

*Entering
the
Heart
of
Śrīla Prabhupāda's
Saṅkīrtana
Mission*

— Presented by Śrīmatī Dāsī and team
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It was very late December in 1958, the disappearance day anniversary of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. His elderly disciple, initiated in 1933 as Abhay Caraṇāravinda Dāsa, was sitting alone in Vṛndāvana. Outside his window, the sacred Yamunā River flowed peacefully – but his heart was in turmoil. He felt so helpless and hopeless. What service did he have to offer as a meaningful gift of gratitude to his Gurudeva on this most painful yet precious day? Any attempt to even remember his glorious master was soon eclipsed by remembrance of the horrendous happenings since his departure from this world.

How powerful had been Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura’s preaching mission! His presses ran day and night, printing transcendental magazines, books and the daily *Nadiyā Prakāśa*. But the four magnificent presses his Gurudeva had established to distribute Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s teachings to the suffering masses had been sold by his deviant disciples to pay court case expenses. And even his own meagre attempts to publish *Back to Godhead* (BTG) every fortnight had come to a grinding halt in November, 1956. He had no money, and support for publishing BTG was sporadic.

Overwhelmed by emotion he broke down and sobbed quietly but uncontrollably. He bitterly lamented his master’s absence and the collapse of the Gauḍīya Maṭha’s unparalleled compassionate preaching prowess.

In the dim light of dawn he took up his pen and poured out his heart to his beloved Gurudeva, overwhelmed by feelings of separation from him.

What he penned, now known as *Śrī Viraha Aṣṭaka*, is a transcendental masterpiece which can give us some entrance into Śrīla Prabhupāda’s heart – and the very heart of his *saṅkīrtana* mission. Quiet and careful contemplation of it will not only connect us more tangibly and deeply to Śrīla Prabhupāda and his mission. It will also make us much more aware of the preciousness of every sincere attempt we make to serve that mission.....

— Śrī Viraha Aṣṭaka —

Cutting through the web of illusion,
The overflowing ocean of mercy called Śrī Nityānanda Rāma
Ordained that the flood of love of God bestowed by Him
be distributed throughout the world.
Unfortunately, those persons to whom the noble responsibility was given
to spread this divine God-consciousness
Were tragically stricken by the disease of caste-consciousness,
And in their hands
which were always busy performing formal ritualistic ceremonies,
the exalted title “Goswāmī”
became merely another family surname,
And the channel of divine current became blocked.

Therefore you personally came, O beloved master Śrīla Prabhupāda,
To demolish the dam of Māyā
And re-release the eager floodtide of *premā-bhakti*.
By your potency
The divine tidal wave of Mahāprabhu’s all-encompassing grace
once again inundated the entire world,
Falling upon even such wretched and fallen souls as myself.
Taking the order of Lord Caitanya as your very life’s breath,
You sent your dedicated servitors door to door
to deliver the whole of humankind.
Under your infallible direction the message of Godhead was preached
From the shorefronts of the ocean
to the peaks of the Himālayas.
But now you,
who suffered so upon seeing the suffering of misguided humanity,
are gone,
And the world once again appears dark and empty.
O Śrīla Prabhupāda, I am feeling lost and alone in your absence
on this day upon which you departed from our vision.

— Śrī Viraha Aṣṭaka (V1)

The intense eagerness to benefit all humankind
which was felt by Śrī Advaita Ācārya
and which thus brought Lord Śrī Gaurāṅga into this world
Was similarly felt by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura —
And therefore, O beloved master Śrīla Prabhupāda,
You who are the most intimate associate of that beautiful golden Lord
graciously made your divine advent as well.
“A human birth in the land of India is intended to be utilized
for the purpose of becoming perfect in God-realization
And then compassionately sharing that realization with others.”
Revealing India’s spiritual glories you preached this *Mahāmantra*
for the illumination of the Earth’s ten directions.
In your absence, however,
the world has once again become plunged into darkness,
And the flowing current from your ocean of mercy
has again been stopped.
Devoid of your ambrosial dispensation of Śrī Caitanya’s message,
Confusion reigns in human society,
And all the Vaiṣṇavas are feeling the pangs of separation
from your lotus feet.
The *jīvas* have reshackled themselves
with the heavy chains of ignorance and delusion,
And as they swim about in the vast ocean of material existence
in a frenzied attempt to reach the shore of peace,
...they perish.

This lance of misery pierces my heart
as it similarly afflicted you, Śrīla Prabhupāda,
who suffered so upon seeing the suffering of the misguided humanity.
I am indeed feeling lost and alone
on this day upon which you departed from our vision.

