

Śrī Vyāsa-Pūjā

Śrī Vyāsa-Pūjā
September 4, 2018

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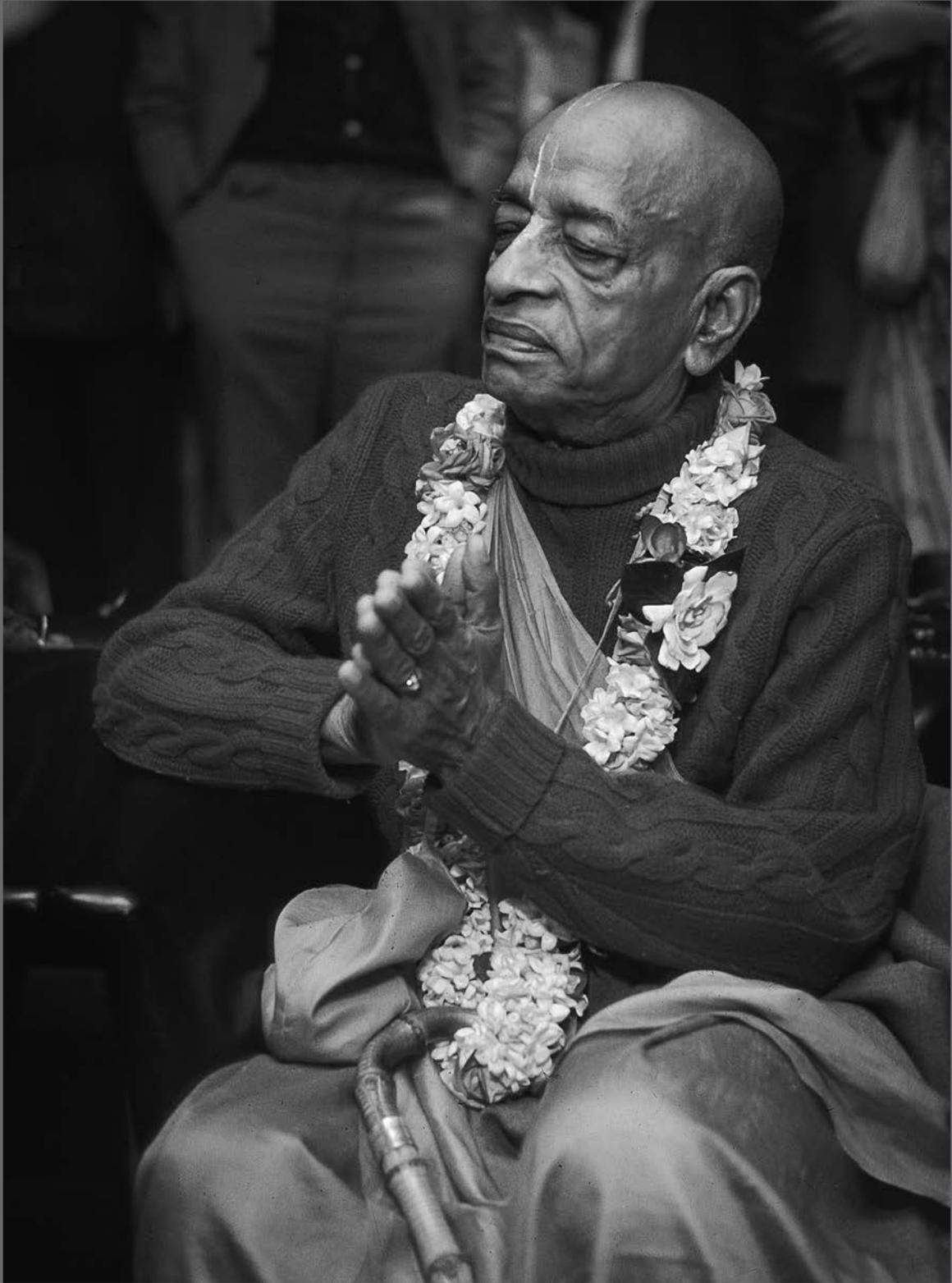
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The Most Blessed Event
Śrī Vyāsa-Pūjā

September 4, 2018

*The appearance day of
our beloved Spiritual Master*

*His Divine Grace Om Viṣṇupāda Paramahansa Parivrajakācārya Aṣṭottara-Śata Śrī Śrīmad
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda
Founder-ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness*



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Introduction

In this year's Vyāsa-pūjā book, the fiftieth such compendium of encomiums for Śrīla Prabhupāda, one prominent theme is heightened appreciation and gratitude for the severe austerities he underwent to give us all a chance to take up Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Devotees cited the following verse perhaps a half dozen times:

It is said that 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. [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.7.44]

Along with this appreciation for what Śrīla Prabhupāda went through to start, expand, and manage ISKCON comes a heightened appreciation for the invaluable gifts he gave us. A poignant example of this is the offering from His Holiness Guṇagrāhi Goswami. Mahārāja has been battling cancer for a few years, and living in Vṛndāvana for some time. There he's established a nightly *kīrtana* program where he's staying, a program that has become extremely popular. Here is an excerpt from his offering:

Along with some devotees who are caring for me, I've now been in Vṛndāvana—a most special land that I have been given access to by your mercy alone—for over two years. Each night we welcome guests to our Vṛndāvana Kīrtana Saṅga, which by Kṛṣṇa's grace has become a well-known event internationally. And also the very highlight of my life! In fact, it has *given* me life, thanks to Your Divine Grace! I never cease to be amazed by the variety of our guests, the excitement we all feel, the joy and affection among us, and my feeling and mood after having taken shelter of the devotees and the *kīrtana*—even after I may have first felt too much discomfort even to leave my bed to enter the adjoining room to attend the *kīrtana*. In fact, many days I feel so inspired by the *kīrtana* that, after getting help to get dressed, I then walk unassisted to the *kīrtana* and dive in. And by the time the *kīrtana* ends and the loving interactions have come to a close, my pains and woes miraculously seem hardly worth paying attention to! What a marvelous natural pain medicine, and what a benediction to have been given that medicine, the holy names, by Your Divine Grace!

A special feature of this year's book is the inclusion of three homages that may well be referred to in months and years to come. Specifically, we're fortunate to have the following three well-researched and -written essays: The first, by Anuttama Prabhu, describes how Śrīla Prabhupāda's Seven Purposes of ISKCON are being magnificently fulfilled worldwide; the second, by Bhaktivaibhava Swami, gives ten reasons why Śrīla Prabhupāda's books are meant for everyone; and the third, by Vaiṣeṣika Prabhu, explores four foundational practices Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasized for all his followers. I feel honored and humbled to have a small part in helping to make these important contributions available to the ISKCON world.

Preparing this book year after year, I come to expect offerings from many of the same sources. But each year there are a few sources that are new. This year I'd like to give a shout out to two new centers on the Vyāsa-pūjā book map—Baba and Enugu.

A devotee in Baba, Bali, Indonesia, wrote this wonderful appreciation of Śrīla Prabhupāda and his followers:

Let me offer my obeisances to all the devotees who have surrendered to your lotus feet, Śrīla Prabhupāda. And then let me offer my obeisances to lotus feet of all the devotees who will join

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your glorious ISKCON movement in the future. I offer unlimited prostrated obeisances to you, Śrīla Prabhupāda, again and again. Please shower your mercy on all of us conditioned souls so we can steadily engage in devotional service to Guru and Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, you are like a combination of Śrī Nārada Muni and Śrīla Vyāsadeva. The great saint Nārada Muni always travels throughout the entire universe spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and Śrīla Vyāsadeva compiled the *Vedas* and *Purāṇas*. You are such a great soul that you did both, Śrīla Prabhupāda—traveled and preached, and wrote innumerable books.

And finally, these heartfelt words from Daśaratha Paṇḍita Dāsa, in Enugu, Nigeria:

Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda, you are *patita-pāvana*, the savior of the fallen. By your mercy, even a most fallen soul like me has gotten the opportunity to chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa. Dear Śrīla Prabhupāda, you have saved me and indeed the whole world with the gift of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. I will forever remain grateful to you for giving me the opportunity to be part of this great movement.

Please bless this fallen soul and all of us here in Enugu so that we will remain in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and become your surrendered agents for spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness in this corner of the world.

