "Sure."

"Do you sell these books or give them away?"

"We ask for donations for them."

He smiled, relaxed, and said, "Actually, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda is my favorite. I have almost all his books. I've been reading them for twenty years. I'm so happy that you're doing this work. Keep distributing these books to change the materialistic consciousness of the people of this planet." He gave me ten pounds and took *A Second Chance*. I was quite amazed.

This verse from the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Ādi 7.2) came to mind: "In distributing love of Godhead, Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His associates did not consider who was a fit candidate and who was not, nor where such distribution should or should not take place. They made no conditions. Wherever they got the opportunity, the members of the Pañca-tattva distributed love of Godhead."

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

Hṛṣikeśānanda Dāsa

I was distributing with the Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Gopīnātha Traveling bus party. I had gone to meet the director of a company. The moment we entered his office, he gave us a look that said, “Why are you here, wasting my time?” We cordially explained our purpose, and he took no time dismissing us: “We’re not interested.”

Undaunted, I took out a laminated picture of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Gopīnātha and a packet of *mahā-prasādam* cookies. “Sir, please accept these gifts. You can take your time deciding if you would like some of our books. I will call you after a day or two.” I could see he wasn’t interested.

After a couple of days we ran out of companies, so I called the director who had given us the cold shoulder. He shouted into the phone: “Hey, where are you?”

“I’m here in town,” I replied.

“Come over as soon as you can.”

I was shocked and told him I was on the way over.

When I entered his office he greeted me with a loud “Welcome!” and a big smile. He got up from his chair and took me by hand to his desk. “Please do your program in my company. You can start today.”

“Sir, it is late now. Can we come tomorrow?”

“You can come whenever you want. Whatever you need, just let me know. I will make all arrangements.”

We thanked him and got up to leave, when he sheepishly asked, “Do you have some more cookies?”

“Yes, of course. Here, please take some more.”

“You know, you have helped me so much,” he said as he held the packet of cookies to his heart. “For the last five years my wife has been upset with me. I couldn’t please her in any way. But the day before yesterday, when I went home and gave her the picture of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa you’d given me, she became so happy. And when she tasted those cookies, she went wild. ‘I want more, I want more. Please get them,’ she kept asking me. But I couldn’t contact you. Luckily you called me up today. Now I will give her these cookies. Please tell me how I may acquire a bigger picture of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.” I was dumbstruck, and at last told him I would be back the next day.

The next morning we started our day of book distribution at his company. He stood next to our book table and forced everyone in his company to buy the books. He also passed out a circular we had prepared. And to top it off, he even arranged for us to distribute books at three other big companies.

Now every time I visit that area I make sure I carry packets of cookies for him, and I continue to distribute them to my other clients. You never know how Kṛṣṇa will change their hearts.

* * *

Kanakābja Dāsa

This is a story about Śivātmā Prabhu, one of the veteran German book distributors.

One day while in his apartment in Hamburg, he suddenly collapsed. Fortunately, another devotee was there and immediately called an ambulance. The emergency crew took him to the hospital, where they found out he was suffering from too much sugar in the blood. When the

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

doctors saw his blood sugar level, they couldn't believe it. They'd never heard of anyone surviving with so much blood sugar. The doctors gathered around him and tried hard to save him (he was in a coma). After some time he started to recover, and finally he woke up. There were a dozen doctors around him, witnessing the miracle.

As soon as he woke up he started to preach. The doctors were amazed. He was preaching full-bore, but since he was really weak he soon lost consciousness again. When he woke up the second time, he continued preaching where he'd left off. The doctors and nurses couldn't believe it. He'd almost died, and now he was instructing them that they are not the body but spirit souls, that there is God, *karma*, miseries of this material world, etc. Word soon spread throughout the hospital. Everyone was coming to see him and hear from him, so he just went on preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

After a couple of days he phoned the devotees to bring him a set of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatams*. The next morning, when the doctors came to see him, he asked them to reach under his bed and pull out the box there. One by one he took out each volume of the *Bhāgavatam*, opened it, and explained its contents. This went on for half an hour, till he finished explaining all ten cantos. One doctor immediately expressed his desire to have the set. He paid 700 Deutschmarks (\$400) and donated to him a machine to help regulate his blood sugar.

Śivātmā Prabhu recovered very quickly. As soon as he got some strength back, he asked the staff in the hospital for some service. He wanted to help take care of the patients. "I'm a monk," he said, "and my duty is to help others." He won the hearts of everyone. Many people started to come to him daily and ask for guidance.

On the day of his departure from the hospital, the devotee who came to pick him up found him in the garden surrounded by a lot of people, preaching. Everyone was so sorry he was leaving. Many gave their address and requested him to visit them at their homes.

For a long time the doctors, nurses, other staff, and patients at that hospital in Hamburg will definitely remember Śivātmā Prabhu, the wonderful Kṛṣṇa monk who won their hearts.

* * *

Khela-tīrtha Dāsa

I was distributing outside a supermarket in a little suburb of Auckland. I stopped a couple on their way inside and asked, "Are you married?"

"No," they said.

I put a *Gītā* in the guy's hand, but his girlfriend didn't want him to stop. She had an Indian body, and he was Caucasian.

It turned out that he worked in the supermarket and was on his way back to work after lunch. His interest in the *Gītā* was keeping him stationary for the time being, despite her urgent whispers urging him to give the book back and continue on their way.

Then from out of the supermarket came a tall bearded guy pointing at me, descending on our exchange. I thought it was a member of the staff coming to chase me from my position in front of their store.

As he got closer he said, "Hey, do you remember me?"

And then I recognized him. It was Dave!

He and I had met a few times before in various parts of New Zealand, and he had gotten two *Gītās*, one for his family and one for himself. A really nice guy.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

It turned out that Dave was the manager of the supermarket. He looked at his employee, who was still standing there with a *Gītā* in one hand and his girlfriend tugging the other, and said, “You should buy that book. It’s the best book you’ll ever read. The Hare Kṛṣṇas have the best philosophy, and if you go to their restaurants you’ll taste the love in the food.”

Of course, the boy was listening to every word his manager was saying, so he pulled out his wallet and started to give some money for the book, much to the chagrin of his girlfriend, who made sure he didn’t give too much. Then Dave said, “Give all you’ve got. I’ll give it back to you before you finish work tonight.”

Then the happy boy and his unhappy girlfriend proceeded into the supermarket with the *Gītā*.

Dave told me he was regularly chanting. Then he said about his employee: “He is a good kid. I always wanted him to read literature like the *Gītā* so he could become more spiritually minded.”

The best instruction a manager can give.

* * *

Madhavendra Purī Dāsa

Under the order of the landlord, a workman was renovating the backyard of our temple in Auckland. The yard had become a mess of dirt and broken concrete, with piles of soil and stacks of wood scattered about. The back laundry was now shared with a wall of tools and shovels. We passed the workman each day at breakfast while using the back laundry area to wash our plates. Other devotees and I engaged him in some small talk as we went by, and life went on as usual. Sometimes we were in *dhotīs* and sometimes in normal street attire, but the man acted as if it were all normal.

Finally, after a few days the small talk ended and he asked us some serious questions. He was curious about where we were going and what we were up to. Perhaps the frequent change of dress had piqued his interest. I explained what we do—that we go to public areas and show people books about the self, spiritual science, yoga, reincarnation, etc. He seemed quite appreciative. The usual five seconds of conversation turned into five minutes. I was briefly answering all his questions and praying to the Supersoul not to say anything stupid. He suggested that his friend was interested in such things and so was he. I talked about our books, and he said he might have a read some time. I was going to leave it at that and see if he was around the next morning, but then I thought, “Well, he suggested it.”

I asked him if he wanted a book. “If you have any,” he said with a smile. I looked over my shoulder at the seventy boxes of books concealed in the other room. I picked out a hardback *Gītā* and a hardback SSR. He was excited to see them. I was thinking to give them to him as gifts, to make a friendship, since he was keen to read them. But then he asked, “Can I give a donation?” He was more than happy to give me \$50.

It’s amazing how Kṛṣṇa sent such a very special soul to renovate the *saṅkīrtana* devotees’ backyard.

* * *

Murāri Gupta Dāsa

Often when we book distributors return from book distribution we discuss our experiences during *prasādam*. Also, at that time senior devotees give us tips about how to handle various queries from the public. But sometimes people ask questions for which we are totally unprepared,

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

and then one has to really depend upon Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Once I was making an announcement on a train about *Kṛṣṇa, the Reservoir of Pleasure* when a man asked for a book. He browsed through a few pages and then asked, “The book is OK, but tell me how you were attracted toward the movement. After all, you said that you are a qualified engineer; how could you have given everything up?”

I had been distributing in the midday heat for more than two hours. The jam-packed crowds and stuffy environment, the loud and shrill noises of the train, and thirst and fatigue overpowered my ability to formulate a detailed answer.

So I just blurted out, “I came because Kṛṣṇa is all-attractive. He attracted me.”

The man thought for a while, nodded, and handed me the cash. The all-attractive Lord charmed another person’s heart!

Another time on a train I had made an announcement and showed the books to the people and was standing near the door to disembark at the next station. A well-dressed man approached. “I have watched you people for quite some time,” he said. “I have no disagreement with your mission or way of spreading your dharma, but one thing I want to know: You people have such shiny faces. Just look at all these people,” he said pointing to the crowd sitting in the train. “How morose, sad, and downtrodden they look! There is no joy on their faces. But your devotees have such shiny faces. What is the secret of this?”

“Sir,” I replied, “the face is the index of mind. If the mind is happy and healthy and full of good God-conscious thoughts, it the face will surely reflect that. Our minds are healthy because we read these books. These books teach us about God and our relationship with him. Once we have built that relationship, we are under the control of the Lord, and just as the Lord is all-effulgent, we also get a touch of His mercy. So if you want to have the same shine, take this book and make your life successful.” The man smiled and took Śrīla Prabhupāda’s book.

* * *

Om̐kāra Dāsa

I was distributing books at a college when I saw a man in a wheelchair. His body was very contorted and he couldn’t speak. When I began approaching him, my mind said to me, “Don’t talk to this guy. He probably won’t be able to understand anything.” But Kṛṣṇa inspired me otherwise, and by the time my mind began protesting, my body was already showing him the pictures in *Coming Back*.

After I showed him the book, I asked if he could understand what I said. He proceeded to laboriously punch buttons with his big toe on a keyboard mounted near his foot. Then a mechanical voice said, “Yes, I can understand you.” Since he looked Hispanic, I asked if he could read English. He punched a few more buttons and I heard a “Yes.” Then I asked if he was interested in the book, and he said he was.

So he gave a small donation and asked me to put the book in his bag. Two years later he received two more books from Karuṇā-dhāriṇī Devī Dāsī. When he saw her he became excited and went straight for her table.

Conclusion? We should always remember Lord Caitanya’s mood while distributing Kṛṣṇa consciousness, as stated in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Ādi 7.23): “In distributing love of Godhead,

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His associates did not consider who was a fit candidate and who was not, nor where such distribution should or should not take place.”

* * *

Om̄karanātha Dāsa

The following ecstatic incident took place when I was on traveling book distribution with three other devotees in northern Greece.

We would distribute throughout the day, and in the evening we would go on *harināma-saṅkīrtana*. One evening a police patrol came and commanded us to stop chanting at once. They took us to the police station, and for a long time they inspected all our belongings while we tried to explain that we weren't doing anything bad. After the inspection, they asked us to show them our musical abilities. So we started to chant enthusiastically with all our musical instruments. Suddenly all the policemen started to smile, and then they started to clap their hands, and at last they even danced! Suddenly the whole situation turned favorable. At the end of the *kīrtana* they thanked us, returned our books and CDs, and told us to carry on as we had been doing.

It appears they just wanted to hear us chant. Special police.

* * *

Pañca-tattva Dāsa

I was distributing in the Czech Republic, in a town near the Polish border, in a parking lot in front of the local shopping center. After some time an older, nicely dressed man arrived in a big luxury car. I approached him and briefly and politely introduced our books and the Prague center. He quickly expressed appreciation for the books and gave a nice donation.

He disclosed that he knew Prague because until recently he had been working there as the head of the biggest engineering establishment in the Czech republic, CKD. When I recognize a cultured and serious man, I take a little time to explain more about the philosophy and our activities with the hope that he will take more books or get more connected to the Society. So I put the *Bhagavad-gītā* in his hands. After he looked at the Supreme Lord on the front cover of the *Gītā*, driving His devotee Arjuna's chariot as Pārtha-sārathi, to my surprise he began to breathe very heavily and lose his balance. When he began to clutch at my body, I asked him whether he was epileptic and suffering fits. He mildly smiled and without a word collapsed to the ground. It all happened very quickly. He lost consciousness and injured his head from the fall.

I had somebody call an ambulance and asked the gathering crowd to help. Then with the assistance of another man I turned him on his back and did whatever I could. The man almost stopped breathing, his face turned blue, and foam issued from his mouth. As his pulse grew weaker, it was clear that the soul was leaving his body.

I was disturbed but at the same time happy. I knew that Kṛṣṇa had bestowed His causeless mercy upon that conditioned soul, who left his body under very auspicious circumstances. As soon as I could see the ambulance coming, I left the scene to resume distributing books nearby. I felt greatly inspired, so I began to directly preach to everybody about the temporary nature of material life. I distributed a hundred big books that day. I couldn't help glancing over to where the doctors were trying to save the man's life. After half an hour they gave up and placed the man's dead body in the ambulance and departed.

This incident starkly illustrates the ephemeralness of living in the material world, and at

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

the same time it attests to the unlimited mercy of the *saṅkīrtana* movement. Although the man who died had dedicated his whole life to *ugra-karma* and sinful activities, by the mercy of Lord Caitanya he left his body smiling after performing devotional service, and with his attention fixed on the Supreme Lord in the form of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which he was holding with respect and appreciation during the last moments of his life.

* * *

Pārtha-sārathi Dāsa

I was on patrol in Iraq when we came under sniper fire. Instantly we took cover. Since we couldn't move, I thought, "Might as well read the *Gītā*." So I took out my pocket *Bhagavad-gītā* and started to read. Next thing I know I had five soldiers around me, all huddled against a wall. They listened intently as I read a verse out loud, and then they asked if I had any books with me they could have. For some reason, that day I had put some small books in my assault pack. Within seconds they were all grabbing them and putting the books in their pockets. You could see in their eyes that they'd forgotten about the situation for a second and were happy to get this doorway to the spiritual world. The next round of bullets struck near our position, startling us up out of our reverie. I quickly gave them orders so we could push through the kill zone.

Just another blissful day of service!

I was sitting in my room at an army base in Iraq, reading *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, when someone knocked on the door. I called out, "Come in," and to my surprise an Indian gentleman entered. He was there to fix something. He walked in and stopped dead in his tracks when he saw the altar with my Deities, and then he fell flat on the floor to pay obeisances.

He ran out and returned with thirty-six other people. They all bowed down and paid their respects to my Deities. I took a chance and brought out a box of *Bhagavad-gītās*. Before I could finish asking if they'd like a book, they were all fighting over who would get into the box first!

Instantly every one of these good souls took Prabhupāda's *Gītā*, and they all left with smiles on their faces.

* * *

Śāstra-kṛt Dasa

In Parammatta, Sydney, a Westernized Indian lady came up to me while I was distributing and said, "I want to buy a set of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatams*. I almost fell over in shock. I couldn't believe that someone wanted a set while I was struggling to sell even one book.

I asked her how she knew about the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. She said I'd given her a *Science of Self-Realization* a month earlier. She'd read it cover to cover and loved it. She had even become a vegetarian and began chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa!

So when she came to our Parammatta Feast the following Saturday she received her set of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatams*—despite the strong objections of her born-again Christian husband. She even changed her son's name from Joshua to Arjuna.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

* * *

Subala Dasa

One Sunday morning I felt I wanted to do something valuable for guru and Kṛṣṇa, so I took a few books with me and went out to distribute in the old section of Stockholm. Because it was Sunday and only ten o'clock in the morning, finding people was difficult.

Then I spotted Olof Palme, the Prime Minister of Sweden, out on his morning walk. I offered him a book, saying that it was about the most essential questions of life and would be useful for his career.

“I’m not so philosophical,” he replied. “Besides, I don’t even have any money with me.”

Still, he reached into his pockets, found a few coins, and gave them to me, and I gave him a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* volume.

Just in time. Two weeks later he was assassinated.

Tāra Dāsa

A student comes along and looks at *Śrī Īsopaniṣad*.

He asks, “Is this about religion?”

“It is a science,” I reply.

Then he exclaims, “Don’t you know you have to accept Jesus Christ as your savior and read the Bible?!”

I think, “*Here we go with another Christian extremist.*” But I stay on course and keep the conversation going. We open the book to the *Īsopaniṣad* to the invocation and read how the Personality of Godhead is perfect and complete and how everything emanating from Him is a completely perfect whole.

So he says, “If you do not accept Jesus you will go to hell. How is that perfect?”

Remembering something Prabhupāda said in one of his *Bhāgavatam* classes, I reply, “We are perfectly responsible for whatever we choose. That is the perfection. Although God does not want to see us suffer in hell, he never interferes with our free will. We have to enjoy or suffer the reactions of everything we choose to do. It is perfect justice.” Somehow that was the right thing to say, and he handed me \$5 and promised to read the *Īsopaniṣad*.

It is really sweet to have the right words come to mind after one prays to Kṛṣṇa to send them.

* * *

Tulasī Devī Dāsī

A Christian man wearing a Jesus shirt refused to take a book in his hand and started in on his Christian speech. I interrupted him politely with “Nice, praise the Lord.” Then I asked what his name was. He said his name was Jay.

“Really? Wow! Do I have a wonderful story for you.” As I quickly got the Seventh Canto out describing the story of Jaya and Vijaya, I said to him, “Do you know what your name means?”

“No.”

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

“It’s wonderful. It means ‘victory.’ Spiritual victory. And the names of the doorkeepers of heaven are Jaya and Vijaya. That’s who you’re named after, and this book has the story.”

He really got enlivened and took the book in his hand. At that point I was able to preach directly about the story. He really got into it and asked how much the book was. So his heart melted, he eagerly gave a donation, took the book, and encouraged me in my preaching work.

* * *

Uddhava Dāsa

In the heart of Sydney’s hustle and bustle, with all my might I was trying to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. After half an hour, nothing was happening. I could hardly even get someone to stop, let alone take a book. Heavily governed by the mode of passion, I was losing my enthusiasm, and I still had the whole day ahead of me. So I cried out loudly, “Kṛṣṇa! Help me! Nityānanda! Gaurāṅga!!”

I felt instant relief and kept trying.

Five minutes later a nice Nepalese student stopped. “*Tapai Neapalio* [Are you from Nepal]?” I said. He took a *Bhagavad-gītā* and my contact info. As we were talking, I heard a voice behind me: “Mahārāja!” said a man while tapping me on the shoulder. I turned around and he shoved a currency note in my hand. “Oh, thank you,” I said as I took what I thought was a \$5 bill. (For the record, I’m not a Mahārāja, but I am trying to be *dāsa dāsa anudāsa*.)

Here in Australia it’s quite common for people to just walk up to us and give a donation out of appreciation for the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. I took a second look at the note—it was \$100! I couldn’t believe it. Never before had that happened to me. I tried to show my appreciation by giving the man some books. But he gravely declined, saying he already had our books. He carried a gun on his belt and wore an armed-guard uniform, indicating he was one of the security guards who transport money to and from banks, etc., in armored vehicles. I begged him to please take something and gave him a copy of *Searching for Vedic India*, by Devāmṛta Swami. When he saw the name of the author, he seemed satisfied, as if he’d read something of his before or heard him speak. He was a very mysterious man—like an undercover devotee or a demigod or something. He respectfully said goodbye and left me and the Nepalese student at a loss for words.

At last the Nepalese student asked me, “How did that happen?” Right then I realized how, so I told him that it was because I cried out to Kṛṣṇa to help me about 5 minutes earlier.

So Kṛṣṇa gave me some encouragement by sending both the nice Nepalese student and the kind donor. The rest of the day I had a wonderful time, drowning in the waves of *saṅkīrtana* nectar. (Its a bit like mango juice.)

We are not alone on the streets. Whether we are having an easy time or a difficult time, Kṛṣṇa is right there with us, and its all for our purification.

* * *

Urukrama Dāsa

I was going door to door in a posh office complex in southern Ukraine. I entered an office and met a man who was very interested in reading the books. He was going through a change in his life; so he wanted to know about God and give up all his bad habits. “But,” he said I can’t take the books because today the President of Ukraine is coming to visit me in my office. We’ll be drinking vodka, and I don’t want these spiritual books here when such things are going on. So come back in

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

a year and I'll buy all your books and give you double what you usually charge.”

I was astonished: First, the president of the country was coming to visit him that day! Second, the man wouldn't take the books because of the impure activities that would be taking place in his office. And finally, then he wanted me to come back after a whole year! Why a year? I tried to gently convince him to maybe take the books the next day or at most after a week. Why wait a year? But he was adamant.

So I agreed, gave him three sticks of incense, and left, thanking him for his interest.

I carefully recorded the date I had visited this man, and exactly one year later I went back to his office, walking in with a full set of books in my arms. When he saw me he was so surprised that he dropped the phone he was talking on. Then he picked it up and finished his phone conversation, after which he expressed how happy he was to see me. He took all the books and did as he promised, giving me double what is normally given. “And,” he told me, “the President appreciated the incense.”

* * *

Vaikuṅṭha Dasa

As I showed a girl a book I told her it explains *karma*, reincarnation, life after death, and so on. She wasn't so interested, so I cut it short: “Everyone's giving a donation.”

“Ok, I'll take one” she said, much to my surprise. “I want you to know that I'm a Born Again Christian and that the only reason I'm taking this book is so that whenever I get in an argument with any of you I know what I'm talking about and can defeat you.”

Finally, an intelligent Christian—but she may have a hard time succeeding in her attempt.

* * *

Vedavyāsa Dāsa

The *Bhagavad-gītā*s were going out at a brisk pace at Vancouver University. At one door a lady student wasn't interested, but then I heard some noise in the basement. I asked the lady at the door, “Can you ask the person downstairs?”

The lady tried, but the person downstairs said, “Not interested.”

Then I heard someone speaking on the phone upstairs. I asked the lady, “Can you ask the man upstairs?”

She seemed surprised that I asked again, but she tried anyway. The student upstairs said no, but the person he was talking to on the phone asked his friend to ask me what the title of the book was.

I said, “*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*.”

He repeated the title to his friend on the cell phone, and then on behalf of his friend he asked me, “Which edition?”

“Bhaktivedanta Book Trust,” I said, “with the original Sanskrit, word-for-word translation, purports, and beautiful illustrations.”

He repeated this to his friend and then asked on his behalf: “How much?”

“\$20.”

“SOLD!” he exclaimed.

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

Everyone laughed as we realized the man on the phone had sold the *Bhagavad-gītā* to his friend. Then the man said, “But I have no money.”

The original lady then said, “I have money!” So she lent money to the man on the cell phone to buy the *Gītā* for his friend.

Lord Caitanya has amazing mystical ways to bestow His mercy.

* * *

Vijaya Dāsa

A guy came to my table and said, “Three years ago you showed me the *Bhagavad-gītā*. I really wanted it and told you I would be right back with some money to get it. But when I returned, you were gone. I have the money now and would like to get it.”

He got it: delayed book distribution.

I was showing the *Bhagavad-gītā* to a gentleman who expressed some interest but said he was a Christian. He said, “If you can show me in this book where Jesus is praised, I’ll take it.” I showed him Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport to 11.55: “There are many examples in history of devotees of the Lord who risked their lives for the spreading of God consciousness. The favorite example is Lord Jesus Christ. He was crucified by the nondevotees, but he sacrificed his life for the spreading of God consciousness.”

“All right,” he said, “you got me,” and he took the book.

Two guys came to my table joking. One of them, Doug, said to me, “I think my friend Alex here is ready to become a Hare Kṛṣṇa.” Then Doug started chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. Going along with their joke, I said, “No, I don’t think he’s ready yet. He’s got too many material desires.” Then I got serious and started showing them the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

“You know,” Doug said “this is interesting, but I don’t have any money.”

“I can get it for you,” said Alex.

Alex gave \$20. So I said, “You gave a nice donation; so you take one also.”

“No, I’m an atheist. I’d never read it.”

“Could you give it to a friend?”

“Yea, OK, I can do that.”

He took it, and as he was walking away he saw a man rushing to my table. So Alex said to him, “Do you want this book?” And handed it to him. The guy couldn’t believe that someone had just given him such a nice book.

Lord Caitanya is so amazing. Alex was an atheist, but he bought a *Bhagavad-gītā* for a friend and distributed another one to a total stranger. An atheist became a book distributor.

The Treasure of the Br̥hat-mṛdaṅga

I was distributing at a concert when a ticket scalper walked by shouting, “Cheap tickets to the next show! You guys want one?”

“No,” I said, “but I have a ticket for you back to the spiritual world.”

“Nah, I don’t want to go there.”

A few hours later the same person came by selling his tickets, and I asked him, “You’re sure you don’t want a ticket to the spiritual world?”

“All right, let me see what ya got.”

The devotee in the van handed me a *Bhagavad-gītā*. I showed him the pictures and explained how we’re all souls in the body, just passing through. I told him about *karma* and how if we act properly then the soul can go back to the spiritual world. In other words, we’re the architects of our future: we can go either up or down, or hang around here. After my presentation he said, “This is a great book. I’d love to read it, and you know, you people are great. And who knows, the next time I see you guys I may just join up.” He shook hands with all the devotees and gave a nice donation. He now has his ticket back to the spiritual world.

I was distributing books in Vienna. Walking around the area in front of the Austrian parliament building, I offered books to many sophisticated and influential people. One middle-aged man in the company of a few other people stopped to look at the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

“This is an ancient classic Sanskrit work of wisdom from India,” I told him. “We present this knowledge to people suffering due to ignorance of their own identity.”

As we spoke, the man revealed his interest in karma, reincarnation, ancient wisdom, and philosophy. He agreed to buy the book, gave a donation, and left with his group.

Afterwards I asked some passersby who the man was.

“He’s the president of Austria.”

I was distributing books at Saddleback College in California when a student came to my table. I showed him the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and he was interested. While I was speaking to the student a man came and listened to my presentation. After I explained some of the teachings of the book, I asked for a donation from the student. He said he had no money.

Then listening man asked me, “Are you a Hare Kṛṣṇa?”

“Yes I am.”

He turned to the student and said, “I’ll cover this for you.” He then gave me \$20. Both the student and I were surprised. Then I said to the student, “That man is your unknown friend.”

The student thanked him for his kindness, and the man replied, “These Hare Kṛṣṇas are good people, and they have a good philosophy.”

I offered a book to the man but he said he already had a copy of all the books I was displaying.

* * *

Vraja Vihārī Dāsa

It was the fall of 1984, and our party had been distributing books at the State Fairgrounds in

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

Tampa, Florida, all day. We parked our van in a Days Inn parking lot for the night. Our party of five *brahmacārīs* was fast asleep in the van when we heard a loud voice over a megaphone: “All right in there! Come out slowly with your hands raised!” I looked out the window and was shocked to see the van surrounded by twelve police cars and about thirty officers with their guns drawn!

We emerged from the van squinting from the bright flashlights burning our eyes. The officers began to frisk each one of us, though we were dressed only in *gamshas*.

“What are you doing here?” the officer in charge demanded.

“We’re distributing love of God in the form of books,” I explained.

“Prove it!”

I opened the van doors, thinking perhaps this was all a dream. I reached into one of the boxes, pulled out a *Bhagavad-gītā*, and handed it to the officer in charge. He intently inspected the book, then me, then the book again, until finally he broke the silence, declaring, “All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda!” I was flabbergasted, as were his gun-toting subordinates and all my vanmates. At this point I was *sure* I was dreaming!

The officer in charge then cheerfully explained: “I used to go to the University of Florida and regularly ate the Kṛṣṇa Lunch n campus. You practically put me through college. I even stayed two days at the temple!”

Turning to his associates, he declared, “These are great books, and you should all buy one.”

On his order the officers began reaching for their wallets. About 80% of them took books. We made almost \$300!

Our new friend then apologized for disrupting our sleep. He explained that earlier that night a gun store had been robbed, and the description of the getaway vehicle exactly matched our van. I don’t think any of us slept again that night. It was certainly a most bizarre experience we went through. But thanks to *prasādam* distribution, it turned into a great *saṅkīrtana* success story.

In the summer of 1991 we went to Toronto to do book distribution. We stayed at the temple and did a marathon for almost a month in downtown Toronto on Yonge Street, a great spot for *saṅkīrtana* in the summer. After the marathon we were on our way back into the US near Buffalo when we got stopped at the border by the US officials. An officer demanded to see the contents of our van. We opened the back and he started poking around inside. When he came upon a shelf that held some of the books we would use for personal reading, he pulled out a *Nectar of Devotion* and shouted to the other border officials, “Hey guys, come over here! This is the *Nectar of Devotion*!” The way he said this, they must have thought he’d found the greatest treasure on earth.

The customs agent then told us he used to go to the temple in Buffalo in 1969 and had once met Śrīla Prabhupāda there and heard him give a lecture. He asked if he could make a donation for the *Nectar of Devotion* and gave us \$50. He told us he often would tell his colleagues about the time he spent with the Kṛṣṇas and Śrīla Prabhupāda.

* * *

Bhakta Chris

I was distributing books outside the LA Forum, where the Smashing Pumpkins rock band was to put on a show that night. It was my first day on *saṅkīrtana*, and I was told to always keep moving

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

so as not to attract the attention of the security guards.

As I was distributing, I felt a tap on the shoulder and turned around to see a stern-looking security guard ordering me to come with him. “I’ve done nothing wrong,” I desperately protested. “I’m a monk distributing religious books.” But the guard wasn’t moved and made it clear I’d have to follow him. We walked into the Forum, down a long aisle, into a corridor, and finally arrived at a door. The guard opened the door and told me to go in. I thought, “O Kṛṣṇa, I’m in big trouble now.” So I stepped into the room, which was filled with marijuana smoke, and there were the four members of the Smashing Pumpkins rock band! I couldn’t believe my eyes.

The lead singer greeted me heartily: “Hi, are you a Hare Kṛṣṇa?”

“Sure,” I replied.

“You have any books with you?”

I showed him my books. He was very appreciative and asked, “How much?”

“We pass them out for a donation.”

Turning to his manager, he said “Give this gentleman a donation.”

Then he thanked me for the books and encouraged me to go out and continue distributing them.

* * *

Bhakta Paul

It was our first day out on traveling *saṅkīrtana* after we’d had a bit of a break at Bhaktivedanta Manor. We pulled up in a car park in Norwich early in the morning and started our morning program. Heavy rain poured down nonstop all through the morning program and *prasādam*. Bhakta Ed and I prayed that the showers would stop so we could go out and distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books nicely. “Dear Indra,” we prayed, “if you so desire, please stop the rain!”

When it came time to leave, the rain was still hammering down. Bhakta Ed said, “I’m just going out anyway.” Literally the moment he put his foot out of the van, the rain miraculously stopped!

So we both headed out to the street. A few minutes into our walk to town, we entered a pedestrian tunnel and I saw a man walking toward us. As he walked past he looked me in the eye and said, “Now that you’re out, the rain has stopped.” I thought this was strange, since we were in *karmī* clothes and had no *tilaka*.

Anyway, we proceeded into town and ended up having a really good day on *saṅkīrtana*. Not a drop of rain fell, and the sun even came out. It appeared that Lord Indra had heard our prayers.

But that’s not the end of the story.

When we got back to the van in the evening, I climbed in first and Ed followed. And guess what—literally as soon as Ed shut the door behind him the heavens opened up and the heaviest rain you can imagine began pouring from the skies, accompanied by thunder and high winds. But now we were ensconced in our warm van honoring delicious *prasādam*.

Once when I was selling books on a street in Germany I showed a teacher *The Journey of Self-Discovery*. He was skeptical and uninterested in the subject. But then a man in his mid sixties riding a bicycle stopped and came over to us.

“*Bhagavad-gītā*?” he asked. “Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books? These are very interesting.”

Chapter 11: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

The teacher asked him, “Do you know these books?”