— Śrī Viraha Aṣṭaka (V2)

Your lotus lips continuously ushered forth the sweetest nectar
in the form of your instructions regarding the Holy Name of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
You made the path of spiritual progress so easy and delightful to follow
with your teaching that “Utility is the Principle” —
That anything useful and practical
could be constructively engaged in the service of the Lord
without personal attachment,
And that the sincere practice of such devotional service
with a genuine spirit of detachment
Could transform every house into a *mandira*
and every common household into a holy *saṅga*.
You lovingly cautioned that the transcendental activities of the Supreme Lord
should never be imitated —
even within one’s mind.
You nectarized the ears of all persons,
Filling their hearts with sublime attachment
to singing, dancing, and worshiping the Lord
in accordance with the standards established by the previous *Ācaryas*.
You magnanimously offered everyone the divine qualifications
to distribute the pure Holy Name for the deliverance of the whole world.
But alas, in your absence,
Nescience has now once again stealthily crept onto the scene,
Creating a most disturbing complication:
Those who are conspicuously unqualified
have taken to the practice of performing solitary *bhajana*
In strict accordance with the dictates of their own minds
and exclusive devotion to their own impassioned senses.
Garbed in fraudulent attire
and lavishly adorned with feigned emotions,
Such persons have, by their selfish strategy,
woefully left their blemishing effect upon the body of society.
O Śrīla Prabhupāda,
You suffered much upon seeing the regrettable plight of misguided humanity.
I am feeling especially lost and alone in separation from your lotus feet
on this day of your departure from our vision.

— Śrī Viraha Aṣṭaka (V3)

“Lord Kṛṣṇa’s associates in Vraja have real life,
And therefore they are preaching.”

Persons interested in genuine wealth and perfection
will doubtlessly find all such things in your words.
“The chanting of the Lord’s Holy Name is the greatest of all religions.”

By preaching this message
and thereby preserving this eternal truth,
You, O beloved Gurudeva, have attained the greatest eternal fame.
One who rejects this truth regarding *Harināma-saṅkīrtana*
will find truth nowhere throughout the three worlds;
And one who accepts the Holy Name from your divine lips
Becomes qualified to make disciples throughout the three worlds
and rescue all such conditioned souls from their suffering condition.
But in your absence, Śrīla Prabhupāda,
The resolute determination explained by Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura
has become broken by the forces of darkness,
And those who were not fixed in devotional service
have divided your holy Gauḍīya Mission into many separated branches.
It appears that the essence of your teachings
Did not enter very deeply into their ears,
And that the tigress of desire for material prestige
has regrettably claimed a great many victims.
Indeed, I am wondering where I, too, will receive the strength
To remain steady in my *bhajana* in separation from your lotus feet.
O Śrīla Prabhupāda,
The depth of your compassion was such
that the suffering of the misguided humanity
was a cause of much suffering for you;
And I am acutely feeling lost and alone
on this day of your departure from our vision.

— Śrī Viraha Aṣṭaka (V4)

Persons afflicted by the jaundice of ignorance
cannot taste the ambrosial sweetness
of the heart-transforming names of *Hare*, *Kṛṣṇa*, and *Rāma*,
And therefore they do not chant the holy *Mahāmantra*,
Whose thirty-two syllables are like resplendent pearl-like droplets
which constitute the elixir of immortality,
The very medicine for curing the disease of such persons.
One of your closest disciples
whose cup you lovingly filled to the brim
with the deathless nectar of your instructions
has ungratefully thrown away that chalice,
And his regrettable preference for infectious poison
has resulted in an epidemic of *sahajiyāism*.
It seems that the prize valiantly acquired by the triumphant lion
has at present been unscrupulously stolen by a jackal.
The oppressive forces of nescience have reduced everyone to tears,

And it appears that each of the young lions
 is again becoming a mouse.
 O Śrīla Prabhupāda,
 Where are your pure teachings to be found at this dark hour?
 Standing as we are
 on the shore of the ocean of spiritual devastation,
 Only your lifesaving glance of causeless mercy
 can save us from certain death.
 Only by your infallible grace
 can we perceive a way to somehow retrace our steps:
 To return to a life of divine remembrance of the Holy Name in great happiness
 And implicit faith in your “Vaikuṅṭha message.”
 O blessed master, please awaken some good intelligence
 in this insignificant servant of yours,
 Increasing the fullness of his faith in your sublime message day by day.
 You compassionately took the suffering of misguided humanity
 upon your own holy head,
 And I am feeling severe pangs of separation from your lotus feet
 on this day upon which you disappeared from our vision.

