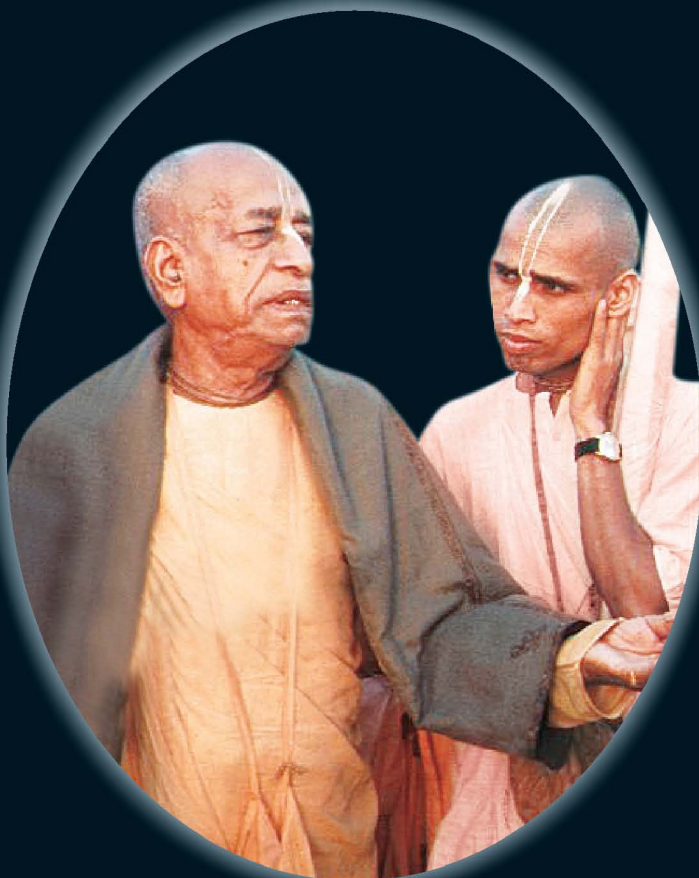


In Conversation with Śrīla Prabhupāda



Contexts and Contemplations

Lokanāth Swami

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Introduction



Śrīla Prabhupāda would often say, “if you wish to remember it, write it down”. In writing this book, I reflect upon Śrīla Prabhupāda’s insistent message on writing: “Realisation means you should write. Every one of you. What is your realisation... You write your realisation... what you have realised about Kṛṣṇa. That is required.” (Śrīla Prabhupāda lecture, 14 August 1972)

I have always been inspired to write, given Śrīla Prabhupāda’s keenness for his disciples and everyone else to write. Writing this book would mean following one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s instructions and more importantly, means remembering Śrīla Prabhupāda in an intimate way. This involved sifting through approximately 1,384 conversation transcripts and then selecting and organizing those that had direct relevance to me and in which I was engaged.

In thinking through the title for this book, I recall stumbling upon a book several years ago which caught my attention. *Conversations with God*, by Larry King Walsch in 1995, was a publishing phenomenon and I was somewhat intrigued by the title of this bestseller. His inspiration for writing that book however, was different to mine. He questions God about his failed existence, but mine is about how to develop a fuller and more insightful spiritual life. While Walsch “spoke” to God directly, my conversations are with the representative of God, Śrīla Prabhupāda.

After some deliberation I finally settled on the title for this book: *In Conversation with Śrīla Prabhupāda: Contexts and Contemplations*, which represents a collection of conversations in which I reflect highlights of my interaction with Śrīla Prabhupāda over several years. The conversations are chronologically described from 1972 to 1977, and capture specifically those conversations on morning walks or room conversations in which I had been an active





participant. Although I had always taken the opportunity to join Śrīla Prabhupāda on his morning walks, it was often a challenge to have an exclusive conversation with him because many disciples, well-wishers and curious onlookers would join him. The unrecorded conversations were created through recollections that are still vivid for me, so reconstructing these did not present much difficulty.

The reader will find it more meaningful if they understand how the book has been structured. The book consists of more than 40 conversations and each are represented as separate conversations. The conversations are unique and totally spontaneous and are divided into three sections. Firstly, the *context* preambles each conversation and captures the background of each conversation. Secondly, the *conversation*, either recorded or unrecorded and hence created, follows the context. Thirdly, the section on *contemplation* in each chapter is a way of offering closing reflections of each. In some of the chapters, multiple themes are identified and these have been collated because of the common context.

While conceding that memory is selective and may include nostalgia and opinions, the recollections of the past provided a means to recreate these unrecorded conversations. In many ways the recollections create for me new ways of understanding, allows me new ways of continuing with my spiritual quest, and inspires me to continue with my work.

The conversations of Śrīla Prabhupāda are “living moments” in dialogical exchanges with me and other disciples and well-wishers. From the conversations we detect the energetic way that Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke, full of conviction. His speech, just like his movements, especially during the morning walks, was smooth and responsive, never static and repetitive. His ability to reflect both on material and spiritual life, his astute observations about human behaviour and society, his clear stances backed with authority of the śāstra and the divine lineage of spiritual masters, and his gentle as well as incisive comments shaped my thinking and practice, as he did for all of us.

In appraising my own development in relation to the conversations, I trace how as a hapless disciple I was reprimanded for vigorously shaking my leg, to Śrīla Prabhupāda appointing me as a leader (“*Do I Come With You, Śrīla Prabhupāda?*”) for the proposed bullock cart pilgrimage in 1977. In working through these conversations, it seemed that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s incisive comments were “custom made” for me because each conversation had a distinct mellow which created a distinct relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda. In the conversation, “*You Are Already Sannyāsī*” such a mellow is amply demonstrated. I met with Śrīla Prabhupāda in his quarters to request *sannyāsa* initiation in the full knowledge that my godbrother, Śrīdhara Prabhu, was scheduled for *sannyāsa* initiation.

Śrīla Prabhupāda tried to dissuade me, but I pressed for a formal initiation because my godbrother, Śrīdhara Prabhu, was also getting initiated. I persisted on the issue as a little child would do, wanting the same opportunity of initiation as Śrīdhara Prabhu until Śrīla Prabhupāda asked: “*So what will satisfy you? Do you want to undergo the formality? Is that what you want?*” to which I jumped at the chance saying “Yes!” In this conversation, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s mood is affectionate and paternal.

The room conversations are face to face with Śrīla Prabhupāda and at times in the presence of a few disciples. These represent the wonderful opportunities for me to engage with Śrīla Prabhupāda in more intimate and cherished interactions. The conversation “*You Can Go by Bullock Cart*”, occurs in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s room. It captures Śrīla Prabhupāda’s elaborate discussion of the programme, his firm belief that the villagers should be introduced to *hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana* process, describes the plight of the traditional village system and takes stock of contemporary India.

The most heart-wrenching conversation I had with Śrīla Prabhupāda, “*You Manage – Let Me Travel to All the Tīrtha-sthānas*” occurs in his quarters. This conversation, still deeply entrenched in my heart, describes an extremely frail Śrīla Prabhupāda who expresses a strong desire to undertake a pilgrimage of all the *tīrtha-sthānas*. Śrīla Prabhupāda entrusts me to lead the pilgrimage given my





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In this book my personal recollections and reflections allow me to reconnect immediately with my spiritual master, and feel his divine presence, an experience which allowed me an opportunity to relive those moments with Śrīla Prabhupāda.

This book is an invitation to the reader to explore the many contexts, conversations, and contemplations that continue to be dialogued even when you have long completed a reading of the book. I hope that by recording my personal reflections others will be inspired and that I will be able to communicate that divinity of my spiritual master to the reader.

- Lokanāth Swami

Gītā Jayantī 2014

Noida, India

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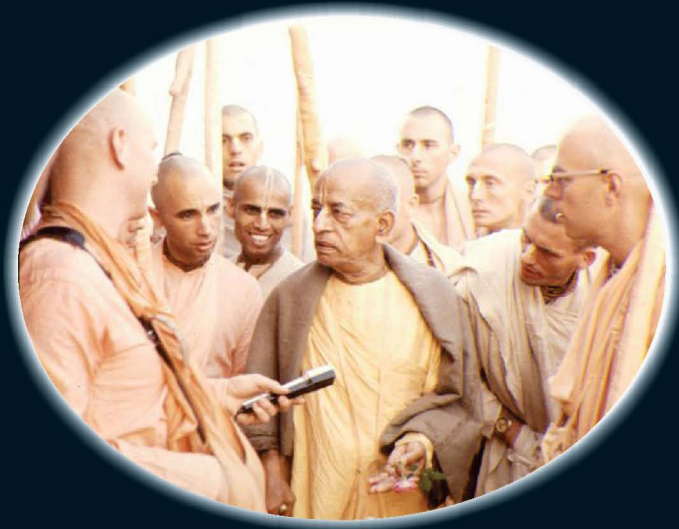
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Lokanāth Mahārāja's book is enlightening and enlivening and his insights and inspirations with Śrīla Prabhupāda very instructive. They helped clarify a number of important points for me. I'm sure you will find it very spiritually enriching for you also.
– Bhakti Caitanya Swami

Lokanāth Mahārāja has not just presented the events of his interchanges with Śrīla Prabhupāda, but he has further enriched his readers' understanding by his "3Cs" format in each chapter – Context, Conversation, Contemplation. Through his personal yet universal journey into the heart of his surrender and service to his Guru Mahārāja, he uncovers many gems and nuggets of spiritual reciprocation which deeply enrich our understandings and feelings for Śrīla Prabhupāda.
– Hari-sauri Dāsa

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