

Chant



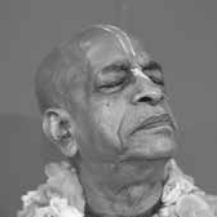


This is the first part of “Chant,” a poem by Śrīmān Hayagrīva Prabhu published in Back to Godhead magazine in 1970. It traces the activities of the His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda from his landing in New York in 1965 to the end of 1969.

*nama om viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya bhūtale
śrīmate bhaktivedānta-svāminn iti nāmine*

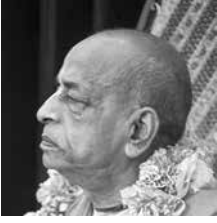
I offer my humble obeisances unto His Divine Grace Prabhupāda A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, who is very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa on this earth, having taken shelter of the lotus feet of that ever-youthful, beautiful, transcendental Lord,

who, alone, in his seventieth year, threw family, society, friendship, love to the wind, left mother India and set sail around the earth to foreign, unknown shores because his spiritual master spoke to him in a dream,
who carried the glorious message of the munificent Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu to a nation plagued with the leprosy of voidism and impersonalism, who brought an ageless message of love of Godhead,
who landed in Manhattan with saffron robes, a suitcase and seven dollars and wondered at *māyā*'s skyscrapers and empty, noisy dreams,
who, with white, pointed holyman shoes, walked through the snow to Times Square and laughed at Kali's cinema ads,
who accepted residence with hashish-yogis who believed they were moving the sun and moon,
who played cymbals and chanted *govindam ādi-puruṣam tam ahaṁ bhajāmi*, “I worship Govinda the Primeval Lord,” explaining to void-meditators that Kṛṣṇa's transcendental body is unlimited, that He can extend His hand to all parts of His creation, that any one part of His body can perform all the actions of all the other parts, and that simply by glancing at nature He impregnated her with countless living entities and set the cosmic systems spinning and struck up the song of the universe,
who journeyed downtown, out of compassion, and set up quarters in Lower East Side narrow mice-ridden storefront and trusted Kṛṣṇa to bring next month's rent,
who opened the storefront doors even to Bowery derelicts and clashed cymbals and chanted Sanskrit hymns to God, whose vibrations caught the ears of young psychedelic middle class renegades searching for alternatives to their legacy of lies and materialism,
who had and everlastingly has infinite mercy, delivering it free of charge, a matchless gift, to whoever stops to hear,
who never, to my knowledge, turned one soul away, who effused them all with kindness, affection, truth,
who had mercy on my soul one bright July morning amidst the roaring Manhattan traffic of Houston and Bowery (Most holy spot! Transformed to Vaikuṇṭha by his feet! Bowery transformed to Vaikuṇṭha!),
who lectured every morning on Second Avenue and as the gold of dawn lit his face played cymbals and chanted softly, careful not to awake the neighbors lest they pour hot water through the floorboards,
who opened *Bhagavad-gītā* and explained Śrī Kṛṣṇa's message verse by verse and set His names—Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma Hare Hare—on the lips of the young,
who, by contact only, warmed their hearts and lit the fires of love of God in their souls and smeared their eyes with the ointment of devotion,

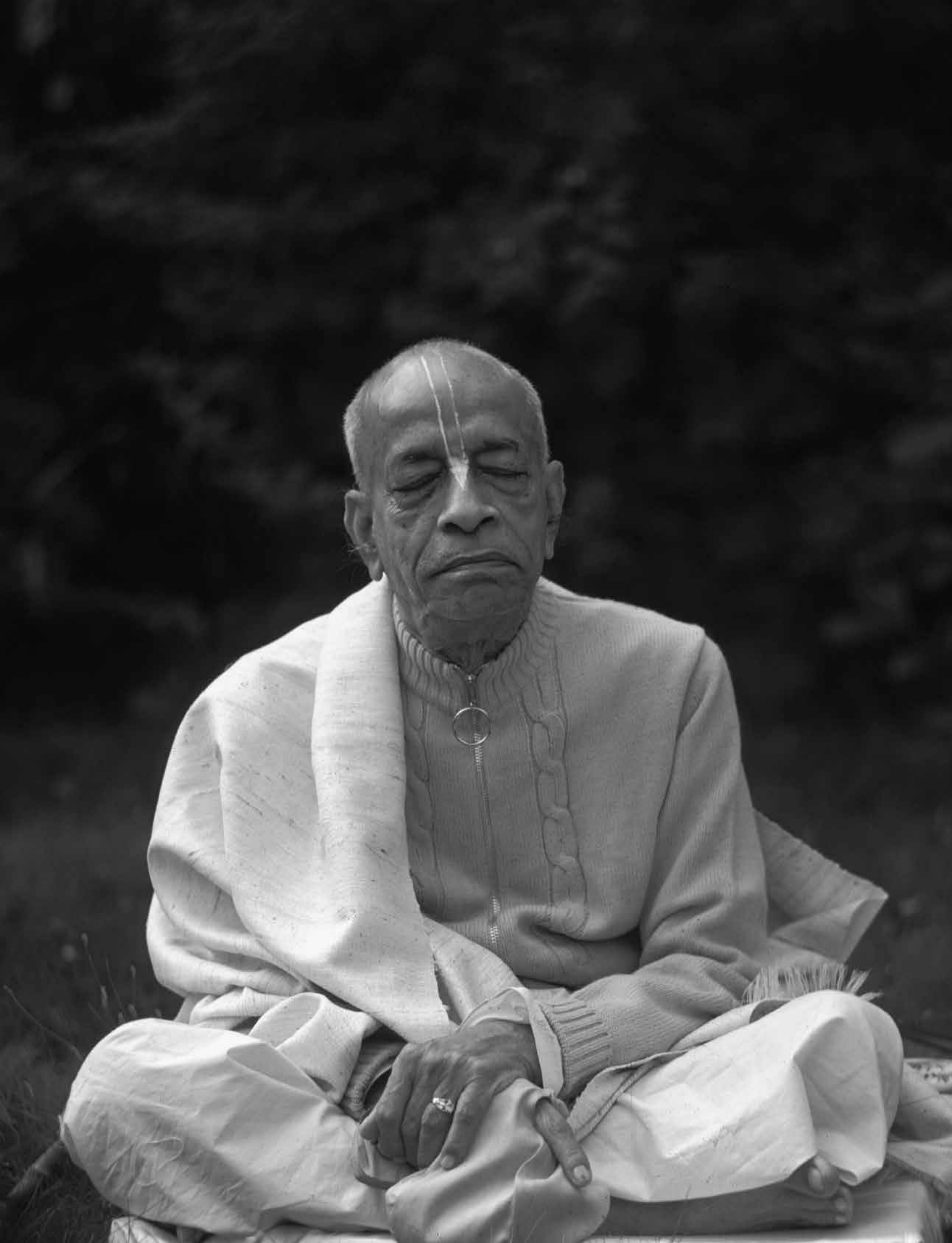


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who defied cheap popular adoration by truthfully telling the youth of America that to have
Kṛṣṇa the soul must be pure, free of everything,
who supplanted the old white-bearded Judaic-Christian God with a beautiful blue adolescent
Boy and evoked *gopī* tears from the eyes of men,
who led his flock to Washington Square to chant, was invited off the grass by the cops, sat
complacently anyway on the asphalt and Hare Kṛṣṇa'd as nervous sailors flicked their
cigarettes,
who initiated his first dozen disciples with a fire sacrifice in his apartment, told them their
real, spiritual names, chanted their beads, threw rice and ghee in the flames (*Svāhā!*) and
sat smiling amidst the smoke as they coughed and ran to open the windows,
who listened, tolerant, to the threats of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant mothers accusing
him of stealing their sons, and offered them bananas, apples, dates and tangerines and
charmed them with his smile,
who every Sunday afternoon for a month sat down on the ground in Tompkins Square Park,
pounded a bongo and chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa three hours straight while dancing angels
dropped exhausted and Lower East Side Ukrainians and Poles stared uncomprehendingly
and grumbled,
who delivered a beautiful lecture on the spiritualization of energy to a thousand empty seats
in midtown's Judson Hall while across the street hundreds flocked to hear the Boston
Pops at Carnegie,
who patiently endured the red tape visa harassment of immigration offices and allayed the
fears of his children as they swore to follow him to India,
who, on a sudden invitation, jumped a jet to Frisco, telling his New York disciples he'd return
in a fortnight, and after four months' absence laughed, "You have not reckoned a day of
Brahmā."
who lectured a thousand Hell's Angels, hippies and teeny-boppers in the strobe-flashing
Avalon ballroom on the glories of Lord Caitanya's *sankīrtan* movement and, hands
upraised, danced with poet Ginsberg, Moby Grape, Grateful Dead and Big Brother to Hare
Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa as Tim Leary looked on benevolently,
who chanted and danced in a ring with longhair boys, girls, beads, beards and headbands
below the shadow of Hippie Hill in Golden Gate Park on bright March and April
afternoons,
who lectured at Frisco Christian Yoga societies, to hippies in the Panhandle, to pacifists at
Berkeley, to yellow, red, white and black nationalists, to anyone, everyone and no one in
the streets and parks of Saint Francis,
who taught the students of Palo Alto a new dance—the "swami"—which in fervor surpassed
the frug and watusi,
who led a nighttime firelit *kīrtan* at Frisco beach, roasted potatoes and sang starlit hymns to
Nārada Muni,
who sauntered through Muir woods contemplating the redwoods and reflecting how tired
their souls must be for having to stand so long without Kṛṣṇa,
who, back in Manhattan, wore his body down chanting and glorifying the transcendental
blue body of Kṛṣṇa, cooking and writing for Kṛṣṇa, and suffered a stroke that would have
killed a mere man, left his body and then returned with the names of his love on his lips,
who sang to Yamarāj, Death, as he stood before him, sang songs of love to the lotus-eyed Boy
with pink-bottom'd feet,
who, in Beth-Israel Hospital, sat like a helpless child as demonic needles came at him,
tolerated them and listened to the Western diagnosis: "Tell him to take it easy. The old
man prays too much,"