— Śrī Viraha Aṣṭaka (V5)

“Let there be congregational singing and dancing
 in praise of the Supreme Lord
 among the association of the Lord’s devotees.”
 Where can one find such sweetness and magnanimity
 as could be compared with Mahāprabhu’s method of attaining spiritual
 perfection?
 If we could but perform *Harināma-saṅkīrtana*
 with complete faith in the words of the spiritual master,
 Genuine love of Godhead would make its divine appearance.
 Without true love of God,
 Our intellects are merely intricate networks of delusion.
 Because no one has obtained that *premā-bhakti*,
 A great catastrophe has resulted:
 The Vaiṣṇavas have given up preaching in favor of solitary worship,
 And a vast and perilous jungle of impersonalism
 has grown tall and spread over the surface of the world.
 Because so many devotees have given up their devotional service,
 The name Patita-pāvana, “Savior of the Fallen”,
 Has itself fallen into disrepute.
 O Śrīla Prabhupāda,
 What are we to do at this most inauspicious time?
 The beautiful garden of *Kṛṣṇa-bhakti*
 which you personally planted and tended with your own lotus-like hands
 Has apparently been looted and destroyed.
 Please awaken some good intelligence

in this insignificant servant of yours,
Increasing the fullness of his faith in your sublime teachings day by day.
You compassionately considered the suffering of misguided humanity
to be your own,
And I am indeed feeling afflicted by pangs of separation from your lotus feet
on this day of your disappearance from our vision.

— Śrī Viraha Aṣṭaka (V6)

O beloved master,
Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya is the very personification of compassion,
And you are the very personification of His message:
That the chanting of the Holy Name is the singular infallible means
of crossing the turbulent ocean of material existence
And entering a life of joyous self-dedication in the service of the Divine Couple.
Lord Gaurahari made the entire world the recipient of His causeless grace,
And you are vigorously distributing that grace
to every town and village of the world.
You personally traveled all over India,
Even in the South
And you sent your devotees
to save the inhabitants of the Western countries as well
from their moth-like rush headlong into the flames of self-destruction.
Mahāprabhu employed many clever tricks
to engage the conditioned souls in devotional service,
And you were expert at understanding all these things
and following closely in His holy footsteps.
You understood exactly what was required to be preached
in perfect accordance with time, place, circumstance, and audience:
And although the leaders of the sheep-like masses
devout in their worship of the idol of mongrelized logic
could not understand;
Though the blind lawyers, though having eyes,
could not see;
And though the many nonsensical groups of deviators and imitators
could not appreciate,
The intelligent section of society
Could understand the impeccable purity of your teachings,
Clearly see the utter selflessness of your motives,
And earnestly appreciate your inexhaustible efforts
to defeat all elements which were opposed to the Absolute Truth.
O Śrīla Prabhupāda,
You accepted much suffering on your own account
in order to relieve the suffering of humanity at large,
And I am indeed feeling pangs of separation from your lotus feet
on this day of your disappearance from our vision.

— Śrī Viraha Aṣṭaka (V7)

Adored master,
 You patiently reminded all of your disciples time and time again
 that devotional service to Lord Caitanya
 is not performed exclusively in solitude.
 You took great care to painstakingly explain to all of us
 That just as the Lord out of His causeless mercy
 preached everywhere and delivered Jagāi and Mādhāi,
 So does the exact same preaching work
 need to be continued in the present day.
 The world has now become filled with countless Jagāis and Mādhāis,
 And it is clear to all that the only means for their salvation
 is the path shown by Caitanya-Nitāi.
 If you were to come again at this time, Śrīla Prabhupāda,
 and personally reestablish the proper understanding of all these things
 in all the ten directions
 The joy of the people would know no bounds.
 Hearing the deeply resonant sound of your voice
 loudly proclaiming the victory of Mahāprabhu's mission,
 The demons and atheists would flee,
 And the thirsty living entities
 would drink the divine nectar-message of Lord Gaurāṅga
 to their complete fulfilment.
 The whole world would once again be set aright.
 Whereas in your absence,
 nothing of value is to be found anywhere.
 Brokenhearted,
 this Abhay makes his cry of appeal, O Gurudeva,
 in the bitter throes of separation from your lotus feet.
 You compassionately felt the suffering of the *jīvas* to be your own,
 And I am indeed feeling lost and alone
 on this day of your disappearance from our vision.

— Śrī Viraha Aṣṭaka (V8)

*nama om viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya bhū-tale
 śrimate bhaktivedānta-svāmin iti nāmine*

*namas te sārāsvate deve gaura-vāṇī-pracāriṇe
 nirviṣeṣa-sūnyavādi-pāścātya-deśa-tāriṇe*

*(jaya) śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu-nityānanda
 śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda*

*Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare
 Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare*