



# The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaᅅga

Spreading the Glories of Śrī Kṛṣᅇa Through Book Distribution

compiled by Vijaya Dāsa



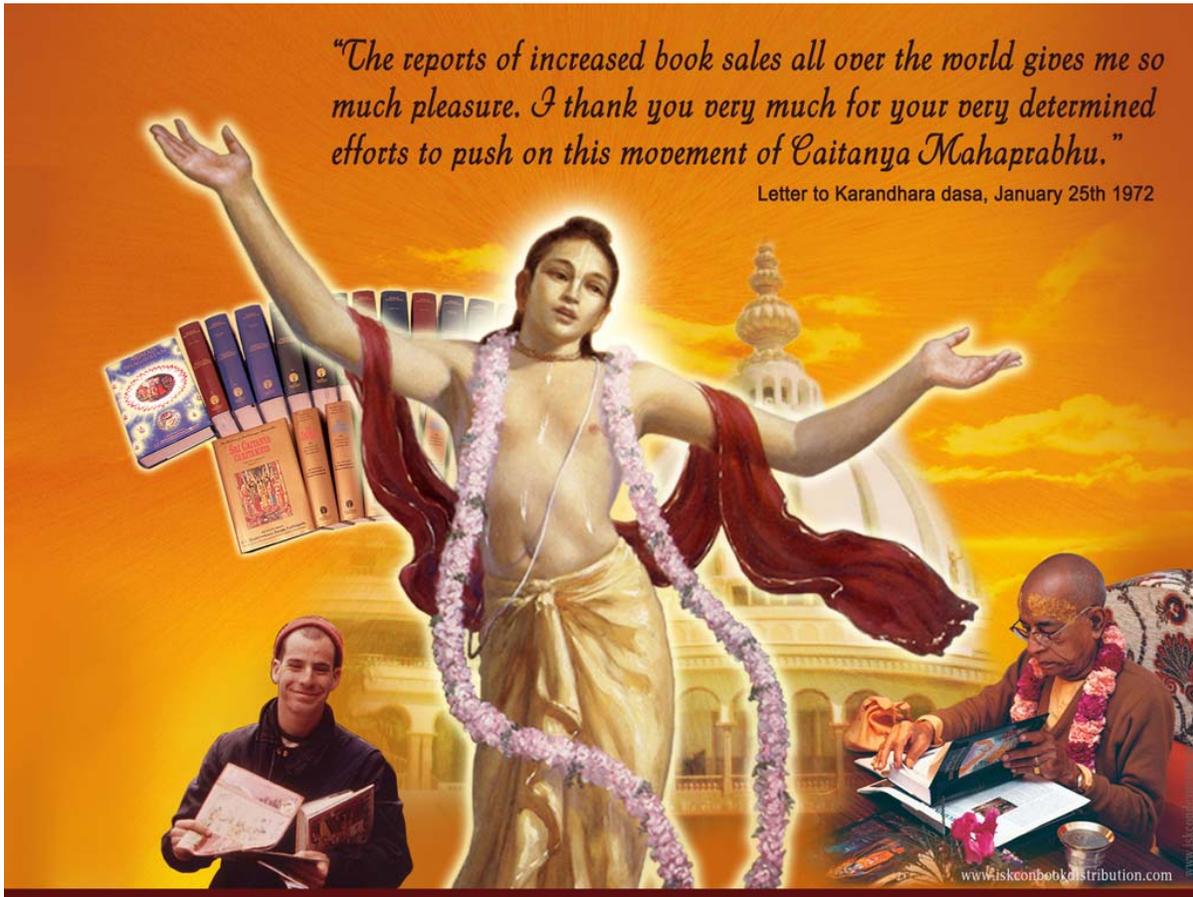
# **The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mrdaᅅga**

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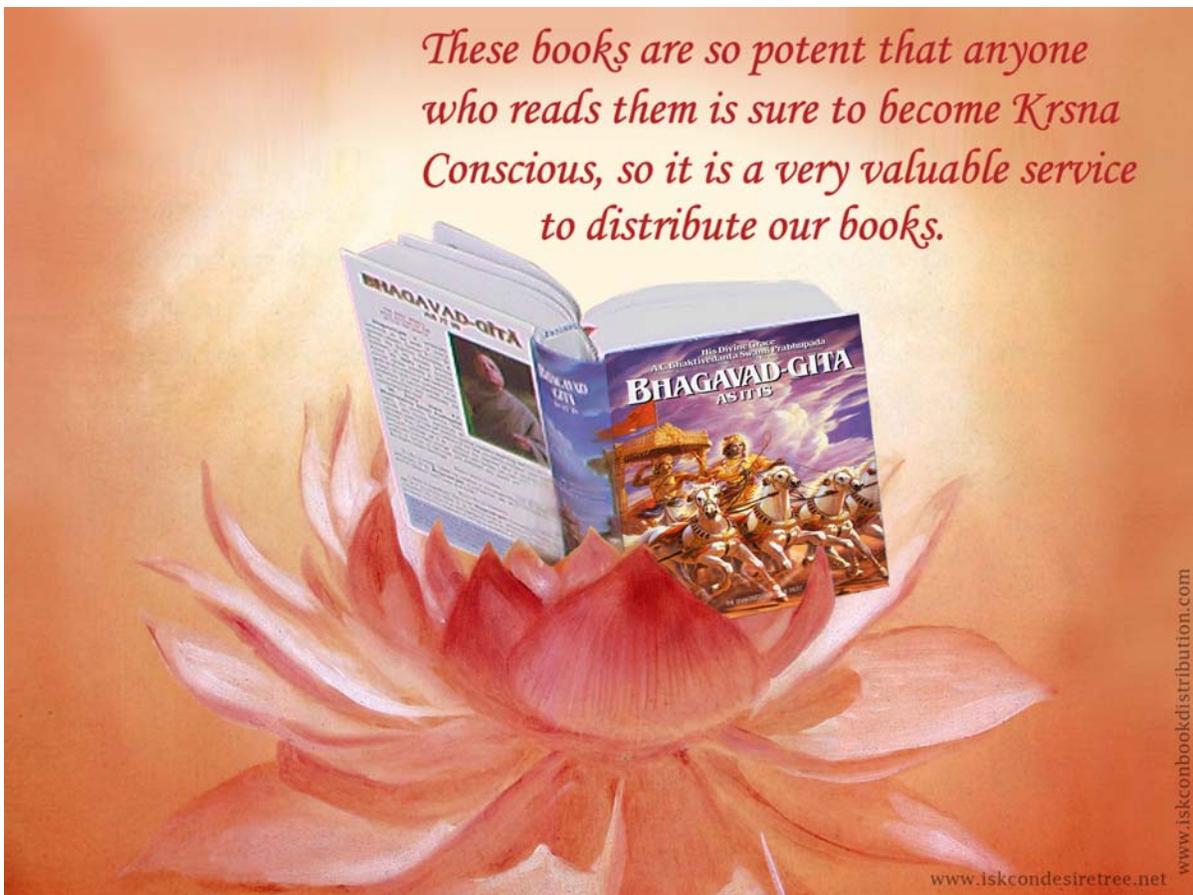
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*"The reports of increased book sales all over the world gives me so much pleasure. I thank you very much for your very determined efforts to push on this movement of Caitanya Mahaprabhu."*

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

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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

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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

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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

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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.

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## 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?

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**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.