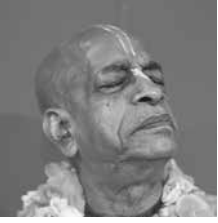


who, after five days, baffled obscene doctors by walking out the sickward's pea-green walls
 to recuperate across country in the dazzling Pacific sands of Stinson beach,
 who sat amidst a labyrinth of kelp horns and sea shells proclaiming that there are only
 devotees and demons, naught between,
 who composed Sanskrit odes to the Primeval Spirit whose eternal teenage lips play a flute,
 who wept in a Frisco storefront—"Take to this process. I may be with you or not, but it is
 eternal."—and bade farewell to his students who thought he was going to India to die,
 who bathed in the sun wearing a turban and flying on a carpet as the Pacific crashed in
 his ears—"All glories to the assembled devotees! All glories to the Pacific Ocean!"—
 and finally, following the sun, whizzed to Delhi, Vṛndāvana and Calcutta to Āyur-Vedic
 physicians,
 who bathed in the Yamunā, where Lord Kṛṣṇa played His water games, and lived in Rādhā-
 Dāmodar Temple, where repose the *samādhis* of Rūpa and Jīva Gosvāmī,
 who traveled through India, defying pneumonia, looking for a house for his American
 children,
 who returned to the U.S. via Japan, trying to see the mayor of Tokyo to institute the
 International Society for Krishna Consciousness in a glass American-made skyscraper,
 who finally proclaimed the Japanese "not ready," and returned to a deluge of tears and
 flowers in Frisco airport,
 who, surpassing the Chinese, instituted a yearly festival of Jagannātha love down Haight
 Street through Golden Gate to the beach, nine miles, and led twenty thousand before the
 cart of Kṛṣṇa, Subhadrā, and Balarāma,
 who bowed to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Seattle and sat in new glory on the New York Vyāsāsana,
 the floating dais of praise, as his children fell at his feet,
 who forgave his renegade disciples in Montreal with a garland of roses and a shower of tears,
 who told golden beach boys in Honolulu and Ka'a'awa, Oahu, that sun, beach and palm
 worship is all *māyā*, that golden flesh, after all, is just a bag covering blood, bone, stool,
 puss, bile, urine and guts, all rotting moment by moment,
 who danced to Kṛṣṇa beneath the sun in L.A. and beneath the red, white and blue flashing
 neon illusions of Hollywood Blvd., Kali-yuga plastic America, and beneath the moon
 danced to Govinda and Rādhārāṇī in a Manhattan alley, searching for a possible temple,
 who proclaimed natural vegetarian prasādamism to the nation's hamburger stands, the cow-
 eaters of America, the pig-eaters, bird-eaters, fish-eaters, lamb-eaters, threatening them
 with endless rebirths as tigers,
 who declared that Colonel Sanders of the Fried Chickens of Kentucky would have to undergo
 a chicken-birth-life-and-death for every chicken smeared with his recipe making its saucy
 way into the all-devouring mouths of the American karmavores,
 who burst two thousand Ohio State students out their skins and jumped for joy on his dais in
 the All-American City,
 who, lauding the "big *mṛdaṅgam*," bought a press, said, "This is my heart," and printed his
 own books in Boston,
 who, having chanted six years in temples of Vṛndāvana, India, where Lord Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet
 danced, walked two miles up a West Virginia dirt road, stopping only once briefly for
 breath, and founded New Vṛndāvana in the locust-flower'd hills,
 who lived there in a shack, sauntered on morning walks through the locusts and maples and
 blessed the dandelions, blackberries and pokeweed with his gaze,
 who sat quietly beneath a persimmon tree reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and musing over the
 Appalachians,