And Śrīla Prabhupāda, please bless this fallen soul so that I will have the opportunity to help publish your Vyāsa-pūjā book for many years to come.

Draviḍa Dāsa
Vyāsa-pūjā Book Editor

The Meaning of Vyāsa-pūjā

To fully understand the meaning of Vyāsa-pūjā, we first need to understand the meaning of *guru*. Throughout the Vaiṣṇava texts, the prominence of the spiritual master's role in a disciple's spiritually successful life is repeatedly emphasized. One must worship the *ācārya*, who is the representative of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.¹

Discipleship is a two-way street: the aspiring disciple requests his or her selected guru for initiation, and conversely the guru examines the qualities of that person to determine his or her suitability as a candidate for initiation. This selection/acceptance process is not banal, like a job-seeker attending an interview with a potential employer. When Kṛṣṇa sees that the *jīva* is sincere, He makes the arrangement for the living entity to come in contact with a bona fide spiritual master.

Our founder-*ācārya*, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, commented that *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* instructs that the guru is the manifestation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. "Therefore, according to all the evidence given by the *śāstra* and by the practical behavior of devotees, one must accept a guru."²

But what *kind* of guru, specifically, must one accept? Śrīla Prabhupāda explains:

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu . . . gives a definition of guru. *Yāre dekha, tāre kaha 'kṛṣṇa'-upadeśa*: the bona fide guru is he who advises his disciples exactly in accordance with the principles spoken by Kṛṣṇa. The bona fide guru is he who has accepted Kṛṣṇa as guru. This is the *guru-paramparā* system.³

In one sense Vyāsadeva is the original guru. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains:

The original guru is Vyāsadeva because he is the speaker of the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, wherein everything spoken relates to Kṛṣṇa. Therefore *guru-pūjā* is known as Vyāsa-pūjā. In the final analysis, the original guru is Kṛṣṇa, His disciple is Nārada, whose disciple is Vyāsa, and in this way we gradually come in touch with the *guru-paramparā*.⁴

Śrīla Prabhupāda's devotion and immeasurable service to the previous *ācāryas*, Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, and Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu are proof of his position as the empowered devotee, the *senāpati-bhakta*, who revolutionized and transformed our lives in the gloom of Kali-yuga.

In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja writes:

*kali-kālera dharma—kṛṣṇa-nāma-saṅkīrtana
kṛṣṇa-śakti vinā nahe tāra pravartana*

The fundamental religious system in the Age of Kali is the chanting of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa. Unless empowered by Kṛṣṇa, one cannot propagate the *saṅkīrtana* movement.⁵

In June of 1970, in response to a letter from Tamāl Krishna Dāsa, who had enquired about the perfection of the spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote:

A Spiritual Master is always liberated. In any condition of His life He should not be mistaken as ordinary human being. . . . [T]hroughout my whole life I do not know what is illicit sex, intoxication,

meat-eating or gambling. So far my present life is concerned, I do not remember any part of my life when I was forgetful of Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also explains in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that “one who is surcharged with . . . transcendental love of Godhead can without difficulty see the Personality of Godhead in every atom and every movable or immovable object. And at the same time he can see the Personality of Godhead in His own abode, Goloka, enjoying eternal pastimes with His eternal associates.”⁶

Sitting in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s quarters in Māyāpur in 1976 during his daily afternoon *darśana*, I personally heard him explain this point. When an inquisitive disciple asked him if a pure devotee sees Kṛṣṇa everywhere, Prabhupāda held out the cupped palm of his right hand and replied, “Even within a drop of water, the pure devotee sees Kṛṣṇa and His associates and all of His pastimes.”

This was a mystical moment, when we caught a glimpse into Śrīla Prabhupāda’s transcendental inner world. Later I read in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that the Lord’s pastimes are also being “televised” in the heart of such a devotee.⁷

The allegory of the man who found a gourd lying on the road points to the ingenuity of the bona fide guru. This traveler later found a stick on the path and then a wire. In themselves the separated items were not particularly useful. But by putting the gourd, the wire, and the stick together, the man made a *vīṇā* and began to play beautiful music. Similarly, Śrīla Prabhupāda came to the West and, as described in *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, “found some rejected youths lying here and there, and . . . by Kṛṣṇa’s grace the combination [was] successful.”

As a rock thrown into a pool creates powerful ripples affecting the entire body of water, Śrīla Prabhupāda brought the holy name to the West, purifying a degraded world and indeed inspiring monumental, although not universally acknowledged, change in the broader society. The ripples have eventually become a tsunami, inundating the world with the nectar of Kṛṣṇa’s names. Temple-based *kīrtanas* have inspired the practice of chanting these sacred sounds even in more mundane circles. We witness this with the popularity of *kīrtanas* at yoga retreats and similar venues around the globe.

An essential element of *bhakti-yoga* is therefore to worship and serve the pure devotee. *Mad-bhaktapūjābhādhikā*—Kṛṣṇa advises that worshiping His pure devotee is better than worshiping Him directly.⁸

Chāḍiyā vaiṣṇava-sevā nistāra pāyeche kebā, says Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura. Without serving a devotee one cannot be released from material entanglement. Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself also instructed us to become not servants of Kṛṣṇa directly but servants of the servant of Kṛṣṇa.⁹

Worship of Śrīla Prabhupāda on Vyāsa-pūjā day is not restricted to those who took direct initiation from him. For ISKCON to continue to flourish, it is imperative that all ISKCON members honor Śrīla Prabhupāda’s appearance day for at least the next ten thousand years, inspired by love and respect for His Divine Grace and deep gratitude for the sacrifices he made for the good of humanity. Keeping our founder-*ācārya* as the focal point of our spiritual society will assure that our spiritual lives will thrive. Shifting the focus spells disaster.

Śrīla Prabhupāda has uniquely presented the philosophy and practice of *bhakti-yoga* in a way that is accessible to anyone, regardless of age or gender, background or birth. He has indeed cut the knots of material attachment from the core of our hearts. Just as he referred to his spiritual master, His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, as “a Vaikuṅṭha man,” so we too describe our Śrīla Prabhupāda as no ordinary spiritual master but as Lord Caitanya’s *senāpati bhakta*, the commander in chief of His army of devotees. This honorific is not to be taken as exaggeration or dismissed as an overflowing of the sentiments of his followers. In *Śrī Caitanya-maṅgala*, Śrīla Locana dāsa Ṭhākura describes how Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself predicted the future appearance of a great *senāpati bhakta*:

Taking the sharp sword of the congregational chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, I will root out and destroy the demoniac mentality in the hearts of all the conditioned souls. If some sinful people escape and, giving up religious principles, go to far-off countries, then my *senāpati bhakta* will come at that time to give them Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The Meaning of Vyāsa-pūjā

Śrīla Prabhupāda is without doubt that *senāpati bhakta*, to be honored by all Vaiṣṇavas.

In 1967, due to ill health, Śrīla Prabhupāda planned a return to India to recuperate. His impending departure in June of that year caused much speculation and deep concern. Could his neophyte disciples carry on if he never returned?

In chapter 12 of *The Hare Krishna Explosion*, Hayagrīva Dāsa writes:

Some of the devotees, worried that Swamiji had decided to go to India to leave his body, asked him whether, during his absence, one of his godbrothers should come to America to assume ISKCON leadership.

The minute this question was presented to him, we sensed that it was offensive. Swamiji became very grave, closing his eyes, and for a moment he seemed to consider it. Then suddenly we saw tears falling down his cheeks.

“My Guru Mahārāja . . . he was no ordinary spiritual master,” he said, wiping away the tears. “He . . . saved me.”

Later, Swamiji told us what we should have always known: There was no one to replace him. The very idea was insulting.

“If someone comes and tells you something different,” he said, “you will be confused.”

The subject was dropped forever.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in the concluding words to the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*:

Although according to material vision His Divine Grace Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Prabhupāda passed away from this material world on the last day of December, 1936, I still consider His Divine Grace to be always present with me by his *vāñī*, his words. . . . I think that His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura is always seeing my activities and guiding me within my heart by his words. . . . It is to be admitted that whatever translation work I have done is through the inspiration of my spiritual master, because personally I am most insignificant and incompetent to do this materially impossible work. I do not think myself a very learned scholar, but I have full faith in the service of my spiritual master, His Divine Grace Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. If there is any credit to my activities of translating, it is all due to His Divine Grace.