“Of course I know these books,” he said. “Who doesn’t know these books? Which one are you holding? *The Journey of Self-Discovery*. That’s a wonderful book. It tells you everything about yoga, karma, reincarnation, the science of self-realization—everything is in that book. You should read it. You should buy the book. Give him a donation. He’s a nice boy.”

Then he told the teacher, “And you know what the best thing is? If you read these books you understand who you are—that you are a spirit soul and a servant of God. Then when troubles come and nothing works anymore—you’re fighting with your wife, your kids are rebelling, your job is hell—you sit down and very calmly sing and meditate on the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. You know what happens then? Everything just turns very positive, very bright. You become happy and ecstatic and just go right off into another realm. You become so happy you just take right off.”

The teacher was so surprised by the man’s conviction that he happily gave a donation for the book and walked off as the older man took off on his bike.

Later the older man returned. I asked him, “You must know these books quite well, right?”

“Yes, of course. I’ve been reading them for eight years now. And every time I tell myself that something has to change in my life, I go to the city and meet one of you guys and buy some new books. So that’s exactly what I’m going to do. Show me what books you’ve got.”

I showed him the books I had. He bought two.

I told him we have temples and asked if he knew about the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement.

“Temples?” he asked. “You mean like churches?”

He didn’t know about the temples. He thought we were just young idealists selling books. He didn’t know there was a whole spiritual movement behind them. He was amazed to learn there is a worldwide society in which people practice the philosophy taught in the books.

“You know,” he said, “nobody actually understands what is going on in this world. Just look at these people, how they are madly running around trying to gratify their senses and be happy in their material pursuits. Like animals, they have no aim in life. They simply know the pleasures of eating, sleeping, and sex. They don’t know what’s going on. Don’t you find it difficult to speak to them about the knowledge of the *Bhagavad-gītā*? Do you actually know what you’re doing here? Do you know that you’re doing the most important work for the whole human society?”

I wanted to hear more, so I asked him, “Do you really think so? Do you really think the work we’re doing here with these books is important?”

“Yes, yes,” he said. “This is very important—the most important thing you can do, more important than breathing. You must give people these books so they can find out why they are living, so they can get some sense into their life.”

The man left happily with his two new books, leaving me amazed at his conviction in the power of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.

End Chapter Eleven: Pleasant Surprises on Book Distribution

*"What is the use of your two minute of preaching? The person will hear and go away. If you distribute one book to him means, he will be eternally benefitted. Book distribution is... **brihat mrdangam.**"*



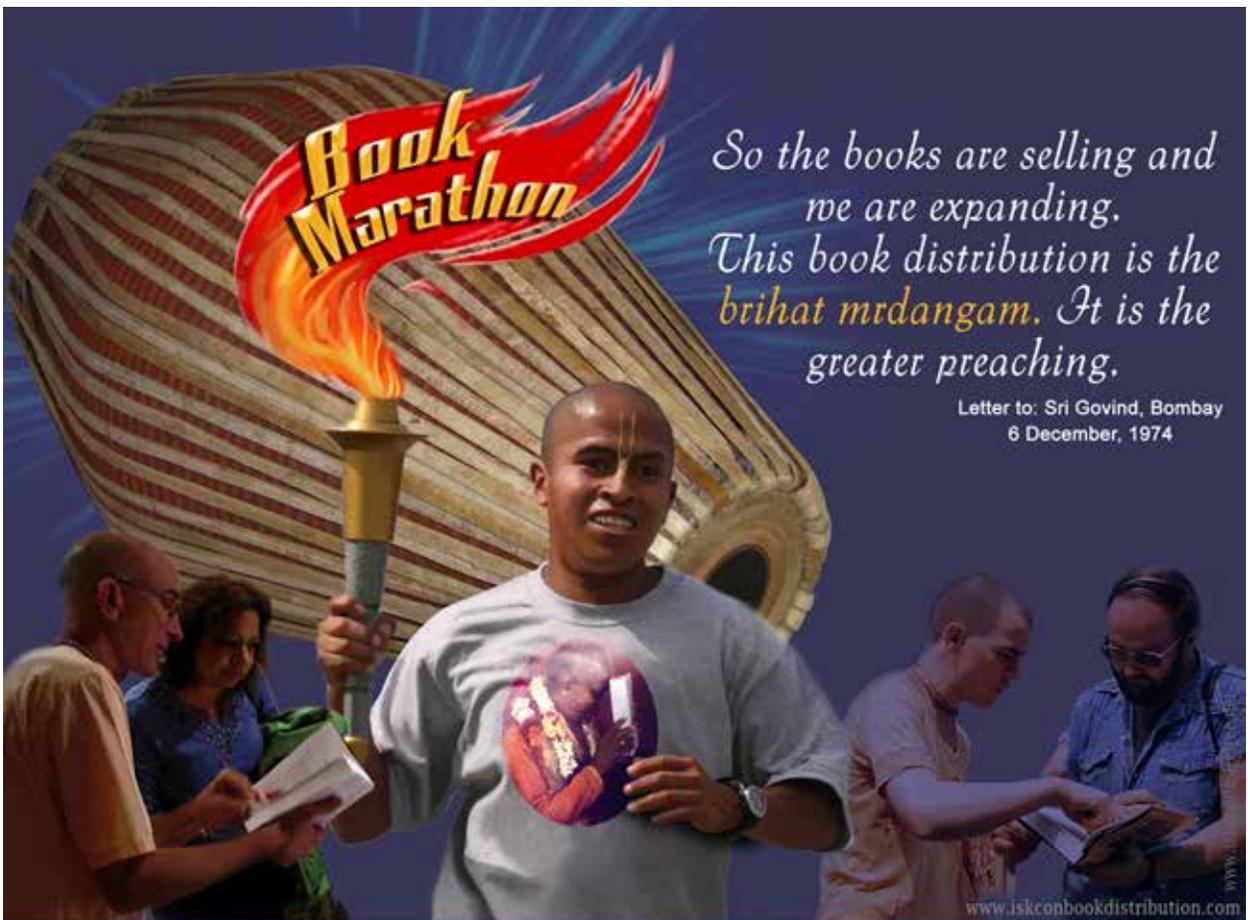
www.iskconbookdistribution.com

www.iskcondesirefree.net

**Book
Marathon**

*So the books are selling and we are expanding. This book distribution is the **brihat mrdangam.** It is the greater preaching.*

Letter to: Sri Govind, Bombay
6 December, 1974



www.iskconbookdistribution.com

Chapter Twelve Positive Preaching

“Even they touch [the book] and they read one line and says, ‘Oh, it is very nice,’ he makes a step forward.”—Śrīla Prabhupāda

During Śrīla Prabhupāda’s time with us, sometimes a newspaper would print a slanderous article about the devotees. When they would bring the article to Prabhupāda and complain, Prabhupāda would ask, “How many names of Kṛṣṇa are in the article?” The devotee would say ten or twenty or whatever, and Prabhupāda would say, “Just see: so many people will now have the opportunity to chant the names of Kṛṣṇa and get purified.”

The lesson is that there is a positive way to see things that are apparently negative. Once a sage doing *mādhukarī* went to a house where a man opened the door and said, “Wait here. I’ll be right back.” When he came back he gave the *sādhū* a handful of ashes. “Thank you very much,” said the *sādhū* pleasantly.

The man was surprised. “Why are you thanking me? I’ve only given you ashes.”

“Because you’ve begun the process of giving.”

On *saṅkīrtana* if a person gives us some change we may think, “What kind of donation is this?” and not even accept it. But we should see the positive side. That person may not have done any service for Kṛṣṇa for millions of lifetimes, and now at last he or she is doing something. This is the most important day in that person’s life. Appreciate it. Sometimes a person may give nothing but just wish you luck, and by that wish they benefit. Śrīla Prabhupāda once said, “If someone says ‘Good morning’ to a devotee, he’s began his devotional service.”

It is said that “First impressions are lasting impressions.” When we meet people, we have to be a good example because we are representing Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda. This point cannot be overemphasized, because, more than we may realize, people are looking closely at how we act. There is another saying in this regard: “Your actions are so loud that I can’t hear your words.” If our actions are pure, that says a lot. An example: In the early 70s the devotees in Melbourne were preparing for Ratha-yātrā. Suddenly a building next door caught fire. Three ladies were trapped inside, shouting out a window for help. A devotee lady named Vaibhāvī Devī Dāsī told the male devotees to grab the canopy for the *ratha* cart and run under the window. Ten devotees then stretched the canopy out and told the ladies to jump. Although at first the ladies were reluctant, they all jumped, one after another, and were saved. The next day the devotees’ heroic actions were front-page news; the article explained that the devotees had used the sacred canopy for their religious parade to save the ladies in danger. Actions speak louder than words. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “Our devotees should be known as perfect gentlemen and ladies.”

* * *

From Śrīla Prabhupāda Līlāmṛta, describing the appearance day of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura in 1968 in Los Angeles.

After the feast the devotees followed Prabhupāda into his room. He sat at his desk and read letters aloud to the small gathering of his disciples seated on the floor before him. The letters were of appreciation. And these letters became Śrīla Prabhupāda’s offering to his spiritual master. Prabhupāda read aloud statements like “We really like chanting,” “We’re happy since we met you,” “We’re trying to teach other people how to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa”—simple sentiments.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

Reading the letters, Prabhupāda became very happy. He then put the letters along with the flowers before the picture of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. Then looking at Nandarāṇī, he asked, “Have you become happy since you have been chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa?”

“Oh, yes,” Nandarāṇī replied, “my life is wonderful.”

Looking at the others, Prabhupāda asked, “And what about you? Do you feel more satisfied since you have been chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa?” They all answered yes.

“Then I have only one request,” Prabhupāda continued. “Whatever happiness you have felt, you simply tell someone else about that. That is all you have to do. You don’t need to teach anything. You don’t need to teach the philosophy. You just explain to people that because you chant Hare Kṛṣṇa you have become happy, and if they chant, they will become happy. Then I will be satisfied, and my spiritual master will be satisfied.”

* * *

His Holiness Śivarāma Swami

When distributing books, we should make as good an impression as possible on the people. They should think all devotees are saints. After buying books, they should be so inspired that they run home and immediately read what they’ve bought. Our books are about how people can change their lives by becoming Kṛṣṇa conscious. Therefore *saṅkīrtana* devotees must be prime examples of perfect people. This is preaching—preaching by words *and* by example. To do this nicely, rely on the Lord within, who will give you all intelligence.

When I met George Harrison, he said he had become interested in devotees because they were on the streets chanting and selling books under any condition—rain, snow, hot sunshine. He knew they could do this austerity only by getting a higher taste. Thus he respected devotees before he even met them.

Saṅkīrtana can be done regularly only by devotees who are getting the blissful higher taste from their devotional practices and from the *saṅkīrtana* itself. Both must be there.

Preaching begins by giving people faith. And faith grows from an appreciation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore in our preaching, we must give people a favorable impression of us if we want them to read the books, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, and finally make a commitment to becoming devotees. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “We don’t want to irritate anyone, however. If he goes away by your aggressive tactics, then you are nonsense and it is your failure. Neither you could sell a book, neither he would remain. But if he buys a book, that is the real successful preaching.”

* * *

Vaiśeṣika Dāsa (ACBSP)

It’s important that we care for the people we meet. Some call this “customer care.” Over the years, through my personal experience on book distribution I’ve come to realize more and more the importance of how I deal with every person I meet. I think this is part of the self-realization process in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We must realize the immense effect of everything that we do and all that we think. We can understand this principle from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. In the *Bhāgavatam* Lord Rṣabhadeva says, *karmātmakam yena śarira-bandhaḥ*: “If your mind is colored with fruitive activity, you have to take another birth in the material world.”

As devotees, we should become more and more aware of the critical importance of all that we

Chapter 12: Positive Preaching

do and say. One of the gifts of going out on book distribution and interacting with people in this transcendental way is that we can come to understand almost immediately how important it is to deal with people in a gentle, transcendental, caring, loving way. And that in itself—that approach, that mentality of going on *saṅkīrtana* with the goal of making each person, as much as possible, a completely satisfied individual when they go away, regardless of whether or not they take a book or give anything—is actually a very exciting challenge. Also, this particular type of approach, this particular type of mentality, in it of itself helps lift us to the transcendental realm.

There are a couple of practical things I've learned over the years in regard to customer care. For instance, we know that there are mantras to introduce a book. For example, devotees often say something like “This is a book on yoga and meditation. It helps you get free from stress and anxiety.” It's stated in the *Gītā-māhātmya* that one who carefully follows the instructions of the *Bhagavad-gītā* will become free from all the miseries and anxieties of life. So this mantra exactly follows *śāstra* and is true. If you read any of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and follow the instructions given there, you'll become free from the miseries of life. So this is a perfectly bona fide mantra.

But there is also another type of mantra that I've been using. I call it an “exit mantra.” For example, when I finish speaking with someone I look the person squarely in the eye, shake the person's hand, and tell him or her, “I want to thank you very much for taking your valuable time, and I want to tell you what an honor it was to meet you.”

People really like that. Sometimes they're miraculously affected. They may have originally responded with something like “No, I'm not interested in this; I don't want to give a donation; I'm a Christian and I don't believe in this.” I thank the person from the bottom of my heart, telling him, “I want to thank you very much for taking your valuable time, and I want to tell you how much of an honor it was to meet you.” And while I'm saying that, I'm thinking of the verse in *Śrī Īsopaniṣad* which says that we should see every living entity as a spiritual spark, and that a person who sees like that has no anxiety or fear. This is the transcendental meditation on *saṅkīrtana*.

And after my “exit mantra,” the same person who said “I'm not interested” sometimes comes back a half hour later and tells me, “We would like to donate.” Several such experiences have really had a heavy impact on me and made me realize that “Wow, everything we do and say, and the way we do and say it, and even the way we think when we're saying it and doing it, has a distinct and definite impact on the people we're speaking to.”

There is nothing more important than such customer care. Even big marketing directors will tell you that there's nothing more important for creating a lasting impression than a very personal meeting between two people. All types of persuasion take place when two people have a conversation. But in the end, it's a person's subtle qualities that change our minds, either positively or negatively. Some statistics on the effects of projecting negative energy: Only 4% of dissatisfied customers actually complain; 96% walk away quietly; 91% will never come back to that place; 68% leave because they were treated indifferently. A dissatisfied customer will tell 8 to 10 people about a bad experience. One in 5 will tell 20 other people. So these are some important considerations.

The positive side for us is that by going out in the public to preach, we have the perfect opportunity to leave a wonderful impression with everyone we meet. There are so many ways to do this. One way is to get into the habit of taking the extra time to make eye contact with the people, to really appreciate something about them, to think of them as spirit souls, to say something nice to them even when—especially when—they don't want to give a donation, or especially when they are indifferent to us. Give them a good feeling. This is yoga—remaining equipoised, keeping your balance through spiritual vision and practice. This is the yoga of *saṅkīrtana*, to come to this level. Then we leave the atmosphere without harmful residue.

Otherwise, if you bring out some envy from your heart, or you feel personally motivated or

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

attached to a particular response from a person you meet, thinking “Why can’t he help so I can have a better score?” you’ll leave a subtle toxic residue in the air, and that residue will get all over you as well as on everyone around you. You create an environment by the way you think. So we should try to come to this platform of *saṅkīrtana* by practicing yoga. It will bring us to a new level and is an exciting challenge.

After stopping a couple of men who were originally from Taiwan, I put a book in the hands of both of them and explained what the books were about. They asking many questions but seemed dubious about taking the books or giving a donation. In the middle of my beseeching them to accept the books, a middle-aged man rode up on a bicycle and intervened. Since he had approached so suddenly, all three of us turned our attention to him. He looked at me and demanded, “Tell me the difference between compassion and dispassion.”

Seeing no way out, I gave my best spontaneous definitions. “Compassion means to understand the sufferings and enjoyments of others based on one’s own experience, and to reach out to help them based on that realization. [Interestingly, I had just been studying verse 1.28 of the *Bhagavad-gītā* a couple of days before, in which Śrīla Prabhupāda discusses this very issue in his purport.] Dispassion is the ability to maintain one’s equilibrium even when there’s cause for disturbance. The ocean,” I continued, thinking of *Gītā* 2.70, “even while being filled by millions of rivers, keeps its balance and does not overflow.” Our bicycle-riding quizmaster smiled and said, “Pretty good!” He then looked at the two gentlemen holding the books and said, “You should get these books.” They did!

* * *

Ānakandundubhi Dāsa

If I meet a nice person while on book distribution, I ask if he or she wants to be regularly contacted. If they say “Yes,” I write them at least once a year. I bring them presents when I visit them, as well as *prasādam* and more books. In other words, I act as their first guru (*vartma-pradarśaka*) and sometimes as a *śikṣā-guru* also. It is the duty of the book distributor! Always give with love!

* * *

Chowpatti Saṅkīrtana

A few years ago the Rādhā-Gopīnātha Mandir hosted a very special guest—His Grace Durgama Prabhu, a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda since the early 1970s. During his three-week stay in Mumbai, he inspired all the devotees with his steady and determined daily book distribution.

His day of book distribution started immediately after the morning *Bhāgavatam* class, when he would go to the book room and fill his bag with many books. At 1:30 p.m. he would be back for lunch, and at 2:00 p.m. he was out again. Devotees were amazed to see that despite his advancing age and the unfamiliarity of the Indian streets, he had an untiring zest for going out and preaching to the conditioned souls. In Italy he could easily start up a conversation with a stranger because

Chapter 12: Positive Preaching

of the familiar culture and language. But we thought that in India he would get lost in the huge unfamiliar crowds.

In fact, however, he was perfectly comfortable meeting the simple Gujarati housewives, the unsophisticated police constables, the pot-bellied *bhaiyas* selling *pāni-purīs* at the beach, and even the young college students racing to and from school. One couldn't miss his attractive smiling visage as he greeted all with a warm "Hare Kṛṣṇa."

His Grace Narottama Prabhu, who had the opportunity to go out with him a few times, was enthralled by his contagious enthusiasm. "It was difficult to keep pace with him," remembered Narottama. "Just when I thought Mumbai's scorching heat had slowed him down, he would run to a stranger across the street and greet him with a resounding 'Hare Kṛṣṇa.' Invariably the person would smile back, and Durgama Prabhu would instantly strike up a conversation as if with an old friend. The man would usually leave with a *Bhagavad-gītā* or at least a small book, feeling happy about the interaction."

His Grace Nityānanda Prabhu also accompanied Durgama once and was deeply touched by his humility and genuineness. Nityānanda remembers: "We went to the nearby residential colony. In each house people were polite and courteous. This was highly unusual, because when I had gone there on my own I had rarely attracted much sympathy from these people, who were annoyed at me for disturbing their afternoon siesta. But Durgama Prabhu was most endearing to all, and in a few houses we were even invited for lunch. I still cherish those sweet dealings of Durgama Prabhu with people, whom we usually thoughtlessly brand as *karmīs* and sense gratifiers."

Near the end of his stay with us, Durgama Prabhu made a startling revelation: "In my thirty-two years in the movement I have not met any envious blasphemers." We were amazed, but we understood why. Since he is kind to all and refuses to be intimidated by anyone, he never meets with angry opposition. Even the most obstinate person confronting him will at most leave with only a gentle refusal of a book offered.

And Durgama Prabhu topped it all off with an interesting confession: "Yes, there have been occasional times when going out has been a drag. But I've learned that forcing oneself to be enthusiastic pays off rich dividends. At such times Kṛṣṇa is more merciful than ever and fills our hearts with so much joy and contentment. I have no other desire but to continue serving my beloved spiritual master by distributing his books till my last breath."

* * *

Hrīmān Kṛṣṇa Dāsa

By our good behavior we set an example for the world to follow. If people become inimical to the Vaiṣṇavas and offend them, they will never get a chance to become devotees. Tolerate, tolerate, tolerate, because the spiritual life of those who are rotting in this material world depends on our tolerance, and so does ours. If we offend the people we meet and disturb them, our minds will become disturbed also. More importantly, any foolish thing we do will result in our Society being frowned upon: "Just see, they can't walk their talk. What's the use of all this high philosophy." Remember, we are representatives of the *paramparā*, and we certainly don't want to make our spiritual father and forefathers look bad because of our foolishness.

The good impression we leave people with will inspire the person's Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They will advance from a favorable impression and will want to continue their connection. If we are really concerned for their Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we must try to have the best exchange possible. After one favorable exchange, the person is more open to another exchange with a devotee. But

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

a negative exchange may prevent them from being open again, and they may share their negative impression with friends and family, preventing others from bring open to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

* * *

Jaḍu Thākura Dāsa

In Mumbai I was distributing books on a train with Pitāmbara Prabhu when I saw a man reading a book. He was so absorbed that he just looked up for a split second to see what Pitāmbara was announcing and then went back to his book. I edged closer and saw that it was the bestseller *The Secret*. I had read an article in BTG about this book. It is about how one can get whatever one wants by desiring it so intensely that eventually the cosmos arranges it for us. Although the idea is obviously ludicrous, the book is widely popular.

I went up to the man and said, “Excuse me sir, may I have a moment, please?”

He looked up.

“I see you’re very interested in this book. It’s nice to see someone so spiritual.”

He smiled.

“But,” I continued, “there’s a fundamental flaw in this book.”

“What’s that?”

“It ignores a very basic law of the cosmos—the law of karma. You see, so many people in this world want things, some of them so desperately that they may even pray for them for years, and yet they don’t get them. Do you know people like that?”

He pondered for a moment and then nodded in affirmation.

“Why don’t they get the things that they so badly want? Everyone wants happiness, and no one wants distress. Yet we don’t get happiness all the time and we keep on getting distress. Who decides this allocation of joy and sorrow? Is our quota of pain and pleasure destined by some higher authority, or is it under our control?”

He was listening intently.

As I handed him *The Laws of Nature* I said, “Here’s a book that explains karma in a lucid and simple way. It teaches you about the laws that bind us and the process that will free us. Give it a try. It will teach you the real secret of success, and even give you a mantra for achieving it.”

He took the book, gave a donation, and asked for my phone number.

* * *

Jñāna-caḅṣus Dāsa

On Saturday night *harināma saṅkīrtana* here in Kansas City, a family of three looked on with delight as the devotees chanted and danced. I approached them and they greeted me warmly. They told me that a week earlier they had seen a chanting party in Washington, D.C., with red, white, and blue party streamers and sparkles. We talked for about fifteen minutes, lightheartedly discussing the effects of the spiritual atmosphere. The father took a look at an *Īsopaniṣad* and asked his wife to hand me a donation. She gave seven dollars, and in turn I gave her a *Higher Taste* and their daughter a *Perfection of Yoga*. The man told me he was a disc jockey at a radio station in Lincoln, Nebraska. He wanted the devotees to come there and make a presentation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement on the air. They were so favorable.

The few days later the Kansas City temple received this letter:

Chapter 12: Positive Preaching

To Whom it May Concern:

My husband and I were in Kansas City last weekend with our daughter and visited with your group on Saturday while we were shopping at the Plaza. I just wanted to write a brief note and let you know how much we enjoyed talking with a young man whose name, I believe, is John. I believe he was originally from the Pittsburgh area and, as I understand, has been with your group for several years.

Our children are being raised Catholic and attend Catholic schools. That being said, my husband and I are very involved with our community in terms of raising cultural and ethnic awareness. In addition, we take advantage of every opportunity to allow our children to learn and grow from talking with people from other religious, racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds and experiencing the rich interaction of these happenings along with attending various cultural events, etc. Rather than preaching “tolerance,” which is such a politically correct term these days, we truly embrace and celebrate diversity.

Our daughter, who was at first anxious and perhaps a bit scared to talk with the group, soon discovered we were right when we told her there was nothing to be frightened of and that those following Kṛṣṇa Consciousness are peaceful people, warm and compassionate.

I hope our donation, albeit certainly not a large one, will assist your needs in some way. Please share our sentiments with the young man we talked with. He represents your school and your interests very well!

* * *

Gīta-govinda Dāśī

I met a nice girl on *saṅkīrtana*. She said to me, “Oh, I remember you; I met you before. I was thinking to go to your temple. Now I really want to go.”

I was surprised and went back to the temple with her. She was very friendly to all the devotees. She stayed one night with us and the next day attended *maṅgala-ārati* and chanted *japa*. Later that day she went to college in a sari, wearing *tilaka*. She said, “All the devotees are so kind; I feel like I’m in a family.”

She started visiting the temple every day. She told us she played the big pipe organ in her church every Sunday, and she invited us to come visit the church and do Hare Kṛṣṇa *kīrtana* there. So we went to the church with *mṛdaṅga* and *karatālas*. Everyone was so happy to see us. The leader introduced us to everybody and then said, “Please do your music.” So we did *kīrtana* and explained the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Everybody became so enlivened. Youngsters danced together with us, and the older folks clapped their hands. One elderly lady said, “I’ve been coming to church for many years, but I’ve never before experienced such a wonderful time.” She was in an ecstatic mood.

A week later, while distributing books, I met a gentleman who said, “Oh, I know you. You chanted in our church.” He was very favorable. Then he eagerly bought three *Kṛṣṇa* books. This group will invite us again.

Book distribution is sometimes nice and sometimes tough. But just keep going on. The purpose of book distribution is to make devotees, purify ourselves, and please our beloved guru and Śrīla Prabhupāda. Transcendental book distribution *kī jaya!!*

In Dallas Indrānuja Prabhu met a guy at a Whole Foods store. He was a musician, a vocalist. He had read the *Bhagavad-gītā* and liked Arjuna, so he had then bought another book from us. He was getting ready to perform in a concert, and so Indrānuja Prabhu asked him if we could distribute *prasādam* and books inside. He eagerly agreed. So we set up a table inside the concert hall where we distributed books and *prasādam pakorās* with tamarind chutney, along with other delicacies, all sponsored by Kālachandjī’s restaurant.

The concert manager was so thankful to us. Everybody liked the *prasādam*—they came back for seconds and thirds. The staff manager, the musician, the concert-goers . . . everybody thanked us.

After the concert one of the managers announced on stage: “We would like to thank the Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees from Kālachandjī’s restaurant for bringing so much wonderful food and books. Thank you.”

* * *

Khelā-tīrtha Dāsa

We should try our best to assure that everyone walks away with a good impression. A famous saying goes “There’s no second chance for a first impression.” Understanding this is so important. Our meditation should be to bring people closer to Kṛṣṇa. If a person doesn’t take a book the first time around, maybe he or she will the next time or the time after that. We can slowly soften their hearts through genuine care, concern, and detachment.

* * *

Madhumaṅgala Dāsa

In the mall where I was distributing, the shoppers were even more in the mode of passion than usual, so I came up with a plan. From a distance I would look at them and start singing, “Smile and you’ll feel much better! Smile and you’ll feel the difference!” As a shopper got close he’d be surprised and start smiling as I shook his hand and continued singing, “You’re looking much better, I can tell, I can tell.”

I’d introduce myself to him and tell him that I was a traveling monk, a happiness monk, and that I was traveling all over the world spreading happiness wherever I go. Then: “Oh, and by the way, I also have these happiness books.” I’d then give him a *Chant and Be Happy* and get him to read the first paragraph. After he took the book I’d thank him and say, “Wouldn’t this world be a happier place if more people could be like us?”

“Yes!”

As he left, when he got a few paces away I’d ask him to say Hare Kṛṣṇa. “Hare Kṛṣṇa!” would come the reply.

Now that is real happiness: giving out Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and transforming lives! Śrīla Prabhupāda *kī jaya!*

Chapter 12: Positive Preaching

In San Diego I passed by a tattoo shop and saw a young guy sitting on a bench at the entrance, smoking a cigarette and reading a book. I said, “Hey, those tattoos are amazing. What’s that book you’re reading?”

“It’s a book on Satanism.”

“Is it by Alister Crowley [a popular writer on Satanism and witchcraft]?”

“Nope.”

“How about Anton La Vey [founder of the Church of Satan in California]?”

“Yeah. Good guess.”

“Wow, that’s amazing! You must have a keen interest in the subject. Here, check out one of these,” and I showed him a selection of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books.

He was really attracted to the pictures in the books.

“Would you like ont?” I asked.

“Sure,” he replied, and asked me for the hardcover book I’d showed him.

“Oh, you mean this one, *Beyond Illusion and Doubt*?”

He nodded and told me to hang on while he went inside to get some money.

After reading it hopefully he will go be beyond illusion, doubt Satan, and be on his way back home, back to Godhead.

At the seaside village of Muizenberg, a suburb of Cape Town, a young man approached me wearing dreadlocks and a t-shirt printed with a picture of “the sacred herb.” On a leather thong around his neck hung a small picture of Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia till 1974.

“Hi there, brother,” I greeted him, “I can see you’re an “ire man.” One love. Ja Kṛṣṇa!” I gave him a traditional Rasta greeting, which is normally “Ja,” and added “Kṛṣṇa” to it. We did the Rasta handshake greeting—top of the fist on top, then the bottom, fist to fist, and then taking the right hand and touching the heart. This Rasta was really in the mode of goodness. Most Rastas I meet are usually so out of from smoking their beloved sacred herb that I can hardly communicate with them. We began to have a very enlivening conversation about the brotherhood of man, one love, and Ja. I began explaining that Ja was the father of everyone and that we call Him Kṛṣṇa. I opened up the *Chant and Be Happy* I was holding and showed him the page showing various names of God.

“Hey, brother,” he said, “I’ve read lots of these books. They’re really amazing. I have one of these books in my bag; I carry it with me wherever I go.” He opened his bag and showed me a well-thumbed SSR.

“Since you like Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books so much,” I said, “I’m sure you’d like to take another one.” I opened up my *saṅkīrtana* bag as he looked for a donation. “What are you up to?” I asked.

“I’m on the way to see a buyer for the beadwork I sell.”

He gave me a donation and took a book. “Thanks,” he said, “I’m really looking forward to reading it.”

Normally after I give someone a book I also give them a hug, but this Rasta gave *me* a hug instead, and so tightly that I thought he was never going to let go—he was just bubbling over with “one love.” I gave him another Rasta handshake and said, “Isn’t Ja Kṛṣṇa amazing, brother?” and said goodbye.

About three seconds after he left, I heard him calling. I turned around and saw him jump about two feet in the air as he waved to me and shouted, “Yoooo, hey, one love Ja Kṛṣṇa!”

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

* * *

Munirāja Dāsa

It's painful to see how the TV has become the guru for so many people. But sometimes TV serves the *saṅkīrtana* mission.

A few years ago a very positive TV program about the movement was broadcast here in Finland. Gopīnātha Prabhu and his wife Rasarāṇī Devī Dāsī, along with a few *brahmacārīs*, were interviewed, and there was a discussion of basic philosophy. Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī was in the studio, and we performed some *bhajans*. The interviewer was excellent—asking nice questions, eating and glorifying *prasādam*, participating in street *harināma* in devotional clothing, etc.

Since that program aired, we have met many people while distributing books and *prasādam* who have a very positive feeling toward us because of it. They'll say things like “Of course I must support you; you're such nice people.” Or “I thought you were a sect where children cannot meet their parents, but now I know you are so nice.” Or even “You stand behind your words: you live as you teach.”

We have now increased our distribution in devotional clothing. Before we were not so much into it, thinking that results would decrease. But we've discovered that even more books and *prasādam* are going out and people are generally respectful to us and positive when we wear *dhoti* and *tilaka*.

Of course, we can't always expect such positive TV coverage everywhere, but the point is that living up to our standards pays dividends.

* * *

Parameśvara Dāsa

We leave people with an impression whether they take a book or not.

Śrīla Prabhupāda once said, “First ISKCON, then temple, then individual.” For ISKCON's long-term success, it's critical that we leave everyone we meet with a good impression. I visit many places where book distributors have been before, and the contrast between those places where they've been rude and inconsiderate and those where they've been kind and considerate is like the difference between night and day. I really notice the difference.

* * *

Rādhā-Gopīnātha Mandir Saṅkīrtana

Murāri Gupta Dāsa reports: November 26 will always bring back memories of the horrifying attack on Mumbai in 2007. On the anniversary of the attack, many peace programs were organized at the various places where the attacks took place. Early that morning the phone rang in the reception office of the Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Gopīnātha Mandir in Chowpatty.

“Is any devotee coming to Nariman point?” a lady asked. “There are many groups here offering prayers and *kīrtanas*.”

Chapter 12: Positive Preaching

Soon a bunch of devotees reached there, only to find that the program was over and the VIPs had left after lighting the customary lamps. But there was still a small crowd there, and devotees sold a few books.

Another group went to the Taj and met with a similar response. But a bigger crowd was expected in the evening.

At 5pm five devotees decided to visit the Taj. Fearing security restrictions, they decided to take only a pair of *karatālas* and Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. The Taj was crowded with thousands of people. Students dressed in white and wearing black armbands came and offered their pledges. One man stood with a banner that read "free hugs" and hugged anyone who came to him. Various groups shouted slogans praising India and criticizing Pakistan. Some read poems. In this vast ocean of humanity there were just five devotees—two distributing books and three doing *kīrtana*.

But they soon created a sensation. Four rows of onlookers circled around them and began to clap and sing the *mahā-mantra*. As a Muslim family passed by, the three-year-old boy in the family, wearing a traditional cap, long *kūrtā*, and pyjama, stopped and began to smile at the devotees. His mother released his hand, and he rushed in front of the crowd and began to clap. Then Kalavink Prabhu gently pulled the boy and began to dance with him. This was sensational! The media went berserk. Scores of cameras started flashing, and media figures, camera men, and photographers all vied to get the best view of the grand unifying act: a Muslim boy dancing with a Hare Kṛṣṇa on the anniversary of a brutal act of terrorism. Then one devotee passed a *Bhagavad-gītā* to the boy, and he raised it above his head and began to dance. The crowd roared and loudly applauded. Soon TV channels made a beeline for the devotees and interviewed three of them: "What is your message?" asked one reporter.

Saṅjaya Prabhu recited the entire *mahā-mantra* and said, "Chanting the names of God is the ultimate peace formula. It clears the pollution in the heart, which is the reason why people hate and attack each other."

"Do you have any message for the relatives of the victims?"

"Yes. If all of us present here pray together for them, they will surely get tremendous peace and benefit."

The book distributors distributed around 25 books. When the devotees finally decided to leave, they came upon a group of about 40-50 soldiers marching toward them. On seeing the devotees, the soldier leading the troops halted, but instead of his regular commands he raised his hands and loudly shouted, "Hare Kṛṣṇa!" In unison the troops responded, "Hare Kṛṣṇa!" And then they all chanted the full Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*.

The devotees were euphoric.

This is an incident that happened with Bhakta Rahul Prabhu. Rahul is a lawyer with master's degree in law and legislation. He is a member of *brahmacārī* training group in the Chowpatty temple.

One day he was distributing books with his partner in a textile mill. At around 10 a.m., when all the workers were busy in the mill, a supervisor came and looked at the books. He liked the set and said, "I have fifty people under me in the training center. Why don't you come and make a presentation to them?"

Rahul took a few sets with him and went to the training center. Another person was giving a lecture there. He waited for ten minutes, and then he was given a chance to speak.

He began with *om ajñāna-timirāndhasya*. Nobody was listening; they were all chatting with

The Treasure of the Br̥hat-mṛdaṅga

each other. This turned him off—or rather on! Rahul had been a keen debater in his school and college days, and he decided to use his oratory skills. He began with a poem he had presented during a competition at the time of his graduation. The poem was called “Sparrow.” I will try to translate it from Hindi.

You may call it courage, patience, or agony.
Close to a pond someone set a building on fire.
Chaos prevailed all over.
Some people poured water on the fire;
Others rescued the trapped victims.
Everyone did what he could.

Seeing a sparrow on a tree branch sprinkling water from its beak,
A crow sitting on the same tree spoke up:
“O dear sister, what are you doing?
Trying to break a mountain with the blows of a leaf?
The water from your beak won’t extinguish even a tiny spark.”

The little sparrow answered,
“Dear brother, you speak the truth—
I know the scant capacity of my beak.
But I also know this:
The day the history of this incident is written,
My name will be not among those who set the fire
But among those who put it out.”

[Now he had their attention.]

Like this our founder-*ācārya* has made history in this world
By spreading the message of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
At seventy, with just forty rupees in hand,
He went to America in a cargo ship,
Suffering two heart attacks on the trip.
Always keeping in mind the instruction of his guru,
He went to West and wrote eighty books.
Today we are offering some to you.

Then he showed the books to the assembled men. Out of fifty men, twenty took sets.

* * *

Tāra Dāsa

Having a respectful and kind mood toward others is essential for getting Kṛṣṇa’s mercy. Practicing seeing others as souls and seeing Kṛṣṇa within everyone frees us from bad qualities and tendencies. A devotee likes people. They are Kṛṣṇa’s children and are very dear to him.

Kṛṣṇa’s hand is in everything. He dictates the activities of everyone we encounter. Are we not

Chapter 12: Positive Preaching

pleased with his arrangement?

Have a long-term vision of *saṅkīrtana*. Leave everyone with a positive and unpressured feeling, and later one of the people you've met might feel inspired to reciprocate with Kṛṣṇa's representative.

The frontline *saṅkīrtana* devotees are instrumental in forming people's opinions of Kṛṣṇa and his movement, for good or bad.

* * *

Tīrthakāra Dāsa

Going door to door in Slovakia, I rang a bell and a lady in her mid fifties answered. She was very friendly and told me she knew Eastern philosophy but had enough books. Then she brought out two photos of Sai Baba. I was on the verge of telling her he's a rascal and a cheater, but I checked the impulse and instead handed her a book and asked for a donation. Within I was telling myself that if she read the book Śrīla Prabhupāda would explain much better than I could that Sai Baba is a cheater.

To my surprise she accepted the book and gave me twenty euros, five times more than I'd asked. I thanked her, bid her farewell, and continued to a higher floor. After a few seconds she caught up with me and gave me another twenty euros, saying the first donation wasn't enough. I visited her a week later at her job and gave her a *Mother Gaṅgā* DVD, for which she gave me another very nice donation.

Sometimes it's better to remain positive and leave the preaching to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

* * *

Vijaya Dāsa

“The results show that there is no limit to our book distribution. Our books are qualified to be distributed unlimitedly.”—Śrīla Prabhupāda, in a letter written on January 18, 1976

This is an interesting statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda. This was written almost four three ago, and now there are more than six million books being distributed every year. He also said, “There will always be costumers for these books.” With these encouraging words, we should continue distributing books throughout the world. It used to be said that the sun never sets on the British Empire. Well, the sun *has* set on the British Empire, and now it is no more. But book distribution is such a success that the sun actually never does set on the book distributors. Throughout the twenty-four hours of every day, every seven seconds or so (as calculated by the North European BBT), somewhere on the planet a book is being distributed.

While I was distributing books at the University of Georgia, a student came to my table.

“How are you?” I asked.

“Excellent!”

“Oh, very good, then you'll appreciate the *Bhagavad-gītā*. It teaches the art of inner happiness.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

Although you're excellent now, there's always room for improvement. A wise man once said, "If you don't learn something new every day about life, then you've wasted that day."

"I agree."

I then asked for a donation, and he gave with enthusiasm.

Just before he left he asked, "Do you think this book will help me? I'm going through some major problems in my life, and I don't really know what to do."

"Oh, yes, this book has helped millions. I'm sure it will help you as well."

He then smiled and thanked me.

Now he has an opportunity to become truly excellent.

We should always display our best character when distributing books because we represent Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrī Kṛṣṇa when we interact with the public. So many people will say, "No, I'm not interested." We have to learn how to accept those no's without being disturbed. As Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (5.20), "A person who neither rejoices upon achieving something pleasant nor laments upon obtaining something unpleasant, who is self-intelligent, who is unbewildered, and who knows the science of God, is already situated in transcendence."

The best example I can think of in this regard is Vaiṣeṣika Prabhu. When someone says no to him he says, "Well, thank you anyway for stopping and giving me your time. It's been an honor meeting you. I hope you have a wonderful day." He doesn't just say this mechanically, but he sincerely means it. He told me that people have come back to him after hearing him be so polite and given a donation and taken books.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said a devotee is a perfect gentleman. Passion is not the force; it's a disturbance. If we try to force them to take books, the interaction just becomes an exchange of egos. When there is attachment, it becomes bitter. Attachment is OK if we're attached to pleasing Kṛṣṇa. In that case we're also detached from the result, because we understand that Kṛṣṇa is in control.

* * *

Viśvambhara Dāsa

If the person is not ready to receive the book, we shouldn't force him. Whether favorable or not, the person will get purified first by looking at the devotee. If someone insults a devotee or swears at him, the devotee should be tolerant. Next time, by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, the person may meet another devotee and become favorably disposed. He may have *darśana* of the book but not take it. And the next time he may touch the book but not purchase it. And the next time, when sufficiently purified by the previous encounters, he may purchase the book. A book distributor understands that all these incidents are part of *saṅkīrtana*; they gradually uplift the nondevotee to the point of being ready to receive the mercy and buy the book. If we realize this, we will always leave people with a good impression.

* * *

Yogīndra Dāsa

Chapter 12: Positive Preaching

Once in a small Swedish town I had a mystical experience while distributing hardbound *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* volumes on the sidewalk outside a post office. A lady with a retarded daughter passed by, and the young girl grabbed the book I offered the mother. Despite the mother's repeated entreaties, the girl adamantly refused to give me back the book. The mother had little choice but to ask me the price. I gave it to her for the minimum BBT price.

A little later I spotted a gentleman some distance away walking briskly toward me with a book in his hand. Expecting trouble, I greeted him politely. He was enraged, loudly claiming I had cheated his wife and demanding his money back. He also complained that "This book isn't even in Swedish!" In fact, it *was* in Swedish—excluding the Sanskrit, of course. I calmly assured him I would return his money, but before I did I said, "Please, just look at any page in the book and see if it's in Swedish or not." He consented and randomly opened the Third Canto volume in his hand to chapter 11, text 31. Then he read the (Swedish) translation:

My dear King, just consider what I have said to you, which will act as medicinal treatment upon disease. Control your anger, for anger is the foremost enemy on the path of spiritual realization. I wish all good fortune for you. Please follow my instructions.

He closed the book, put it under his arm, and walked away, taking with him the advice of Svāyambhuva Manu to Dhruva Mahārāja.

* * *

Bhakta Rock

I was standing in Union Square park, in downtown San Francisco, with a little box of books. There was an art festival going on, so I slipped in and out of the park so the security wouldn't bother me.

At around 10:30 a.m. I noticed a very familiar face walking through the show with his family. It was Robin Williams, a leading American actor and comedian. To get his attention creatively, I fanned out the books I had in my hand and waved them near his face as he walked toward me.

Startled, he smiled at me. "Quickly," I said, "tell me what you see."

"Books—but that's not what you're going to say, right?"

"True. What I am showing you is the key to the past, present, and future. And with this key, you can dissolve all anxiety."

"You have good improvisational skills. You should be an evangelist."

"Nah, I'm just here to be your friend. I'm a huge fan of your work and was really impressed with *What Dreams May Come*. It had a real cool vibe, and I appreciated its depth. Did you enjoy doing it?"

"Yes. It made me start to see the world in a different way."

"Well, this is the next step, my friend. I have the feeling that making that movie made you thirsty for more." I then showed him five books: *Beyond Birth and Death*, *The Higher Taste*, *A Second Chance*, the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and *Your Ever Well-Wisher*. He was fascinated by the pictures and wanted to know how much the books were.

"Whatever you think they're worth," I said. "I personally don't put a price tag on transcendence, so I don't know. Just go with what your heart tells you."

Apparently he liked my answer, because he then said, "I appreciate your honesty. You have a

The Treasure of the Bṛhat-mṛdaṅga

real genuine quality about you, so I'll take what you've got."

I handed him the five books and he gave me a fifty dollar bill. I thanked him for his interest and he said, "Thank you. Hopefully, this will get me some good karma. Say a couple of mantras for me, okay?"

As he shook my hand I said to him, "That's what my life is about, so I'll say some for you too."

End Chapter Twelve: Positive Preaching

Chapter Thirteen **Reflections and Realizations**

In the beginning of our Society, devotees didn't know of the importance of book distribution. They had no idea what it was about. Then gradually Śrīla Prabhupāda planted within the hearts of his disciples the desire to disseminate transcendental knowledge to the people. It wasn't long before the devotees took book distribution to heart, and thus millions of pieces of literature were distributed throughout the world. Now decades later, many of those devotees are still distributing books. This chapter contains their realizations, along with the realizations of the second- and even third-generation book distributors.

* * *

Śrīla Prabhupāda Letter

I am very glad to hear how the book distribution is increasing more and more. This is our greatest weapon. The more the books are distributed, the more the ignorance of the Age of Kali will be smashed. The world is feeling the weight of this Hare Krishna Movement, especially in your country [USA]. We have to increase this book distribution work more and more to firmly establish this Movement, which is the only hope for the suffering living entities. [Letter to Balavanta, 23 November 1976]

Śrīla Prabhupāda-lilāmṛta (excerpt)

Prabhupāda, Hamsadūta, and Girirāja visited the king of Indore and invited him to become a life member, but the king declined. The devotees were disappointed, and in the car on the way back to Gītā Bhavan, Hamsadūta asked Prabhupāda, "Did I say the right thing about the books?"

"My books are like gold," Prabhupāda replied. "It doesn't matter what you say about them. One who knows the value, he will purchase."

* * *

His Holiness Bhakti Chāru Swami

We should try our best to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. However, just to distribute a book to someone is not enough. The person also needs to be inspired to read it, and for this it is very important that our personal dealings and behavior be exemplary. People have to respect us in order to respect our philosophy. It is most important to remember that while we are preaching we must be sincere so that people realize we care about them. People are not stupid. They understand what is what. If we are more interested in their money than their souls, our

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

objectives will not be accomplished. That is why our preaching should be positive. We want to distribute as many books as we possibly can, but we should not do this just for the sake of money or numbers. We should distribute the books with the understanding that it is preaching.

* * *

His Holiness Bhakti Vikāsa Swami

We may sometimes hear that at one point Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted that ISKCON stop expanding and that we should, as he put it, “boil the milk”:

Now I want that we shall concentrate on making our devotees Krishna conscious and ourselves becoming Krishna conscious, and not be so much concerned with expanding ourselves widely but without any spiritual content. Just like boiling the milk, it becomes thicker and sweeter. Now do like that, boil the milk. [Letter to Rūpānuga, 9 May 1972]

There are courses through which devotees learn *sāstra*, at the MIHE or VIHE, etc. These are very Kṛṣṇa conscious programs. And one who is feeling blissful studying the *sāstra* in one of these programs may think, “Okay, this *sāstra* study is the most important activity at this time, whereas book distribution is not relevant anymore. It was there to start the movement up, and that is maybe why Śrīla Prabhupāda stressed it at that particular time.”

But the fact is that there are many, many quotes by Śrīla Prabhupāda after 1972 where he expresses his great pleasure in hearing the results of book distribution, which is indeed an activity of expansion. For example, in 1974 Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “Regarding book sales figures, please endeavor in this way. This is the only solace of my life. When I hear that my books are selling so nicely, I become energetic like a young man.”

In 1977, when Śrīla Prabhupāda was about to leave this world, as he lay on his departure bed he would ask Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja to read the monthly international book distribution newsletter. Not only would he ask him to read the general scores, but he would ask him to read every name of every devotee, along with the number of books that each devotee sold—small, medium, large, and mahā-big. He wanted to hear the entire list. Not just the top ten distributors, but the entire list. Tamāl Krishna took a long time to do this, and Śrīla Prabhupāda was relishing. So nobody can say that book distribution was only for the beginning and that later it did not remain relevant. Śrīla Prabhupāda consistently showed, from the very beginning to the very end, that book distribution pleased him very much.

Śrīla Prabhupāda told us time and time again, “Please distribute books,” “By distributing books you are giving me so much pleasure,” “By distributing books we will change society.” These instructions were relevant in the past, they are relevant today, and they will be relevant in the future. One very interesting quote from Śrīla Prabhupāda in this regard is as follows. In November 1975 he wrote to Bhakti Tirtha Mahārāja: “Everyone will want our books. We will always have customers. This is Caitanya Mahāprabhu's mercy.” If we reflect on this instruction, we will realize that the real mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is that there will *always* be people to buy Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. We will never run out of customers. Kṛṣṇa Himself, the Supreme Lord, will somehow or other personally arrange for people to always be interested in

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

Another very nice letter in this connection is as follows:

Therefore this rumor that within a few years there will be police repression and people will have no more money to buy books and sankirtana will stop is completely bogus. Whoever told you that is a rascal, saying it in my name. I never said that. Rather sankirtana movement will expand, continuing so long as we are sincere. When I came in the beginning I began to expand it and it is now going on and there is no question of it stopping. Therefore go on with your lifetime plans making secure in distributing of books. There is no cessation. This movement is eternal. [Letter to Govinda Dasa, 8 May 1974]

There will always be customers. Even if people do not want the books, the Paramātmā will inspire them. One time in America, at a book table, an old man approached the book distributor and asked him, "Do you have the *Bhagavad-gītā*?"

"Yes, sir," the devotee replied.

"Let me see it." He took the book in his hand, turned it around, saw Śrīla Prabhupāda's picture, and said, "Yes, I'll buy this one."

"Why, sir?" the devotee asked.

Pointing to Śrīla Prabhupāda's picture, the man replied, "This man has been coming to me in dreams for years and telling me, 'Buy my *Bhagavad-gītā*, buy my *Bhagavad-gītā*.' When I saw you dressed in the same color as him, I thought that maybe you would have his *Bhagavad-gītā*. Now I've found it."

So this may be an extreme example, but it helps prove that there will always be customers for Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. The Paramātmā is in charge. When He decides a certain soul needs a book, He will make all sorts of arrangements for that to happen.

Is distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda's books just a leftover from the past? Is it relevant in ISKCON today? For the answer, look to Śrīla Prabhupāda's words and look all around. Śrīla Prabhupāda was very clear that he wanted distribution of his books to continue.

"So please, I beg you, continue distributing my books in this way and Kṛṣṇa will pour His blessings upon you all."

Śrīla Prabhupāda *begged* us to distribute his books. And why? Look all around you. Everyone is full of intense suffering. Sinful life is so normal, so gross, that the world is in a horrible situation. Really, the only hope is Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

How can we understand that? Just open the books and read them to experience their transcendental power, which cuts through illusion and reaches through multiple layers of ignorance to reach the soul.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said:

There is no comparison. There is no literature throughout the universe like *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. There is no comparison. There is no competition. Every word is for the good of the human society. Every word, each and every word. Therefore we stress so much in the book distribution. Somehow or other, if the book goes in one's hand, he will

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

be benefited. At least he will see, “Oh, they have taken so much price. Let me see what is there.” If he reads one *śloka*, his life will be success. If he reads one *śloka*, one word. This is such nice thing. Therefore we are stressing so much, “Please distribute book, distribute book, distribute book.” A greater *mṛdaṅga*. We are chanting, playing our *mṛdaṅga*. It is heard within this room or little more. But this *mṛdaṅga* will go home to home, country to country, community to community, this *mṛdaṅga*.

It’s really up to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s dedicated followers to “do the needful.” Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are the only hope for afflicted humanity. Somehow we have to bring this transcendental nectar-relief.

So don’t moan, don’t groan, just pick up your beadbags, pick up your bookbags, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and get out there, praying for the mercy of Lord Caitanya and Śrīla Prabhupāda to become an instrument in distributing Their mercy everywhere, to everyone all over the world, without discrimination.

Māyā always gives us some excuse not to go out and distribute books. In summer it’s too hot, in winter too cold, in the monsoon season too wet. In the meantime people are going to hell.

I was recently told that some devotees in Croatia say it is better to distribute books other than Śrīla Prabhupāda’s because people cannot understand the latter.

My response: This is faithlessness, i.e., atheism. Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are nondifferent from Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are full of transcendental potency, by which Kṛṣṇa reveals Himself to persons who read them. There is abundant evidence of this worldwide every day. Don’t expect any mercy from Śrīla Prabhupāda or Kṛṣṇa if under some pretext you make propaganda to stop distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books.

Three principles for success: Everything everywhere is performed in terms of three principles: *jñāna*, *bala*, and *kriyā*—knowledge, strength, and activity. In every field, all three of these must be present for an endeavor to succeed. Therefore, if one wants success in anything, one must be backed by these three principles.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura used to say, “If you have life, you can preach.” What does that mean? “Life” means if you have conviction in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Preaching is not a stereotyped thing. You can’t preach in a formal way. Preaching happens when one’s heart is full of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and it bubbles over. Someone who is hearing about Kṛṣṇa and thinking about Kṛṣṇa—then naturally he not only *wants* to share his Kṛṣṇa consciousness with others but he *must* do so. He cannot but preach. Someone who is in Kṛṣṇa consciousness cannot but chant Hare Kṛṣṇa—he can’t stop chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. One kind of chanting is doing it

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

formally: “Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa. *I have to chant my rounds.* Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare. *When is it gonna be finished?*” Another kind of chanting is not coming from the tongue or lips but from the heart—automatically “Hare Kṛṣṇa.” When one has got the life of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, when one is feeling the bliss of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then he must preach; you can’t stop him from preaching. So that begins with *sādhana*, faith, conviction—all these things will give us strength and infuse us with the feeling that we must preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Summer, 1986. I was alone, a tiny soul in orange on the grimy streets of central London. “What,” I suddenly thought, “if I had to come here by myself? What if there were no temple, no devotees, and no worldwide movement? What if I were the only one who knew about Kṛṣṇa and I had to preach single-handedly? Could I do anything?” I pondered the possibility for a second before being slammed with reality: “No!” I continued to walk the cold uncaring streets, my heart marveling in new-found appreciation of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

In some of his earliest days in New York, before he had any movement, Śrīla Prabhupāda produced some flyers on which was printed the *mahā-mantra*—Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. A young man named Robert Nelson, who was helping Śrīla Prabhupāda, recalled how Prabhupāda handed him one of these flyers: “When Swamiji handed me this flyer, he had a smile on his face as if he were handing me the whole world.” Robert didn’t realize that Śrīla Prabhupāda was giving him something far more valuable than the whole world, something beyond the world. He was giving him Kṛṣṇa in the form of the Holy Names.

Śrīla Prabhupāda went on to write so many books. The message in those books is to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. Whenever a book is distributed, the recipient is given more than the whole world: he is given the information by which he can get out of this world. Even if you had the whole world, it would just be another big entanglement. But the knowledge in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books can take us beyond this material world.

What happens on book distribution is extremely profound. People’s lives today are not profound; they are extremely shallow. The whole ethos of modern life is extremely shallow. People watch TV, go to the movies, drink, have girlfriends and boyfriends—very shallow. Society based on sense gratification is very shallow. There is no deep thinking. Even if there is so-called thinking, it is just intellectual life based on sense gratification. We can see the result: people become sophisticated cats and dogs. But those who receive Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books get the profound knowledge by which they can transcend birth and death and return to Kṛṣṇa.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaṅga

Devotees themselves must always remain aware of the profundity—the depth—of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. And naturally if devotees are aware of how wonderful Kṛṣṇa consciousness is, how meaningful it is, how there is actually nothing in this material world that has any meaning—how everything is *anartha*, meaningless, and that the real *artha*, the only meaning of life, is to understand Kṛṣṇa—if devotees understand this, they will be very eager to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. These books give people a chance to understand Kṛṣṇa. Otherwise they have no such opportunity. They won’t get knowledge of Kṛṣṇa from their parents, from the educational system, from the TV, from the people they associate with. But these books give people the opportunity, for maybe the only time in their lives, to make their lives meaningful.

Devotees should always be aware of this when they are distributing books. It is not that we are salesmen. Even the result is not very important. Of course, we want the devotees to distribute many books, but the real success is not a matter of book scores. It is a matter of desiring that everyone we meet take a book, knowing that only this and nothing else in their life is of any value. Their whole life is a complete zero. If they take a book, then only can they properly utilize their human form of life, get free from birth and death, and come to Kṛṣṇa.

Generally, we can’t directly say to people, “I know what’s right, and your life is completely wrong.”

If they feel we are taking a superior position, they won’t feel like taking a book. Especially people in the Western countries are strongly repelled by proselytizing. They say, “You’re trying to *convert* me! I have my own religion!” We’re actually trying to convert people from material life to spiritual life, but they’re in *māyā* so we can’t tell them that.

Because modern life is based on gross sense gratification, people lead very shallow lives. Still, some can appreciate that devotees are profound, that being offered one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books is not something ordinary. Naturally, devotees should communicate that this is something very deep, very real, very meaningful. The devotees and the books that the devotees are offering are not of this world. They are not part of the way of life that people are used to, in which the dealings are very superficial, in which one person deals with another simply for the sake of sense gratification. But devotees are different from everyone else because they are not offering anything for their sense gratification. Devotees actually have nothing to get from the person they approach, because we’re not taking the person’s money for our sense gratification but for devotional service. People can feel this. Otherwise, why should they take these books? As soon as they open the book, they understand, “This is not something for my sense gratification.”

They can understand that these books are something different and better than every other book they’ve read. They can understand this from the devotee offering the book to them. The devotee himself is very profound; he is not like any other person they’ve ever met. Of course, we cannot preach the entire *Bhagavad-gītā* to everyone we meet, but just by the devotee’s demeanor—even though he’s speaking what would seem to be ordinary words—“Hi, how are you? Where are you coming from?”—still, there is something in the devotee that touches the person and makes him think, “This is something very special.”

The devotee himself must be feeling this. Otherwise, how can he go on distributing books day after day? It is because we have faith in these books, a faith which makes us think, “People *need* these books.” We’re convinced that these books are changing people’s lives. With this faith and conviction that people require these books, with such compassion based on knowledge, we can go on and will go on and must go on distributing these books more and more and more.

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

* * *

His Holiness Bīr Krishna Goswami

While I was in Māyāpur in 1975, a leading Venezuelan book distributor came. I wanted to introduce him to Śrīla Prabhupāda, so I took him up to Prabhupāda’s *darśana* room. Several devotees were showing him pictures of temples that had recently opened. Prabhupāda was politely acknowledging the reports, graciously looking at the pictures. When I had the opportunity, I said, “Śrīla Prabhupāda, this devotee has distributed ten thousand copies of your *Bhagavad-gītā* in Venezuela.”

Prabhupāda’s eyes opened wide. “Really?” he said, looking at the devotee. Prabhupāda then pointed at the devotee and said, “He has the mercy of Kṛṣṇa!”

The other devotees were a little taken aback that Prabhupāda was more pleased by this report than theirs. Prabhupāda could sense their discouragement and said to them, “You also have the mercy of Kṛṣṇa. In Vṛndāvana there are the cowherd boys, Kṛṣṇa’s mother and father, and the *gopīs*, and all of them are dear to Kṛṣṇa, but of all the devotees the *gopīs* are special. Similarly, in our Society there are so many types of service a devotee can do, but the book distributors are special.”

* * *

His Holiness Devāmrita Swami

Distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books is the most effective means for spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness. No one can deny that. We have the chance to personally intervene in people’s lives and start them on the path to relief from all their suffering—just by getting them to take a book. Reducing people’s suffering by giving them Kṛṣṇa consciousness is an eternal compassionate act of Lord Caitanya’s. In Australia Prabhupāda once said that if a person just takes a book in his or her hand and simply appreciates it—“Oh, this is a nice book”—and they don’t even buy it, that appreciation is enough to give them a human form of life in their next birth. I couldn’t believe it! I played the tape over and over again, saying, “What!?” This is an extraordinary point to remember. You are not just selling books; you are completely intervening in someone’s chain of repeated births and death. You are totally being an instrument in adjusting their karma and changing the whole future of their life.

Based on book distribution, we can do so many other things. The core of book distribution has to be there, and then we’ll see how Kṛṣṇa unfolds everything else. Where there is organized *yajña* as the *ācāryas* desired, there is Kṛṣṇa. We are fortunate to take part of this organized *yajña* and in this way make spiritual advancement. A little sacrifice is required, that’s all. A little sacrifice to be part of the great sacrifice. By doing the *yajña*, we please Kṛṣṇa. The *saṅkīrtana* devotees are trying to please Kṛṣṇa’s senses; this should be their thought during the day. They are making a sacrifice to directly give pleasure to the Supreme Lord as His dear devotee Śrīla

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

Prabhupāda instructed. That’s what it means to be a devotee. If one is engaged in this way, going out on *saṅkīrtana*, surely Kṛṣṇa will reciprocate.

Even if this service is done mechanically, there is benefit. I know that sometimes devotees say, “You know, they just mechanically distribute the books; they just give the books out.” But the fact is that even if it is done mechanically there is great benefit. Now, how great is that? Not that one should think, “Oh, they are doing it mechanically; therefore we should stop.” No. If you are doing it mechanically, very good, but we hope that you will go deeper and deeper. But not that “You are doing it mechanically, so stop the service!” If that is all you are able to do, that’s all right. For example, if you just chant your rounds mechanically, do we tell you to stop? Do we say, “You are chanting mechanically; stop your rounds!” Do we say that? No. We say, “Go on chanting, and gradually, by your attempt to chant, you will become more and more devotional.”

It’s the same thing with book distribution. If you are doing it mechanically, it is very good that you are trying to do something. Now go on, and gradually, by hearing and doing the service, you will get into deeper levels of book distribution.

So we glorify all levels of the service, even the mechanical level. But at the same time, of course, we are always urging the devotees: “Go deeper, go deeper.” Unless you hear, you won’t get that inspiration to go deeper. The serious distributors of Lord Caitanya’s mercy are always eager to hear because they want insights into how to go deeper and deeper into the *saṅkīrtana* ocean. So this is our heritage. This is what Śrīla Prabhupāda has given us. This is our family business. And we do it because Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted it. When people get a book, you don’t know what the result is going to be. They are getting Kṛṣṇa in their hand, and how Kṛṣṇa will act is a mystery—you will not be able to see it all immediately. So it requires some love and dedication—“Even though I can’t see the complete result of this activity, I am doing it to please Kṛṣṇa.”

One should pray to the Deities, beg them for the sincerity needed to distribute this information. Kṛṣṇa will reciprocate with such a devotee. It is not that waves of devotees go on *saṅkīrtana* and get no realization. But one has to know how to ask for the realization. One has to know how to beg for it. Beg Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda: “This is the most confidential activity I can be doing, yet sometimes I don’t see it like that, so please raise my vision and perceptions.” Then, if one is fortunate and begs sincerely, Kṛṣṇa will give one a glimpse of what is really happening, just a glimpse into the ocean of *saṅkīrtana*, and throughout one’s life it won’t be forgotten.

For two years in the early 70’s I did *saṅkīrtana* seven days a week in New York, and I couldn’t do anything. I would do a few books here and a few books there, very small. They used to call me “the hard-luck kid.” I was even a party leader. I was trying hard, but I just couldn’t get any results. Then one marathon, at the start, I prayed to the Deities because for two years I had not been able to do any big books. That was the supreme goal back then—to be able to do a *Bhāgavatam* volume or a *Gītā*—and I was just doing small books, paperback *Kṛṣṇa* book trilogies. So I prayed to the Deities: “Please. It’s two years now. I’m begging you, just give me a chance.”

I’ll never forget it.

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

I went out to a shopping-center parking lot and said, “OK, I’m just going to do like the big guys do, the airport distributors—Tripurāri, Svavāsa, all the others. As soon as I drive into the parking lot, I’m just going to open the trunk of the car and pull out the big books, and whoever is right near, I’m going to approach them, without even loading up my book bag. So I did that: the first person took hardcover book, and so did the second person and the third person. By the time an hour or two had passed, I had done fifteen hardcover books. I was just trembling in ecstasy because I knew *this wasn’t me!!* After *two years, seven days a week*, doing nothing, there was no way I was going to think I was the doer. I never forgot this realization all my life.

I remember Bhṛgupati and another devotee coming up to me and asking “What’s going on? What’s come over you? What’s happened?” because here you have somebody who was just doing a few little magazines and small books a day for two years, and all of a sudden I distributed so many hardcover books. When I got back to the temple the *saṅkīrtana* leader—Romapāda Prabhu, he was a *brahmacārī* then—he was astonished: “What’s going on?!”

I said, “I prayed for the mercy and He gave it.”

This can happen to anyone. You should not think that you’re totally bound by your circumstances and it will always be the same thing. Make some kind of endeavor to go to a higher level for Kṛṣṇa. Beg for His help in your service. This is the meaning of *bhakti-yoga*: to engage our senses to satisfy the master of the senses. And the master of the senses says, “No one is more dear to Me—nor will there ever be one more dear to Me—than one who distributes My glories.” So we have to take it from the top; we take it from Kṛṣṇa.

Most devotees who have put aside book distribution will admit, “The best years of my life were when I was distributing books.” Why? Because they were fully absorbed in distributing Lord Caitanya’s glories with austerity. It’s important to understand that Kṛṣṇa consciousness involves austerity. There is just no way around it. You can package it this way or that way, but sooner or later you have to accept that to advance in *bhakti* you have to voluntarily accept inconvenience for Kṛṣṇa’s pleasure, and then the Lord reciprocates with you.

This is something every sincere devotee knows: “Oh, now Kṛṣṇa is reciprocating with me.” If you distribute books, you definitely feel, “Yes! I am involved in the mainstream of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.” The mainstream of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not what people make it out to be; it is what Lord Caitanya and His representatives make it out to be. This is a very essential point if you are going to survive in book distribution. The mainstream of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is what the *ācāryas* make it out to be, not what the people in general make it out to be. If you try to define your Kṛṣṇa consciousness according to what people in general think, you’re not going to go back to Godhead. Therefore we look at what the *ācāryas* say; we take our precepts there; we look at Prabhupāda’s example; we look at what Prabhupāda asked us to do.

Everyone knows how Prabhupāda came to America with just a little bit of money in his pocket but with two hundred of his three-volume *Bhāgavatam* sets. He said, “I wasn’t worried because I had those two hundred sets with me.” So he set the example. We also should not worry and should just go on distributing the mercy of Lord Caitanya in the form of these transcendental literatures.

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

* * *

His Holiness Girirāja Swami

Conditioned souls in the material world are faced with two questions: How do we live while we are here in this world? What do we do after we leave the present body?

The *Bhagavad-gītā* (3.10) explains:

*saha-yajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā purovāca prajāpatih
anena prasaviṣyadhvam eṣa vo 'stv iṣṭa-kāma-dhuk*

“In the beginning of creation, the Lord of all creatures sent forth generations of men and demigods, along with sacrifices for Viṣṇu, and blessed them by saying, ‘Be thou happy by this *yajña* [sacrifice] because its performance will bestow upon you everything desirable for living happily and achieving liberation.’”

The material world is like a prison house in which the conditioned souls are bound by the repetition of birth and death. The goal of human life is to become free from this repetition of birth and death and go back home, back to Godhead. In order to help the conditioned souls, the Lord has provided for the performance of sacrifice. Actually, to become elevated one must perform sacrifice.

The Vedic literatures explain that there are four different *yugas*, or ages, that repeat in cycles like the four seasons, and different types of sacrifice, or different methods of worship, are recommended in each age. The first is Satya-yuga, in which meditation is recommended. The next is Tretā-yuga, in which Vedic *yajñas* are recommended. Then the next is Dvāpara-yuga, in which temple worship is recommended. And in the present age, Kali-yuga, the recommended method is *saṅkīrtana-yajña*.

*kṛṣṇa-varṇam̐ tviṣākṛṣṇam̐ sāṅgopāṅgāstra-pārṣadam
yajñaiḥ saṅkīrtana-prāyair yajanti hi su-medhasaḥ*

“In the Age of Kali, intelligent persons perform the *saṅkīrtana-yajña* to worship the incarnation of Godhead who constantly sings the name of Kṛṣṇa. Although His complexion is not blackish, He is Kṛṣṇa Himself. He is accompanied by His associates, servants, weapons, and confidential companions.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.5.32) This verse refers to Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, the incarnation of Kṛṣṇa for Kali-yuga.

What is *saṅkīrtana*? *Kīrtana* means to glorify the Lord. In the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī explains that within the category of *kīrtana*, which is one of the nine primary processes of devotional service, there are different subdivisions. There is the glorification of Kṛṣṇa’s name, which is *nāma-saṅkīrtana*; the glorification of Kṛṣṇa’s form, *rūpa-kīrtana*; the glorification of Kṛṣṇa’s qualities, *guṇa-kīrtana*; and the glorification of Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes, *līlā-kīrtana*. They all come under the category of *kīrtana*. And the prefix *saṅ* means complete. So *saṅkīrtana* means “complete glorification,” or glorification of every aspect of Kṛṣṇa: His names, His forms, His qualities, His pastimes, and so on. Complete *kīrtana*, *saṅkīrtana*, also means that everyone should participate—not just me or you or him or her alone—but that we should all

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

come together to glorify Kṛṣṇa. That makes the glorification more complete, and so it is called *saṅkīrtana*.

We also use the term *saṅkīrtana* to refer to the distribution of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, the distribution of transcendental literature. Śrīla Prabhupāda's books contain complete explanations of Kṛṣṇa—His name, His form, His qualities, His pastimes, and everything else about Him. So book distribution is complete glorification of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda is speaking about Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which is *kīrtanam*, and those who read his books are hearing or reading, which is *śravaṇam*. The two go together: *śravaṇam kīrtanam*.

We must consider all those people out there who are not coming to the temple. How will they hear the glories of Kṛṣṇa? Thus we go on book distribution, *saṅkīrtana*. That makes the participation in the *kīrtana* more complete, because people who don't even know about *bhakti-yoga*, who don't even know about the *Bhagavad-gītā*, who don't even know about Lord Kṛṣṇa, can take part in the glorification of Kṛṣṇa by accepting a book, giving a contribution, and reading the book. Reading is also hearing: *śravaṇam*. *Śravaṇam kīrtanam*.

Saṅkīrtana is most important for all of us. Why? What will be the result if we participate in the *saṅkīrtana-yajña*? The first benefit is that we will live happily in the world. Everyone wants to live happily in the world, but they don't know how. Here the *Bhagavad-gītā* explains how—by *yajña*—which in Kali-yuga means *saṅkīrtana-yajña*.

According to *Bhagavad-gītā* 3.10, such *yajña* will make us prosperous and happy, and on top of all that it will grant us liberation. As long as we are in a physical body, as long as we are in the material world, we have to suffer repeated birth and death. “As sure as death.” And if we live long enough, old age. Thus the *Bhagavad-gītā* advises, *janma-mṛtyu-jarā-vyādhi-duḥkha-doṣānudarśanam*. We should be conscious of these four miseries: birth, death, old age, and disease. Everyone suffers from these miseries. By performance of *saṅkīrtana-yajña* we can escape them—forever.

As with other types of *saṅkīrtana*, the distribution of transcendental literature is also joyful. It pleases Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, and when Kṛṣṇa is pleased, we naturally feel joyful. So we should distribute more books, hear about Kṛṣṇa more, speak about Kṛṣṇa more, and chant more. In other words, we should increase our service to Kṛṣṇa. In this way we can enjoy life here and in the end go back home, back to Godhead.

So we should engage in *saṅkīrtana-yajña*. It is the all-auspicious welfare work for the world—the best thing to do for ourselves, our families, our friends, the community, the nation, and the planet. It is the best way to please Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, and to attain liberation and go back home, back to Godhead.

* * *

His Holiness Hridayānanda Dāsa Goswami

Our understanding of the books and our understanding of the *importance* of the books is inseparable from our understanding of Śrīla Prabhupāda. We are convinced, for good reasons, that Prabhupāda is truly present in his books. Therefore the importance of the books is closely related to the importance of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

We can make some general observations about how the role of book distribution or literature distribution has historically changed societies. Before the American Revolutionary War there was wide distribution of revolutionary pamphlets. And the distribution of these

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

pamphlets was considered one of the most important forces in bringing people to a particular consciousness in which they were willing to risk their lives and take strong action to achieve a certain goal. We certainly find the same thing before the American Civil War, with the antislavery movement. There was literature distribution—not necessarily by people with shaved heads, but there was literature distribution. And it actually had a very powerful effect in bringing about a certain state of consciousness that led to the Civil War. Another example is the Communist movement, which was very much a literary movement in a sense. A lot of the spread of Communism was based on distribution of literature.

Śrīla Prabhupāda knew this. In other words, Śrīla Prabhupāda knew that his books have the special potency to change people’s consciousness radically. The general principle is that the distribution of literature is a fundamental component of any attempt to bring about significant change in a society or in the whole world. And the fact that widespread distribution of literature is an important component of all significant social events and movements was something Prabhupāda was aware of. The proof he was aware of this is that he often compared what he was doing to some of these earlier movements, but of course with the understanding that his books will actually bring about the real good for the world. So Prabhupāda knew these things about the effect of literature distribution. In fact, not only is literature fundamental for effecting change but also for maintaining what you have.

So if we look at civilizations that actually flourished, that are successful historically, we will find there is some powerful document or book on which the civilization is based, not only for maintaining the culture and the civilization but for expanding it, for effecting change in the world. For example, this whole experiment of American democracy, which is still an experiment, is based on documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Prabhupāda knew all these things. In addition to being a pure devotee from the spiritual world, he was a learned gentleman. He certainly knew all these things and talked about these things very openly—that distributing literature is a well-known proven strategy for bringing about significant change in the world.

We have our spiritual understanding that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are nondifferent from him and therefore also nondifferent from Kṛṣṇa. One may say that this is a very mystical thing, but it is not. Even with mundane authors, such as Karl Marx, for example, it’s commonly accepted that he put his most important ideas in his books. Whatever he was about, whatever he thought he understood, he put into those books. So in the same way Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “I have put everything into my books.” It is not that Prabhupāda had some other ideas he was hiding from us. For example, Prabhupāda never said, “I have much more to teach, but you cannot bear to hear it.” Rather, Prabhupāda said the opposite: “I have put everything into my books.”

So even in an ordinary sense people in general think they are communing with or having some type of intimate association with another person by reading that person’s book. So what to speak of the case of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, in which he explicitly and openly tells us the very best things that can be known, namely knowledge of Kṛṣṇa. And then of course there is the fact that on the spiritual platform everything is absolute, meaning that Kṛṣṇa is not different from

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

His name and fame, and certainly in Prabhupāda’s books we will find nothing but the name and fame of Kṛṣṇa. So to say that Prabhupāda is present in his books is to say that Kṛṣṇa is present there.

How does that come about? What does it mean to say that because Kṛṣṇa is not different from His name and fame, He is present in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books? In a similar vein, Prabhupāda taught us that in the *Bhagavad-gītā* when Kṛṣṇa says “I am the taste in water,” for example, we should try to understand *how* Kṛṣṇa is the taste in water, and we should also try to understand how Kṛṣṇa is nondifferent from His name, fame, entourage, abode, paraphernalia, and so on. So what does that mean—“nondifferent”? Kṛṣṇa is everywhere, but we have to know how to experience that. For example, there is electricity in buildings, but if you want to plug in an appliance, you have to have the proper connection. Even though there are electrical wires and there is in fact electricity available within the building, unless you have the proper connection you can’t access the electricity. If you have an appliance with a European plug, for instance, and you try to plug it in in the USA, it’s not going to work.

So Kṛṣṇa is everywhere, but unless we have the proper connection we cannot access Kṛṣṇa. And of course that word “connection” in Sanskrit is yoga. So wherever Kṛṣṇa’s name and fame are present, wherever people are chanting Kṛṣṇa’s name and fame, such as Śrīla Prabhupāda’s chanting of Kṛṣṇa’s name and fame in his books, in that situation Kṛṣṇa actually becomes accessed. That’s the connection—you actually gain access to Kṛṣṇa. This connection is not based on some mechanical technique but is based ultimately on Kṛṣṇa’s will. Kṛṣṇa has chosen to make Himself present wherever His names and glories are being sincerely chanted. And so we can speak philosophically about how it happens, but ultimately it happens because Kṛṣṇa has decided that it would happen in that way.

Śrīla Prabhupāda would give the example that if someone is speaking about you, your ears perk up. If you walk into a room and people are talking about you, you really want to know what they’re saying. So if you talk about Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa is there. If you distribute books about Him, He is there. In the *Padma Purāna* He says, *nāham tiṣṭhāmi vaikunṭhe yoginām hrdayeṣu vā/ yatra gāyanti mad-bhaktāḥ tatra tiṣṭhāmi nārada*: “I am not in Vaikunṭha or the hearts of the yogis, but I am wherever My devotees are spreading My glories.”

As we distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, something most significant is taking place. These books are in fact Kṛṣṇa—when you distribute books you’re putting Kṛṣṇa in people’s hands. When Lord Caitanya was born, all the neighbors came, and many demigods also came, disguised in many different ways, and they would all hold little baby Nimāi. This is a very advanced form of devotional service—to hold the Lord in your hands—and yet this tremendously advanced form of devotional service is available to everyone who receives one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. We can actually give Kṛṣṇa to people—they can actually hold Kṛṣṇa in their hands. We know that if someone peeks into the temple room and sees the Deity of Kṛṣṇa, there is tremendous benefit. In the same way, since Kṛṣṇa is not different from books about Him, if someone just takes a peek at one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, they are making great spiritual advancement. Therefore Prabhupāda said, “If someone simply touches the book, they make advancement.” Why? Because it is actually a glorious act of devotional service to hold Kṛṣṇa in your hand. If someone reads one word, that is glorious. Why? Because they have actually gotten Kṛṣṇa’s *darśana*. Even if someone just opens one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and reads the word *the*, it is still Kṛṣṇa because it is absolute. The book is a spiritual object—it is sacred. Somehow Kṛṣṇa has invested His potencies in all of this.

One should be humble, but at the same time one should recognize the incredible opportunities Śrīla Prabhupāda is offering us to represent him in a very significant way. It reminds me of a phrase from the Bible inscribed on the philosophy building, Emerson Hall, at Harvard University. I'm sure it's a tremendous embarrassment to the current occupants of that building, who are often atheistic with a vengeance. The inscription is a question addressed to God: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" In other words, who are we that someone as great as God even bothers to think about us? So just like a proud father and a proud mother see so many great qualities in their children, Prabhupāda was in every sense a loving father who saw so much good in his disciples and encouraged them and exalted them and praised them and pushed them forward and inspired them to do more than they could ever imagine they could do. We cannot become a tired old corporation that is much more concerned about the dangers of someone doing something wrong than with seizing the opportunity to do something right. So we have to move forward.

One way we manifest humility is by letting Kṛṣṇa do through us what He wants to do through us. In other words, Kṛṣṇa wants to spread this movement. Kṛṣṇa wants to bless this planet. And so to be humble is to let Kṛṣṇa do His work through us. As Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna, *nimitta-mātram bhava savya-sācin*: "O Savya-sācī, Arjuna, just be My instrument." That's true humility. True humility doesn't mean that I think, "Well, I can't do anything, so I won't do anything." True humility means that I offer myself as a willing instrument to God so that His will can manifest through me. That's real humility. And the will of Kṛṣṇa is that the people of this world hear about Him.

There was a time when we had a consciousness within ISKCON that we as a society had a sacred responsibility toward Śrīla Prabhupāda to distribute his books. We didn't think so much that it is the duty of the *brahmacārīs* or the *brahmacārīṅīs*. We felt that it is simply the duty of our community; it was the duty of the movement to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. Now that was a happy situation back then because most of the members of ISKCON were very young. So we were actually enthusiastic to get out there. Plus we were very, very convinced about Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Now we have the graying of ISKCON. ISKCON has become older in the sense that the average age is much older than it was before. And there is a natural tendency in societies all over the world that young people study and also do service for their teachers. As they get older, they develop their own families—they become concerned with money and taking care of their family and so on. And in older age, they again become religious. So as ISKCON has gotten older, we have seen that the sense of feeling responsible for distributing books is not so much there. What ISKCON needs is to recapture the sense or the conviction that it is the duty of the society to distribute books.

Obviously, ISKCON is a diverse society: there are all kinds of devotees, and there are all kinds of functions that need to be done. And ISKCON will only become more and more diverse

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

as time goes on. But alongside that diversity, which is actually a strength of ISKCON and not a weakness, there must be a feeling of responsibility within ISKCON as a society, both among temple devotees and congregational members, to distribute the knowledge Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us in his books.

Long ago we had a movement, but it wasn't exactly a society in the sense of being mature or having different social structures and so on. It was a movement but not yet a mature society. But now we cannot simply become a society but not a movement. A movement means you are moving. And the movement Prabhupāda wanted was preaching, and the most important preaching was book distribution.

We should think about how ISKCON as a society can be mobilized in such a way that all of us feel a personal sense of responsibility that book distribution flourish and increase. If everyone does at least something, the result will be huge. Somehow or other all of that diversity in our society should be mobilized so that whether someone is a graphic artist or a truck driver or a dentist or a philosophy professor, whether one cuts potatoes in the kitchen or personally goes out and sells books—whatever one does, one shares that sense of responsibility for the well-being of the distribution of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

* * *

His Holiness Jayādvaita Swami

I was doing some research about the days in America when Śrīla Prabhupāda had begun his preaching and was trying to publish his books. It was 1966, and some young men had come to him and begun to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They had only the barest ideas of the philosophy. But the Swami was wonderful, *prasādam* was great, and chanting got you higher than LSD. And by hearing the transcendental sound of the *Bhāgavatam* and the holy name, delivered in the line of pure devotees, these new American followers were becoming purified. Śrīla Prabhupāda, as he had prayed to Kṛṣṇa on the ship, was acting as Kṛṣṇa's servant, and now, through Śrīla Prabhupāda, Kṛṣṇa was unfolding a strange and wonderful drama.

In a little storefront on the Lower East Side, in the midst of hippie dropout acidheads, in the East Coast venue for America's 1960s freak show and psychedelic zoo, Śrīla Prabhupāda was preaching Kṛṣṇa's message of pure devotional service—Jhārikhaṇḍa revisited! Creatures who'd been living like animals were chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and dancing.

There was *kīrtana*, there were lectures, and there was *prasādam*, but where were the books? He had the three-volume sets, reddish brown, of his original *Bhāgavatam*. He had *Easy Journey to Other Planets*, a small booklet with a pale-green cover, brought over with the *Bhāgavatams* from India. And with his usual persistence, determination, and faith in the words of his Guru, Śrīla Prabhupāda was working on more.

As his new followers turned on with the *mahā-mantra* and tuned in to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, Śrīla Prabhupāda was writing *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. On a vintage typewriter placed atop a yellow tin suitcase that served as a desk, Śrīla Prabhupāda, in his apartment one flight up in the back, typed with two fingers at night. During the day, whenever he wasn't leading *kīrtana*, or giving class, or cooking and serving *prasādam* with his own hands to his new recruits, or preaching to them, or meeting new people, or writing letters, or honoring *prasādam*, or accepting his astonishingly few hours of rest, he was dealing with yet another crisis in the one little

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

storefront that constituted his International Society.

And if anyone were to ask, in his closet lay a bundle of manuscripts wrapped in saffron cloth, the next canto of the *Bhāgavatam*.

Those were the days when \$100 was nearly all ISKCON had. And Śrīla Prabhupāda went up to Long Island with Gargamuni and for \$150 bought two old mimeograph machines. (Asking price: \$150 apiece.) *Back to Godhead!* Gargamuni became the first printer, a professor-turned-seeker and a freelance writer for comic books became the first editors, and a hundred copies of BTG, cranked out on the greasy old machines, joined *The East Village Other* and the acid-is-the-answer underground papers in the East Village head shops.

Meanwhile, Śrīla Prabhupāda kept typing, and one day Gargamuni, looking in a shop window, saw a dictaphone. He didn't know what it was, but it looked like something maybe the Swami could use. Gargamuni bought it on the spot. He brought it back and presented it to Śrīla Prabhupāda and started to explain how to use it (the man in the shop had taken an hour or so to explain all those buttons). But somehow Śrīla Prabhupāda already knew. And now he began writing his books by dictating.

But who could transcribe? No one. Brahmānanda tried. Hayagrīva tried. Others tried. But the work was tedious, Prabhupāda's accent was hard to follow, everyone had other things to do. And the work started piling up.

And then Neal showed up, a college student from Antioch on a work-study program, ready to live with a religious group for some time and study it while doing some service.

“Can you type?” a devotee asked him.

“Sure.”

“We have all this dictation . . .”

“Oh, I do that sort of thing at college.”

Bingo!

Prabhupāda wanted the *Bhagavad-gītā* published. Getting the book edited was another saga. Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to Rāyarāma, “Howard wants to do it but he has no time to finish it or to type it. You are also engaged in various ways, and I do not know how to make it ready. Both you and Howard want to edit it but nobody takes charge to finish the job quickly say within a month.”

But meanwhile he had Brahmānanda looking for a publisher.

Allen Ginsberg's publishers weren't interested. Brahmānanda wrote to others, and, publisher after publisher, they all turned him down.

And then one day a letter came from someone at the Macmillan Company, asking to buy some books. Śrīla Prabhupāda told Brahmānanda, “Deliver them personally. And tell him we have a *Bhagavad-gītā* to publish.” Which is how Brahmānanda wound up in an office at Macmillan, face to face with nobody, a mere clerk in the accounting department, a clerk who had sent that letter only to buy books for himself.

And while Brahmānanda sat there, utterly frustrated, suddenly the chief editor walked in. The chief editor!? Mr. Wade. Brahmānanda said, “We have a *Bhagavad-gītā* to publish.”

“A *Bhagavad-gītā*? We need a *Bhagavad-gītā*. Can you bring it tomorrow? We'll publish it.”
Sight unseen!

Shortly thereafter, Śrīla Prabhupāda had a stroke and went back to India. But, “Although I am practically on the path of death, still I cannot forget about my publications.”

Soon Śrīla Prabhupāda was back in America, and then *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* was in print, then *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*. And the story goes on from there, the story of Śrīla

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

Prabhupāda’s determination and persistence, his vision, his steadfast faith in the words of his spiritual master: “Print books.” It becomes the story of thousands of books sitting at Second Avenue, no one able to sell them, and then the story of a few copies miraculously sold, and then hundreds and thousands and millions. The story becomes a wealth of stories, stories of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s followers, books in hand, getting books out to people, tens of thousands of people, millions of people, all over the world, the books working their wonder, bringing people to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa and His devotees.

In 1972 Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to me personally: “These books and magazines are our most important propaganda weapons to defeat the ignorance of maya’s army, and the more we produce such literature and sell them profusely all over the world, the more we shall deliver the world from the suicide course.” Many remember such instructions from Śrīla Prabhupāda, and, along with his personal example, they inspire us always.

[From a class given in New York City]

I was traveling with another devotee from New Jersey to New York City on a train when a Muslim man sat down next to me. After awhile he turned to me and asked what my religion was. That started a whole conversation about God and spiritual life, and he was very interested. When I travel I always like to carry books with me for people like this. So I and the devotee traveling with me were trying to find where we had put them. Finally we found a *Perfection of Yoga*, and I gave it to him. He asked if he could give something for it and gave a very nice donation. It was very enlivening to see someone of another faith so interested in what we have to offer. . . .

Earlier in the year I was in South Africa. While there I asked a devotee how he had joined. He told this story:

When I was very young my father visited France, and while waiting in the airport in Paris for his plane back to our home in the Congo, he saw a *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* on a table. Someone had apparently left it there. It was there for a long time, so at last he picked it up and started reading it. No one came looking for the book, so he took it with him on the flight. He found it very interesting.

Later, whenever he was home he would often quote from the *Bhagavad-gītā*, saying “Kṛṣṇa says this” and “Kṛṣṇa says that.” I began thinking, “Who is Kṛṣṇa?”

When I grew up and was on a visit to South Africa, I met some devotees distributing books, and they told me about Kṛṣṇa. I put the two together and said, “My father knows all about Kṛṣṇa!” They invited me to the temple and I really liked it. Eventually I joined. My father is also a devotee and chants sixteen rounds.

There is a saying in India: “There is a name on every grain of rice.” Similarly, there is a name on every book that goes out, and only Kṛṣṇa knows whose hand it is going to end up in, just as only Kṛṣṇa knows to whom every grain of rice will go.

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

* * *

His Holiness Jayapatāka Swami

We've heard so many *saṅkīrtana* pastimes about how a book goes from one hand to the next to the next to the next, and in various ways reaches a receptive reader. Śrīla Prabhupāda knew that if the books went out, sooner or later somebody would read them, and if anybody reads one of his books, they will start to become awakened.

Book distribution is something every devotee should do. I won't say at one point in their spiritual life they should do it, but actually throughout our entire devotional lives we should always remain book distributors. We should carry a few books with us every day so that whenever we meet somebody interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness we can give them a book. To explain Kṛṣṇa consciousness in any depth takes a long time, but if somebody gets a book, it's as if you're giving them (depending on which book) a hundred to a thousand hours of Prabhupāda's preaching!

We should distribute books to colleagues at work, to neighbors, to friends. If you keep a book in your purse when you go to the grocery store, if you meet somebody who says, "Oh, are you a Hare Kṛṣṇa?" you can respond to their interest substantially. So always have a book ready to give a curious person.

We calculate that we have about 500 thousand to a million active congregational members. If every one of them would distribute a book a day, then that would be up to 365 million books in a year. Right now (2016) we have distributed about 520 million books and magazines since Śrīla Prabhupāda founded ISKCON in 1966. Practically speaking, we could double it in less than two year's if everybody distributed a book a day.

There are so many opportunities where we have failed to present Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. We should take advantage of every opportunity and not let a single opportunity slip through our fingers.

* * *

His Holiness Kavicandra Swami

When there is a large natural disaster—a hurricane, flood, earthquake, tsunami—thousands of people respond to help the victims. So many work without sleep. I wish we could all feel such urgency to distribute books. The greatest disaster is to forget Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda must have seen how everyone bereft of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is suffering and in great need of help. Therefore he was able to do so much to spread Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu's mission. Everyone is going to be kicked out of their home (the body), and without Kṛṣṇa consciousness their destination will not be a pleasant one.

"When, oh when will that day be mine, when kindness to all beings will be appearing, with free heart forget myself comforting, Bhaktivinoda in all humility prays, 'Now I will set out to preach Your order sublime.' When, oh when will that day be mine?"

* * *

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

His Holiness Nirañjana Swami

One should glean the depth and wisdom that is contained within Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. When we devote our lives to studying them, we see how Śrīla Prabhupāda has given everything within his books. Certainly this gives us a greater inspiration to give them to others. When we have something very valuable, and when we appreciate its value, we want very much for others to experience it.

There is an expression I often think of, namely “a necessity of life.” We often tend to think that the meaning of “a necessity of life” is something that sustains life in the body, such as food, water, shelter, or air. But life is eternal, i.e., it exists outside and beyond the body, and so we need to ask ourselves, What is the real necessity of life? Śrīla Prabhupāda would say that preaching, especially book distribution, gave him life. He showed by his own example that this is what sustained his life. It is what he was so much absorbed in. It was his mission to give us transcendental wisdom in the form of *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, and his other books. He wanted us to study these books ourselves, realize their contents, and then go out and distribute them so that others could become similarly fortunate and appreciate the great value of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. This is life.

If we ask ourselves what is the real necessity of our lives as devotees, we will see that it is spreading the message of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, especially through book distribution. We come to life when we remember how dear Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books were to him, when we see pictures of his radiant smile when he would see a newly printed volume of his *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, when we see him smile from ear to ear when he would hear the stories of devotees going out to distribute his books, and when he would hear the results.

The simple conclusion: Pleasing Śrīla Prabhupāda is our “necessity of life,” and distributing his books is the best way to do it.

His Holiness Rādhānātha Swami

Our life is centered around Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. By reading them, by distributing them, by preaching from them, by living by them, we can attract the most intimate attention of Śrī Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu, and our lives are perfect. So it is very pleasing to see how devotees have made great endeavors in this book distribution program. It is pleasing because we know it is what Prabhupāda wants, and we see how, when we make Prabhupāda’s desire our desire, we become blissful. We become empowered, and the most congenial form of spiritual intimacy is created among ourselves. So, whoever we may be, wherever we may be, we can all be a part of this divine mission. This Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is designed so that we are all extending ourselves for the sake of preaching, for the sake of helping others become better devotees, and if we just work together in this way, so many wonderful things will be manifested through our endeavors. This is Kṛṣṇa’s promise, and this is the perfection of our lives.

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mission is an organic whole, and we must consider and regard every part

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaṅga

of that whole. Śrīla Prabhupāda established temples. Śrīla Prabhupāda established *āśramas* and farm communities. He also personally taught the proper behavior of Vaiṣṇavas toward Kṛṣṇa, toward one another, and toward the people in general, and in this way he gave us a culture. Prabhupāda's books point the way to that culture. And we who live by those books and that culture must provide a Kṛṣṇa conscious spiritual environment in which devotees can live and feel protected.

The devotees are going out each day to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. This is such a wonderful, wonderful service. To give a person medical assistance is good because it gives the person relief from the body for some time, but to give a person the mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, as Śrīla Prabhupāda has revealed to the world through his books, is to give the person the opportunity to enter into the spiritual world. It is to give a person the only real solution to his problems of life, Kṛṣṇa consciousness. So those who perform this work with sincere compassion are performing the greatest welfare activity in all creation, and what you give through Śrīla Prabhupāda's books should also be exemplified. In this Age of Kali, the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* is the most sublime means of purification of the heart. This is the conclusion of all the writings of the great saints. Let us distribute these books with great enthusiasm, and let us show the world how wonderful and joyful life can be when we chant the Holy Name in the association of devotees.

* * *

His Holiness Śivarāma Swami

Wherever I distributed books—Montreal, Winnipeg, Minneapolis, or Chicago—and with whomever I distributed, there reigned an overriding, common, almost incessant conversation about Śrīla Prabhupāda's desire for his books to be sold. During morning *prasādam*, on the way to our spot, at interludes while distributing, on the way back to the temple, in the shower, and as we lay in our sleeping bags waiting to fall asleep, we would share with each other what we understood were Prabhupāda's desires and instructions on book distribution, and how we could realize them. We would also discuss our own realizations on the subject. We slept, ate, and lived the order of Prabhupāda, in the very way that every morning we sing *cittete kariyā aikya*. It was *samādhī*.

We spoke of how Śrīla Prabhupāda had received the instruction to print books, how he was the living Vyāsadeva, how he wanted his books in every home in the world, how the books would change people's lives, and how they would bring about a worldwide revolution. We felt we were Prabhupāda's personal servants, his instruments in his cause, and we discussed how pleasing our work was to His Divine Grace. We were like Prabhupāda's Special Forces, his commandos. Although we knew that in exchange for sacrificing our youth to sell books Prabhupāda would take us back to Godhead, we often talked about how in the next life we would rather continue selling books in this world or in another world.

I often had a favorite vision of my next life in Vaikuṅṭha. I imagined that I would take birth with a body that never tired and could carry a full set of *Bhāgavatams*, on a planet that was like

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

an airport, where people were always arriving, where they always had lots of money, and where they always bought books. I envisaged that under those conditions I would always do what Prabhupāda liked best and would swim in the bliss and unshakable conviction that resulted from serving his *vāñī*, because while distributing books we would taste the association of Prabhupāda in a way that was even more intimate than when we were in his physical presence.

Śrīla Prabhupāda knew of our intense meditation on his every word. He encouraged us both by spoken instructions and by messages through the heart, reinforcing our dedication to serving his mission in a very special way. As we were absorbed in thoughts of him, Prabhupāda was absorbed in thoughts of us. And that wonderful exchange gave us great strength to continue our difficult service.

Today, as it was forty years ago and as it will be a thousand years from now, ISKCON devotees can live with the mission of Śrīla Prabhupāda by printing and distributing his books. In that way they will taste the unparalleled mellows of *sañkīrtana-rasa*. They need only be careful not to get in the way.

Late in 1989, while visiting Hungary and preparing devotees for their first Prabhupāda marathon, I had a very vivid dream. In the dream I was with Lord Balarāma, who said to me, “Let’s go see what Kṛṣṇa is doing.” We entered a very ornate room, where Kṛṣṇa was resting upon a beautiful bed. Balarāma sat beside Kṛṣṇa and woke Him up, and then Kṛṣṇa sat up on the side of the bed, His lotus feet on the ground. He was dressed just like a cowherd boy. In my dream I offered *dañdavats* while saying prayers, and then I knelt before Kṛṣṇa, looking up at Him. Kṛṣṇa pointed at me with His forefinger. He was smiling but was also a little stern, so as to impress upon me the importance of His words. He said, “Just translate and distribute books about Me, and that will be better worship of Me than any prayers. By that one activity, other projects will develop and be maintained.” It was a very clear message, one that is etched in my heart along with many such instructions from Śrīla Prabhupāda. I believe the instruction is for all leaders and all devotees of this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. If your lives rotate around this principle, everything will “develop and be maintained.”

Although I had been in contact with devotees for some years, it wasn’t until early 1973 that I read a letter by Śrīla Prabhupāda which made me realize that Kṛṣṇa consciousness had a mission I wanted to be part of.

Before joining ISKCON I would come to the Montreal temple for Sunday feasts, and sometimes during the week. On one occasion, when there was hardly anyone at the temple, I read a letter from Prabhupāda that had been posted on the bulletin board shortly after the first (three-day) Christmas Marathon. Here are some excerpts:

With great happiness I have read the amount of books sold during three-day period, December 22–24, 1972. It is scarcely believable that more than 17,100 books could have

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

been sold by one temple in three days! People can see that our boys and girls, devotees, are so much sincere and serious to distribute the message of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, they are at once struck by seeing them and therefore they appreciate and purchase. So I am so much pleased upon all of the boys and girls in Los Angeles and all over the world who are understanding and appreciating this unique quality of our transcendental literature and voluntarily they are going out to distribute despite all circumstances of difficulty. By this effort alone they are assured to go back to home, back to Godhead. In order to change this materialistic society and prevent them from gliding to hell, first thing is to educate them. All decent men want to give service to humanity; only thing is they do not have information really what is that service. By giving people knowledge, jnana, that is the highest service to humanity. In this way everyone who hears our message gets the opportunity to fulfill his actual position as human being and become delivered from the clutches of maya. Selling books to give everyone access to the Absolute Truth is the real understanding of desire to serve humanity.

I read the letter carefully. It struck me deeply. Kṛṣṇa consciousness was more than a religion. It was a living missionary activity. Its mission was to give people a chance for liberation. And the best way to do that was to give them Prabhupāda's books, through which they would be educated about the path to liberation. I knew this was what I wanted to do with my life: Be happy and make others happy through Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I now had a mission in life. As soon as I realized that, I decided to join the temple.

In the following years and decades I would remember the day in front of the bulletin board. I would remember what Prabhupāda said: There would be difficulties in spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but it was the best gift to humanity, and I and all others who dedicated ourselves to that mission would go back to Godhead. Those words have always given me great strength. They continue to do so.

No other religion can give the crystal-clear picture of the Absolute Truth that we can. Nothing can compare. And honest people of all faiths will agree. This is our real contribution to society: the Truth. And our responsibility is to live by the Truth, to be the personifications of the Truth.

Preaching means to plant the seed of *bhakti*. When and how it sprouts and grows we do not know. That's unique to each individual. But grow it will. And for every seed we sow, we advance closer to Kṛṣṇa. We endear ourselves to Him in a way that He cannot repay (*na pārāye 'ham*). That is Kṛṣṇa's statement. Therefore *sāṅkīrtana* devotees pave their own way to the spiritual world, and thus they are always happy and hopeful.

The *sāṅkīrtana-yajña* is the austerity we perform to attract Kṛṣṇa's attention. Without austerity, there can be no success in devotion. The *gopīs* already have *prema*, and we are aspiring for it. How determined we must be! We keep that determination by strict practice of *sādhana* and by following the principles. Get your strength from the Holy Name. In the temple, on the street, at the airport. It is our constant shelter, guide, and friend. Everything is in the Name.

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books give *prema*. The more books we distribute, the more people will get *prema*, and as a result we will get *prema*. Continue to make your *prema saṅkīrtana* worship in the temple of your heart.

The *sāstra* says, “One cannot spread the Lord’s holy name without being empowered by Him.” The more we surrender to His service, the more we are empowered. It is not a material thing. Ordinary people cannot work so hard, in such difficulty, with such big results, for no pay. This kind of work is “transcendental *samādhi*.” The choice to be empowered, to be in *samādhi*, is ours. With full faith in Lord Gaura’s ability to empower us, we must fully surrender to this service and keep our backs to illusion. Then we can do anything, anything at all!! It is a matter of pure desire. Try to remain fully focused, and let us “do something wonderful.” The secret? Try not to get in the way.

For many years I distributed the paperback *Kṛṣṇa* book trilogy. During the day we sold books, during *prasādam* we talked of the books, and at night we dreamt of book distribution. Even when we fell asleep during *japa* it was into a reverie of book distribution. Book distribution became our constant meditation, day and night. It was our *samādhi*.

In Montreal the *brahmacārī āśrama* was in the book warehouse. We lived and slept there. To have some privacy I built an igloo out of *Kṛṣṇa* book boxes and literally slept inside *Kṛṣṇa* book. One night as I lay in my igloo on the floor (beds were *māyā*), I became overwhelmed with happiness. *Kṛṣṇa* book was Kṛṣṇa, and like a baby in its mother’s lap, I was resting in Kṛṣṇa’s lap. Book distribution was such a simple, happy life, and one, as Prabhupāda had told us, by which we were guaranteed to go back to Godhead. What else was there to do?

We would rise early, stay in the temple room from the start of *maṅgala-ārati* until the end of class, take *prasādam*, and be out the door by 9 am. I commuted downtown by bus, and every day I carried three boxes of sixty books each, totaling 40kgs. (We hadn’t thought of book trolleys yet.) By the time I arrived at my spot I was exhausted and perspiring, but as soon as I opened the boxes and put a trilogy into a person’s hand—“Sir! Please check this out!”—*Kṛṣṇa* book gave me the strength to start a new day.

In short, we ate, slept, and lived books. By that life we felt an unassailable connection with Śrīla Prabhupāda, Lord Caitanya, and Kṛṣṇa. We knew that book distribution was the safest place to be. And it remains so even today.

Love means to serve another without the desire for personal gain, desiring nothing in return. *Saṅkīrtana* is the school for love.

Devotees who distribute books for Lord Caitanya should know that they are doing the highest service. Because they are His representatives, the Lord takes all responsibility to maintain and protect such preachers, and He blesses them with the greatest gift—love for Himself. Therefore we have nothing else to do but our duty, and to do our best. Everything else we leave in Lord Gaura’s hands. That is pure faith in Him.

People have no idea what religion is. To them the concept of selfless loving service is incomprehensible. They mostly worship God for selfish ends—wealth, peace, happiness. But when they see that we serve out of love, sincere people are impressed.

Don’t ask Kṛṣṇa for wealth, freedom from suffering, or even happiness as payment for your service. Just ask for more service. That is pure devotion. The vibration from devotees with such

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

devotion will change the hearts of the greatest materialist. That is preaching. That is our revolution.

We are not beggars. We are givers. We give people the opportunity to serve by donating, we give them transcendental knowledge, we give them the holy name, *prasādam*, association, and hope in a hopeless world. Only out of humility do devotees approach nondevotees to give all these treasures to them.

And when we approach, we do so with a straw in our mouth. We may flatter people: “You are so cultured, so intelligent, so broad-minded. Being all these things, I know that you are one of the few people who will appreciate this book. And being detached as you are, you can give a donation and take a book. I know you can do it—because you are special.”

Let’s preach with strength and energy. Not half-heartedly, not reluctantly, not even with modest enthusiasm, but with *strength!!* We owe everything to Prabhupāda, so let us try to repay that debt in the way he requested.

* * *

His Holiness Tamāl Krishna Goswami

I said, “Śrīla Prabhupāda, this is the perfect reciprocation: You are working so hard day and night to write these books, and all the devotees are working hard day and night to distribute them.”

Prabhupāda said, “I am writing the drama, and they are playing on the stage.”

* * *

His Holiness Bhaktisiddhānta Swami

After a home program in Dunedin, New Zealand—a town that is, to say the least, off the beaten path—one gentleman remarked, “Well, this is all well and good, but where do we go from here?” This question really struck me and has stayed with me. When we distribute a book, this question should also arise within our minds. Why be satisfied with the initial contact and just leave it at that? Do we have plans to follow up with those whom we meet (at least in some way), or are we satisfied with the routine hit and run?

The topmost luxury is to witness a group setting that develops in response to book distribution, where a variety of people who’ve received books have a space to come to in order to assimilate the books. In such a scenario one can delightfully observe people making tangible spiritual progress. When book distributors adopt this long-term vision of sustained care for the conditioned souls who receive books, *saṅkīrtana* naturally becomes a lifetime affair.

How to develop such a program? One simple idea thought of by Balarāma Dāsa of New Dvārakā is a contact card. He works at a main Nissan car dealership in LA, which sells a car to 35% of the people who visit their lot. Among the 65% who come and go, 50% will eventually come back and buy a car because they filled out a form so the dealership could stay in touch with them. By this additional effort, a huge number of the “walk-outs” were transformed into sales.

Could you imagine if our devotees in the field would make that little extra effort and have the interested people give us their contact info on the spot so we could initiate a follow-up program? We could then send them details about more books, or invite them to the temple, or

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

notify them of available seminars, home programs, etc. If each distributor filled out only three cards a day, and then the info was entered into a computer database, after a year we might have maybe a thousand contacts. Then year after year the names would add up. Let's say only one percent respond to the invitations or newsletters. You will still have a minimum of ten persons per devotee each year. Depending on the size of your *saṅkīrtana* outreach team, you will be able to stay in touch with many persons and capitalize on valuable nurturing without much expense.

Balarāma Dāsa is a retired twelve-year book distributor. He figures that if he had recorded his contacts in this way he would now have between 7,000 and 14,000 names, what to speak of the list that the existing fifteen *saṅkīrtana* devotees could have gotten in that period. Just ask the congregational preaching coordinator at your temple how many names are on the database and then take a deep breath as you realize the importance of follow-up.

If the materialists can employ such long-term follow-up to avoid losing potential sales, then what about our position as Lord Caitanya's gardeners? How many interesting exchanges have you had over the years on the front lines? Can you imagine what would happen if after receiving the seed of the book the recipient would have received, say, a lively invitation that would act as the watering process? Here is the beginning to the ultimate sale—the making of a devotee through the medium of transcendental horticulture.

* * *

Bhṛgupati Dāsa (ACBSP)

On book distribution you can really see how Kṛṣṇa is completely in control, and you never know what's going to happen next. Distributing books makes you a candidate to receive a lot of mercy from Kṛṣṇa, especially if you've had good *sādhana* that morning. Book distribution is not a matter of our material expertise. Rather, book distribution is about trying our best and letting Kṛṣṇa do the rest.

I was doing door to door in south central L.A., one of the poorer, tougher neighborhoods in town. The street I was on was really run down and neglected. As I entered a convenience store, I saw a middle-aged Asian man smiling at me from behind a one-inch-thick slab of bullet-proof glass. After exchanging greetings, I slipped a *Bhagavad-gītā* underneath the glass for him to look at. To my surprise he responded by saying, "I have books like this."

"What do mean," I asked.

He then brought out a bag containing six of Śrīla Prabhupāda's small books. "I got these at a temple in Culver City. Funny—I was thinking about the temple just before you walked in."

"Kṛṣṇa is in our hearts," I told him. "We're not independent in our thinking and activities. As the Supersoul within our hearts, He's inspiring and directing both of us. It looks like I've been sent here to give you some association and an opportunity to do some service." He seemed to like how that sounded.

"You know," he said, "I regularly give these small books to my customers." Right then one came in and I got to see him in action. He handed two small books to the customer and told him that if he didn't like them he could give them to a friend or a library, because they're books of spiritual wisdom and it would be disrespectful to throw them away.

When the opportunity presented itself, I asked him, "Do you need more books?" and showed him what I had in my book bag. He took all the small books I had and gave a very

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaṅga

generous donation.

As I was leaving, he said, “You know, I chant Hare Kṛṣṇa while driving. When I retire in five or ten years, I’d like to live in a community of devotees. Can you recommend one?”

The following week I returned to his store with *japa* beads and a beadbag, thinking he might like to start chanting on beads. He already had a set, which he had purchased from Govinda’s boutique, but he hadn’t used them because he preferred to chant slower. He did, however, take another stack of small books and gave another generous donation.

Śrīla Prabhupāda once said there’s a devotee on every street corner. We should never underestimate the potency of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and Lord Caitanya’s *saṅkīrtana* movement. Not only is my Asian friend a devotee, but he’s also a book distributor. Only Kṛṣṇa knows how many hidden book distributors there are in the world.

Some of the effects of book distribution are yet to manifest. What is happening is that the distribution of so many books—millions and millions since the late 60’s—is raising the spiritual consciousness of human society as a whole. Eventually, at some point, we will see some dramatic changes in how human society conducts its affairs. Book distribution will be responsible for that.

Imagine you have a pot of water on the stove and you light a flame under it. After thirty seconds you won’t see anything—it will look exactly the same as it did at the beginning. After one minute of heat you still won’t see anything. After two minutes you may still not see anything. But after three or four minutes you’ll see some bubbles on the inside of the pot. And after five minutes or so it will suddenly break into a boil. Thirty seconds before the water boiled, it looked like ordinary cold water. The water had to absorb all that heat, and at a certain point, when it reached the critical temperature, BOOM, it broke into a full boil. But thirty seconds before that you would not have been able to recognize it as very hot water. At that point it would have been foolish to say, “Oh, the fire is not having any effect on the water.” It may superficially appear that nothing is happening and that the water is not getting warmer, but it is factually becoming increasingly hot, to the point where it eventually breaks into a boil at 212 degrees Fahrenheit.

Similarly, the books are having their effect. It appears as if nothing is really happening as a result of book distribution. No nations are declaring themselves to be Kṛṣṇa conscious states. But it is having its effect. The more the books go out, the more the effect is building up, just as the longer you leave the pot of water on the stove, the hotter the water becomes. If the books keep going out, going out, going out by the hundreds and thousands and millions, a point will come at which something dramatic happens, just like water starting to boil when it reaches the boiling point. If the books keep going out in big quantities, as has been happening, a point is going to come at which everybody will say, “Oh! I guess this book distribution really is all that it was cracked up to be.” But until that happens, the tendency is to think, “Oh, nothing is really happening. Look, we’ve distributed so many millions of books but human society remains the same.”

But this is the same as saying that the heating water on the stove is not getting hotter because we haven’t seen it come to the boiling point yet. Only a fool would say that. But an intelligent person, one who has common sense, knows that at every second the water is coming closer to the

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

boiling point.

In the same way, if the books keep going out in large quantities, as was Śrīla Prabhupāda’s desire, at every second human society will come closer to some dramatic positive transformation. And what is that? The fulfillment of Lord Caitanya’s prediction that His name will be heard in every town and village. Therefore we should be very confident that if we just keep pushing on this movement by distributing books, Kṛṣṇa consciousness will spread to every town and village. As Śrīla Prabhupāda put it, “Print and distribute as many books in as many languages as possible, and the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement will automatically spread.”

The one thing that inspires me most to continue distributing books is the transcendental reciprocation that one experiences as a result of trying to surrender to the service. This comes primarily in the form of results beyond one’s expectations. That I interpret as help from Śrīla Prabhupāda, Lord Caitanya, and Kṛṣṇa, and increased taste for chanting, on occasion.

When you try to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books sincerely, you experience how you’re being helped by the internal potency of the Lord. Some of my best days on book distribution started off really tough. By persevering we invoke the compassion of our spiritual master and the Lord upon us, and then by Their causeless mercy They enlighten the general populace from within to be favorable. Then all sorts wonderful and amazing things happen. People you never imagined would even stop not only stop but enthusiastically take books and give nice donations. You can clearly understand that this is Kṛṣṇa’s mercy upon you and the people you’re engaging, and you feel very grateful that you’re being allowed to have a glimpse of what devotional service can be like.

There is a sentence in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that inspires me very much whenever I read it: “When Kṛṣṇa wants to do something, simply by His willing, everything is performed so perfectly that one cannot imagine how it is being done.” Sometimes we want to perform some service, such as distributing books, and it may be difficult, but if we are sincere then Kṛṣṇa will help in an amazing way, as book distributors experience all the time. We could take a picture of all the devotees distributing books and use this sentence as the caption.

* * *

Maṇidhara Dāsa (ACBSP)

In Kali-yuga there are no *śruti-dharas*—whatever people hear goes in one ear and out the other. Therefore we need books. And we have the best books, books that can purify anyone who reads them.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaṅga

Saṅkīrtana helps us come to the point of understanding why we came to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement: To become a devotee, and then to help others become devotees. Kṛṣṇa is so pleased with those who spread this knowledge that He gives them a higher and higher taste for Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Enthusiasm to distribute books is the life-giving energy one receives from Lord Caitanya, which is so easily available when one distributes. Instantly one will be enthused to leave the mental platform, because to be successful one has to give up one's artificial impersonal nature and open one's heart to the conditioned souls while offering them Śrīla Prabhupāda's most precious gifts. A book distributor doesn't just give out the books; he gives himself as well.

Not only does Śrīla Prabhupāda's statement "Books are the basis" define our philosophical basis, but it also defines the basis of ISKCON. Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted the temples to be constructed on the basis of book distribution (and of course with general donations as well). He wanted our lives to be based on his books.

I don't think Śrīla Prabhupāda's focus on book distribution was meant for a particular time; rather, he meant it to be the focus of his society for all time. This doesn't mean that every devotee will stand on the street every day with a book bag. It means that every devotee should keep the idea of book distribution as a priority and try to help in any way possible to see that books are distributed. I firmly believe that if this "book distribution culture" would be reestablished in ISKCON, we could avoid so many problems we face today.

When Śrīla Prabhupāda heard statements such as "It's not respectable to go out and try to convince people to take books; therefore we should do it another way," he would say, "Show us a better way." Then, of course, the devotee would have nothing to say. Śrīla Prabhupāda totally opposed this kind of mentality. He was well aware of the shortcomings of his book distributors, but instead of preaching to a few selected "intellectuals," he chose a way to introduce his books into society in the most massive way possible. This offensive type of argumentation is powered by a fear that we will not be respected. Did Śrīla Prabhupāda offer a "respectable" view of our Society when he chanted surrounded by the still somewhat mentally deranged hippies in New York City? Hardly. But by book distribution and *harināma saṅkīrtana* he made these hippies into happies, and many of them have become very respected personalities. This kind of argumentation—trying to make book distribution temporary—is mediocre and powered by *kaniṣṭha adhikāri* mentality in the name of respectability and academic advancement.

But of course, Śrīla Prabhupāda was also ecstatic to see the Library Party introduce his books into academic circles in colleges and universities. Why should the one exclude the other? By the above-mentioned argumentation, book distribution doesn't become "respectable" but stops altogether, as history has taught us. This is surely not what Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted. But of course, his books should be distributed without agitating the public.

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

* * *

Praghoṣa Dāsa (ACBSP)

Saṅkīrtana—book distribution and *harināma*—is where “the rubber meets the road,” so to speak, in our collective efforts to share what we have all been given by His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda. That is where our philosophy ceases to be mere doctrine and becomes realized action. His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda considered each and every soul on the planet to be absolutely significant, and this realization was a direct result of his knowing our eternal connection to the Lord Himself.

Śrīla Prabhupāda took most seriously the task of transforming our unfortunate condition to one of absolute good fortune. He did this one soul at a time. Each of us was individually made eternally fortunate by Śrīla Prabhupāda. There is a wonderful parable I have always loved that illustrates Śrīla Prabhupāda’s tenacious determination to make Kṛṣṇa consciousness available to as many souls as possible.

One morning an old man was walking on the shore of the vast ocean. He was hobbled and crooked, and his breathing was labored. He looked up and noted that thousands of starfish, large and small, had been stranded on the beach by the outgoing tide. They were too far from the roiling waves to save themselves and faced suffocation and intense heat from the sun’s rays as it rose in the sky. He began to bend over slowly and painfully and pick up one starfish at a time, walk to the shore, and hurl it back into the safety of the cool waves. A ten-year-old boy spied the old-timer and studied his actions for some time. In due course he approached the old man, who was so absorbed in the task at hand that he failed to register the presence of the boy.

“Hey, mister, what are you doing?” the boy queried.

The old man noted the look of incredulity upon the boy’s face and said, “What does it look like I’m doing? I’m returning these starfish to the sea before they all die on the shore!”

The boy looked up the beach and saw stranded starfish as far as he could see.

“Hmppf!” puffed the lad. “Old man, I don’t want to discourage you, but did you happen to see just how many of these critters there are out here?”

“What’s yer point, young fella?” asked the old timer as he looked the lad up and down.

“Well, do you really think you’re gonna make a difference?”

The old man looked at the boy with a twinkle in his eye as he slowly bent over with a groan and picked up a big starfish. He paused to gather his strength and then slowly walked to the shore and hurled the starfish out to sea as far as he could. Then he walked back to the boy, who was still staring in disbelief at the efforts of the old man.

“Well,” the old man said, smiling wryly, “I sure made a difference for *that* one, didn’t I!”

The boy smiled, nodded his head in agreement, and then joined the old man in his efforts.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaṅga

Śrīla Prabhupāda has arranged for all the “stranded starfish” of this godforsaken material world to be given the golden opportunity of Kṛṣṇa consciousness within the mission of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Śrīla Prabhupāda showed the example and set about saving us all—individually, one at a time. Each of us has our own beautiful recollection of how we found the shelter of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Śrīla Prabhupāda, and his devotees. This shelter remains fully available to any sincere soul, and thousands are experiencing this shelter all over the world, daily. Anyone can participate, like that young lad who took to helping the old man rescue as many starfish as possible. One just needs to roll up his or her sleeves and dive into the task full bore and help Śrīla Prabhupāda in his efforts to make a difference in the lives of as many souls as possible. Can’t you practically see His Divine Grace, with a twinkle in his beautiful gaze, chuckling with delight as his books pass from our humble hands to those of the suffering souls gasping and suffocating in this world of ignorance and fear?

When we’re on *saṅkīrtana*, let’s all keep our eyes fixed on the individual standing directly in front of us. Let’s “make a difference for *that* one.” Then let’s move to the next person and again “make a difference for *that* one.” Then at the end of each day we can tally up all those individuals for whom we made a difference and offer those results to His Divine Grace Śrīla Prabhupāda, knowing how much he will delight in our efforts.

Remember: you too can help make a difference for at least one soul. Let nothing prevent you from making that difference. If you can’t go out personally, offer your time, your money, or your assistance to the men and women who are going out. Trust me, *you will make a difference*, even if for only one soul. And remember, once upon a time, in the not-too-distant past, that one soul *was you!*

* * *

Sureśa Dāsa (ACBSP)

Most days on *saṅkīrtana* were not miracle days. There were, of course, philosophical miracles every day. Any time someone asked a question or presented an argument or objection I couldn’t answer, I wouldn’t rest until I researched Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and found the proper response. The same questions tended to come up again and again, so even if I wasn’t prepared for one person, I would be ready for the next.

For example, one woman challenged, “I don’t believe in God; I believe in infinity.”

“If you believe in infinity,” I answered, “then you must include God; otherwise you are making a limitation on infinity.” She thought about it for a minute and then bought a *Bhagavad-gītā*. I became more and more confident from regularly reading Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. I especially found that repeating his messages word for word was extremely powerful and convincing.

One evening I was selling books at the back of Tower Records, on Sunset Blvd. in Hollywood. It was pretty late and dark, maybe 8 or 9 o’clock. I stopped a strikingly beautiful woman and showed her a *Kṛṣṇa* book. She liked the pictures, so to make a little conversation before asking her to buy one, I asked what kind of work she did. She replied that she was a prostitute. I was taken aback. I had been a *brahmacārī* for four years by that time, and to be honest I’d felt a deep sense of loneliness much of the time. And here I was, speaking with a beautiful prostitute in a dark and rather quiet place! I thought about the humor of the situation, and how Lord Kṛṣṇa might be testing me. I said an internal prayer, “Lord Kṛṣṇa, I don’t wish to

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

entertain any other desire at this time except that You allow this person to purchase this *Kṛṣṇa* book. Please fulfill my desire.” The woman bought *Kṛṣṇa* book and went on her way. I didn’t think much more about it. I had done my duty, and I went on too.

* * *

Svavāsa Dāsa (ACBSP)

I joined in Denver, Colorado. I was a *bhakta* for about two months, and then they decided that I was too much trouble in the temple. So they sent me out on the streets to distribute books. In those days we used to do book distribution in *dhotīs*, with shaved heads. We used to go door to door. I remember we were so poor in those days that although there were eight of us we had only six winter jackets; we couldn’t buy any more. So we had to share these jackets among all of us. I was put in charge of the jackets, and also of the boots. We didn’t have enough money to buy enough boots—we only had four pair for the eight of us.

But despite all these difficulties, book distribution was actually great fun; it was ecstatic. We would go out in cold weather, below zero, with snow up to your knees, but we were ecstatic because we knew Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted the books distributed. That was the difference. It’s not that we fully understood what we were doing, but we were doing it because Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted it. And because he wanted it, we thought it was the right thing to do. When you’re twenty-one years old, your idea of right and wrong is kind of mixed up. But we were sure that Śrīla Prabhupāda really knew what was going on, and we really and thoroughly believed him, and so when we were able to distribute some books we felt successful.

What does it mean to be successful? There are a lot of definitions of success out there these days. Often people think that success means making a lot of money or acquiring a lot of power. But there is another definition of success: progress in pursuit of a worthy goal. Then you are satisfied. That brings you joy.

So we felt successful because we felt joy and satisfaction in working to fulfill Śrīla Prabhupāda’s desire that his books be widely distributed. We felt successful; we felt empowered. We were poor as anything, but we felt successful. We didn’t have any money or power. We were laughed at, ridiculed, and spat upon. But when we came home and were with the other devotees, we felt really successful and happy. If we endeavor to serve, if we focus on the service, or if we just try our best to do the service, that is success. And what is that? We know that Śrīla Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa are pleased by our endeavor.

* * *

Vaiśeṣika Dāsa (ACBSP)

When someone receives a book, they receive permanent value. Everyone is trying to get permanent value; otherwise they wouldn’t be working so hard. Everyone is working hard—driving somewhere, studying to get a degree—to make some money. Why? Because they think they’ll get some permanent value out of that activity. Otherwise they wouldn’t do it. So Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.27), the Lord demands that whatever one may do in one's daily activities, such as worship, sacrifice, and offering charity, all the results should be offered to Him only. This offering of the results of pious acts unto the Supreme Lord is a sign of devotional service to the Lord and is of permanent value, whereas enjoying the same results for oneself is only temporary. Anything done on account of the Lord is a permanent asset and accumulates in the form of unseen piety for gradual promotion to the unalloyed devotional service of the Lord. These undetected pious activities will one day result in full-fledged devotional service by the grace of the Supreme Lord. Therefore, any pious act done on account of the Supreme Lord is also recommended here for those who are not pure devotees. [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.9.13, purport]

So anything done in connection with Kṛṣṇa as an act of devotional service is permanent. This means when we go to distribute books, when we go to introduce people to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, to the Holy Name, by distributing books, that interaction is completely transcendental, and people get permanent value every time they see or touch a book. Every time they meet a devotee they get some benefit, and that benefit is incalculable if they have some appreciation for the book or for the devotee, and even greater is their benefit if they offer a donation from their heart. "Let me give something," they think. "It's a good idea; I like what this person is doing." That person's spiritual benefit and progress are off the chart! It's indescribable how much good fortune comes to a person who comes in contact with one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

In the above-quoted purport Śrīla Prabhupāda says that any bit of devotional service done produces permanent benefit, which accumulates until one eventually comes to the stage of full-fledged devotional service by the grace of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. So this book distribution is such that we are taking the greatest treasure, the greatest object of permanent value, and introducing it to people, offering them the greatest benefit they can get in this life. And everyone is looking for this. Actually this is what everyone is seeking: They are going here and there, searching, hankering for some permanent value in life, and we are offering them the real thing.

When I go out on book distribution, I find it vital to remember just how powerful these books are and how anyone who comes in contact with them will be permanently benefited. In this regard, Śrīla Prabhupāda said in Vṛndāvana in 1976:

Suppose you are going to distribute books. But what is the idea? "It is Kṛṣṇa's book; it must be distributed." So Kṛṣṇa is remembered there. At the same time, because it is Kṛṣṇa's book, if somebody purchases, if he pays something, he'll look at it, something, that, "What this nonsense has written? Let me see." Then he will get some idea. If he reads one line, he comes hundred times forward to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This is the idea. . . *Svalpam apy asya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt*. This is preaching.

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

Those who have tried book distribution know for themselves that Kṛṣṇa awards an unusually sweet taste to anyone who makes even a small effort to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. Indeed, Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu writes in His *Śikṣāṣṭaka* prayers: *pratipadam pūrṇāmṛtāsvādanam*: “At every step, this *saṅkīrtana* process will give you a full taste of the nectar for which you are always anxious.”

But among the myriad wonderful ways in which one can broadcast the glories of the Holy Names, there is something utterly unique and special about distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. Confirming this, Jayanti Rādhikā Dāsī of ISKCON San Diego recently wrote to us about Mrs. Prakasha, a long-time member of ISKCON who this year went on book distribution for the first time. Jayanti Rādhikā wrote, “Mrs. Prakasha told me, ‘Doing this makes me feel like a real devotee; for the first time I feel truly connected to what Śrīla Prabhupāda wants us to do.’” Jayanti continued: “Mrs. Prakasha had determined that she would come out for two hours; but when her two hours were up, she didn’t want to leave.”

In a similar letter, senior devotee and veteran book distributor Rāgātmikā Dāsī of Alachua, Florida, expressed her realizations about getting back out on book distribution after a long hiatus. She wrote: “Well, needless to say, it all came back—the sweetest taste I had ever experienced in my life, from giving Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books to a conditioned soul. By Prabhupāda’s grace, I felt I never wanted to stop. You reminded me that Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted us to take over ‘the family business’—book distribution.”

There can be no doubt that book distribution is pleasing to Śrīla Prabhupāda, and anyone who takes it up is doing, in Prabhupāda’s words, “great service.” Consider how Śrīla Prabhupāda dedicated his life to his translations and purports, regularly rising before midnight to speak his divine realizations into a Dictaphone while everyone else was sleeping. Then in hundreds of lectures and letters, Śrīla Prabhupāda implored his followers to print and distribute his books profusely to the masses.

If we want to distribute books, we have to overcome the mind. *Indriyāṇi parāṇy āhur indriyebhyaḥ param manaḥ/ manasas tu parā buddhir yo buddheḥ paratas tu saḥ*. The senses are the lowest, and above the senses is the mind. Above the mind is the intelligence, and above the intelligence is the soul. It gets subtler and subtler the higher we go. We have to take shelter of the higher position and go above the senses and the mind to the intelligence. We need to develop our intelligence in Kṛṣṇa consciousness by studying Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books.

This is our technique—strong *sādhana*. Our main process for developing our intelligence is to take as our life and soul—above all other activities, whatever they may be—our *japa*. It has to be our *japa*; otherwise we can’t get out of this material world. It is impossible without the Holy Name. It is impossible without taking shelter of *japa*. You have to take shelter of the Name. You have to become most dedicated to chanting the Names—Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. That means regulated *japa* like anything. And the minimum is sixteen rounds. Minimum!

Your shrine should be your bead-bag. You should build a shrine around your bead-bag. Your bead-bag should be your main source of inspiration for your whole spiritual life. You have to take your beads, and you have to concentrate your mind, and you have to hear the Names—you

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaṅga

have to hear “Hare Kṛṣṇa”—and you have to do that every single day. This is the way to rise above the mind and come to the position of developing your finer intelligence, to come to the position of understanding that “I’m not my body,” that we have a relationship with Kṛṣṇa, and that our real self-interest is in taking shelter of the Supreme Personality of Godhead at every moment. If we have that understanding, then we’ll also have the impetus to go out on book distribution, because, as Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *ātmaupamyena sarvatra samam paśyati yo ’rjuna*: The true yogi compares his own self to others. So, if he is suffering, he looks at others and thinks, “Oh, these people are suffering too.” If you are becoming self-realized, if you are tasting something higher, you’ll see what is your actual position in this world and you’ll say, “Whoa, look at these people! They don’t even know that they’re not their bodies! I have to save them! This is my duty. I have to give them the *Bhagavad-gītā*. I have to give them a chance.”

Seven Steps to Success for Book Distributors

1. If we practice, we’ll become expert at it. Practice makes perfect.
2. Cultivate the desire to distribute.
3. Read Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books.
4. Chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra with attention.
5. Take shelter of the Holy Names; in between speaking to people, chant.
6. Depend on Kṛṣṇa for the results.
7. Be organized—take it seriously.

Devotees who read and then distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are performing the highest welfare work. Those engaged in this service—and those engaged in encouraging others to engage in it—are certainly privileged.

At a Prabhupāda Festival in New Dvārakā, His Grace Kṛṣṇa-kānti Prabhu recounted a story emphasizing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s strong desire that we remain focused on distributing his books.

Kṛṣṇa-kānti told how at the devotee recording studio called Golden Avatar he had produced a recording of a devotional song, which he made into a vinyl phonographic record. Kṛṣṇa-kānti and Karandhara Prabhu, the GBC in LA at the time, took the record to Śrīla Prabhupāda and

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

played it for him. After listening, Śrīla Prabhupāda asked what they intended to do with it. Kṛṣṇa-kānti told him they had been thinking it would be nice to mass produce the record so that the devotees could sell it to the public the way they were selling incense to produce revenue.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “This is all right, as long as it doesn’t diminish book distribution by even this much.” Upon saying this, Śrīla Prabhupāda held up his hand and pinched together his thumb and index finger, leaving not even enough space for the light of day to pass through. He then repeated his statement and gesture.

Kṛṣṇa-kānti said that after seeing and hearing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s dramatic instruction, he and Karandhara left the room and never talked about the record again.

While reading the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* I came across this very nice purport (SB 4.22.47):

Great personalities of the material world are very eager to render welfare service to human society, but actually no one can render better service than one who distributes the knowledge of spiritual realization in relation with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. All living entities are within the clutches of the illusory energy. Forgetting their real identity, they hover in material existence, transmigrating from one body to another in search of a peaceful life. Since these living entities have very little knowledge of self-realization, they are not getting any relief, although they are very anxious to attain peace of mind and some substantial happiness. Saintly persons like the Kumāras, Nārada, Prahlāda, Janaka, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, and Kapiladeva, as well as the followers of such authorities as the Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* and their servants, can render a valuable service to humanity by disseminating knowledge of the relationship between the Supreme Personality of Godhead and the living entity. Such knowledge is the perfect benediction for humanity.

Knowledge of Kṛṣṇa is such a great gift that it is impossible to repay the benefactor. Therefore Pṛthu Mahārāja requested the Kumāras to be satisfied by their own benevolent activities in delivering souls from the clutches of *māyā*. The King saw that there was no other way to satisfy them for their exalted activities. The word *vinoda-pātram* can be divided into two words, *vinā* and *uda-pātram*, or can be understood as one word, *vinoda-pātram*, which means “joker.” A joker’s activities simply arouse laughter, and a person who tries to repay the spiritual master or teacher of the transcendental message of Kṛṣṇa becomes a laughingstock just like a joker because it is not possible to repay such a debt. The best friend and benefactor of all people is one who awakens humanity to its original Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

I especially appreciate that Pṛthu Mahārāja requested the Kumāras to be satisfied by their own benevolent activities because the gifts they are distributing are so valuable that the recipients cannot possibly repay them. (When I ask for a donation for a book, I often say, “Sir, we won’t sell these books because they are too valuable—they are spiritual books—so we just take a donation. Give the most you can.”)

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

A profound sense of gratitude awakened by associating with Śrīla Prabhupāda through his books should be our impetus for distributing them to others. Moreover, the activity of distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda's books is its own reward. By that activity one gains the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda and subsequently the mercy of Kṛṣṇa; and knowledge of the Lord and detachment from matter then become concomitant benefits.

While in Japan, I had the great fortune to go out on *harināma saṅkīrtana* in Tokyo. One evening at the temple we formed a party of five and went to a major train station, where we set up to chant on a sidewalk just outside the station. Three of us formed the chanting party, while the other two set up a little book table in front of us. These two, His Holiness Kavicandra Swami and His Grace Nitāi Gauracandra Prabhu, stood by as part of the chanting party but were poised to scan the faces of each passerby for any sign of interest in the chanting.

Each time the streetlight at the end of our block turned green, it let loose hundreds of pedestrians heading home from work. The Japanese have a tendency to keep to themselves in public, so even while our little *kīrtana* party belted out the *mahā-mantra* to various catchy tunes, most of the commuters walked past us as if they hadn't heard a thing. Among every throng, however, there were always a few who couldn't help but look over to see what the tumult was all about. The looks could come from anyone: A businessman throwing a quick, curious glance, a mother and child stopping briefly to smile, or a purple-haired student who would suddenly give up walking to gawk with wide-open mouth and eyes.

Upon seeing even the slightest glimmer of attraction (or sign of recognition) from a person in the crowd, Kavicandra Swami or Nitāi Gauracandra Prabhu would spring to the side of that fortunate soul to offer him or her books and *prasādam*. This was amazingly effective, as most would end up buying a book; many even stayed to listen to the *kīrtana*.

The day after this experience, our traveling party was reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* together when we came upon a verse in chapter 3 of the Eighth Canto, called "Gajendra's Prayers of Surrender." In his prayers Gajendra sings, *muktāya bhūri-karuṇāya namo 'layāya*: "I offer my obeisances to the Lord, who is untouched by the contamination of material nature, who is unlimitedly merciful, and who is never inattentive or idle for the purpose of my deliverance." In other words, the Lord is always our well-wisher and is always seeking ways to deliver us. Hearing this I, thought, "Then what is my problem? If the Lord is trying incessantly to deliver me, why am I still stuck in the material world?"

Then I remembered the vacant expressions on some of the faces of the people who passed by our *saṅkīrtana* party. How expert they were at averting their eyes, minds, and hearts so as to ignore the loud, blissful chanting! I also remembered the eagle-eyed devotees vigilantly scanning the crowds, looking for any opportunity to impart wisdom and mercy.

These remembrances I then related to my own condition: The Lord has been tirelessly endeavoring since time immemorial to get my attention, impart soothing instructions, and give me good tidings from my real home in the spiritual world. Unfortunately, I've been expert at ignoring Him.

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

Saṅkīrtana is directly the Lord's work. When we trouble ourselves to go out to distribute books, we are aligning perfectly with the Lord's mission, helping Him as He calls out to the conditioned souls: “*Jiva jago! Jiva jago!* Please awaken and come home to Me!”

Śrīla Prabhupāda made our lives exciting. He pushed us, and he was definitely not accustomed to thinking small. In thinking of what my life was like in the movement while Śrīla Prabhupāda walked the planet, I often recall a famous quotation from Helen Keller: “Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.”

Life with Śrīla Prabhupāda was and still is a daring adventure.

After arriving in America, at times Śrīla Prabhupāda barely had enough money to pay his rent. Even during these lean financial times, he wasn't at all poor. He carried the most valuable currency of all: absolute faith in the words of his guru and Kṛṣṇa. He took every risk for Kṛṣṇa. He was fearless at all times.

Because of this fearlessness, when his first young followers met Śrīla Prabhupāda they became emboldened, and with little or no worldly training they went out to change the world on Kṛṣṇa's behalf. And they did. They were convinced that by following the order of their guru they would not fail. They were correct!

Śrīla Prabhupāda's “boys and girls” traveled the world, meeting dignitaries and rock stars, opening temples, making hit albums, organizing festivals, and publishing and distributing millions of magazines and books.

In 1975 the BBT was moving too slowly to keep up with Śrīla Prabhupāda's translating. The manuscripts for the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* had been sitting for some time without being published.

Then on a morning walk at Venice Beach in Los Angeles, surrounded by senior devotees and the heads of the BBT, Śrīla Prabhupāda suddenly said that he wanted all seventeen volumes of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* published within two months.

Until that time, the BBT had been able to publish only one book every four months. Now Śrīla Prabhupāda was ordering that all seventeen be finished in two months! The head of the American BBT, Rāmeśvara Dāsa, shocked upon hearing Śrīla Prabhupāda's order, replied, “Śrīla Prabhupāda, that's impossible.”

Upon hearing this, Śrīla Prabhupāda suddenly stopped walking. He planted his cane in the sand and said, “*Impossible* is a word found in a fool's dictionary.” The devotees were practically speechless.

But as Śrīla Prabhupāda's order began to sink in, Rāmeśvara and the other devotees began to feverishly plan how to execute it. With this, the famous *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* marathon began. For the next two months the devotees worked practically without sleeping or eating to publish the seventeen volumes in just two months. After two months of marathon, they went to *maṅgala-ārati* with tears in their eyes, feeling the mercy of the pure devotee, Śrīla Prabhupāda.

At *Bhagavad-gītā* 3.15 Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “The all-pervading Transcendence is eternally situated in acts of sacrifice.” Human life is meant not for working hard for bodily maintenance but for reawakening our eternal relationship with the Lord and then going back to Godhead. All this can be achieved by acts of divine sacrifice.

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

The best sacrifice is to please the pure devotee. Fortunately for us, we've been given that chance. Śrīla Prabhupāda has left us with as much service as we like—if we like. It is entirely up to us. Let us be bold in his service.

Saṅkīrtana is the *yuga-dharma* and brings good fortune to all. There is no doubt about it: the performance of *saṅkīrtana* is the panacea for all the problems of the world.

All our earthly problems are due to ignorance of our eternal spiritual nature.

Rūpa Goswami says that those who hear the *saṅkīrtana* party even once immediately become washed of sins and gain an inkling of their spiritual identity. And as we've already seen, people who are especially fortunate also eagerly join our *saṅkīrtana* party upon seeing and hearing it.

Furthermore, Śrīla Prabhupāda made it clear to us that books like *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Bhagavad-gītā* are written *kīrtana*. Those who receive these books and read one word become eternally benefited.

Distribution of books is *saṅkīrtana*. When we distribute transcendental literature, people take it home to read and share with others. These books last for decades and are slowly infiltrating homes, libraries, schools, and motels and becoming popular, as is the practice of *bhakti-yoga*.

Every despot in the world knows that books change people's lives. This is why historically a dictator's first order of business after assuming power is to censor written material, sometimes even burning books. When I visited Vietnam I quickly became acquainted with the Communist policy prohibiting the distribution of literature not sanctioned by the government.

Śrīla Prabhupada's powerful books are the basis of our ISKCON movement. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, is revolutionary and will eternally benefit all who read it.

Prasādam distribution is similarly potent. People everywhere appreciate receiving tasty food given out of friendship and love. Distribution of *kṛṣṇa-prasādam* creates goodwill, and the recipients make permanent spiritual advancement just by accepting it. No matter one's present condition—human, animal, lowly insect—a soul who accepts *prasādam* gets benefit.

In the *Gītā* Kṛṣṇa often lauds those who do good to others. For instance, at *Bhagavad-gītā* 5.25 Kṛṣṇa says, "Those who are always busy working for the welfare of all living beings achieve liberation in the Supreme." And at *Gītā* 16.2 Kṛṣṇa says *dayā bhūteṣu*, showing mercy to other living entities, is one of the primary divine qualities. And again, at *Gītā* 11.55, Kṛṣṇa says that those who are "friendly to every living being" certainly come to Him. Regarding this last statement, Śrīla Prabhupāda comments:

A Kṛṣṇa conscious person knows that if a man is suffering it is due to his forgetfulness of his eternal relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, the highest benefit one can render to human society is relieving one's neighbor from all material problems. In such a way, a pure devotee is engaged in the service of the Lord. Now, we can imagine how merciful Kṛṣṇa is to those engaged in His service, risking everything for Him. Therefore it is certain that such persons must reach the supreme planet after leaving the body.

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

By Kṛṣṇa's mercy, those who perform *saṅkīrtana* gain clarity and spiritual health. They quickly become spiritually advanced and find an inner fulfillment that is not available anywhere else in the universe.

Kṛṣṇa is a wish-fulfilling tree. He gives everyone what they desire. As we perform *saṅkīrtana*, Kṛṣṇa personally clears our hearts and minds, allowing us to desire our highest benefit in life. Indeed, those who perform *saṅkīrtana* live with Kṛṣṇa constantly. And as Sañjaya says at *Bhagavad-gītā* 18.78, for such persons there is always opulence, victory, extraordinary power, and morality.

Those who perform *saṅkīrtana* to please the transcendental senses of the Lord never tire of it, nor are they restricted in their ability to perform *saṅkīrtana*. As they desire to increase the *saṅkīrtana-yajña* by spreading it all over the world, Kṛṣṇa gives them facility. Such persons factually swim in an ever-expanding ocean of happiness (*ānandāmbudhi-varadhanam*).

So let us focus on saving one living entity at a time, beginning with ourselves. As we do so, let us continue refining and increasing our practice of *saṅkīrtana*, investing in new tools, inviting new members to join, employing everything at our disposal for increasing this *yajña*.

* * *

Daivīśakti Devī Dāsī (ACBSP)

In 1970, when Śrī Kṛṣṇa allowed me to realize He exists, my first reaction was that I need to tell the world about Him. This was before I met the devotees, so I could not figure out how to tell everyone I met about Kṛṣṇa. Soon Kṛṣṇa led me to His devotees, and I understood that by distributing Prabhupāda's books I could help other suffering living entities come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Since then I have been trying to distribute Prabhupāda's books to educate people about Kṛṣṇa.

What inspires me to distribute is the instructions received from Śrīla Prabhupāda and my love for Prabhupāda's books. Also, a strong and consistent prayer to help people become Kṛṣṇa conscious. Books are the basis of understanding Kṛṣṇa consciousness and advancing on the path back to Kṛṣṇa. Reading Prabhupāda's books is like taking medicine. It cures us of the material disease, which keeps us trapped in this material world. If we have something wonderful that can cure the world of misery, then naturally we would like to share it with the rest of humanity. That is the essence of book distribution.

Many times Prabhupāda said we should dedicate our life to distributing books. To do that we have to read the books and try to understand them. Then we'll naturally be inspired to distribute the knowledge within them. We shouldn't degrade ourselves to a competitive mentality when it comes to book distribution. Always see the person we are speaking with as a suffering living entity whom Kṛṣṇa has sent to us. We should try our best to help each person we speak with. Never think fruitively; such a mentality will destroy our enthusiasm and compassion. Don't just distribute books, but sincerely try to help others come closer to Kṛṣṇa. If you find someone interested, spend some time with them and get some contact information. The more we want to help people, the more people Kṛṣṇa will send to us who are open to being helped. Don't be afraid to try new ideas. Be brave, be strong, and be sure that Kṛṣṇa is guiding you. If you are not inspired in what you are doing, you won't be able to inspire others. You must love what you are doing for Kṛṣṇa; otherwise, something is wrong. Prabhupāda once told some devotees who were

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaṅga

trying to force me to do something I was not willing to do: “Force does not work. You cannot force.” So if you want to distribute books throughout your life, love what you are doing and do it voluntarily, not because you are being forced to do it.

* * *

Nidrā Devī Dāsī (ACBSP)

Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted us to dedicate our lives to distributing the mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. To do that we have to cultivate the desire to distribute the mercy. It is a lifelong cultivation. Giving Kṛṣṇa is an eternal service, so why not give much of your lifetime or all of it to book distribution? We need to associate with those who distribute books and encourage book distribution, and also with devotees in general who enliven us in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We need to continue with strong *sādhana* and make Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books the basis of our lives—hearing from them and serving the book *bhāgavata* and person *bhāgavata*, praying for the mercy to distribute, and keeping the book Deities in our hearts.

The distribution of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Bhagavad-gītā* are eternal services. It is our family business. Books are the basis, always. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that there will always be customers for our books. He himself went out and personally distributed, so certainly this is respectable and glorious, now and always. Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote to his disciples that the books and magazines are our most important propaganda weapons to defeat ignorance and that the more we produce literature and sell it all over the world, the more the world will be delivered from its “suicide course.” He wrote that it is the most important preaching work, and he thanked us for helping him. He lives forever in his instructions, and so we keep on distributing.

I started distributing books in 1973. My topmost inspiration has been Śrīla Prabhupāda—his books, his *vāṇī*, his life. “Distribute books, distribute books, distribute books.” Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purports are such an inspiration. His desire to expand this mission inspires me to distribute such great treasures in book form; share the wealth. Just meditating upon the benefit the souls receive is special inspiration. People are suffering, and this knowledge will save them. To be an instrument in this mission is very inspiring. Great inspiration also comes from the association of book distributors and devotees in general. Of course, all of us get inspiration from our beloved Deities. Keeping Them in our hearts during the day inspires book distribution and all of our services.

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s love and mercy, the holy names, and the association of devotees are what inspire me to continue distributing.

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

We are on a mission, and souls are suffering; we have the medicine, and the need is urgent—urgent for us to continue for our own purification as well.

Devotional service is eternal. In the spiritual world everyone shares Kṛṣṇa, so we practice to do the same here.

It is inspiring to taste the nectar of book distribution and see the conditioned souls get the mercy. Inspiration also comes from the blessings of the *paramparā*, from those who continue to distribute, and from enthusiastic devotees. In the USA Śrīla Prabhupāda started at age seventy. His desire to see his books distributed widely is the major inspiration behind book distribution, and we can pray to receive that inspirational mercy from Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Guru-Gaurāṅga are also the inspiration. Deities in our temple and all around the world give inspiration.

All souls are looking for Kṛṣṇa, for genuine loving exchanges. Book distribution is part of that exchange, where souls connect with Kṛṣṇa and the distributor.

To distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a natural activity of the soul. We understand how pleasing it is to Śrīla Prabhupāda and the *paramparā*.

Nothing is more important than to develop love for Kṛṣṇa and to share it.

Book distribution is nondifferent from the nine processes of devotional service. It is a complete devotional-service package that anyone can do. It just takes the desire and the mercy to cultivate the desire.

* * *

Ānakadundubhi Dāsa

Book distribution is lots of fun, a never-ending adventure, always full of bliss, even in the most difficult times. I know I will never be able to repay Śrīla Prabhupāda for the precious gift he gave me, so I am trying to fulfill his first desire: “If you really want to please me, distribute my books.” I plan to go out for the rest of this life, depending on the mercy of Lord Caitanya, Śrīla Prabhupāda, and all the Vaiṣṇavas.

Book distribution is a continuous reminder of how miserable material life is and how true the words are in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. It is a pure spiritual activity that purifies us more than any other service. We see how Kṛṣṇa is always present and is arranging all the situations, and ultimately how He is the real doer and we are just the recipients of His mercy, tools that He kindly chooses to use. Our faith in book distribution grows stronger and stronger every day. It is the only way to save the world!

* * *

Ānanda Vidyā Dāsa

It is amazing that even one book is distributed. It is a miracle that one person gives a donation to buy these books. What are these people who buy books doing? They are taking money they would use for sense gratification and purchasing a book that will basically chastise them. Indeed, the books are telling them that they are doing everything wrong, that they should give up their bad habits, and that they should completely change their lives. If they knew what

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaṅga

they were getting, they probably wouldn't give a donation. But because the books are attractive—Kṛṣṇa is all-attractive—so many people are inspired to take a book, and they experience the bliss of Kṛṣṇa consciousness right there at the *saṅkīrtana* spot, right there in the shopping mall. Why? Because they are associating with a devotee, they are surrendering to the devotee, they are giving a donation, they are doing devotional service right there, and they are getting Kṛṣṇa. It's as if they are coming in front of the Deity in the temple and giving a donation or offering obeisances. It is just as potent. Just as Kṛṣṇa is nondifferent from his Deity form, Kṛṣṇa is nondifferent from His books. People are coming in contact with Kṛṣṇa directly.

Book distribution is such a direct way to preach. A conditioned soul is completely wrapped up in ignorance; he couldn't be further away from Kṛṣṇa if he tried. He is completely in the ignorance of material illusion, and suddenly Kṛṣṇa is right there before him. All of a sudden he has the opportunity to associate with a devotee, to please a devotee. It is stated that without the mercy of a devotee one cannot understand Kṛṣṇa, one cannot understand this philosophy. So by pleasing the *saṅkīrtana* devotee—just by being nice to him and surrendering to what he says and giving a donation to him and just making friends with that devotee and pleasing him—Kṛṣṇa is pleased, and thus He makes it possible that the person will be able to understand the book.

It is a wonderful mission Śrīla Prabhupāda has given us. In this age, not so many people are coming to the temples. The temples are there, and they are an important aspect of the preaching. But so many people will never come to a temple. So what to do? We bring Kṛṣṇa to them; we bring the temple to them. In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* we read how Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu gave up the company of the goddess of fortune, namely his wife Viṣṇupriyā, as well as His happy home and His loving mother, and out of His great mercy He ran after the conditioned souls to give them love of Kṛṣṇa. So that is practically what the *saṅkīrtana* movement is: we are running after the conditioned souls to give them Kṛṣṇa. We are not waiting for them to come to the temple. We are arranging it so that all they have to do is reach into their wallet and give a donation, and they've made the connection. We try to stop them as nicely as we can, but ultimately Kṛṣṇa stops them. Then we engage them in some quick conversation, make friends with them, and show them a book. The book is right there in their hand. We say our mantra, and we come to the critical point: "Now please take this book and give a donation." We cannot force them. As the saying goes in America, "You can lead a horse to the water, but you can't make him drink." So we arrange the whole situation for this conditioned soul to connect with Kṛṣṇa. But that one point—taking a book and giving a donation—depends on his free will: he can decide whether to surrender to Kṛṣṇa or not.

This mission is really the mercy of Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda. It is said that to get the mercy of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, one has to approach Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. But to get the mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, one has to get the mercy of Lord Nityānanda. And, one step further, Śrīla Prabhupāda said that to get the mercy of Lord Nityānanda, one has to approach Jagāi and Mādhāi. That is the mood. We are approaching the Jagāis and Mādhāis in the mood of being representatives of Lord Nityānanda, on the order of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu:

yāre dekha, tāre kaha 'kṛṣṇa'-upadeśa

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

āmāra ājñāya guru hañā tāra' ei deśa

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu said, “On My order, you go out and become a guru by presenting the instructions of Kṛṣṇa.” Which means presenting the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa’s personal instructions, and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, which consists of instructions by Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa’s devotees about Kṛṣṇa and devotional service. But it is all absolute, *kṛṣṇa-upadeśa*, and to present these instructions is the order of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

He also gave that order to Lord Nityānanda and Haridāsa Ṭhākura. One day He told them, “Now go door to door and beg alms like mendicants, but don’t ask for anything except that they chant the names of Kṛṣṇa.”

So they accepted the order of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. It was difficult. The pious people naturally fell at their feet. Nityānanda and Haridāsa would ask them to chant, and the pious people would naturally take it up—“Yes, yes, we will chant.” But the rascals would blaspheme them and criticize them and throw things at them and try to get them in trouble in different ways. So they had to face so many problems. But it was the order of Lord Caitanya, so they had to do it.

But the problems are the mercy. That is why Kṛṣṇa says, *na ca tasmān manuṣyeṣu kaścin me priya-kṛttamaḥ*: “The preachers are most dear to Me.” Why? Because the preachers take so many risks. There are so many austerities they have to undergo, and out of compassion they tolerate (*titikṣavaḥ kāruṇikāḥ*). They tolerate so many problematic situations to give mercy. And therefore Kṛṣṇa is so pleased with those who take up this mission.

* * *

Hrīmān Kṛṣṇa Dāsa

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are the Deities, the *saṅkīrtana* spot is our altar, and selling the books is our *pūjā*. This is the real Deity worship—on the reality altar, where we see it all happen before our eyes. In this *pūjā* we can’t hide behind the curtain of pretense, because you have to deal with all your *anarthas* directly! I can imagine so many things—“I’m such a humble devotee, I’m so this, I’m so that.” But how humble are you when someone on the street argues with you to your face and then tells you to go to hell? On the street Kṛṣṇa will directly show us all the envy, greed, lust, and pride in our hearts, and we’re left gagging for his mercy. “Kṛṣṇa! Please save me!” We are forced to cry out like this, and this is the perfection. Kṛṣṇa will make us depend on Him.

* * *

Jayānanda Dāsa

One day I noticed that my *saṅkīrtana* partner was having an exceptionally huge day while I was struggling like crazy. At one point I also noticed that his book cart was running out. So I took it to the van to reload it for him. When I came back he was kind of upset that I would serve him like that.

Then he said he was thinking of taking a break and getting some fruit, but he didn’t want to stop distributing because the books were flying out. So I said, “Okay, keep distributing. I’ll buy

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaṅga

you some fruit.” Before he could protest I was on my way to the store. I came back ten minutes later and he’d distributed 23 more books! Of course I praised him like anything, but he became really annoyed and said something like, “If somebody loves me only because I get a big result, I don’t appreciate that love. The real thing is to always try to be a servant, even if that service is insignificant, like buying a banana for your friend.”

He was convinced that I distributed those books by buying him a banana (and an apple), and I was convinced that he distributed so many books because he had such a nice understanding of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He did 146 books that day. I did 28.

* * *

Karuṇā-dhāriṇī Devī Dāsī

In between people I try to think of Kṛṣṇa’s form or lotus feet or chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. *Saṅkīrtana* really facilitates this type of meditation. There is an ecstatic festival in the temple of the mind waiting for you on *saṅkīrtana*. When you come home to do Deity worship, it means a lot to you. I think every *saṅkīrtana* devotee should have the privilege of doing Deity worship. It enriches the *saṅkīrtana* experience, and vice-versa.

Prabhupāda said every devotee should learn the art of book distribution. Did he say anything half-heartedly? No. He knew what it would do for us, how it would test us, how it would increase our faith, and how it would sharpen our preaching skills. Properly done, book distribution fosters selflessness. Everyone knows that the really long-time, steady book distributors are some of the most self-sacrificing and humble devotees in our society.

Caution! Beware! Reading quotes from “*If You Want to Please Me . . .*” or “*Distribute Books, Distribute Books, Distribute Books*” can put a person in an altered state of awareness. And if you read them out loud, others may become similarly affected.

A devotee read the following words aloud to a gathering of devotees:

There is no doubt about it; to distribute books is our most important activity. The temple is a place not for eating and sleeping, but as a base from which we send out our soldiers to fight with maya. “Fight with maya” means to drop thousands and millions of books into the laps of the conditioned souls. Just like during the war time the bombs are raining from the sky like anything. [Śrīla Prabhupāda letter to Rāmeśvara, 3 August 1973]

Everyone was a little struck just by the sound of it. Why do these old words sound like some fresh poetry? It is only a paragraph taken from a letter written by Śrīla Prabhupāda in 1973. It does not rhyme, it has no meter, and it refers to *bombing*!

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

Śrīla Prabhupāda surely saw the weaknesses of us Westerners, with our opulence, influence, and just plain misplaced aggression. He knew we needed more than a mild temple life to make us satisfied. His words “Just like in war time the bombs are raining from the sky like anything” capture and engage our *imagination*.

Movements other than the *saṅkīrtana* movement simply cannot engage the spiritual energy in the hearts of mankind so completely. For example, the New Age Movement has many persons practicing yoga, eating organic diets, and following various regimens for self-improvement. How very powerful it has been over the last so many years! Modern people’s strong desire for a quality lifestyle leads them to place their faith in elaborate seminars, retreats, study, association, crystals, and candles.

They get an improved sense of well-being. They may learn for the first time that they are something other than their mind. They may start to consider healthier choices when they fill their stomachs. They try yoga *āsanas* and breathing to cut down on the stress caused by their career and poor relationships.

Devotees know their newfound information is old wine in a new bottle. If they are something other than their material mind, as they may discover, then what is the identity of the soul? If going organic is their new fascination, how can they learn that their food should be an offering to God? A sequence of *āsanas* and breathing is a good cure for a headache, but without knowing the Yogeśvara, it is all sadly lacking. Prabhupāda explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, “Without Kṛṣṇa consciousness they do not even know what are the causes for material happiness.” And so the New Age continues, but because it has no all-encompassing engagement such as devotional service and the distribution of Kṛṣṇa conscious information, its disciples remain self-improved but stuck on self-improvement.

Being full of contradictions, all forms of religion but *bhāgavata-dharma* work under conceptions of fruitive results and distinctions of “you and I” and “yours and mine.” The followers of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* have no such consciousness. They are all Kṛṣṇa conscious, thinking that they are Kṛṣṇa’s and Kṛṣṇa is theirs. ” [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 6.16.41, translation]

We were born in an age of popular innovations such as fast food (cow slaughter) and nuclear weapons (human slaughter). We need deeper purification than we even know. Śrīla Prabhupāda could see exactly what we needed. He was a book distributor himself, and he understood its potential for engaging us. In fact, he invented it. He traveled all over India distributing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, and then he came to America and distributed here.

“Fight with *māyā*’ means to drop thousands and millions of books into the laps of the conditioned souls.” He could understand that book distribution would engage us in a way that we would be physically, actively, and very sincerely approaching others who have the same contamination as ourselves. That is perhaps the single most truly beautiful and addicting quality of book distribution: the more you work for others, the more it works on you. It puts you in an altered state of awareness. If you are truly out there for the purpose of benefiting the people you meet, if that is actually your pleasure, your happiness, and your meditation, you are the luckiest person in the world, and Kṛṣṇa is in your hand.

* * *

Madhumāṅgala Dāsa

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

At the Somerset West shopping mall I stopped a young man coming toward me. He seemed to be in deep thought. I said to him, “Hey, smile. You look so serious. What’s the problem?”

“I don’t know what Christmas present to buy,” he replied.

“I have just the present you need,” I said. “Follow me.” I showed him a complete set of the books I had with me. He looked at them with great interest. “Unfortunately,” he said, “I can’t afford the whole lot. I’m a student, you know.”

“That’s okay. You can take half. Who are the books for?”

“My girlfriend. A family member of hers has just died, and these books are just what she needs.”

“That’s very thoughtful of you. She will most definitely get great benefit from reading these books. Have you read any books by Śrīla Prabhupāda before?”

“No, but my mother once told me she had met a traveling monk who showed her similar books.” Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are the greatest gift to human society.

After he took the books and left, I thought of something I’d read in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Ādi 7.20–21):

The characteristics of Kṛṣṇa are understood to be a storehouse of transcendental love. Although that storehouse of love certainly came with Kṛṣṇa when He was present, it was sealed. But when Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu came with His associates of the Pañca-tattva, they broke the seal and plundered the storehouse to taste transcendental love of Kṛṣṇa. The more they tasted it, the more their thirst for it grew.

So when we are giving out Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books to so many fortunate spirit souls, we are helping Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu distribute the treasure love of God, which is the greatest gift and the perfection of life.

I was relishing the nectar of distributing books. About an hour before we were to leave our spot, a security guard came and asked me to leave. At that point I was distributing books at a very rapid pace.

What to do? I had to comply with the guard’s request. Where was I to go? All the surrounding shops were starting to close for the night.

Then I saw a McDonald’s across the street. By the mercy of Guru and Kṛṣṇa I noticed the queue of cars at the takeout driveway. “That’s it!” I thought. “They’re all lined up and fired up to get their Big Macs, and while they’re waiting I’ll give them a Big Book.”

I started at the end of the queue and handed the driver a book: “Here, check this out. Have a look.” Gradually I made my way to the front. Then I returned to the end of the queue and collected the donations. I did this again and again.

All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda, by whose mercy the patient customers on their way to a hellish existence were taking books, getting purified, and beginning their journey back home, back to Godhead! Śrīla Prabhupāda said we must think of ways and means to distribute books.

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

* * *

Nanda Dāsa

I was having a hard time distributing books for a couple of days, and I couldn't figure out why. I checked my e-mail after the two-day struggle and found a letter from Omaha, Nebraska, USA. Who do I know from Omaha?

As I read on, I gradually recollected the person writing me.

Several months earlier, while distributing books in Kansas City, I had met a man from "The Street Ministry." The Street Ministry is a group of Christian preachers who wander around downtown areas in America telling people about Jesus. Generally we avoid such militant Christian preachers. But I had made friends with one of them after meeting with him several times. I had even invited him to the Rūpānuga Vedic College in Kansas City for the Sunday Feast program.

Eventually he came to a Sunday Feast along with a bunch of his friends. During their visit they were so grateful for the experience that they insisted on personally thanking me by sending me some photographs they had taken during the *kīrtanas*, lecture, *prasādam* feast, etc. Hence the email.

I had a realization about why I had been having a hard time distributing books the last couple of days. Why I wasn't able to taste the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and give it to others. I had become impersonal. "Absolute is sentient, thou hast proved/ Impersonal calamity thou hast removed."

I had a personal relationship with this preacher that had led to both of us moving a step forward in spiritual lives: The preacher got *prasādam*; I got a personal realization. Isn't it the most amazing thing that sometimes when we take up devotional life we have to learn how to become personal again?

Before receiving transcendental knowledge, our personal relationships were based on various layers of extended selfishness. But when we first learn renunciation, that selfishness so easily translates into impersonalism.

I didn't realize that people I met were individual persons with an individual approach to God. People are on different levels and can take only as much as their level allows. I had forgotten about the preacher who wrote to me. But when I remembered how personal he was, it struck me how impersonal I had become.

So now I wanted to be a person with persons.

I replied to the email and left the temple with renewed vigor and push. After all, once you get a taste for book distribution, it's difficult to stop, despite the difficulties involved.

* * *

Navina Nirada Dasa

I met a simple man, your ordinary 9-to-5 worker, in a chemical company in Basel, Switzerland. He was not really interested in the topics I tried to explain to him. But he had a great fortune: in his company worked a really nice devotee. He preached to the workers, brought them *prasādam* cakes, and also distributed books. The worker I met was very impressed with this

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaṅga

devotee, telling me that he worked the hardest, that he was the best at his job, and that he helped other workers too.

Now, this man was by no means a philosopher, but because he was so impressed by the good example of that devotee, he understood that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is something extraordinary. And he happily bought three books.

So, whoever you are, wherever you are, and whatever you're doing, if your character is first class you can convince people about Kṛṣṇa consciousness just by your example. That is actual preaching. It is not easy to convince someone simply by words, especially if one is not an expert speaker. It takes both *ācāra* and *pracāra*, perfect behavior and perfect speaking.

* * *

Nayana Rañjana Dāsa

In our war against Māyā we have to utilize our complete arsenal. *Back to Godhead* magazine is a single bullet, while a subscription to BTG sent out monthly through the mail is like automatic fire. Then there are the paperback books—each one like a grenade. They are more likely than magazines to remain in a person's home.

Then we have the heavy artillery, shells fired one by one or in short salvos. These are the hardbound books. They cause permanent damage as they plummet into people's homes. Sometimes they lay latent for many years, waiting to explode as soon as they're pulled down from a bookshelf.

But then there is the *brahmāstra*, the nuclear warhead—the Full Set! This is no ordinary weapon, for it can deliver the final blow against Māyā and end the war. The Full Set solidifies Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the purchaser's life, leading the person to become a life member or a fully initiated devotee.

To be effective, the Full Set *brahmāstra* must be strategically armed. ISKCON must have distributors trained in the art of launching this devastating weapon into the homes of the fortunate. These soldiers, although expert in all types of warfare, will take advantage of any opportunity to deliver a Full Set. As Māyā retreats, more and more of these opportunities will arise.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda said, every temple is a base from which to send out our soldiers to battle Māyā, and so each temple should have at least one devotee trained in launching the Full-Set *brahmāstra*.

It's not necessary to decrease any other program, but we should just add this powerful weapon to our arsenal. As Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "We will always have customers for our books."

* * *

Parameśvara Dāsa

I had an interesting dream while taking a fifteen-minute nap while on book distribution at a concert. I dreamt I was in a temple somewhere, and I saw the *mūrti* of Śrīla Prabhupāda on the *vyāsāsana*. Out of affection I touched Prabhupāda's shoulder, and the *mūrti* came to life! It was

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

of course very moving for me to see this. So I thought that the best thing to do was ask Prabhupāda if there was anything I could do for him. All of a sudden the temple room was filled with a lot of people moving about, and Prabhupāda asked me, “Could you stop someone and bring him here? I want to preach.”

I tried to stop someone but I couldn’t, so I said to Prabhupāda: “Prabhupāda, I’m not able to stop anyone. Maybe we could find someone who is standing still.”

So he got up from the *vyāsāsana*, and we began walking together to find someone for him to preach to. One fellow saw me and said, “Oh, you’re the book guy. I want that *Science of Self-Realization*.”

I said “OK” and gave him the SSR, and he gave three dollars for it. Then I told him, “There’s this amazing spiritual master who wants to speak to you. He’s the author of the book.” Prabhupāda was right there. Then the fellow opened the book, and Prabhupāda was gone in an instant, the dream broke, and I woke up.

I learned from this dream the truth of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statement that “I am in my books.” I really realized it after this dream. Prabhupāda and I were looking for someone for him to preach to, but as soon as the guy opened the book, Prabhupāda disappeared, indicating that he is preaching to people through his books.

* * *

Rādhikā-ramaṇa Dāsa

While on *saṅkīrtana* at one of the night-life spots in Tokyo, I saw a mafia guy. He was standing with a group of his bodyguards and groupies. Later I found out he was the owner of one of the major nightclubs in that area and a big player in the black market. I approached him despite the objections and obstructions of his entourage. He looked at me trustfully and directed everyone to let me through to show him the books. I felt quite insecure, but I really tried to give it my best shot. It was an intense moment, having to face my own shortcomings. Could he sense my lack of sincerity? Although he took all the books I showed him and gave a nice donation, I still felt a little disappointed with myself. I analyzed the whole exchange again and again—how the worm of false ego had bitten me and infected my dealings with him.

I continued distributing for awhile, but because of guilty feelings I just had to go up to him and tell him, “You know, I’m not pure. There is lust, pride, envy, and greed in me. But these books are pure; please keep them and read them.” Because this honest attempt touched his heart, he became very respectful. We built up a very trusting relationship, and every time I met him he always invited me to go for dinner at his nightclub, and I had to explain that I couldn’t because I’m a monk.

A few months later I saw him in a florist’s shop, so I waved at him. As I approached him a bunch of his bodyguards and other vultures tried to stop me, but he called them off—“Hey, he’s my buddy!”—and he hugged me. He gave me a big donation, grabbed a bunch of books from my stack, said, “I’ve just got to read these books,” and walked away. It was a very quick exchange, but I felt Kṛṣṇa giving both of us His mercy. I felt very happy, and when you’re happy on *saṅkīrtana* all the people become happy with you and the books just fly out in ecstasy.

I got the realization that it is very important to be introspective, that I should always try to increase my awareness of the people’s individual natures, that I should respect the people and

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaṅga

deal with them honestly, and that I should ultimately be more and more Kṛṣṇa conscious with every person I meet.

* * *

Tāra Dāsa

I strongly suspect that my life is more than half over. When it's time to check out, the Lord will tally my efforts. I'm not proud to say that I'll come up deficient on many counts. At least I want Him to know that I tried to do some good for others. I'm counting on His statement that there is no one more dear to Him than those who try to share His message with others. It's a very enticing offer! We become *most* dear to Kṛṣṇa by giving His message to others. It's an open secret how to conquer Kṛṣṇa's heart. God is revealing His mind: "Share My instructions and you'll win Me over." That's inspiring! At the end of this life, whatever regrets I have, I'm sure I won't regret the efforts I made to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. There is no better way to use this brief life than to help others become Kṛṣṇa conscious.

To do book distribution long term, you have to find your rhythm. We all have different capacities. I could never stick with the standard *saṅkīrtana* schedule. I'm an afternoon person. That's when I get my strength. So I adjusted my schedule to suit my nature.

Put pressure on the mind, but not too much. It's like a rubber band. You can stretch it to a certain degree, but beyond that it will break. Don't live in the comfort zone, but don't live in the burnout zone either. Find your balance.

Having said that, sticking with *saṅkīrtana* often just requires stubbornness. When you feel no inclination, stubbornly push on with the process of giving Kṛṣṇa to others. To avoid burnout, take a Kṛṣṇa conscious break and absorb yourself in hearing and chanting.

Sharing Kṛṣṇa with others is the life force of the movement and the highest form of charity. The *gopīs* confirm this by declaring that the emissaries of Kṛṣṇa are the most munificent welfare workers. Influenced by the lower modes, we may imagine *saṅkīrtana* to be an activity for getting something from the public. This is a strange notion. The sheltered servants of God are trying to get something from the unfortunate forgetful souls! Rather, we should always remind ourselves that we are trying to be an instrument of Caitanya Mahāprabhu's *giving* mission. When this consciousness is prominent, everyone becomes satisfied. For the conditioned souls it is a novel experience—meeting a stranger who unselfishly wants to give them something. They tend to value the book more because they remember the encounter as special.

* * *

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

Vāsudeva Datta Dāsa

While doing *saṅkīrtana* in Japan, I wanted to call my mother in Europe, who is very favorable, but I had some difficulty getting a connection. So I called some technical service for help. A young man answered. I tried to explain the problem to him, but he kept saying that my card was not offering me a live operator. I asked him to explain why the day before I had connected to America without any problem but now I couldn't get Europe. He became very angry and started berating me: "You fool! Shut up! I can't believe you're so stupid!" I was shocked. I couldn't believe that someone who was supposed to help customers would speak so harshly without any reason.

By some inconceivable mercy I stayed cool and even felt a little sorry for the technician because he was so frustrated. Usually I would have yelled back at him, as I had often done with *riksha-wālās* in India who had tried to cheat me. But this time I thought, "Why should I spoil my consciousness with this man?"

So I gave up trying to call my mother and went to do *saṅkīrtana* at the Shinjuku station, which is known to be a difficult spot. But by the mercy of Guru and Caitanya Mahāprabhu, practically all the people I approached were very friendly, and I sold fifty books in three hours.

Every *saṅkīrtana* devotee, after a bad day, tries to figure out what went wrong—"Did I commit some offense? Did I overeat?"—so that he can avoid the mistake in the future and improve. And after a good day he'll try to figure out what he did right—good rounds, *sevā*, *tapasya*—so he can repeat it.

I tried to figure out why I got some mercy. My rounds were, as usual, nothing special. But then I remembered the nasty guy on the phone whom I had tolerated.

Then I got a realization. Usually I play the submissive, surrendered soul in front of my guru or some other senior devotee, but with ordinary devotees I'm arrogant, and what to speak of "the *karmīs*." This time I saw that Kṛṣṇa appreciates tolerance and humility even before an "insignificant" unhappy telephone operator. He can test our tolerance through such a person. To be gentle with such people is difficult, and even more so with young devotees, but if we tolerate in this way Kṛṣṇa reciprocates and makes us more effective preachers.

* * *

Vijaya Dāsa

After an enlivening six-week college tour in the western United States, Jaya Gaurāṅga Dāsa and I decided we would leave Salt Lake City after a half day of book distribution and go to Las Vegas (Sin City), spend the night, and then go back to LA. This would break the trip in half so we wouldn't have to drive as much at one stretch.

As we entered Las Vegas we decided to take an exit where we could find a place to park the van and rest for the night. While exiting we unexpectedly saw a sign reading "Southern Nevada Community College." Seeing that, I said to Jaya Gaurāṅga, "Looks like Kṛṣṇa wants us to distribute books here tomorrow rather than go straight back to LA."

The next morning we drove to the school to have a look. It turned out that Southern Nevada

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

Community College was a small school—and there were fifteen Christians distributing Gideon Bibles on the campus quad! Still, it turned out to be a really nice campus for book distribution, with many students taking Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. Jaya Gaurāṅga and I wondered how long it had been since book distributors had been there. Most likely many, many years.

While distributing I couldn’t help but notice that the Bible distributors were quite elderly. So I asked a few of them how old they were. One said he was 78, another 69, and another 75. I commended them for their sincerity in doing what they were doing in their senior years. One of them said, “What better way could we spend our senior years than in glorifying God?” He was 81!

I thought these elderly men should be an inspiration for some of us to also distribute Prabhupāda’s books into our elderly years.

A short time before Prabhupāda left this world, he instructed the devotees, “You serve Kṛṣṇa throughout this life, then when you get old you can come here to Vṛndāvana and retire.”

Tamāl Krishna Mahārāja then said, “But Prabhupāda, you never came here to retire, so we won’t either.”

Prabhupāda was pleased with that reply and smiled.

While reading the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* I came across a verse spoken by King Rantideva that spelled out the mood of a great devotee: “I do not pray to the Supreme Personality of Godhead for the eight perfections of mystic yoga, nor for salvation from repeated birth and death. I want only to stay among all living entities and suffer all distresses on their behalf, so that they may be freed from suffering.” (SB 9.21.12) Of course, very few can achieve this highly elevated state of consciousness, but Rantideva is a glorious example of compassion that we can appreciate and strive to emulate.

Difficulties will undoubtedly arise when we try to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Sometimes members of other religious groups harass us. Sometimes it’s too cold or too hot. Sometimes our ego is complaining, or our mind is screaming at us: “No! This is too much!” But if despite all the difficulties we stay out with the conditioned souls, suffering all types of distress for their benefit so that they can become free of suffering, then how much pleased Kṛṣṇa will be! How much benefit the conditioned souls will receive! And how much we will advance!

Kṛṣṇa has a problem—us conditioned souls. And when real religion becomes too much eclipsed and irreligion too predominant, He comes here to solve the problem. If we perform the austerity of trying to help Kṛṣṇa solve this problem, then how much pleased He is! Everyone has to do something, so why not help Kṛṣṇa solve this problem of forgetfulness of the conditioned souls? He says that there is no one more dear to Him than one who preaches the message of *Bhagavad-gītā*, and that there will never be anyone more dear.

Sometimes a devotee will go out to distribute books with a fruitive mentality, hoping to get some name and fame for being a successful book distributor. This desire for name, fame, and adoration is subtle—one may not even notice it—so we have to be introspective and examine our motives. When we see the impurities, we need to pray to Kṛṣṇa for purification. He is known as *bhāva-grāhī janārdana*: He sees our real intention.

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

We have to go out with a humble desire to let everyone know about Kṛṣṇa. This humility is the key to being successful on *saṅkīrtana*. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says, “When will I, with a humble heart, go out to spread the teachings of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.” Humility is the crown jewel of devotional service, and it doesn’t come easily in Kali-yuga. It’s something we have to work on and pray for, and the more we do book distribution, the more we become humbled. Once in a letter to Hridayānanda Mahārāja and Satsvarūpa Mahārāja, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “If you are not tolerant and humble, you will not be able to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness.”

For Śrīla Prabhupāda, printing transcendental literature was his life and soul. He printing *Back to Godhead* magazine and then the First Canto of the *Bhāgavatam* when he had practically no money. In the early 60’s there was a man in Delhi who would print on Prabhupāda’s promise that he would get the money due him. But sometimes the money wouldn’t come, and the man would have to tell Prabhupāda that he couldn’t print without some payment. Prabhupāda would then preach to him and the printer would do another print run. Prabhupāda had practically no money.

When Śrīla Prabhupāda started the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement in America, the devotees didn’t know how important printing was to him until he hammered it into their heads. Then they understood. On July 15, 1975, at an interview in Berkley, Śrīla Prabhupāda was asked, “What will happen to the movement when you die?” His answer came back immediately: “I will never die.” All the guests and devotees cheered, and Prabhupāda continued, “I will live on in my books.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda knew his time was limited, so he felt the urgency to quickly spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness everywhere. This is the mood of a pure devotee: he wants to see everyone happily engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness; he is *para-duḥkha-duḥkhī*—he feels pain upon seeing the suffering of the conditioned souls. He himself feels the happiness of being Kṛṣṇa conscious and wants to share it with others. He’s an ocean of compassion, giving himself fully for the advancement of human society so that everyone can be happy.

By setting up the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Śrīla Prabhupāda expected his devotees in the press to cooperate fully to perform the essential task of publishing his books. When his books didn’t come out fast enough, he felt disturbed and knew the devotees weren’t cooperating fully. He famously said in 1977, shortly before his departure, “Your love for me will be shown by how you cooperate with one another after I am gone.” So it is very clear that cooperation is one of the most important ways to please Prabhupāda. A symptom of love is that one acts in a way that is pleasing to the beloved. That action is cooperation. One may ask, “Cooperate for what?” As soon as the word *cooperate* is used, there is a goal in mind, and people have to cooperate with one another to reach that goal. Prabhupāda established many goals in ISKCON. He wanted us to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world, a royal goal. He also wanted us to at least maintain the standard of Deity worship he established, but ideally he wanted us to increase the standard. He wanted successful farm projects with *varṇāśrama-dharma* established. He had more goals, but these are what he most emphasized. Because he didn’t get a chance to establish *varṇāśrama*, he said, “Fifty percent is left unfinished.”

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

But book distribution was clearly something he wanted to continue for the spiritual advancement of human society. This is something that we as members of ISKCON can without doubt engage in together and know that Prabhupāda is pleased. So this is something we should cooperate with each other to accomplish, to show our love for Śrīla Prabhupāda.

By going out on book distribution, you risk losing your false ego. Therefore the false ego protests, telling you not to go on book distribution. The false ego doesn't want to die, so it complains, vehemently. By going out on book distribution the real ego comes alive—that “I am the eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa”— and the dirty false ego dies.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said a *brāhmaṇa* is one who leaves an area cleaner than it was when he arrived. We've come into this world of so much contamination, and we are also dirty with so much contamination in our hearts—lust, greed, anger, false ego, etc. So we should make a very sincere effort to become clean ourselves and also help others become clean. Then we will be real *brāhmaṇas*, because when we leave this world we will be clean and some of the people we've come in contact with will also be cleaner. The advantage of book distribution is that while we're distributing we're getting purified and other people are getting books, giving them a chance to also get cleansed.

Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted everyone in our society to learn the art of book distribution. Why did he stress it so much? Because he knew that his books would change people's hearts and bring them happiness. He said that even if someone touches a book he benefits, what to speak of reading it. Prabhupāda said if a person reads even one line or one word his life will be successful.

A devotee is *para-duḥkha-duḥkhī*: he dislikes seeing others suffer. This world is a place of suffering, as Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. When we give people books, we're giving them an opportunity to be relieved of all suffering and enter an ocean of bliss. In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*Madhya* 19.137) Lord Caitanya tells Rūpa Gosvāmī, “The ocean of the transcendental mellows of devotional service is so big that no one can estimate its length and breadth. However, just to help you taste it, I am describing but one drop.” So all the instructions Rūpa Gosvāmī received from Lord Caitanya were just a drop from the ocean of the nectar of devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Similar, each book we distribute is a drop of Lord Caitanya's mercy. We want to distribute tens of millions of these drops and flood the world with the Lord's mercy.

Śrīla Prabhupāda once said, “If you want to be inspired to distribute books, you should chant the *Ṣaḍ-gosvāmy Aṣṭakam*, because it is in the mood of preaching.

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

The first statement of the *aṣṭakam* explains how the Six Gosvāmīs very enthusiastically chanted the holy name. Once a devotee asked Śrīla Prabhupāda, “Prabhupāda, how can we be enthusiastic on book distribution?”

Śrīla Prabhupāda replied, “Chant your sixteen rounds uninterrupted.” In other words, if you get up and chant some rounds before *maṅgala-ārati* and the rest after *maṅgala-ārati*, that is also uninterrupted because during *maṅgala-ārati* we are also chanting. But we should not have rounds left during the day. Rounds chanted in the morning are so much better than when we chant them after breakfast or in the afternoon. This is because the *brāhma-muhūrta* is the most auspicious time of the day. Śrīla Prabhupāda went even further and said, “It is better that you chant all your rounds before *maṅgala-ārati*.”

That’s a little tough for most. The point is that early chanting is the best chanting. You’ll hear your rounds best in the early morning because at that time of the day, when nothing else is happening, it is easier to focus. But right after breakfast things get busy.

The Six Gosvāmīs chanted so nicely because they had a taste for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They were very popular among the gentle and the ruffians because they saw the soul and the Supersoul in everyone. This is why they were so enthusiastic to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

When we are distributing books, it’s impossible to approach everyone we see. So we approach those who look more inclined to take a book instead of those who don’t, but if there’s only one person to approach and they don’t look inclined, then try anyway. Sometimes amazing things happen. I remember one time in the airport—it was very slow. A businessman came toward me wearing a suit that looked like it cost maybe a thousand dollars. He appeared to be a very hardcore businessman, the type of person we generally don’t approach. I thought, “Well, he’s the only one here right now, so let’s give him a try.” So I stopped him, spoke to him, and showed him the *Bhagavad-gītā*. He said, “You know, I’m completely into this! It’s amazing that you picked me!” He took the *Gītā* and gave a very nice donation. It was amazing. He was so nice. So you never know who will take a book.

Another time I was at a college campus sitting behind a table displaying the books. An old janitor came by, rolling his trash bucket. He saw the books and asked me, “What’s that all about?”

“Yoga, meditation, philosophy,” I replied “It gives inner peace.”

“All right, sounds good.”

He gave a donation, took the *Bhagavad-gītā*, put it in a plastic bag to protect it from the trash, and put it in his trash can. I would never have spoken to him. That’s the nice thing about doing a book table: So many types of people come to the table that *saṅkīrtana* devotees usually don’t approach.

Lord Śiva and Pārvatī went to a village dressed as ordinary village people. While they were walking around, a beggar came and asked for a donation. Lord Śiva said he didn’t have anything, but Pārvatī told him he should give something. He ended up giving him a watermelon. The beggar was not very satisfied, however, because he didn’t like watermelon, but he took it anyway, thinking he could get something for it in the village. He found someone who would give a few cents for it, and then he went on his way. When the person who bought the watermelon cut

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

it open, he was surprised to find that it was filled with priceless jewels. The beggar who received the melon didn't know its great value, so he effectively just gave it away.

This is the situation we find when we distribute books. People receive these great treasures of knowledge, but because they don't know how priceless they are they give them to someone else or throw them away or keep them in their house for years and years but never read them. As far as possible we should try to help them understand how important the books are so that they don't make the same mistake the beggar made.

Wherever we distribute books, that place becomes a sacrificial arena. When there is an initiation ceremony, the fire *yajña* is considered the mouth of Viṣṇu and the area around the fire a sacrificial arena. Book distribution is a *yajña*, and wherever the devotees distribute is the sacrificial arena. By this sacrifice we are purifying the atmosphere of the world.

The result of the book-distribution sacrifice performed over the last few decades is that millions of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books now reside in people's homes all over the world and the people in those homes are getting purified. Prabhupāda said that his books are worshipable Deities, and as I've traveled around the world I've sometimes seen his books on the altar in our temples, especially during the Prabhupāda Marathon.

Millions of people are reading millions of books on this planet—books on science, geography, and history, books on art, music, and architecture, novels, exposés, and poetry books, etc.—but the result of all this reading is that the people continue their material existence. Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, however, give clear information about the soul, about Kṛṣṇa, about our relationship with Kṛṣṇa, about devotional service, and ultimately about love of Kṛṣṇa. This is the difference between Prabhupāda's books and the countless other books throughout the world. At *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.5.11 Sūta Gosvāmī tells the sages at Naimiṣāraṇya: “Those words which do not describe the glories of the Lord, who alone can sanctify the atmosphere of the whole universe, are considered by saintly persons to be like unto a place of pilgrimage for crows. Since the all-perfect persons are inhabitants of the transcendental abode, they do not derive any pleasure there. On the other hand, that literature which is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of the name, fame, forms, pastimes, etc., of the unlimited Supreme Lord is a different creation, full of transcendental words directed toward bringing about a revolution in the impious lives of this world's misdirected civilization. Such transcendental literatures, even though imperfectly composed, are heard, sung and accepted by purified men who are thoroughly honest.”

This is a movement designed to turn crows into swans. The best way to do it is to get the books into the hands of the people. Then Kṛṣṇa does His magic. Just as our lives completely changed by our reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, the life of anyone who reads his books today will be completely transformed. If it could happen to us, why can't it happen to the people receiving Prabhupāda's books today? The fact is that their lives *are* changed. We may not see it, but Kṛṣṇa does. This is one of the big reasons I go out: I know that some people will have their lives changed for the better by receiving Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

At *Bhāgavad-gītā* 4.38 Kṛṣṇa says, “In this world there is nothing so sublime and pure as transcendental knowledge. Such knowledge is the mature fruit of all mysticism. And one who

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

has become accomplished in the practice of devotional service enjoys this knowledge within himself in due course of time.” This is the difference between Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and other books: his books purify a person simply by their reading them. Or, as Prabhupāda said, “By touching them they get purified.”

Another benefit of book distribution is that it helps us remember Kṛṣṇa. As servants of guru and Kṛṣṇa, we want to mold our life in such a way that we are always thinking of Kṛṣṇa. The service of book distribution is most conducive to constant remembrance of Kṛṣṇa. How could a *sankīrtana* devotee forget Kṛṣṇa when he or she is carrying books about Kṛṣṇa, showing books about Kṛṣṇa, and explaining different aspects of Kṛṣṇa to the people he or she encounters? And when things get difficult, the distributor prays to Kṛṣṇa. *Sankīrtana* devotees will often chant Hare Kṛṣṇa all day to keep themselves in the right frame of mind. Or they will chant various verses, which help them in the same way. One verse I chant quite often on *sankīrtana* is *Bhagavad-gītā* 13.23:

*upadraṣṭānumantā ca bhartā bhoktā maheśvaraḥ
paramātmēti cāpy ukto dehe ’smin puruṣaḥ paraḥ*

“Yet in this body there is another, a transcendental enjoyer, who is the Lord, the supreme proprietor, who exists as the overseer and permitter, and who is known as the Supersoul.” I find that this verse helps me remember that Kṛṣṇa is the controller and that He is always with us in all circumstances. It helps me depend on Him more.

Sometimes I chant this verse constantly, as in *japa*, because it places me in the right frame of mind. We may try our best to distribute books, but ultimately Kṛṣṇa is in control.

Suppose a *sankīrtana* devotee is trying to convince someone to take a book and the person resists. Then the devotee tries harder, thinking, “I’m going to convince this person to take a book.” Then the person he’s trying to convince becomes even more determined not to take the book because he senses the devotee’s false ego. Next, because of attachment, the devotee becomes angry and the atmosphere becomes even more polluted.

To avoid such scenarios, it’s essential to always remember that ultimately Kṛṣṇa is in control. Only then can we be peaceful on book distribution. It’s not easy to get free of this attachment to the result. Śrīla Prabhupāda once said, “There are two things that go very deep in the heart: attachment to the result and sex desire.” Book distribution helps us become free of both, and therefore the *sankīrtana-yajña* and Kṛṣṇa consciousness go well together. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī once said, “In the morning one should beat the mind with a shoe a hundred times, and in the evening with a broomstick a hundred times.” On *sankīrtana* we have to also beat the mind. The mind may become attracted to the opposite sex or attached to the result, or so many other things can distract us. Then we have to beat it with our intelligence to get it back on track, the track of pleasing Kṛṣṇa by giving Him to others in the form of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books.

To distribute books successfully one has to have good *sādhana*—rising early in the morning, chanting attentively, reading Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books attentively, etc. Then when we go out on book distribution we are so spiritually surcharged that we can approach people with the realization that they are kindred souls who have simply forgotten our common father, Kṛṣṇa. Done with this understanding, book distribution is the most ecstatic service—going from soul to soul offering them the most valuable medicine to cure the disease of birth and death.

Many appreciate us. Quite often people who take a book tell me, “Thank you for coming out here and doing this.” What devotee wouldn’t get a boost from such reciprocation? We should

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

also be grateful to have the opportunity to engage in this service. We should always remember we're not just distributing books: we're distributing the most profound knowledge on the planet. As we learn at the beginning of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, the Vedic literature is like a tree and the *Bhāgavatam* is its ripened fruit (*nigama-kalpa-taror galitaṁ phalam*). When we go on book distribution we are distributing the most valuable fruits of Vedic wisdom. We want to deliver these fruits to every home on the planet.

I was distributing in the airport and it was becoming very frustrating—no one would take a book. Then I started to chant a verse that usually comes to mind during these times:

*tat te 'nukampāṁ su-samīkṣamāṇo
bhuñjāna evātma-kṛtaṁ vipākam
hṛd-vāg-vapurahir vidadhan namas te
jīveta yo mukti-pade sa dāya-bhāk*

Śrīla Prabhupāda's explanation of this verse, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.14.8, is found in the purport of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.6.46:

The meaning of this verse is that when a devotee is in a calamitous condition he takes it as a benediction of the Supreme Lord and takes responsibility himself for his past misdeeds. In such a condition, he offers still more devotional service and is not disturbed. One who lives in such a disposition of mind, engaged in devotional service, is the most eligible candidate for promotion to the spiritual world. In other words, such a devotee's claim for promotion to the spiritual world is assured in all circumstances.

After meditating on this verse, I realized what my problem was: "I'm too attached to the result." But fortunately, Kṛṣṇa humbled me. Then I began to pray to Kṛṣṇa to help me become attached to just trying to please Him. Immediately I felt enlivened by this meditation. Thus, a few minutes later I met a man from Malaysia named Shiva who expressed great joy upon seeing the *Bhagavad-gītā* I presented to him. Then he told me his story. Twelve years earlier he had visited the ISKCON temple in Kuala Lumpur and was very happy to speak to the devotees there and experience the nice atmosphere. That night Śrīla Prabhupāda came to him in a dream. Prabhupāda told him to hand him his beads, and he did. Prabhupāda then chanted one round on his beads, handed them back to Shiva, and said, "Now chant Hare Kṛṣṇa."

Since that time Shiva has chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa on his beads every day. He also purchased some books from me to add to his collection (he already had the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and several other books by Śrīla Prabhupāda). After this transcendental experience, practically every person I spoke to took a book. Kṛṣṇa is very kind—He knows how to wake us up.

I highly recommend that all devotees learn the *tat te 'nukampāṁ* verse. As Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in *The Nectar of Devotion*: "This statement of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* should be the guide of all devotees."

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

If we want to distribute books, we should pray to the Deities: “Please give me sincerity. Please give me Your mercy so I can give this mercy out to others.” This is the mood we should have. If we have the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, then His mercy will go out in the form of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. But if we don’t have His mercy, then how can we go out steadily?

We should pray to Tulasī Devī. She is such a dear servant of Kṛṣṇa. She always makes arrangements for Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes. That is her service in the spiritual world. She wants all the suffering souls in the material world to go back to the spiritual world. So if we pray to Tulasī Devī, then she will give her mercy and arrange for the glories of Kṛṣṇa to be heard in this world also.

We should pray to Śrīla Prabhupāda during *guru-pūjā*: “Please help me continue what you have started: book distribution.” We have to be beggars, praying for the mercy. And Kṛṣṇa very much wants to give His mercy. But we have to want it. And what is in the way? Sense gratification—poison for the soul. It is just a disturbance to our actual happiness. As Śrīla Prabhupāda says in his purport to *Bhagavad-gītā* 3.39, “While one enjoys sense gratification, it may be that there is some feeling of happiness, but actually that so-called feeling of happiness is the ultimate enemy of the sense enjoyer.” Why? Because it takes us away from actual happiness. But book distribution is the real pleasure of the soul, because helping the conditioned souls get closer to Kṛṣṇa pleases Him the most. We should pray to Kṛṣṇa for His mercy so we can distribute books steadily.

When Śrīla Prabhupāda was asked about the secret of his success in spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world in just twelve years, he said, “I have presented Kṛṣṇa as He is.” Kṛṣṇa is all-attractive; so if Kṛṣṇa is presented as He is, then people will be attracted. If we go out and preach, understanding our position, understanding Kṛṣṇa’s position, and understanding the position of everyone we meet, then people will be attracted. Our position is that we are servants of Kṛṣṇa. So if we go out on *saṅkīrtana* with that mood and just try to please Kṛṣṇa by distributing books, then people will feel that purity and sincerity and will want to reciprocate. So the main point is that we have to try to please Kṛṣṇa, and if we do, then people will reciprocate.

We have to pray to Kṛṣṇa, pray very sincerely to be His instrument: *nimitta-mātraṁ bhava savya-sācin*. We can’t do anything on our own, because we’re not the doers. But one thing we *can* do is pray to be Kṛṣṇa’s instrument. One devotee prayed to Kṛṣṇa this way: “Please, Kṛṣṇa, don’t let me get in Your way as You spread this movement. Please give me at least enough purity to keep me from getting in Your way. Please allow the sincere people to take books. Please don’t let my false ego and insincerity get in the way of people accepting Your mercy.” It’s a nice prayer. Sometimes our ego and material desires actually get in the way of people getting the mercy of Kṛṣṇa. How sad. We are out there trying to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but we have some material desire. Because of that impurity, people don’t receive the mercy. But if we

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaṅga

are good instruments, if we are sincere, then even people who aren't searching for Kṛṣṇa, or even searching for some higher understanding of life—even they will take the mercy.

The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* says that in the present age people in general are short-lived, lazy, misguided, unlucky, and, above all, always disturbed. In such an all-encompassing degraded atmosphere, to find someone willing to take up Kṛṣṇa consciousness seriously is very, very rare. But we have to soldier on. We know Kṛṣṇa wants us to distribute books that glorify Him, so we do it. As Prabhupāda says in one conversation:

Pradyumna: What if people don't want to hear our message?

Śrīla Prabhupāda: People might not understand our message, but Kṛṣṇa will be pleased, and that is our mission. They thought Jesus Christ's mission was stopped. They killed him. But his mission was attained. He preached three years only, but so many followers. He pleased Kṛṣṇa. We must not be disappointed that no one is hearing Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We will say it to the moon and stars and all directions. We will cry in the wilderness, *bolo kṛṣṇa, bhaja kṛṣṇa, koro kṛṣṇa-śikṣā*: "Chant Kṛṣṇa's name, worship Kṛṣṇa, follow Kṛṣṇa's instructions!" Because Kṛṣṇa is everywhere, He will hear us. We want to get a certificate from Kṛṣṇa that "This man has done something for Me." Not popularity. If a pack of asses says you are good, what is that? We have to please Kṛṣṇa's senses with purified senses.

We are trying to shine a light in the darkness. The *saṅkīrtana* devotees are torch-bearers in the darkness of Kali-yuga, giving light to the blind in this dark world. The torches are Prabhupāda's books. All over the world the light of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is touching people's hearts. We see a little of it, but Kṛṣṇa sees all of it, and He's pleased. Prabhupāda said, "If they read one line they are going one hundred times toward Kṛṣṇa." Practically every day I meet people who have read some of Prabhupāda's books and are appreciating them.

Purity is the force. Let's pray to have the mood of the great king Rantideva, who said, "I do not want liberation or mystic perfections. I only want to stay among all living entities and suffer all distresses on their behalf so that they may be freed from all suffering." People are suffering because of a lack of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. By the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda we have the cure for the disease of material existence. By reading Prabhupāda's books they can become healthy again.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* Kṛṣṇa says, "A faithful person who is dedicated to transcendental knowledge and who subdues his senses is eligible to achieve such knowledge, and having achieved it he quickly attains the supreme spiritual peace." What does it mean to be dedicated to knowledge? Kṛṣṇa says we have to have faith in the knowledge. Another thing is that if someone

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

is dedicated to something or someone, he wants to serve that person or object of affection. For instance, people who are dedicated to their country want to serve the country, people who are dedicated to their family want to serve the family, and people who are dedicated to a company want to serve the company. To be dedicated is a part of love: if you love someone, you're naturally dedicated to that person. So to be dedicated to knowledge means to have faith in the knowledge and to serve the knowledge, and the way to serve the knowledge is to distribute it to others so they can also benefit from it. Another way to be dedicated to knowledge is to regularly hear it. A devotee wants to hear only that knowledge which is in relation to Kṛṣṇa. That is the sign of real dedication.

* * *

Caitanya-lilā Devī Dāsī

Saṅkīrtana means complete concentration on the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa and our guru. For me it is the only way to connect closely to my spiritual master and Śrīla Prabhupāda. The pleasure that we give to the spiritual master while doing this ecstatic service enters deep into one's heart and produces the thought "I want to do this forever!" When the spiritual master is satisfied, we become empowered to do anything. If we're really sincere, there is no end to this mystical, transcendental exchange. *Saṅkīrtana* is the way to understand that Kṛṣṇa is a person. In this way our faith will grow, we will always remain enthusiastic and surrendered to our mission, and we can go deeper and deeper into the ocean of book distribution.

* * *

Himavati Devī Dāsī (Czech)

One day I distributed a few books on a street in Prague. Then I headed back to the temple on a completely full metro train. I was reading a book, and after some time I noticed that everyone had left the carriage except the woman sitting next to me. I immediately thought of something Kadamba Kānana Swami had related during a class—how he had met a devotee when he was a *karmī*. That devotee had been sitting next to him on a bus but didn't say anything to him. Mahārāja said, "Because that devotee didn't talk to me, I wasted a lot of time till my next meeting with devotees."

So, I thought, I must address this woman. As it turned out, she was really interested in the books and took several of them.

Moral of the story: "Whomever you meet, tell them about Kṛṣṇa consciousness and try to give them a book."

* * *

Anonymous

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥daṅga

I visited the Kabbalah [mystic Judaism] Learning Center in Tel Aviv, Israel. Jewish folks are known as intelligent businessmen, and these people are no exception. Their scripture is called the Zohar (23 volumes), and they place great stress on it.

The first thing I noticed when reaching the top of the stairs was the many boxes of the sets of books. Many arrangements were made to make the visitor aware of the books. I was and still am thinking that we should be much more enthusiastic in promoting the full set of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* volumes. But generally, at most temples it is not easy to find a full set.

Recently at the Chowpatti temple in Mumbai I decided to promote full sets at the Sunday Feast. By the mercy of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, three guests went home with full sets.

In 1977 I personally witnessed how enthusiastic our Śrīla Prabhupāda was to have full sets of his books distributed. I don't think that outside of India we are doing enough, and I pray that we can increase the sales.

In Māyāpur, during a meeting of Bhakti Chāru Swami with his disciples, a devotee from Zurich asked why book distribution is sometimes so difficult. Mahārāja replied, “It is difficult right now because people don't yet understand the value of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. But the day will come when people will understand their value, and then people will line up to buy Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.” He added, “You are doing the pioneering work.” He gave an example: “Can you imagine how difficult it must have been for the pioneers who founded the United States of America? They went through so many difficulties. But due to their efforts, America is such a prosperous country today. Similarly, through your present efforts and difficulties, Kṛṣṇa consciousness is being established. You are actually paving the way for others. Think of the early Christians. They went through so many difficulties. Many of them gave their lives. They lived underground in the catacombs. They were thrown to the lions. But because of their hard work, Christianity spread all over the world. The pioneering job is always difficult, but the pioneers will be glorified in due course of time.”

If you are living and working outside the temple community, you probably perform many daily activities like going to the bank, grocery store, or gas station, or driving your kids around. When these activities are done in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, they are not mundane. But how to maintain this Kṛṣṇa consciousness with all the distractions and responsibilities of family life?

Even *āśrama* residents sometimes have to run errands that seem mundane. One thing that helps me think of Kṛṣṇa when I run errands is to bring along a few of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books to distribute on behalf of Śāstra Dāna.

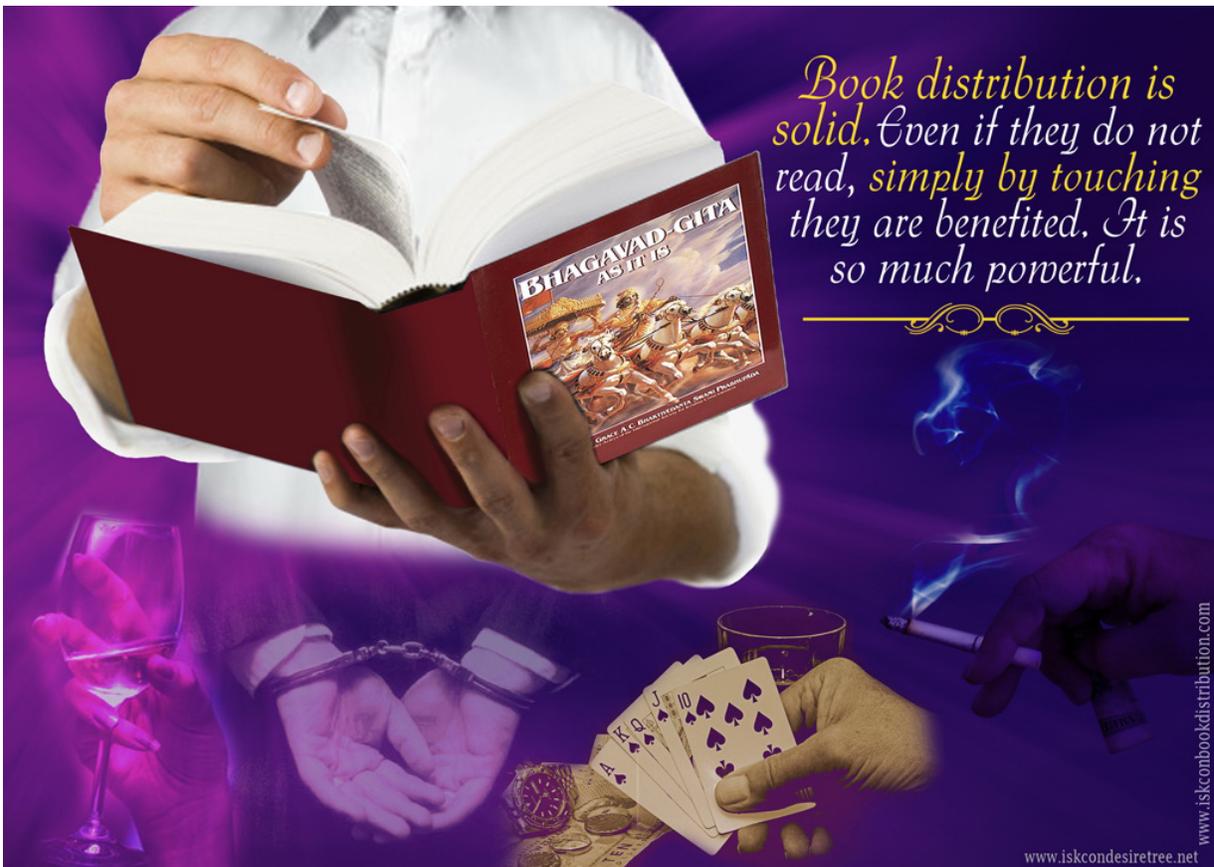
For example, a few weeks ago I had to go to the bank. I thought, “What a chore! How boring!” Then I remembered that the bank is on a street full of nail and hair salons and coffee shops, ideal places for donations of Śāstra Dāna books. My consciousness at once changed. As I drove to the bank I didn't think about my transaction but about where and how to distribute the

Chapter 13: Reflections and Realizations

books. The bank errand became incidental, while the book distribution became the main objective, and the whole event became spiritualized, a service for Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Anyone can distribute these Śāstra Dāna books. It doesn't take much time, and it's very simple and ecstatic! It's fulfilling because it's helping our spiritual master with his mission, which he worked so hard to accomplish. Individually we are not as empowered as he, but collectively, if we each just distribute a few books a week, we can accomplish so much. Imagine if just twenty devotees were to distribute one book a week while running some errand. That's twenty more books a week going out, and over a thousand a year. So please don't think that it's useless to distribute just one book.

End Chapter Thirteen: Reflections and Realizations



Book distribution is solid. Even if they do not read, simply by touching they are benefited. It is so much powerful.



Chapter Fourteen: Sādhana

Once on a morning walk Śrīla Prabhupāda was talking with some book distributors. He asked them if they were reading his books, and no one answered. He sternly said, “When the people ask you about the contents of the book, what do you say? ‘Oh, I don’t know what the book is about; I only distribute them.’ No, you have to read the books also.”

Then again, there is this famous statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda from a letter: “What your lecture will do for three minutes? But if he reads one page, his life may be turned.” Sometimes devotees use this statement to try to justify not preaching to the people but just selling them books. But the previous statement makes it clear that Śrīla Prabhupāda wants us to read his books so that we’ll know what to say when people ask about the books. In my early years of book distribution I leaned more toward the “What your lecture will do for three minutes?” statement. Even if someone asked about the books, I would just reply as briefly as possible and concentrate on distribution.

Now when I distribute I try to strike a balance between the first statement and the second. When I find someone sincerely inquiring about the books, I’ll spend ten to twenty minutes or more speaking to the person. They practically always take a book and walk away saying, in effect, “It’s been a very interesting conversation.” Sometimes they come to the temple. This program is good for them and for us, because it gives us an opportunity to speak about Kṛṣṇa to people who’ve never heard of Him. Generally when we preach, we do so to devotees—“preaching to the choir.” But speaking to nondevotees about Kṛṣṇa consciousness can be exhilarating; they’re often amazed at what we have to say.

Essentially, when we’re speaking to them we’re trying to bring them out of *māyā*, but we ourselves are to some degree also in *māyā*. We want to bring them out of the ocean of material existence, but if we aren’t good swimmers ourselves it will be difficult to save others from drowning. So we have to read Prabhupāda’s books scrutinizingly and pray very sincerely to Kṛṣṇa to help us stay out of *māyā* so that we can help save others from the ocean of birth and death. Some of us aren’t very good swimmers—*māyā* is still lurking in our heart—but Prabhupāda is the best swimmer, so the main emphasis is always to have the person walk away with one of his books, because he’s in his books. In fact, he called his purports his “emotional ecstasies.”

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.20.17, spoken by Kṛṣṇa to Uddhava, really expresses the urgency of giving people a chance to get out of the ocean of birth and death:

Though automatically obtained by the laws of nature, the human body is a very rare achievement that can award one all benefits in life. It is like a perfectly constructed boat with the spiritual master as the captain and My instructions as favorable winds impelling it on its course. If despite these advantages of human life one fails to cross the ocean of material existence, I consider him the killer of his own soul.

Śrīla Prabhupāda

This routine work, such as chanting, speaking, rising early, cleaning, cooking and offering prasadam, arati, reading books—these activities are the backbone of our Society, and if we

The Treasure of the Br̥hat Mr̥danga

practice them nicely in a regulative manner, then our whole program will be successful. If we become slack or neglect these things, then everything else we may try will fail. So it is very important that you keep your standards very high in these activities, then your preaching will be strong. Preaching is our real business, preaching and distributing books. If your preaching work is strong, then your management of temple affairs will also become automatically very strong. Just like if the head wills it, the hand will move. Preaching is like the head of our KC Society—if the head is removed, the whole body dies. Managing is the hands, which work nicely if the head is healthy. If the hands are removed, the body will not die, but it will be crippled. So preaching is more important than management, but both must be there if the whole body is to operate nicely.

[Letter to Patita Uddhāraṇa, 8 December 1971]

So you haven't got to make yourself very learned scholar [to distribute books]. Just like a postal peon, he's not necessarily very learned scholar or even a very literary man. His only business is to take the envelope and put it in the right place. That's all. Similarly, to spread this Kṛṣṇa consciousness, you haven't got to become a very learned scholar or literary man. You have simply to understand . . . *Śravaṇam kīrtanam*. You hear and spread this. People will be happy. *Akhila-bandha-muktaye*. They will be liberated from all problems. It is so nice thing. [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* lecture, New Vrindavan, 16 June 1969]

[Translation] Upon seeing the chanting and dancing of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, Lord Nityānanda predicted that later there would be dancing and chanting in every village.

[Purport] This prediction of Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu's is applicable not only in India but also all over the world. That is now happening by His grace. The members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness are now traveling from one village to another in the Western countries and are even carrying the Deity with them. These devotees distribute various literatures all over the world. We hope that these devotees who are preaching the message of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu will very seriously follow strictly in His footsteps. If they follow the rules and regulations and chant sixteen rounds daily, their endeavor to preach the cult of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu will certainly be successful. [*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya-līlā* 7.82]

The GBC member means they will see that in every temple these books are very thoroughly being read and discussed and understood and applied in practical life. That is wanted, not to see

Chapter 14: Sādhana

the vouchers only: “How many books you have sold, and how many books are in the stock?” That is secondary. You may keep vouchers . . . [But] if one is engaged in Kṛṣṇa’s service, there is no need of vouchers. . . . Everyone is doing his best. That’s all.

So we have to see that things are going on very nicely. So in that way the GBC members should divide some zones and see very nicely that things are going on, that they are chanting sixteen rounds, and temple management is going according to the routine work, and the books are being thoroughly discussed, being read, understood practically. These things are required. Now, suppose you go to sell some book and somebody says, “You have read this book? Can you explain this verse?” then what you will say? You will say, “No. It is for you. It is not for me. I have to take money from you. That’s all.” Is that very nice answer? [Class on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Melbourne, 5 April 1972]

The book sales are very encouraging, increasing, increasing. It is very good news. Thank you, I want this. Record selling is temporary. Even George Harrison’s record sales do not continue for a long time. But a book sold becomes a permanent matter for enjoyment. We read the scriptures again and again and it is still fresh. When there is time I go on reading my own books. [Letter to Hamsadūta, 1 October 1974]

I am very much stressing at this point that all of my students shall be very much conversant with the philosophy of Krishna Consciousness, and that they should read our books very diligently at least one or two hours daily and try to understand the subject matter from varieties of angles. [Letter to Madhudviṣa, 16 June 1972]

This is actually our successful propaganda. We want to distribute our literature and books within as well as our prasadam, and injecting our Hare Krishna medicine within the ear. So, reading of the literature and hearing of the chanting is the medicine, and prasadam is the diet. So, if diet and medicine are properly administered the disease of maya will be cured. But the physician must be always healthy. People may not say, [“Physician, heal thyself.”] That means the preachers must be of highly elevated character, following strictly the rules and regulations and chanting regularly in the temple. [Letter to Satsvarūpa, 27 June 1968]

* * *

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdanga

His Holiness Bhakti Puruṣottama Swami

In Māyāpur we have a program where anybody who buys a *Bhagavad-gītā* is given a free membership in the *Bhagavad-gītā* club. And anybody who buys a set of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatams* is enrolled in the *Bhāgavatam* club. Once a year, in the spring when there are a fair number of rooms free in the guesthouses, we invite people to come and take seminars over a four-day weekend on the *Gītā* and similar seminars over another weekend on the *Bhāgavatam*. We get from four hundred to seven hundred people coming to attend each of these programs and systematically study Śrīla Prabhupāda's books from morning to night, for eight hours. We go deep into the philosophy.

This is just an example of how important it is to take the distribution of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books seriously and encourage people to actually read and study the books. The people who attend these seminars are often not members of the congregation, but after the seminars they almost all become members.

* * *

His Holiness Devāmrita Swami

Śrīla Prabhupāda gave very specific instructions about how Kṛṣṇa was to be satisfied. So if there is going to be any success in book distribution, then we have to see if those instructions are being followed. Śrīla Prabhupada's desire was that everyone would become absorbed in reading and distributing his books.

Book distribution is directly giving pleasure to Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission. We should take it as *bhakti*—not just ordinary book sales but *bhakti*, which means that in doing this service you have to depend on Kṛṣṇa, your hearing and chanting have to be very sharp, your attention before the Deities has to be very focused.

* * *

Bhṛgupati Dāsa (ACBSP)

When a leading book distributor told Śrīla Prabhupāda that sometimes when he traveled to different temples he was asked to give class on book distribution technique, Śrīla Prabhupāda

T

Chapter 14: Sādhana

asked him how he responded. He said, “We tell them that first they have to study the books and follow the regulative principles.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda responded, “Yes, that is our only technique: To become very devout followers of the rules and regulations.”

In other words, purity is the force, not technique. Just as a cook needs some recipes to follow, a book distributor needs some things to say. But what’s most important is how sincerely one is trying to follow the instructions of one’s spiritual master. Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate determining factor, always.

* * *

Mañidhara Dāsa (ACBSP)

Strength results from any regulation, especially a spiritual one. By regulating one’s life, one saves energy and becomes more able to control the ever-unsteady mind. I always remember how during my fifteen years as a temple president *saṅkīrtana* offered a wonderful opportunity for peaceful *sādhana*. (I also remember what a troubled life a manager has to live.) By simplifying our life and focusing on its essence, we become simply blissful, and people notice that when we meet them on the street. *Sādhana* is the basis of *saṅkīrtana*. Without it *saṅkīrtana* gradually wanes and eventually stops. Unfortunately, I have seen whole *saṅkīrtana* parties vanish because the devotees on the party neglected their *sādhana*. After all, we’re not on the level of spontaneous *bhakti*.

* * *

Vaiśeṣika Dāsa (ACBSP)

Prabhupada taught us, “The main technique—no, the only technique—for book distribution is your strict *sādhana*.”

You are tasting the name of Kṛṣṇa, thinking that “This is real meditation”; you are chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, chanting good *japa*, becoming accustomed to avoiding the ten offenses to the Holy Name; and you are actually getting deeper and deeper appreciation that this is not a material sound vibration. Simultaneously you are losing interest in the material world. At this point you know from experience that this is the real process for this age. You can understand that. For this you don’t need a certificate, and you don’t need a technique to distribute books other than this. This understanding is what impels the devotee to go out to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books. That person can understand the necessity.

* * *

Daivī-śakti Devī Dāsī (ACBSP)

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdanga

Śrīla Prabhupāda personally taught me about the importance of *sādhana* in relation to success in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I try to chant and read for several hours before facing the world each day, tasting the nectar of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, for which we are always anxious. Then, filled with that nectar, I begin a fresh day of book distribution. At the end of each day, exhausted but blissful, I do more reading and chanting, attending the temple programs as much as possible. Prabhupada gave us the sandwich program: Morning and evening program, with service in between. Read Prabhupāda's books and try to understand them. Then you will naturally be inspired to distribute the knowledge within them.

* * *

Nidrā Devī Dāsī (ACBSP)

Sādhana is the foundation. It nourishes us so we can distribute books with a purified consciousness. Good *sādhana* means increased Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which increases our desire to act as Kṛṣṇa's instrument for engaging the conditioned souls in His service. The discipline of *bhakti-yoga* must be practiced so that we become Kṛṣṇa conscious and do the service with devotion, and so that we are seen to be practicing what we preach.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote:

If someone has desired to distribute books all day he may do this, but he must always follow the principles of rising early, chanting 16 rounds, etc. . . . All programs must go on, but it is a fact that this book distribution program is very, very important.

* * *

Ambarīṣa Dāsa (Russia)

The greatest inspiration every day is the chanting of the Holy Name. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us this greatest jewel, and we have to serve the Holy Name with full attention. Reading the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is another constant source of inspiration. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu heard the accounts of Dhruva Mahārāja and Prahlāda Mahārāja many times in the company of Gadādhara Paṇḍita.

The morning program is meant for raising us to the spiritual platform. It's very hard work to distribute Śrīla Prabhupāda's books when you're on the mental or bodily platform. We have to use all the tools Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us to raise our consciousness: *maṅgala-ārati*, *japa*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class, *prasādam*. *Kṛṣṇa-śakti vinā nahe tāra pravartana*: We can preach only when we are empowered.

* * *

Chapter 14: Sādhana

Ānakadundubhi Dāsa

Sādhana is the backbone of book distribution. If we listen carefully to the Holy Names when we chant our *japa*, and if we read Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books carefully, we will be able to distribute his books year after year. If we are intense in our *sādhana*, we have a chance to become a top book distributor.

* * *

Candraśekhara Ācārya Dāsa

I remember Christmas Eve during the 1996 LA December marathon. His Grace Vijaya Prabhu had decided to stay at the LA airport for as long as he needed to distribute a hundred hardbound *Bhagavad-gītās*. Sure enough, late at night he came back to the temple having distributed that exact amount and having collected \$1,140. Yajña Puruṣa Prabhu asked him a very important question, which I recall vividly: “So, Vijaya, what’s your secret? How have you been able to distribute so many books for so many years?” Vijay Prabhu was silent and then said, “It’s my guru’s [His Holiness Hridayānanda Maharaja’s] mercy.” He then added, “And hearing. I have a thousand lecture tapes of Śrīla Prabhupāda and five hundred of Hridayānanda Mahārāja. The secret is *hearing*. I hear those lectures and I read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Bhagavad-gītā* every day. So it’s not me, it’s *sādhana*. If I didn’t have good *sādhana*, I wouldn’t be able to do anything.”

On a similar note, His Grace Bhṛgupati Prabhu often reminds the devotees just how important it is to hear Śrīla Prabhupāda’s lectures. If you examine his life, Bhṛgupati Prabhu is always listening to a Prabhupāda lecture.

* * *

Hrīmān Kṛṣṇa

Everything comes from the Holy Name. Our preaching is just an expansion of our chanting. Devotees should mold their lives around chanting excellent rounds. This is the number-one priority. And reading Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books every day gives us such enthusiasm to continue and also our greatest reward. After I come home from a day’s book distribution and sit down to read, all the purports just come to life.

* * *

Parameśvara Dāsa

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdanga

The stronger the *sādhana*, the better the book distributor. Since I've made it a must to rise before 4:00 am, do a morning program, read Śrīla Prabhupāda's books at least an hour a day, chant sixteen or more rounds, and follow the regulative principles, I've always been enthused to distribute Prabhupāda's books.

If we truly take up Śrīla Prabhupāda's full program, natural love for Kṛṣṇa is awakened. Love means doing something the beloved wants. Kṛṣṇa wants these books distributed. Prabhupāda said, "Book distribution is the most important activity."

* * *

Tāra Dāsa

We give to ourselves through *sādhana*. *Sādhana* means filling up our hearts with Kṛṣṇa. Then we go out and give Kṛṣṇa to others. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is never a mechanical process. We try to figure out formulas for how to smooth things out—"I'll chant good rounds and then I'll do big on *saṅkīrtana*." Of course we should engage in our *sādhana* with maximum attention, but finally we still have to fully depend on Kṛṣṇa in all our activities.

* * *

Vijaya Dāsa

Good *sādhana* is very advantageous for our becoming strong preachers. And to continue for years with book distribution we have to be determined to keep our *sādhana* steady. The mind will say so many things—it is so powerful. It will always say nonsense until we just get completely absorbed; then there will be no room for its nonsense. Whatever the mind says, just let the nonsense go. Because we know what is right and what is wrong, what is nectar and what is nonsense that should just be kicked out. If we hear *kṛṣṇa-kathā* nicely, then as soon as some nonsense comes into our mind a red light will start flashing: "Danger! *Māyā* has entered! *Māyā, māyā!*" When a building catches fire the alarm goes off and everyone in the building is alerted to the danger. Similarly, *māyā* is a blazing fire (*bhava-mahā-dāvāgni*) that can burn up our determination to serve Kṛṣṇa. But if we're sincere, Kṛṣṇa's rain of mercy will put out this fire. What is Kṛṣṇa's rain of mercy? It's the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* and *guru-sevā*.

The *bhakti-yoga* process enables us to control the mind and senses and engage them in the service of Kṛṣṇa. When one is distributing books, the mind is absorbed in approaching people, preaching to them, showing them the books, and trying to convince them that the book will benefit them. What better way is there to control the mind than to be thinking of how to give Kṛṣṇa to others? In one purport Prabhupāda writes (I'm paraphrasing), "The best way to control the mind is to always be thinking of how to do good to others." People in general don't know what is good for them. We didn't know either, but from hearing and reading the literature given to us by Kṛṣṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda, now we know what is right and what is wrong.

Spiritual knowledge is what is most needed in society. Everyone needs guidance on how to

Chapter 14: Sādhana

lead a pure life. Just as the body has needs, such as food, water, and shelter, so the soul also has needs. Śrīla Prabhupāda describes this in the following famous passage in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.8):

The need of the spirit soul is that he wants to get out of the limited sphere of material bondage and fulfill his desire for complete freedom. He wants to get out of the covered walls of the greater universe. He wants to see the free light and the spirit. That complete freedom is achieved when he meets the complete spirit, the Personality of Godhead.

When we distribute books we're giving the souls an opportunity to experience complete freedom by loving the supreme lovable object, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was so much into book distribution that when devotees would read the *saṅkīrtana* results to him he would often say, "Now double it!" To steadily increase book distribution we have to regularly read Prabhupāda's books. Prabhupāda said we should know his books as a lawyer knows his law books. This means we have to study every day. There is a beautiful verse Parīkṣit Mahārāja speaks to Śukadeva Gosvāmī about the effects of hearing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*:

The sound incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Soul [i.e., the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*], enters into the heart of a self-realized devotee, sits on the lotus flower of his loving relationship, and thus cleanses the dust of material association, such as lust, anger, and hankering. Thus it acts like autumnal rains upon pools of muddy water. [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.8.5]

Śrīla Prabhupāda said that the way to become empowered to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness is to be very strict devotees in terms of following the four regulative principles, chanting sixteen rounds, and studying his books attentively. In fact, several times Śrīla Prabhupāda chastised his disciples because they were distributing his books but not reading them. It's very important that we read scrutinizingly, very carefully, with a desire to become purified and to understand Kṛṣṇa. If we take this very seriously, we will become Kṛṣṇa conscious. Then when we approach people, they'll think, "There's something valuable here. This person is special and is giving me something that may help me become like him." Strong *sādhana* will give us strength and purity.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also wanted us to chant the holy names with attention. If we do this we will be inspired to distribute his books. Our book distribution is a reflection of our *sādhana*. But sometimes we see that some devotees go on book distribution without reading and without chanting attentively but still have a good day. How is that? The answer is that momentum was built up from previous days of good *sādhana*, but if such a devotee carries on without practicing strict *sādhana*, it will be very difficult if not impossible to continue distributing books.

The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdanga

If we want to distribute books, we have to follow what Śrīla Prabhupāda set up in this society: rise early, chant our rounds with sincerity, and read a minimum of one hour a day. The time has to be found to hear and chant nicely. This gives the purity. You get inspired. The books are such an inspiration. One *bhakta* told me he has read the *Bhagavad-gītā* many times. He chants sixteen rounds a day though he's not initiated. He hasn't read any other books; he just reads the *Bhagavad-gītā* over and over. He's satisfied with that. I was impressed. Each time he reads he gets more knowledge and realization—he gets uplifted. This is the power of the *Bhagavad-gītā*: you get uplifted by hearing the message of Kṛṣṇa explained by the pure devotee.

In one *Gītā* purport Śrīla Prabhupāda says that Kṛṣṇa is like a diamond and the pure devotee is like gold; you put the two together and they look very beautiful. So Kṛṣṇa and the pure devotee are a very nice combination. Therefore if we take shelter of Kṛṣṇa and of the instructions of a pure devotee, we will become very attractive because of that connection. People become attracted and want to hear what we have to say. Purity is the force. This is what inspires people to exchange with us. But if we have some material motive, then people will see that, because the face is the index of the mind. They can see the attachment on our face, and then even if he is a nice person he will say, “No, no, no. I'm not interested. Sorry, I don't have any time.” But if you're sincere, if you're actually trying to please Kṛṣṇa, then even people who are in a hurry, who aren't interested, will stop and listen to you and take a book.

I remember one guy in the Miami airport—he was running fast through the airport and I called out to him: “Sir! Excuse me!” He couldn't stop dead in his tracks because he was going so fast, so he had to run in a big half circle and come back to me to hear what I had to tell him. I showed him the book, said what we were doing, and he said, “Sure, this is great.” He gave twenty dollars and continued running. So, not that I have any purity—I don't—but even if people are in a hurry, if we are a little sincere then they will stop, listen, and take the mercy of Lord Gaurāṅga.

* * *

Viśvambhara Dāsa

As we've all heard, “Purity is the force,” and purity comes from good *sādhana*. Rising early in the morning is the secret of success for anything we do in our life. First we pray to the guru, then we pray to Tulasī Devī, then we pray to Nāma Prabhu, then we hear some *kṛṣṇa-kathā* in the association of devotees, and then we honor *prasādam*. These practices give energy to the consciousness and body, as well as enthusiasm, determination, and purity of the mind. When we read a little from the book we're attempting to distribute, we become empowered. The books are not just books: they're nondifferent from Kṛṣṇa. So we can also pray to the books to empower us to distribute them.

Padampat Singhania was the man who was willing to build a Kṛṣṇa temple in New York City in 1966 but wasn't able to transfer the money to the US. His family was so pious that if someone didn't go for *darśana* of the Deities, they would be fined. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “We also will fine: if someone does not come to *maṅgala-ārati*, then they have to go and sell one *Kṛṣṇa* book.”

Chapter 14: Sādhana

* * *

Karuṇā-dhāriṇī Devī Dāsī

At *kīrtana* time you are hearing and chanting, when you read out loud you are hearing and chanting, and when you chant *japa* you are hearing and chanting. Book distribution is yet another ecstatic opportunity for hearing and chanting, only it is very interactive.

End Chapter Fourteen: Sādhana