who boarded the jet age from New York to Hamburg, carrying over the Atlantic real
 Aryan Vedic civilization in his head and magic mantras on his lips, the Paramhansa on
 Lufthansa, descending on Europe on his silver swan, singing songs of Kṛṣṇa-love for
 fractured Germany,
 who, not knowing one word of German, lectured on ecstasy in a little storefront temple on
 Eppendorfer Weg, chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa *uber alles*,
 who defined real Aryanism—life according to spirit, not to flesh—to rapt disciples
 following him on a vigorous morning walk amidst cold, implacable North German beer
 consciousness, sausages and Volkswagens,
 who sat before an Elbe sunset, holding up a picture of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa dancing on the lotus
 shaped Vaikuṇṭha planet, and who smiled and transformed the Elbe into the Yamunā,
 who descended on London reporters like a thundercloud and deluged them with the Absolute
 Truth—“I have come to teach what you have forgot.” “Which is?” “God.”
 who sang “Bhaja Govindam” to this century’s British bards, the Beatles—“What are you
 doing? Your philosophical speculation and grammatical word jugglery will not save you at
 the moment of death, so *bhaja* Govinda, just worship Kṛṣṇa,” and struck up a new song in
 George’s heart,
 who shouted down the new crows in London’s Conway Hall and continued playing cymbals
 as their wings fluttered,
 who founded a six-story Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa temple a block away from a storehouse of ravaged
 Indian treasures, the British Museum, and despite a Gandhi exhibition began the Vaiṣṇava
 colonization of England,
 who buried his head in flowers and danced in ecstasy before the Lord,
 who saw Arjuna throw down his bow at Kurukṣetra and Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma pass
 through Mathurā with Their cows and boyfriends as the city girls showered Them with
 flowers from their balconies,
 and who at this moment deluges the blazing fire of the soul trapped in materials and drowns
 the conflagration of even the most obdurate (my own!) soul entangled in the great chain
 fire of action and reaction,
 who even now insists on wishing me well despite my pigheaded gnawing at o’erchewed stool,
 who knows the innate sweetness of the soul in love with Kṛṣṇa and who delivers that love
 with truth, who draws it out the timid soul with truth and who demands its flourishing
 and wishes it well,
 who resides at the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa eternally, who is His ambassador on earth, transmitting
 His message infallibly,
 who views this universe to be no more significant than water in a calf’s hoofprint,
 who floats upon the tossing ocean of material and looks with compassion upon the countless
 dynasties of suffering souls struggling below,
 who hears the discordant sounds of Kali’s millennia and blends them in harmony to one song
 that anyone can sing,
 who must play in the starry sandbox of the universe like a child with his toys,
 who must laugh at the *māyā* karmaval, the vast play of illusion, of America, of the world,
 who must talk to Kṛṣṇa alone at night, sitting on his bed, conferring, listening carefully to His
 advice,
 who perpetually receives the waters of benediction from the ocean of mercy and who pours
 them forth in torrents to extinguish the flames of materialism,
 who, always engaged in chanting and celebrating the message of Lord Caitanya, sometimes
 dances in ecstasy and trembles and quivers in his trance,



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who, with his disciples, untiringly worships Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Their temple,
who is always offering food to Kṛṣṇa and who derives great satisfaction in seeing his disciples
eat *bhāgavat-prasādam*, the delicious mercy of the Lord,
who is eternally eager to chant and preach the glories of the loving exchanges between Lord
Kṛṣṇa and Rādhārāṇī and who aspires to relish these pastimes at every moment,
who expertly assists the *gopīs*, Lord Kṛṣṇa's transcendental cowherd girlfriends engaged
in the perfection of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's conjugal love affairs, who makes various tasteful
arrangements for Them,
who, as all scriptures reveal, should be honored as highly as the Supreme and Almighty Lord,
for he is the Great God's most confidential servitor,
whose mercy enables me to receive the benediction of the mercy of Kṛṣṇa and without
whose mercy I cannot advance on the spiritual path, and who is therefore worthy of my
perpetual obeisances and my worship.

Coda
(from the editor)

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

Our respectful obeisances are unto you, O spiritual master, servant of Sarasvatī Gosvāmī. You are kindly preaching the message of Lord Caitanyadeva and delivering the Western countries, which are filled with impersonalism and voidism.

All glories to
Śrīla Prabhupāda!