In a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda instructs us how to worship him by paraphrasing *Gurv-aṣṭaka* 7:

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura has advised that the spiritual master acting on the Supreme Lord’s behalf must be worshiped as being as good as the Supreme Lord, for he is the Lord’s most confidential servant in broadcasting the Lord’s message for the benefit of the conditioned souls involved in the material world.¹⁰

The Vyāsa-pūjā ceremony therefore celebrates the transcendental position of that spiritual master coming in the disciplic succession. He is the Supreme Personality of Servitor Godhead.

The introductory paragraph of this essay discussed the importance of accepting a guru in the disciplic succession as an essential step for advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Additionally, the *kind* of guru is of critical importance. That spiritual master is one who has himself served a pure devotee in the disciplic succession. Trying to develop spiritual life without accepting a bona fide guru will lead only to failure.

In March of 1975, in Atlanta, on the appearance day of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, Śrīla Prabhupāda delivered a discourse in which he emphatically instructed his disciples on the importance of accepting a bona fide spiritual master:

Sotry to receive Kṛṣṇa's grace through the disciplic succession [coming from] Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Then you will understand everything. *Yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau*. This is the process, Vedic process. One should have unflinching faith in God and spiritual master. Don't jump over [to] God, crossing the spiritual master. Then it will be failure. You must go through. We are observing Vyāsa-pūjā ceremony, the birth anniversary of our Guru Mahārāja. Why? We cannot understand Kṛṣṇa without spiritual master. . . . If anyone wants to understand Kṛṣṇa [by] jumping over the spiritual master, then immediately he becomes a bogus. Therefore Caitanya Mahāprabhu says, *guru-kṛṣṇa-kṛpāya pāya bhakti-latā-bija*. That is Vedic injunction. *Tad viddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā*. Nobody can understand Kṛṣṇa without going through His most confidential servant. This is the meaning of this Vyāsa-pūjā. You cannot surpass. If you think that you have become very learned and very advanced, now you can avoid the spiritual master and you understand Kṛṣṇa—that is bogus. That is the meaning of this Vyāsa-pūjā ceremony. We should always pray, *yasya prasādād bhagavat-prasādaḥ*. *Yasya prasādād*, only by the grace of spiritual master we can achieve the grace or mercy of Kṛṣṇa. This is the meaning of this Vyāsa-pūjā, offering obeisances by *paramparā* system.

Further exploring the meaning of Vyāsa-pūjā, we can pose this question: *How* should this sacred and ancient tradition be conducted?

On February 25, 1970, on Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's Vyāsa-pūjā day, the Los Angeles devotees saw Śrīla Prabhupāda offer *ārati* to a large picture of his Guru Mahārāja. After the *ārati*, he directed his disciples in offering flowers to the picture of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. Still standing before the picture, he said he had nothing to offer his spiritual master on that day except his disciples. He then read aloud the names of all his disciples.

By contrast, in Tokyo later that year, on the seventy-fourth anniversary of Śrīla Prabhupāda's appearance, it was apparent that the devotees did not know how to observe the etiquette of celebrating the spiritual master's Vyāsa-pūjā. He asked the devotees whether they had not seen how he had observed the Vyāsa-pūjā of his spiritual master in Los Angeles. Confused by his request for the *puṣpa* (flowers), devotees brought *puṣpānna* rice instead. Śrīla Prabhupāda scolded his disciples for concocting and for acting improperly. He said that in devotional service everything must be done properly, according to the *paramparā* method, without fabrication.

"The next day," wrote Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami in *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, "a simple, traditional ceremony was performed and the devotees felt ecstatic. By pleasing the spiritual master, then everyone is pleased."

All the practitioners of *bhakti-yoga* are duty-bound to be loyal servants of the *paramparā* system, being mindful of the correct way of performing devotional services to the Lord and the spiritual master. Thus the Vyāsa-pūjā celebration epitomizes the true meaning of faithfully following in the line of our Brahma-Madhva-Gauḍīya-sampradāya, without deviation and with full concentration.