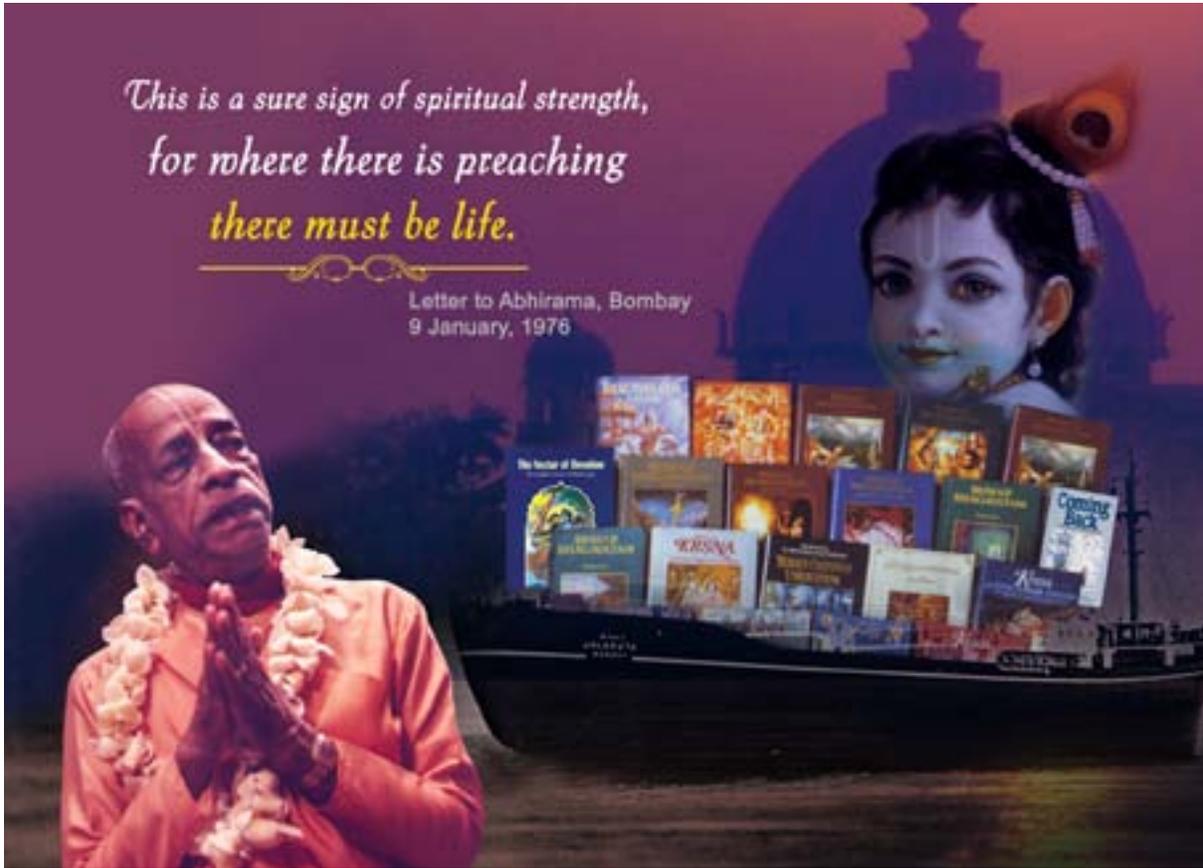
**Vijaya Dāsa:** What advice do you have for someone that wants to distribute books throughout his or her life?

**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

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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."

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### 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.

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#### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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

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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.

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### 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. . . .

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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-nipuṇau 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 Datta. 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."

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### 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

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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.

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### 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."

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### 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

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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.

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### Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.25.21

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

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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.

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### 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

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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.

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# 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.)

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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.”

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### 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.

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### 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

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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!

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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

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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.

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### 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 a 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.

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### 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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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.

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## 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.

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### 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.

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### 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."

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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."

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## 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.

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### 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

## 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 Nṛsiṁhadeva 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.

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### 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.”

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## 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.

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### 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.

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### 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."

## 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.

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## 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."

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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

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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

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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

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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 *saṅkīrtana* 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

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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](http://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 Yogeesva, Bombay  
28 December, 1971

[www.icd.com/krishna.html](http://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*

## 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.

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### 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

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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.

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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.

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### 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.

\* \* \*

## 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.

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## 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 become 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.

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### 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*.

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### 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.

## 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?"

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“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.”

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### 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.

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### 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

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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 Ārūḍhā 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.

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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!

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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

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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.

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### 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.

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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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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## 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

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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.

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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.

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### 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.

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### 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!

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## The Treasure of the Bṛhat Mṛdaṅga

### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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

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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.

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### 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.

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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!

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### 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.

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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.

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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.

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### 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.

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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!*

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### 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.

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### 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

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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.

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### 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.

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### 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

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### 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.”

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### 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.”

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### 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.

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### 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.”

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### 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

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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.

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### 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.

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### 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

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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.

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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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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### 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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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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."

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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.

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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.

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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

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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.

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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.

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### 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.

## 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*

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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

## **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](http://www.iskconbookdistribution.com)

[www.iskcondesiretree.net](http://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](http://www.iskconbookdistribution.com)

[www.iskcondesiretree.net](http://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

### Vaiśeṣika Dāsa

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.

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### 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*.

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### 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?

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### 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.

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### 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.

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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

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### 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.

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### 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.

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#### 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?”

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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## 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.

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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

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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.

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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.

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“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.

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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?”

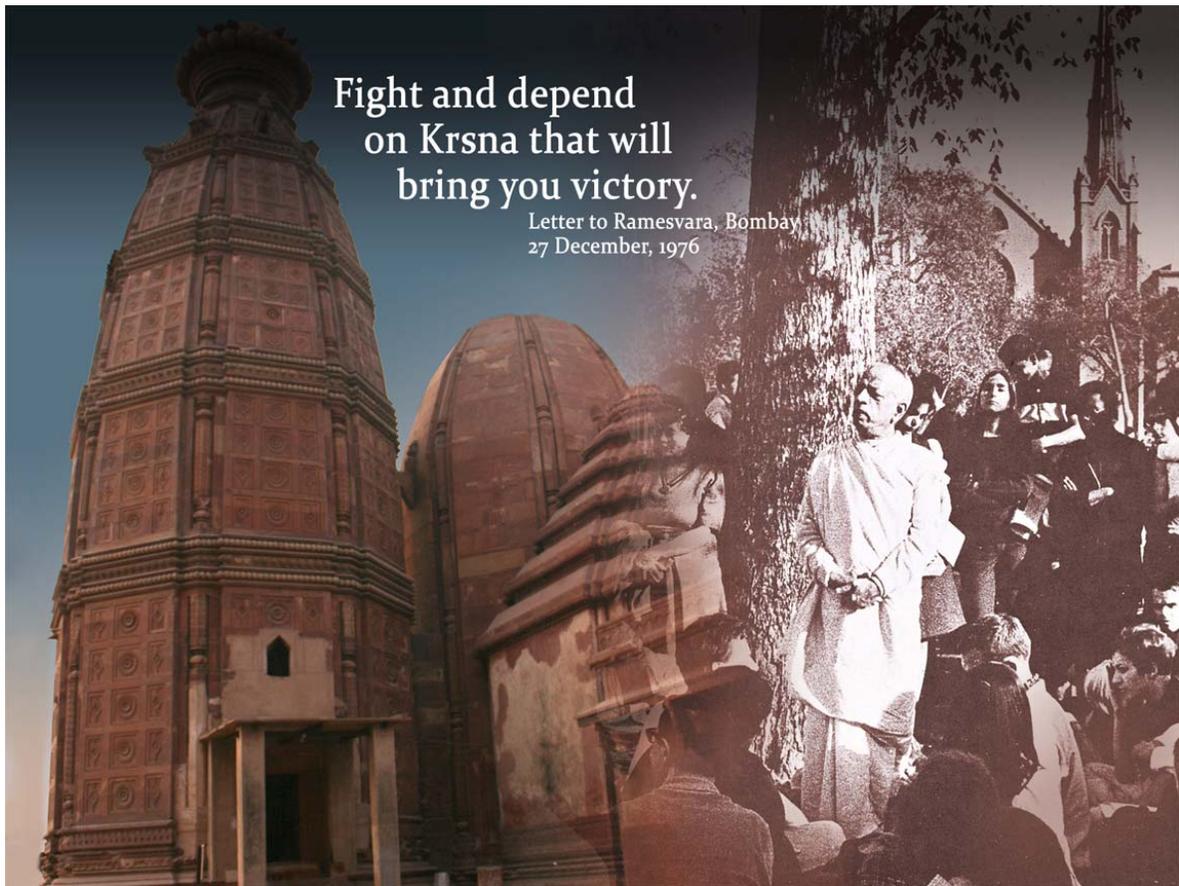
In so many ways I explained to him that the complex arrangement of nature couldn’t have come about by accident. After awhile he agreed that there *might* be a God.

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.”

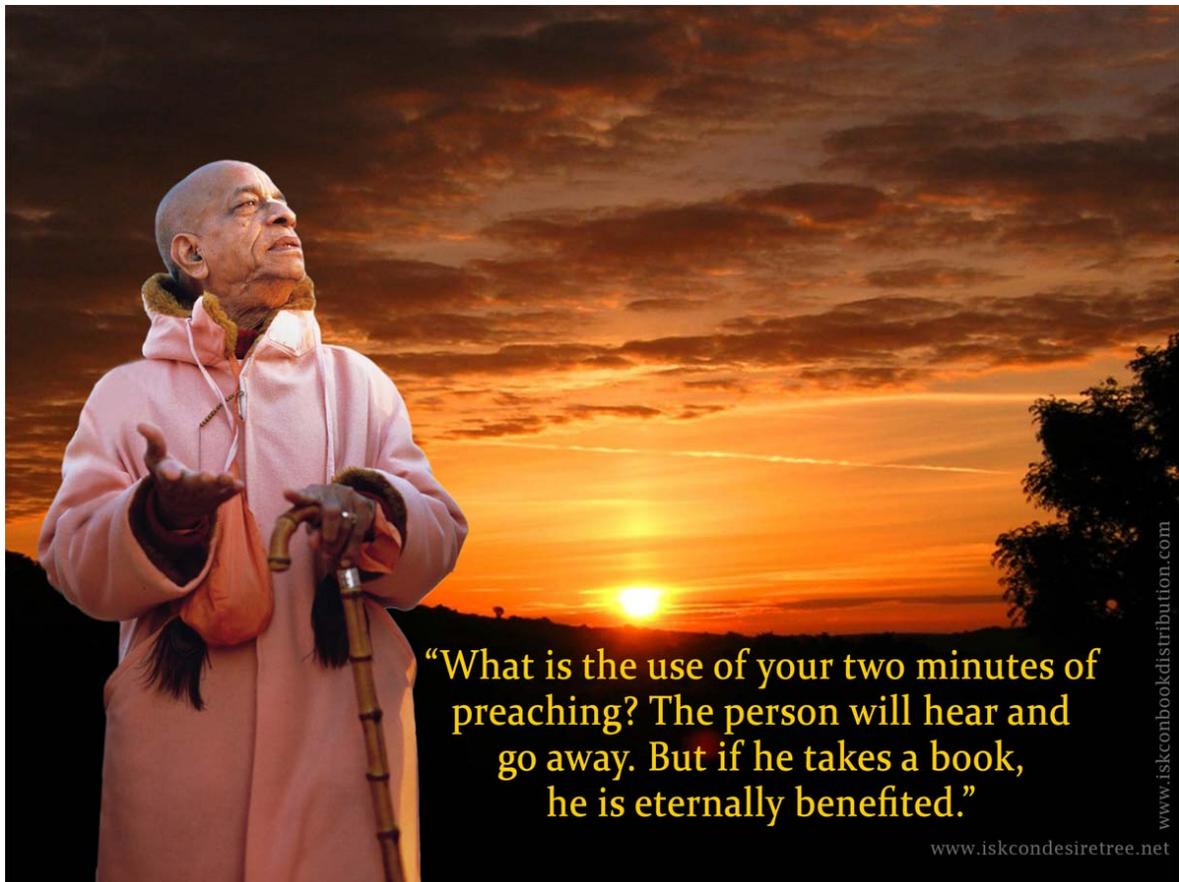
He kept the book—Kṛṣṇa’s mercy.

**[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](http://www.iskcondesiretree.net)

[www.iskconbookdistribution.com](http://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 Devāmṛta 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.

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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.

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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.

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“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.

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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.

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## 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 buy 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. After 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.

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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.”

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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.”

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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.

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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

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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.'"

