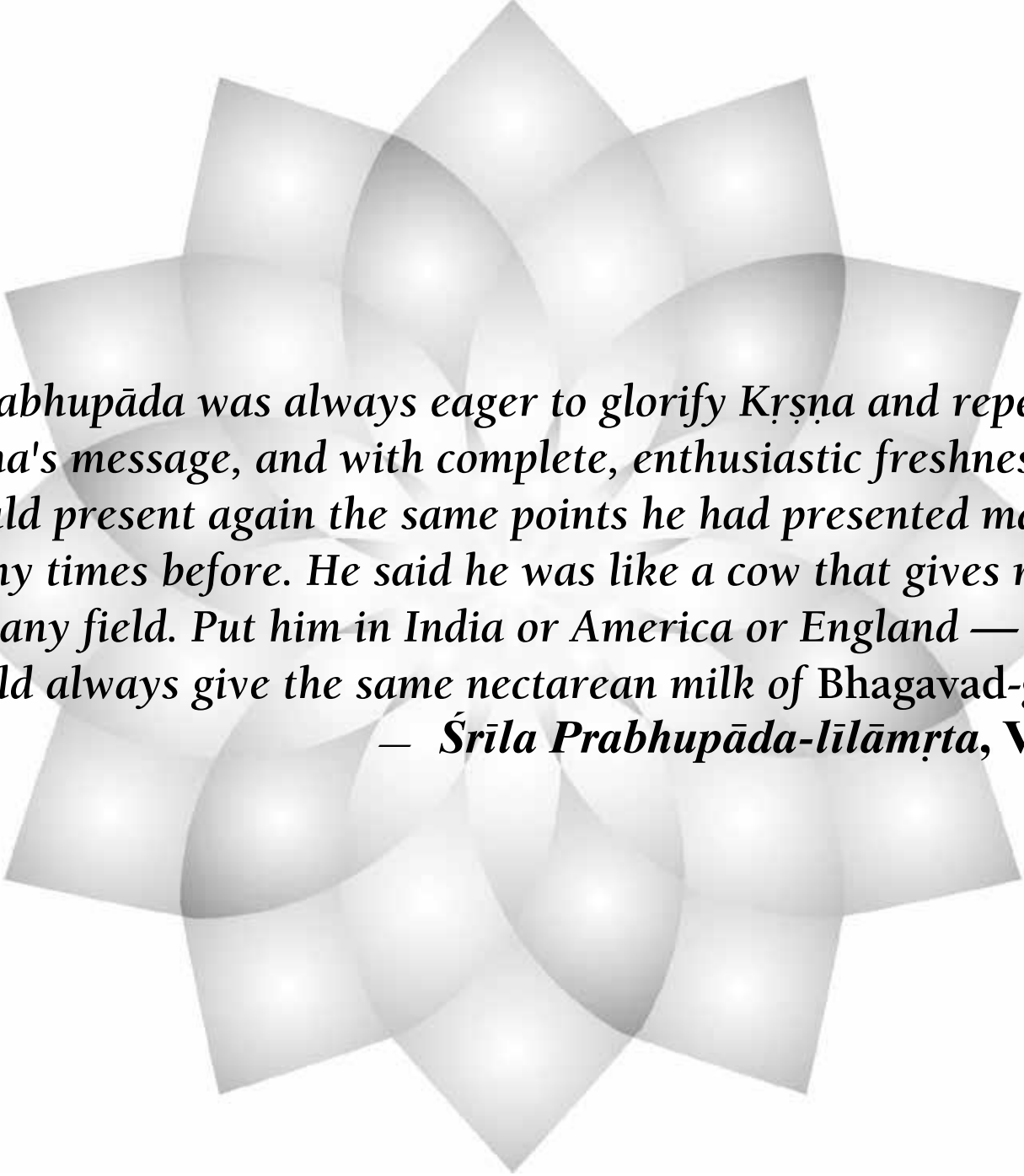


The Advent of Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*

— Presented by Śrīmatī Dāsī and team
ISKCON, Śrī Vṛndāvana Dhāma



Prabhupāda was always eager to glorify Kṛṣṇa and repeat Kṛṣṇa's message, and with complete, enthusiastic freshness he would present again the same points he had presented many, many times before. He said he was like a cow that gives milk in any field. Put him in India or America or England — he would always give the same nectarean milk of Bhagavad-gītā.

— Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta, Vol. 5

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You Guys Have Got It Wrong!

It was a cold winter morning in Vrndāvana, and I'd just happily devoured a piping hot, nutritious and very delicious breakfast when the phone rang. It was Dr. Śyāma Ballabha Upādhyāya — my Vrajavāsī dentist.

Although over many years the man has caused me excruciating pain in the name of tooth extraction, root canal treatment and the like, we've somehow become friends.

He is a very interesting character. Fiercely dedicated to Vraja and Vrajavāsī culture, and yet always inquisitive to understand how others love their God. His childlike desire to understand and know is matched by a very sharp and finely discerning intelligence. It is often a challenge to deal with him. But I like him — he keeps me out of complacency and comfort zone.

- * *Hare Kṛṣṇa, Dr Śyāma. Good to hear from you.*
- * *Srimati, can you do me a favor?*
- * *Sure.*
- * *I've got friends coming for lunch on Sunday and I want to treat them some ISKCON mahāprasāda — but the mahā stall has been closed each time I've visited the temple. Can you give me a contact name and number?*
- * *No problem.*

I gave him the details and he was obviously happy and relieved.

- * *So what's your next big temple festival?*

I thought for a moment....

- * *Mokṣadā Ekādaśī — The advent of Bhagavad-gītā.*
- * *How will you be celebrating that?*
- * *Our international family of devotees will be joining together on that day to chant the entire Bhagavad-Gītā for Lord Kṛṣṇa's pleasure and purpose. Śrīla Prabhupāda's Bhagavad-gītā As It Is has been translated into some 55 languages and so on that day devotees from all over the globe will be filling the ether with the vibration of Kṛṣṇa's words spoken more than 5,000 years ago.*

There was a pregnant pause...

- * *Srimati, I have a question.*
- * *No problem.*

- * *Kṛṣṇa spoke this message in Sanskrit more than 5,000 years ago. You are a foreigner and you don't know Sanskrit, so how is it that you know Bhagavad-Gītā so well?*
- * *That's Śrīla Prabhupāda's kindness. His Bhagavad-Gītā made Kṛṣṇa's words accessible to everyone — regardless of nationality and creed.*
- * *Then why aren't you celebrating the advent of your Prabhupada's Bhagavad-gītā As It Is? You guys have got it all wrong! If your Prabhupada hadn't given you Bhagavad-Gītā in your own language — and a language suitable to today's worldview — you wouldn't even know who Kṛṣṇa is. Can you tell me a little about the advent of your Prabhupada's Bhagavad-gītā As It Is?*

There was another pregnant pause.....

- * *I'll have to do a little homework to do justice to your question, Dr. Śyāma.*
- * *No problem. But I want to know before Mokṣadā Ekādaśī, okay?*
- * *Sure. I'll WhatsApp you in a couple of days.*
- * *Great! I want to know about the advent of the Bhagavad-Gītā that had — and is having — global impact. If I don't hear from you in a couple of days, I'll give you a ring. Have a great day!*
- * *You too!*

The phone call ended, but his words were still ringing in my ears,

- * *Why aren't you celebrating the advent of your Prabhupada's Bhagavad-gītā As It Is? You guys have got it all wrong!*

Hmm! He's right — I don't even remember when Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Bhagavad-Gītā* was first published. I certainly do need to give some time for this one.....

When Our Plans Don't Match Kṛṣṇa's Plan

Have you ever experienced it? You're inspired, you're energized, you have all the resources you need — but your plan to please Kṛṣṇa fizzles away into nothingness, backfires disastrously or takes on a life of its own only to give results you'd rather not remember.

Why me? This is often our first spontaneous response, but usually the philosophical mind or the do-or-die in us will soon have us back on our feet. And we're ready to try again!

We see this recurring pattern ever so obviously present in Śrīla Prabhupāda's life. Let's take a brief look at one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's many early attempts to publish *Bhagavad-*

gītā As It Is. We've probably read it many times before, but today let's look at it from a different angle of vision.

South India, 1948

While on business in Madurai, in South India, Abhay showed some of his writings to Muthuswamy Chetty, another medical salesman. Mr. Chetty was impressed and felt he could persuade his wealthy friend Dr. Allagappa, the famous "Birla of the South," to finance the printing. In April of 1948, Mr. Chetty wrote to Abhay, saying that he had been prompted to help Abhay "for something God has meant." He asked Abhay Charan to send him the complete Geetopanishad manuscript so that he could present it to Dr. Allagappa in Madras. Mr. Chetty had already written Dr. Allagappa about the "first-class work Geetopanishad, to cover 1,200 pages of royal size" and had urged him to publish it for the benefit of religious-minded people. He had also mentioned that Abhay had been trying to publish the book since 1946.

Dr. Allagappa soon replied to Mr. Chetty that he was interested, and Mr. Chetty wrote to Abhay, "So I am on my way to help you, and only God must help me." As for talking business with Dr. Allagappa, there would be no need, since "once he does it, it is for the sake of benevolence..." Anticipating success, Mr. Chetty invited Abhay to come to Madras to meet Dr. Allagappa. "There he will arrange for what God has meant for you to do in your religious duty." In Madras, Abhay would be able to check and correct the proofs of the manuscript and see the book through the various stages of printing. It was a big opportunity, and Abhay was not one to miss an opportunity. If the book could be published, it would be a great victory in his mission to fulfill the request of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī.

But then the worst thing happened. The manuscript was stolen. It was the only copy, the one Abhay was keeping safely at home. He questioned his family and servants-no one knew what had happened. Abhay was baffled; so much work had been undone. He felt he had worked so many months for nothing.

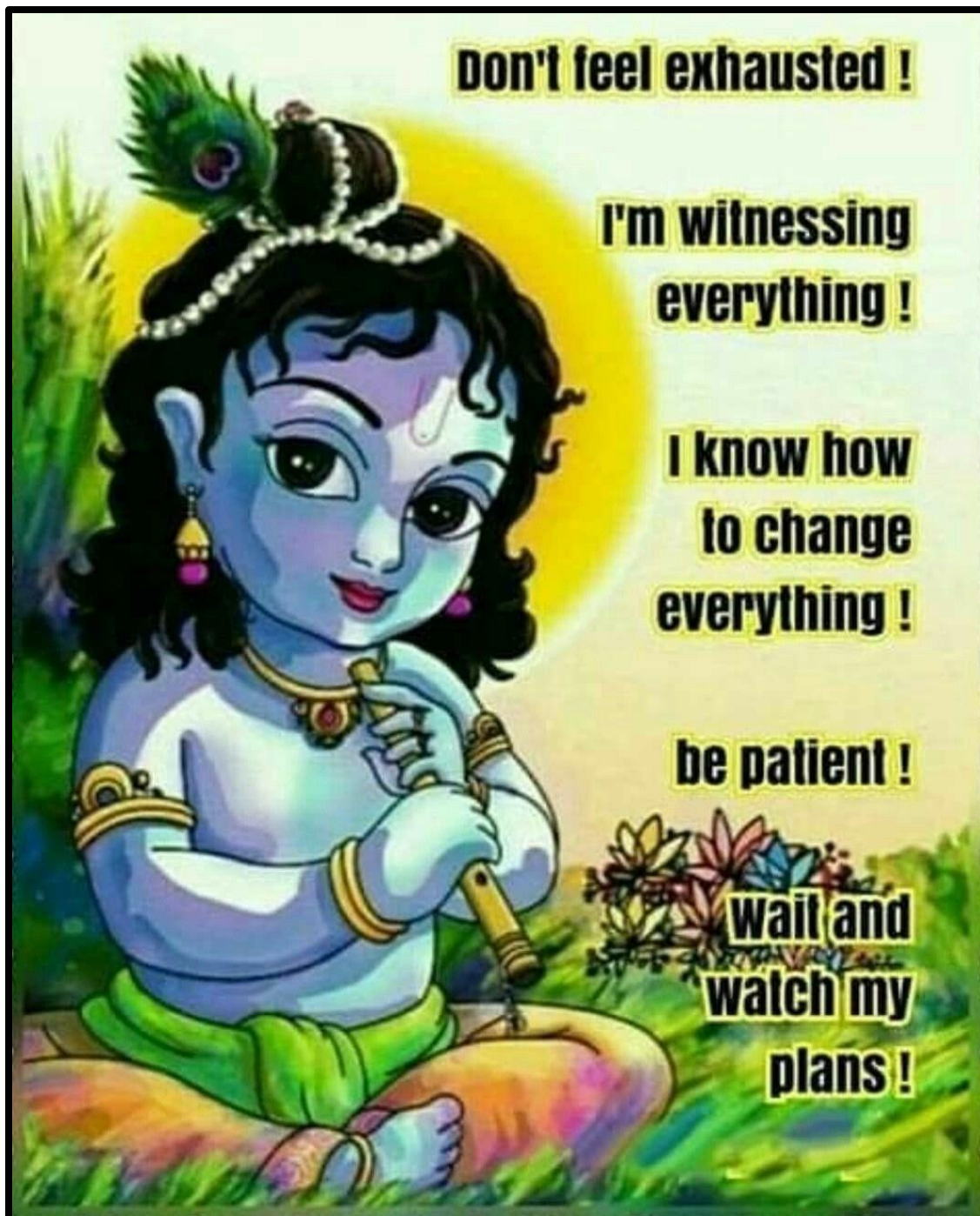
— Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta, Vol.1

How devastated Śrīla Prabhupāda must have felt! Why did Kṛṣṇa do this to him? Let's calmly, coolly and quietly reflect on this question for a moment. Hmm!

If a Madras businessman had published Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*

- **Would Śrīla Prabhupāda had ventured to the West, or would he have made India his preaching base?**
- **How many copies would have been published?**
- **Would they have reached an international audience?**
- **Would ISKCON have been established?**
- **Would Hare Kṛṣṇa have become a household word internationally?**
- **Would the average Westerner have come to know about Kṛṣṇa and His world?**

Seen in light of all this, we can see that this very painful setback was part of Kṛṣṇa's plan to make Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* internationally accessible to one and all.



When Kṛṣṇa’s Plan Prevails —The MacMillan Miracle!

America, 1968

Have you ever had a long-cherished desire and plan to do something special for Kṛṣṇa? Have you ever felt He’s finally given you the nod of approval, picked you up, sat you on His magic carpet and flown you through all time and space barriers and boundaries and allowed you to do just what you wanted to do, just for Him?

This pretty much sums up the advent of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. Brahmānanda Prabhu was a key player in this amazing adventure. He fondly and very vividly remembered this magical time and Satyarāja Prabhu expertly and very graphically captured it on paper. It soon became a part of a mesmerizing book entitled “*Swamiji*”. Let’s take a look at this first-hand experience of Kṛṣṇa’s magic and mercy.

A Little Background

The Bhagavad-gītā was important to Swamiji. He saw it as the perfect book to convey Kṛṣṇa consciousness, as it consists of the Lord’s own words and His interactions with His loving devotee, Arjuna. In 1939, just seven years after Swamiji was initiated by his spiritual master, he wrote a lengthy introduction to the book in English, presaging his full translation and commentary, which appeared soon after he began his mission in the West.

When Swamiji arrived in New York in 1965, he gave priority to his work on the Gītā. In India he had already completed a translation, spanning well over a thousand pages, but it was stolen. In March 1966, he was adjusting to life in the Western world when he met with another loss: his typewriter, cassette recorder, and several books were taken from him. But he was resilient and determined to complete his work. In 1967 he finished the new manuscript, again over a thousand pages, and resolved to get a major publisher so that his message would be heard throughout the world.

At the time, Allen Ginsberg, famous poet of the Beat Generation, was visiting the New York temple, and he was enjoying a friendly relationship with Swamiji. Since Ginsberg was experienced as a published author, Swamiji asked him to show the manuscript to his benefactors, which Ginsberg did. But they were unimpressed, claiming the book had little commercial value.

Swamiji then gave the manuscript to Rayarama Dasa, an early disciple with some experience in the publishing world. Rayarama, too, was unsuccessful in his attempts, his contacts explaining their hesitation in much the same way that Ginsberg's did.

Enter Brahmānanda

Enter Brahmānanda. He vividly relates the story as if it were yesterday, though it was more than forty years ago. "I didn't know anything about publishing," he admits. "But Swamiji put the manuscript in my hands, saying, 'You must get this published.' So I knew what I had to do."

What he didn't know was how to do it. If Ginsberg and Rayarāma couldn't get the book published, how would he?

"I bought a couple of books on publishing, and I was about to take a course at R.R. Bowker LLC, noted in the publishing industry—I just didn't know what to do. Still, Swamiji wanted me to get the book published, and that was that."

Around this time, the devotees had released the "Happening" album, an assortment of devotional songs. They had placed an ad for the record in the Village Voice and were receiving orders from various parts of the East Coast.

One such order came from midtown Manhattan, relatively close to the little storefront serving as a temple for Swamiji and his early disciples. Brahmānanda brought the letter to his master.

Enter Śrīla Prabhupāda

"Look, Swamiji. It's an order from Macmillan. They're one of the biggest publishers in the world."

Swamiji gazed knowingly into his disciple's eyes and gave the following directives: "Do not mail out this order as we do with others. Instead, bring the record to Macmillan's offices and hand deliver it to the person who sent us the letter."

Brahmānanda nodded, aware that Kṛṣṇa was using him as an instrument. "When you deliver the album," Swamiji continued, "tell them that you are a

disciple of a guru from India and that he has translated the Bhagavad-gītā. They will publish it. Do not worry.”

Brahmānanda was stunned. Swamiji seemed so confident. There was no doubt the book would get published—and by Macmillan! One couldn’t do much better than that.

Kṛṣṇa’s Magic

The next day, dressed in suit and tie, Brahmānanda made his way up to the Macmillan skyscraper at 866 Third Avenue, just off 52nd Street. His expectations as large as the building itself, he was disappointed when he learned that the order for the album had come from an accountant, not an executive or a prominent person in the company.

“This really had nothing to do with the publishing company,” remembers Brahmānanda, “it was just a simple worker who had some interest in mantras and meditation.”

So Brahmānanda dutifully delivered the album and had pretty much given up hope that his teacher’s Gītā would get published. Just then, in the midst of polite small talk with the accountant, a young executive happened to appear in their midst and was introduced to Brahmānanda. “This is James O’Shea Wade, our Senior Editor.”

Brahmānanda seized the moment.

“I am a disciple of a guru from India,” he said, trying to repeat Swamiji’s words verbatim. “He has translated the Bhagavad-gītā.”

“What?” Wade responded, incredulously. “We’ve just published a full line of spiritual books, and we were looking for a Bhagavad-gītā to fill out the set.”

Brahmānanda’s mouth dropped open. Though at a loss for words himself, he contemplated the potency of Swamiji’s: “They will publish it. Do not worry.” Wade then broke the awkward silence.

“You bring in the manuscript tomorrow,” he offered, “and we’ll publish it, sight unseen.”

Brahmānanda raced back down to the storefront and told Swamiji the news. In his own inimitable way, Swamiji was nonchalant, as though he knew what would transpire before it happened.



In a recent interview, James Wade confirms: “I vividly remember the stir caused in our rather sedate and boring office the day the Swami came to visit, accompanied by followers in orange robes.” Apparently, Swamiji himself brought the manuscript personally to James Wade the day after Brahmānanda’s brief visit to Macmillan!

James Wade was Senior Editor at Macmillan from 1965 to 1969. But in his few years at their offices, he managed to publish a pure devotee’s edition of the Bhagavad-gītā. The abridged version came out first, in 1968, and because of seeds James Wade had planted, Macmillan published Swamiji’s unabridged Bhagavad-gītā As It Is in 1972.

Kṛṣṇa’s Magic Continues

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Bhagavad-gītā As It Is went on to become one of the most significant editions in the modern world, often outselling both popular and scholarly translations. Claiming millions of readers in some fifty-five languages, from Polish to Japanese, German to Azerbaijani, Danish to Croatian, English to numerous Indian languages, Prabhupāda’s Gītā is a phenomenon. It can be found in homes, bookstores, research libraries, and academic institutions around the world.

And it has captured the hearts and lives of millions internationally.



Amazing! My Vrajavāsī doctor and friend is right. The advent of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* is definitely worth celebrating — it’s the only edition which has dynamically and purely carried Kṛṣṇa’s message to every corner of the planet and it’s the only one that’s had global impact.

It is in its own right a Gītā Jayantī.



Jaya Śrīla Prabhupāda!
Jaya Bhagavad-gītā As It Is!

*(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***