The Vyāsa-pūjā day is the grand and solemn occasion when we join together throughout the world to honor our founder-*ācārya*, Śrīla Prabhupāda. With hearts full of deep spiritual emotions, we meditate on the sacrifices he made out of love for his spiritual master and for all of us. Like the sparrow trying to dry up the ocean, we attempt to glorify him and express our deep love and respect for him.

In a letter to Bali-mardana Dāsa dated August 25, 1970, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, "The spiritual master is the representative of Vyasadeva because he carries the message of Vyasadeva throughout the world."

As members of ISKCON, we specifically re-dedicate ourselves to the lotus feet of Śrīla Prabhupāda, the great representative of Vyasadeva, on Śrīla Prabhupāda's Vyāsa-pūjā day. We can also resolve that every day throughout the whole year we will rededicate ourselves to serving him and his movement and remembering that Śrīla Prabhupāda is always with us through his *vāñī*.

Again in the *Līlāmṛta*, Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami recounts the intense feelings of separation two members of Śrīla Prabhupāda's fledgling movement experienced due to his impending return to America in December 1967, after a six-month sojourn in India to regain his health:

The Meaning of Vyāsa-pūjā

When the day for Śrīla Prabhupāda’s departure finally arrived, he gave last instructions to Acyutānanda and Rāmānuja.

“Just pray to Lord Kṛṣṇa that I can go to America,” he requested Acyutānanda.

“How can I?” Acyutānanda replied. “You’ll be leaving me.”

“No,” Śrīla Prabhupāda replied, “we’ll always remain packed up together if you remember my teachings. If you preach you will become strong, and all these teachings will be in the proper perspective. When we stop our preaching, then everything becomes stagnated, and we lose our life. . . .”

If we remain sincere and honor Śrīla Prabhupāda not only on his Vyāsa-pūjā day but every moment of our lives, his ISKCON will continue to thrive and our lives will be successful. We will remain “packed up” with Śrīla Prabhupāda.

The mission of the spiritual master is the mission of the Supreme Personality of Godhead—to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness all over the world—and Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mission is our mission. That is the true meaning of Vyāsa-pūjā.

Kṛṣṇarūpā Devī Dāsī

Notes

¹ *Bhagavad-gītā* 13.8

² *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.16.23, purport

³ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.24.48

⁴ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.24.48

⁵ *Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā* 7.11

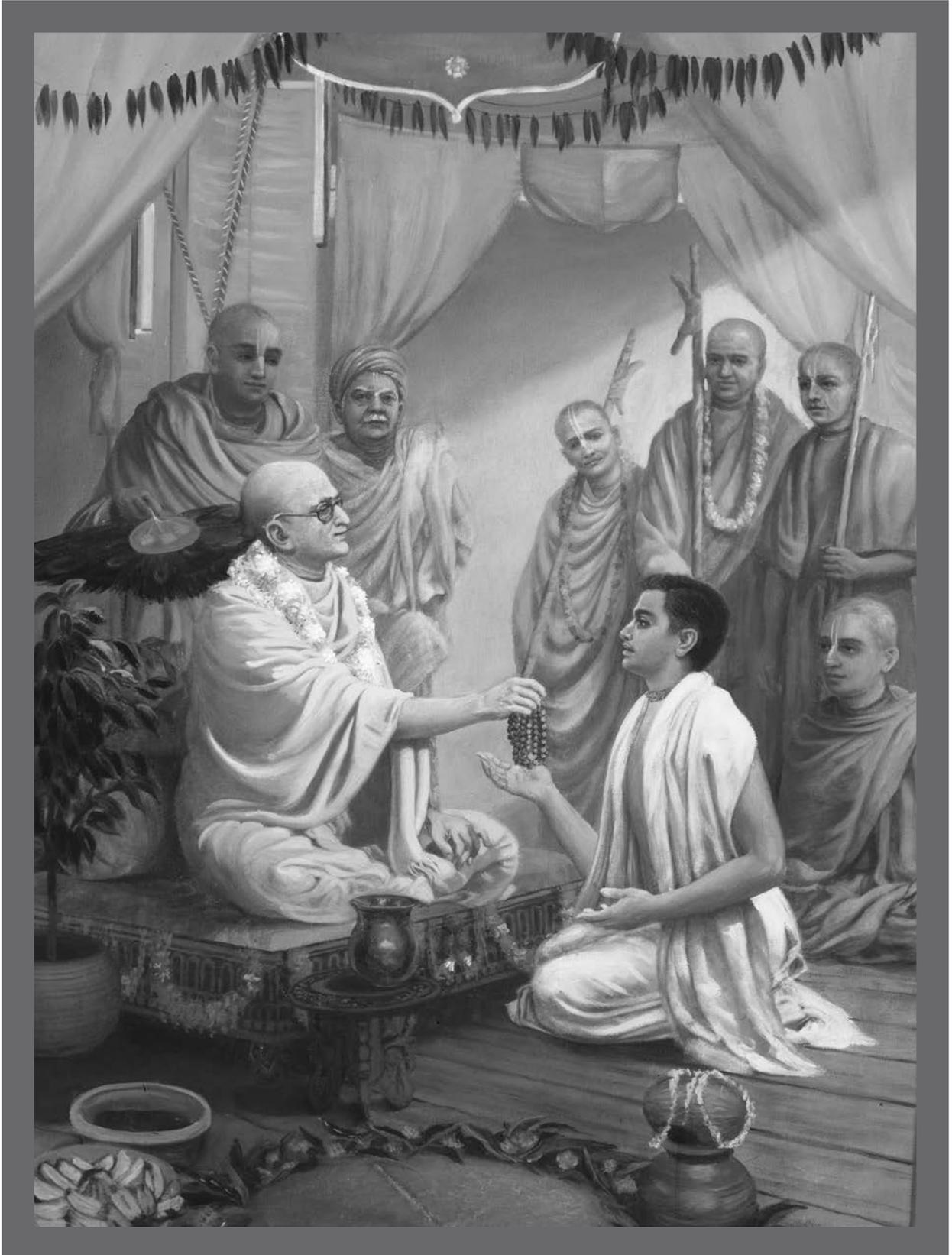
⁶ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.9.35, purport

⁷ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.9.35, purport

⁸ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.19.21

⁹ *Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā* 13.80

¹⁰ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.24.46, purport



“Adore, Adore Ye All The Happy Day”

Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote the following poem in February 1935, on the occasion of the Vyāsa-pūjā celebration of his spiritual master, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura. It delighted Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta, especially the sixth stanza, which he felt captured the essence of his preaching against the Māyāvādīs. After reading this poem, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī was especially keen that Śrīla Prabhupāda preach and write in English.

The following version of the poem was prepared from two sources: the version Śrīla Prabhupāda included in the March 1952 edition of his *Back to Godhead* magazine, and the version he wrote by hand on the back of a letter he sent Rāyarāma Dāsa on March 20, 1969.

1.
Adore, adore ye all
The happy day,
Blessed than heaven,
Sweeter than May,
When He appeared at Puri,
The holy place,
My lord and master,
His Divine Grace.

2.
Oh my Master,
The evangelic angel,
Give us thy light,
Light up thy candle.
Struggle for existence
A human race.
The only hope,
Your Divine Grace.

3.
Misled we are,
All going astray.
Save us, lord,
Our fervent pray.
Wonder thy ways
To turn our face.
Adore thy feet,
Your Divine Grace.

4.
Forgotten Krishna,
We fallen souls

Paying most heavy
The illusion’s toll.
Darkness around,
All distress.
The only hope,
Your Divine Grace.

5.
Message of service
Thou hast brought,
A meaningful life
As Chaitanya wrought.
Unknown to all,
It’s full of brace.
That’s your gift,
Your Divine Grace.

6.
Absolute is sentient
Thou hast proved.
Impersonal calamity
Thou hast removed.
This gives a life
Anew and fresh.
Worship thy feet,
Your Divine Grace.

7.
Had you not come,
who had told
The message of Krishna,
Forceful and bold.
That’s your right,

Śrī Vyāsa-Pūjā 2018

You have the mace.
Save me, a fallen,
Your Divine Grace.

8.
The line of service
As drawn by you
Is pleasing and healthy
Like morning dew.
The oldest of all,
But in new dress.
Miracle done,
Your Divine Grace.