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### 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

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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.

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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!*

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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.”

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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*.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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“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?”

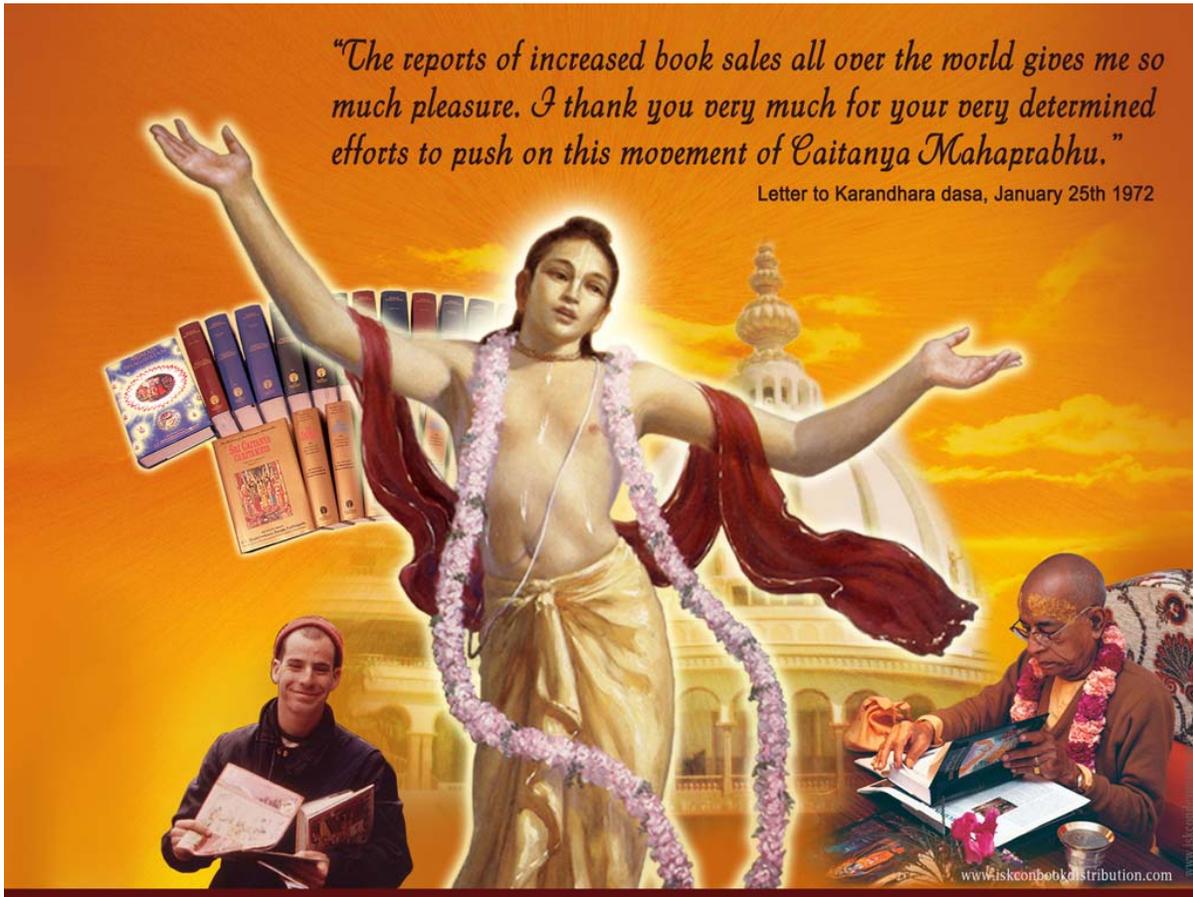
“Well,” I said, “this book is just like a cake. I may say ‘This is a nice cake’ and you may say ‘No, I don’t think so,’ but how will you know unless you taste it? So unless you take the book and read it, you’ll never know how good it is.”

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.”

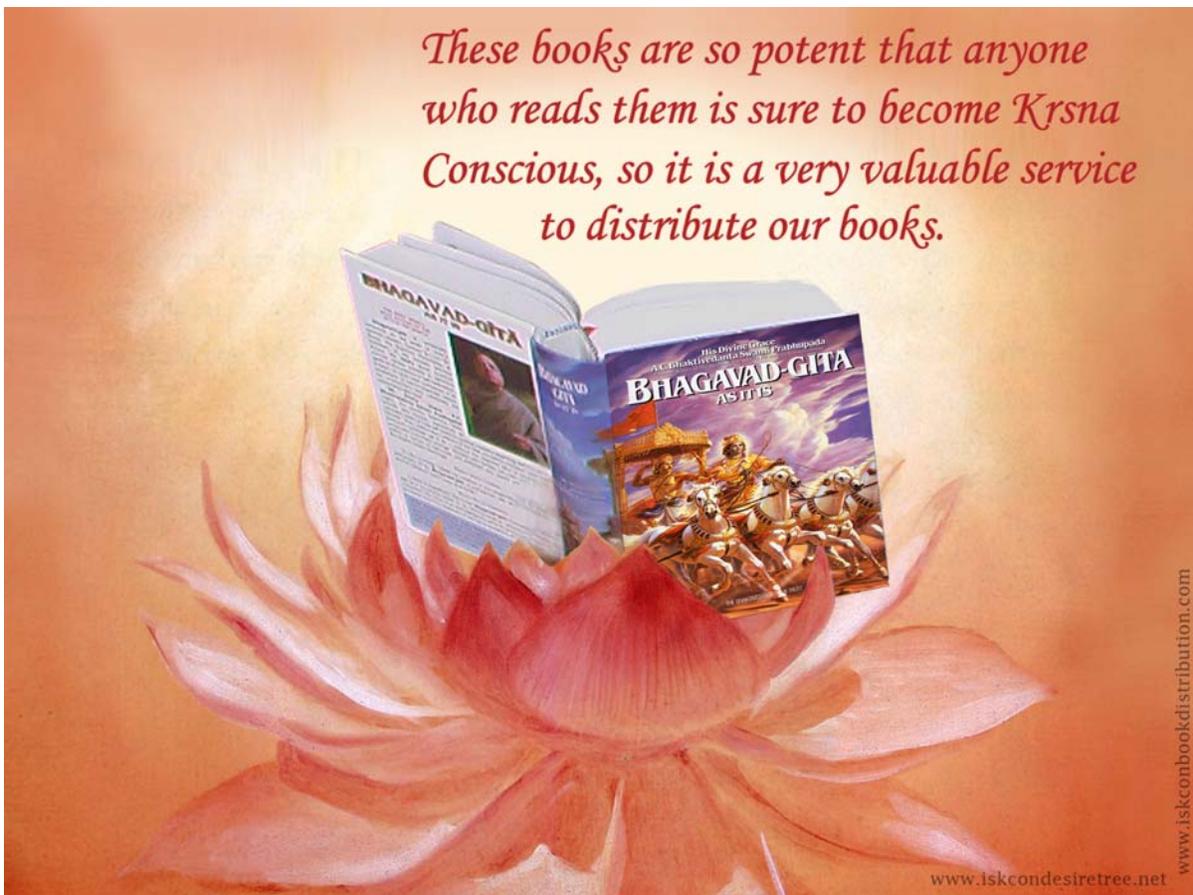
[End of Chapter Four: A Change of Heart]

*"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

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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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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## 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.

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### 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.

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### 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, *tṛṇād 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 . . . *Tṛṇād api su-nīcena*. Go on trampling. Hundreds and hundreds of people are trampling over the grass; it doesn't protest. *Tṛṇād api su-nīcena taror api sahiṣṇunā*. The tree is standing. You sit down. When there is scorching heat, you

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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.

\* \* \*

### 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

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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.

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### Bhakta Dāsa

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."

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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.”

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### Vaiśeṣika Dāsa

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.

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### Ratneśvarī Devī Dāsī

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.”

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### 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

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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.

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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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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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.

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### 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.

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### 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."

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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.

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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

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.

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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

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

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*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 Prabhu

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.

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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.

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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

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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]