Special Edition
In Memory of Kurma Rupa dasa
Jaya Sri Guru! Jaya Sri Gopala! Jaya Sri Go Mata!

With both joy and sadness we present a special memorial edition of the Care for Cows newsletter in honour of Kurma Rupa dasa, the founder and inspiration behind Care for Cows. All of the articles and most of the photographs in this edition were written or taken by Kurma Rupa and were found amongst his personal effects. Most items are in a cow protection context, and some are of a more personal nature.

To continue the legacy of Care for Cows we humbly request supporters to consider providing a donation in memory of Kurma Rupa. The most beneficial option for both the cows and the donor is the Life Adoption Program whereby $3,333 is placed in a fixed term deposit that generates enough interest to maintain a cow for its lifetime. When the cow passes on, the funds remain in our account to maintain another cow, and so on perpetually.

To donate, please go to http://www.careforcows.org/how_can_i_help or contact Keshi the Go-sadan manager on krishnu35@hotmail.com.

We hope this memorial edition serves as inspiration in your service to Sri Gopal and the cows.

Your servants at Care for Cows

History of Care for Cows

By Kurma Rupa dasa

When I retired from teaching in the Gurukula, I moved to Madhuvan Colony where there were several abandoned cows begging door to door for their maintenance. Along with the neighbors I would offer them capatis and vegetable cuttings when ever they came to the house. I had been told by an astrologer that it would be beneficial for me to feed a white cow rice or flour on Sunday and this was a practice I followed. In this way the abandoned cows in Madhuvan Colony marked my house as a good place to visit.

In 1999 when Kartika arrived I decided that part of my vow would be to purchase one mund of fresh grass each day and feed it to the abandoned cows. Each afternoon I would bring the 40-kilo bag of grass to my house by bicycle and feed half of it to the cows at 5:00 pm and the other half at Sam. In a few days the cows understood my schedule and after filling up with fresh grass in the evening, they would camp out in front of my house until morning when they knew I would feed them again. This continued until the end of Kartika when I offered them a special feast including atta and gur to announce and celebrate the completion of my vrata.

After the feast they settled in to rest and in the morning were all standing at the door waiting for me to continue. Obviously they had not understood that I had only intended to feed them temporarily. As they looked at me intently and raised their noses to sniff me, I felt they had elected me as their protector and I felt honored and decided to keep up the practice.

One of the many neighbors who also offered left-over capatis and such then announced that he had a vacant plot in the colony which he would let me use to host the cows. Another neighbor offered to let me use their water supply and with the purchase of some bricks and cement, a small cowshed to host the 9 regulars was born.
History of Care for Cows

Other neighbors, after making the bhoga offering to their Deities in the morning, would bring the first plate to feed the cows before serving their families. Others came and brought grass and busa for the cows or offered funds to help maintain them. Food for Life Vrindavan, a charitable society, then offered to host our herd on a property near by and gradually we expanded our herd to 130. In 2006 Care for Cows was registered as a charitable trust in Mumbai and we are now functioning independently.

The uniqueness of our project is that besides the hired laborers all other participants are volunteers who freely offer their talents and resources to tend to the abandoned cows in Vrindavan. We are centered around serving cows rather than getting milk and accepting service from them. Our vision is that cows are valuable in all circumstances as serving them pleases Bhagavan Sri Krishna. Our goal is to follow the statements of Srimad Bhagavatam: “Life’s desires should never be directed toward sense gratification. One should desire only a healthy life, or self-preservation, since a human being is meant for inquiry about the Absolute Truth. Nothing else should be the goal of oneís works. It is therefore concluded that the highest perfection one can achieve is to please Lord Hari.” (SB 1.2.10,13)

Of course there are many ways to please Lord Gopal but we are most inspired by these two statements, “O Uddhava, I can be worshiped within the cows by offerings of grass and other suitable grains and paraphernalia for the pleasure and health of the cows” (SB.11.11.43); and, “Worship of the cow is accomplished by gently scratching, by the offering of green grass, and by circumambulating. By pleasing the cow, Sri Gopal is also pleased.” (Gautamiya Tantra)

Our hope is to render selfless service to the cows of Vrindavan with the hope that Sri Gopal will be pleased, for if He is, there is nothing left to be achieved.

Last Wish

The following was found in Kurma Rupa’s personal documents.

I am Kurmarupa dasa a lowly servant of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada who by the kindness of his disciples was allowed to visit the holy land of Sri Vrindavan and live here for 30 years serving Vaisnavas and cows.

My last request is that I abandon this body here in Kiki Nagla amidst the cows we have served. Please do not, in the attempt to save this body, take me out of Sri Vrindavan only to arrange that I die in Delhi or Mumbai. Nothing could displease me more than this.

The goal of my life is to serve Srila Prabhupada and Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama in Vrindavan until my last breath. Those who are real friends will assist me to accomplish this.

I am lucid, clean and have never been more peaceful. No pain and no discomfort. It has never been more easy for me to control my tongue, belly and genitals and focus on the Holy Name of Krishna. By the mercy of Srila Prabhupada and Sri Krishna I have been able to stay here for 30 years and now want to go to Goloka Dhama.

My last request is that you assist me in accomplishing this. Only enemies will obstruct my last desire.
<p><strong>Dying Where Cows Reside</strong></p>

From Brahma-vaivarta Purana

At 8.45am on June 28th, 2015 (Padmini ekadasi of Purushottoma masa) Kurma Rupa left his body while staying amongst the cows at the Care for Cows Go-sadan at Kiki Nagla. The Brahma-vaivarta Purana 21.91-93 states the results of passing away in a place where cows reside.

sarve deva gavam ange
tirthani tat-padesu ca
tad-guhyesu svayam laksmis
tisthaty eva sada pitah
gos-padakta-mrda yo hi
tilakam kurute narah
tirtha-snato bhavet sadyo
bhayam tasya pade pade

gavas tishthanti yatraiva
tat tirtham parikirtitam
pranams tyaktva naras tatra
sadyo mukto bhaved dhruvam

“All of the demigods live in the bodies of cows. The holy places live in the cow’s legs. Laksmi lives in the cow’s heart. A person who puts tilaka on his forehead with the mud that has touched a cow’s hoof at once attains the result of bathing in a holy place. He is fearless at every step. A place where cows stay is considered sanctified, and a person who dies there certainly attains liberation”.

What if I Were to Say ... ?

By Kurma Rupa dasa

If I were to say that fifteen years ago I had a desire to offer Sri Giriraja pure milk...but it was not available.

But I got off my duff...rounded up some abandoned cows from the street, got kicked in the process, picked the maggots out of their wounds, brought them food by bicycle, fed them, nursed them back to good health, begged from a benevolent neighbour a place for them to stay, and in a few months I had enough milk for a meagre offering...

If I were to say that after making that sacrifice, I felt warm and satisfied within. And after honoring that prasada my palms became moist and my hands trembled upon reading, “That which in the beginning may be just like poison but at the end is just like nectar, and which awakens one to self-realization is said to be happiness in the mode of goodness.” (BG.18.37)

Would you think it possible?

What if I Were to Say ... ?

promise that He preserves what one has and carries what one lacks, my eyes grew cool and my vision blurry...

Would you think it possible?

If I were to say that I now understand Queen Kunti’s request for further calamities more deeply...

Would you think it possible?

What would you think were I to speak all those lies? That I’m arrogant, proud and full of conceit?

What would you think were I to speak all those lies?

And better than everyone else?

What would you think?

When we say, “Better to offer Sri Krishna milk from protected cows,” and they answer, “It’s not available,” I think it means, “My dear Sri Krishna, I’m not willing to do the necessary to get it for you.”

What do you think?
The Deities at Sri Sri Krishna Balarama Mandir on the 28th July 2015, the day of Kurma Rupa’s passing

Kurma Rupa (third from left) in sankirtana at the Sri Sri Krishna Balarama Mandir during the early 80’s

The focus of Care for Cows is caring for cows, not on milk production. Any milk given by the cows is delivered daily to these Deities once in the morning and once in the afternoon, with any excess milk provided to the go-sevaks and well-wishers. Kurma Rupa wrote in an email dated 7 December 2010, “I suspect that the milk production has decreased as there have been no reports of new calves recently. If the milk is on the decline, then I do not want to supply others... I want the milk to go to Their Lordships as that is where it belongs.”

Letter from Kurma Rupa 21 March 2015

“I have advised you that the formula for success in go seva is to keep the welfare of the cows as the top priority. This is the formula we have used for the last fifteen years and thus it has been tried and tested. Other go sevaks who follow it have reinforced this conviction in me.

Of course I do not know for certain but I suspect that your present financial predicament is rooted in the failure to strictly implement the formula. Do not be discouraged. It is not always an easy thing to prevent the mind from rationalizing our actions.

In any case, please see the present challenge you’re facing as a growth opportunity. Sri Gopal often puts His devotees in distress in order to intensify their devotion. And while the obstacles He places in front of us initially seem insurmountable, if we fix our mind firmly upon Him, He will save us at the last moment. When He does that, your shraddha in Him will grow and this will be the reward you receive for making sacrifices and taking risks to please Him.”
Lessons from the Cowshed
By Kurma Rupa dasa

He is special to me as he represents that commitment and the resulting inner satisfaction. Today the wind blew a large piece of straw in his eye and he blinked repeatedly trying to remove it. When that did not work he brought his back hoof to his eye but since it was covered with dung and sand, it only made matters worse.

I approached the magnificent beast with intent to relieve his discomfort. As my hand approached his eye he clamped it shut concealing it well under the bulging muscles of his brow. I held his muzzle between my left arm and flank and pried his brow open with my right fingers and thumb. But as I tried to intrude, he withdrew his eyeball further into his socket making it inaccessible. He then shook his massive head free from my hold and snorted threateningly.

Lesson: No matter how noble your intentions, you cannot open the eyes of those who use all their power to keep them shut.

The Benefits of Cow Protection

The following scriptural quotes were found in Kurma Rupa’s personal documents under the heading ‘Benefits of Cow Protection.’

Srimad-Bhagavatam 10.6.19 Purport
There are so many facilities afforded by cow protection, but people have forgotten these arts. The importance of protecting cows is therefore stressed by Krishna in Bhagavad-gita (krṣi-go-rāksya-vaniyājam vaisya-karma svabhavajam [Bg. 18.44]). Even now in the Indian villages surrounding Vṛndavana, the villagers live happily simply by giving protection to the cow. They keep cow dung very carefully and dry it to use as fuel. They keep a sufficient stock of grains, and because of giving protection to the cows, they have sufficient milk and milk products to solve all economic problems. Simply by giving protection to the cow, the villagers live so peacefully. Even the urine and stool of cows have medicinal value.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 9.15.25 Purport
Jamadagni was more powerful than Kartaviṣyārjuna because of performing the agnihoṭra-yajña with clarified butter received from the kāmadhenu. Not everyone can be expected to possess such a cow. Nonetheless, an ordinary man may possess an ordinary cow, give protection to this animal, take sufficient milk from it, and engage the milk to produce butter and clarified ghee, especially for performing the agnihoṭra-yajña. This is possible for everyone. Thus we find that in Bhagavad-gita Lord Krishna advises go-rāksya, the protection of cows. This is essential because if cows are cared for properly they will surely supply sufficient milk. The instruction given by Lord Krishna -- go-rāksya -- is extremely meaningful. The whole world must learn from Krishna how to live happily without scarcity simply by producing food grains (annad bhavanti bhutani [Bg. 3.14]) and giving protection to the cows (go-rāksya). Kṛṣi-go-rāksya-vaniyājam vaisya-karma svabhavajam [Bg. 18.44]. Those who belong to the third level of human society, namely the mercantile people, must keep land for producing food grains and giving protection to cows. This is the injunction of Bhagavad-gita. In the matter of protecting the cows, the meat-eaters will protest, but in answer to them we may say that since Krishna gives stress to cow protection, those who are inclined to eat meat may eat the flesh of unimportant animals like hogs, dogs, goats and sheep, but they should not touch the life of the cows, for this is destructive to the spiritual advancement of human society.

Srimad-Bhagavatam 8.6.12 Purport
Although in this age men can live up to one hundred years, their duration of life is reduced because they do not drink large quantities of milk. This is a sign of Kali-yuga. In Kali-yuga, instead of drinking milk, people prefer to slaughter an animal and eat its flesh. The Supreme Personality of Godhead, in His instructions of Bhagavad-gita, advises go-rāksya, which means cow protection. The cow should be protected, milk should be drawn from the cows, and this milk should be prepared in various ways. One should take ample milk, and thus one can prolong one’s life, develop his brain, execute devotional service,
and ultimately attain the favor of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. As it is essential to get food grains and water by digging the earth, it is also essential to give protection to the cows and take nectarine milk from their milk bags.

**Light of the Bhagavata Text 27**
Protection and grazing ground for the cows are among the essential needs for society and the welfare of people in general. The animal fat required for the human body can be well derived from cow’s milk. Cow’s milk is very important for human energy, and the economic development of society depends on sufficient food grains, sufficient milk, and sufficient transportation and distribution of these products. Lord Sri Krishna, by His personal example, taught us the importance of cow protection, which is meant not only for the Indian climate but for all human beings all over the universe. Less intelligent people underestimate the value of cow’s milk. Cow’s milk is also called gosarna, or the juice from the body of the cow. Milk is the most valuable form of gosarna, and from milk we can prepare many important and valuable foodstuffs for the upkeep of the human body. The killing of cows by human society is one of the grossest suicidal policies, and those who are anxious to cultivate the human spirit must turn their attention first toward the question of cow protection.

**Srimad-Bhagavatam 10.6.22-23 Purport**
Even in the houses of the cultivators, who were not very advanced in the modern ways of civilization, the ladies used to know how to chant mantras to give protection to children with the help of cow dung and cow urine. This was a simple and practical way to give the greatest protection from the greatest dangers. People should know how to do this, for this is a part of Vedic civilization.

**Govinda Kavacha**
A kavacha is an item or items worn for spiritual protection, usually kept within an amulet (tabiz). The contents of the Govinda kavacha was found written amongst Kurma Rupa’s personal effects. It is made from products and mantras relating to the cow.

1. Dust from the Vrndavan goshalla
2. Dust and hair from Vrindavan cows switches (tail) and bodies
3. Dried cow dung
4. Fibers from ropes used for binding the cows legs at milking time; or from being tied around the cows neck; or from the nasal harness of bulls.
5. The Goloka mantra
6. Om surabhai namah mantra

Place within a silver tabiz (amulet) on a tulsi and silver chain.

**The Benefits of Cow Protection**

**The Kutir**
Due to the kindness of a well-wisher, Kurma Rupa stayed in a simple residence in Madhavan colony nearby the Krishna-Balarama tree for many years. It was a traditionally designed residence consisting of 3 separate small rooms joined by a raised path - a bedroom, a kitchen, and a bathroom - with cow dung covered walls and a thatched roof inside a small enclosed compound. The photo below shows Thakurani, a cow who would visit the kutir every morning during her madhukari rounds and return in the evening. Thakurani often stayed inside the compound during the night.

**Sri Saligram-sila**
Personal saligram-sila during Govadhana-puja celebrations
During April and May wheat and barley are harvested in the Vrindavana area and mostly it is done by hand. The villagers including toothless grandmothers and 8-year-olds can be seen in the fields cutting the stalks in bundles or thrashing it to get the grains. After that is accomplished, the stalks of the wheat are stacked in the field and in a day or two a tractor will arrive with a cutting machine. The bundles of wheat and barley stalks are fed into the machine and out comes the chopped fibers which are called busa and is the main fodder for cows in this area. For a few weeks large mounds of busa can be seen in the fields before bullock carts, tractor and trailers or large trucks come into the fields and carry it off to a dry place where it is stored fed to the cows all year around. This is the time many goshallas buy their year supply of fodder.

This year the weather was very cruel to the farmers. First a severely menacing hail storm plummeted the fields just before the harvest dashing many of the seeds to the ground. One farmer claimed that the boiling dark gray sky dumped an 80-kilo block of ice in his field. It was the talk of the town for days.

Despite that, the grumbling farmers did their best and harvested as many grain as they could. After they had the stalks thrashed and pulverized, it lay in their fields awaiting to be transported to the goshalas. To add insult to injury a series of dust storms appeared and blew the secondary harvest in all directions. Farmers took another loss.

After pulverizing his wheat stalks one farmer was anxious to sell it before the next wind storm appeared. We gathered around his mound of fodder which appeared like a pale yellow sand dune. He boasted, “Despite the hail storm we still got a good harvest. What I have here is 300 mund of busa and I will sell it for Rs.30,000.”

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We studied the mass with the intent to estimate how many bullock carts it would take to carry it off knowing that each cart fully loaded can carry 40 mund maximum. We hoped to ascertain how much the farmer was exaggerating and hopefully reach an agreement.

After the standard going back and forth we reached an agreement that the busa was 250 mund and we would pay Rs.25,000 when it was delivered inside our storage barn. Loading and delivering was included in the price.

The agreement was made in the afternoon and that evening and angry wind again blew and perhaps 30% of the busa was carried off.

We came back to the field in the morning and looked at the dune now visibly reduced. The farmer said that he was sorry that our busa had been carried off by the wind. We responded that it was not our busa that was carried off, but his. He argued that we had made an agreement and that oral contracts are binding and that if we did not keep our word he threatened to take action.

He again adamantly argued, “It is your busa the wind carried off! I will keep my word and deliver the rest to your barn but you must pay me the full amount we agreed on.”

We retorted that since the busa was still in his field that it was HIS and that the wind had carried off his busa. He became furious and tried to intimidate us in many ways.

Finally we said, OK we agree that since we agreed to purchase this busa it is ours and there we have to bear the loss caused by the wind. But you should know that last night after we made the agreement, I gathered your Rs.25,000 and was enroute to give the payment to you when the wind came. It blew so much dust in my eyes that I became blind and fell into an irrigation ditch. When I fell the notes slipped out of my hand and the wind took some of them away. Most of them I recovered but a few of them were taken by the wind. Since by your logic, the wind carried away some of my busa, you have to agree that it carried away some of your rupees.”
Before she died, I asked my mother, “Why did you take me out of the American School and put me in Lomas High?” She raised her eyes from the quilt she was stitching and answered with a warm smile, “Because one day you came home from the American School and said you didn’t like it and asked that we send you to Lomas. We asked you why, and you didn’t answer.” Admittedly, my remembrances of High School are faded. Some names still have faces, others do not.

My father moved our family to Mexico City from Monterrey when he was offered the position of Golf Pro at the Club de Golf Chapultepec. Once we got settled, I spent the tenth grade at the American School and the eleventh and twelfth at Lomas.

During those years Mexico City was the most fascinating playground I had ever known—parks, museums, concerts, movies, golf courses, los Piramides, El Popo, night clubs, bullfights, and restaurants with taquitos and quesadillas of delicious variety. Unfortunately I regarded Lomas as just another place for diversion. Education was not at all a prominent interest.

In that playground the most attractive figures for me were Pat Lonergan, Pam Burrows, Cyretta Chaput, Joyce Chiles, and Jean Attridge. I clearly remember going to school just to admire their youthful beauty and enjoy their stimulating company.

I remember often going “night-clubbing” with Pam, Bob Demetrion, Judy Morgan, Tim Locke, Jerry Newgord, Bill Siefert and others. The Hotel Maria Isabel, Las Jacarandas, the Belvedere Room, El Run Run, El Torre Latino, y La Plaza Garibalde were among our favorite places. I remember poker parties and many nights out on the town with Tim, Bob, Jerry and Alf Rey Conde who would all get drunk knowing well that Craig would remain sober enough to drive everyone home safely. I didn’t like drinking though I did it to avoid the jeers and possible rejection from my peers. I always remember having an inclination towards moderation and sense control but I lacked the strength of character to assert my values while mixing with the majority. Sherry Migdail is the only teacher I remember.
from High School and especially the course she taught entitled Great Books. She gave us a taste of Epictetus, Sophocles, and Socrates but I most remember her enthusiasm to share Dostoyevsky’s Crime and Punishment. Sherry’s animated lectures whetted my thirst for philosophy and nourished my desire to understand human nature and the meaning of life. From my limited perspective these were the common themes in the Great Books.

This yearning to know the purpose of life was an internal concern that constantly grew in prominence though I do not remember discussing it with anyone at Lomas. The chain of endless social distractions were effective enough to obscure and intermittently eclipse my existential concerns. But often, while playing golf or wandering around Mexico City alone I would contemplate what the purpose of life could be. I understood that man naturally strove to be happy but wondered if there was a specific process one could follow to achieve happiness. During my senior year I reached the tentative conclusion that the purpose of life was to serve others. (“Yo me llamo Juan Diego y estoy aqui para servirle.”)

For some unknown reason I was elected president of the Senior class of 1965 and recall being nervous while giving a clumsy and empty address at our graduation ceremony held at the American Embassy. I remember the Prom—Pam with an orchid pinned on her emerald green evening gown and me with a carnation on a rented tuxedo. (Despues soplo un viento y los Lomaseros departieron a muchas partes.) I was surprised when my parents told me they were going to send me to college as the thought of continuing my education never entered my mind. Having no idea what to study, I was off to Texas A&M University simply prepared for more social interaction on a new playground. Pam was off to Long Island but we stayed in touch; the rest of my classmates I never saw again (with the exception of Cyretta whom I met briefly 37 years later.)

During my college years (1965-1970) the Viet Nam war loomed dark overhead and the young men of America were being forced to participate. Since I had been born in Texas and was a US citizen, I also had a military obligation to fulfill. At that time students were deferred from being drafted into the military and that became the impetus for me to get serious about my studies. With the help of my Dean I discovered an interest in photo-journalism and advertising and began to focus in these fields.
Swimming Against the Current

Pam and I stayed in touch and I spent a summer vacation with her and her mother on Long Island. It was then we planned to marry. Our relationship had been troublesome and I remember a rare lucid moment when it became apparent to both of us that it was not going to work, but somehow we dismissed it and married just before the beginning of my senior year.

My last years in the university were stimulating. I made the Deans list and won an award to attend an annual advertising convention in Dallas which was at that time a center for advertising aficionados. There I had a rude awakening.

We watched the best one hundred 60-second TV commercials of the year and the advertising firm that won presented an analysis of their strategy. They had made an ad for Winston cigarettes which of course was intended to increase sales. The CEO of the firm explained that once a person became a Marlboro Man, a Macho Camel smoker, or a soave Cool inhaler it was damned hard to get them to change their brand and thus smokers were not the ideal market to target for increasing sales. Better to aim at the potential smoker’s—those who are not yet committed to a particular brand. Target children.

With this stroke of genius the firm designed an ad which appealed to the child’s psyche and aired it during children’s TV shows and indeed over the course of time the sales of Winston cigarettes rose and the victims started smoking at an earlier age. The CEO was wildly cheered and applauded for his innovation and creativity and with a broad smile bowed gracefully at the waist. I was in the midst of soulless, cunning, greedy predators—coyotes.

This incident burst my bubble of naive idealism and my head and heart pounded as I slumped in my seat. It hit me that the advertising profession delighted in using the mass media to manipulate and exploit the innocent public and that my college diploma would only qualify me to be a pawn in the hands of avaricious hypocrites worshiping profit.

My parents flew from Mexico City to congratulate their eldest son in cap and gown while cameras flashed as my Dean pushed the diploma in my moist and fidgeting hands. With a B.A. in Journalism and my enthusiasm crushed, Pam and I moved to Pennsylvania to find work but no respectable firm would hire a man being stalked by the military, especially with a forehead so deeply etched with skepticism. My daily trips to Philly for job interviews became so painful that I escaped by spending many long hours at the Philadelphia Museum of Art admiring the paintings of Vincent Van Gogh and again wandering around alone carefully observing the world.

At night I put on a tuxedo and worked for a dapper gourmet restaurant that catered to parties in the fabulous homes of the Philadelphia elite. I served wine, champagne, steak and lobster tails to the upper crust while they tirelessly narrated the intricate family ties they had with those who first arrived on the Mayflower. It was obvious that despite their wealth, luscious estates and prestigious social standing, they were still unhappy being plagued by alcoholism, infidelity, divorce, broken families, duplicity, pretence, and so many other miseries. Wealth offers no guarantee of happiness so I began to question if it was worth striving for.

During this period it became clear to me that I either had to prepare myself to make the money necessary to acquire the endless trinkets the media promises will make one happy, or learn how to minimize my needs and be satisfied.
Swimming Against the Current

with the bare necessities. I had to either focus on acquisition of external things or on internal development. After much introspection, I chose to focus on the latter.

Later that year I was coerced to enter the US Army and that marked the end of our two-year marriage. In retrospect, it is clear to me that the main factors contributing to the failure of our marriage were my immaturity, narcissism and inability to express my inner feelings.

Because of spending my youth in Mexico, and having been called “spick” and “beaner” by Texan bigots all too long, I had no patriotic feelings for America whatsoever. On top of that, Mars being weak in my horoscope, I had no martial spirit and was thus completely unfit for military life and worse, for defending a country I felt no part of. (Yo soy Mexicano rasa!)

After more than two months at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri undergoing Basic Training (Thorough Indoctrination is more accurate), I received orders to attend Advanced Infantry Training and was shipped to Fort Polk, Louisiana, which at that time was one of the two military installations specifically geared to prepare soldiers for an 11-month tour of Viet Nam. That was my darkest day.

During the first week I was assigned to a barracks with eighty strangers, mostly uneducated, petty criminals. A row of eight open toilets was where men sat and smoked while competing to evacuate louder than their commode comrades. The large open shower room hosted perhaps thirty naked hooligans at a time, all curious to see how their genital measured up to the rest. It was a place where the hardened and coarse were the most respected and men of good character and integrity were ridiculed and scoffed at.

There, I experienced a profound isolation. I visited a Chaplain, then a psychiatrist to express my inner turmoil and get relief or consolation but instead met smug faces rocking negatively above tightly crossed arms and realized that the Army is a closed system which offers no solace but the stockade. I was trapped. The Army was a prison masquerading as a respectable corps dedicated to fighting for freedom and upholding the ideals of the Constitution.
Swimming Against the Current

With my parents, friends and wife gone, I walked alone silently. I was an outsider, an observer and couldn’t relate to anyone. Another poor soul in the barracks went catatonic and earned the name Riga Mortis Charlie while I remained withdrawn, but active. During one sleepless night I curled up in a fetal position and while pleading for relief, something like a prayer arose, “Dear Lord, whoever you are, if you get me out of this mess, I’ll search out a way to serve and repay you.”

In that darkest hour a faint, subtle and reassuring voice appeared within and consoled me to the degree I was able to sleep. Over the following weeks the voice offered repeated assurance and steadily guided me, step by step, through an interesting and intricate two-month intrigue which changed my military occupational service from infantryman to administrative clerk.

For the next year and a half I remained at Fort Polk working on a staff that handled all correspondence for the commanding general. Part of my job was to investigate allegations made by soldiers or their relatives regarding infractions or injustices committed by the Army. While interviewing the soldiers concerned I became privy to many horrifying atrocities going on in Viet Nam and soon it dawned on me that the war was not about restraining communism, but about economic gain, even at the expense of the nation’s sons. Filicide for Profit. (Los mas coyotes de los mas coyotes.)

I then travelled to Santa Barbara, California to further my training in photo-journalism and to begin fulfilling my end of the bargain to find out how to serve God. Upon arrival I reunited with Jerry Newgord who, though not a Lomasero, was on old Mexico City friend who was working on his PhD. in English and absorbed in writing a novel. We spent much time together remembering our high school years and practicing photography, but I was not able to discuss my existential concerns with him. However, after my experience with the inner voice I regarded isolation, solitude and cries my best friends.

Because my family never offered any type of spiritual education and because of the hypocrisy I had encountered in the few churches I had attended, I began my spiritual search outside Christianity. I began reading books about Yoga which gradually introduced me to the Bhagavad-gita, a literature highly regarded by all Vedantists.

Unfortunately, my interest in photography, the need to make a living, and social diversions distracted me and I put my self-imposed obligation on the back burner for several months. Then one morning while on a nature assignment in the Sequoia National Park I woke up to find all my photography equipment stolen from my car. I was numb. I drove to a café and ordered a cinnamon bun and some coffee and contemplated deeply. A trucker sat next to me and to make small talk asked, “So what do you do for a living, ol’ buddy?”

I was in no mood for small talk but his question focused my introspection and lead me to understand that the source of my distress was twofold: one, the physical loss of the photo equipment; and two, the resulting identity crises. I could no longer honestly answer, “I’m a photographer,” as my identity was based on the possession of the equipment and without it, I felt lost.

I understood that acquiring new equipment would only soothe the sting of one prong of the fork and that to alleviate the other I would have to cultivate an identity that could not be threatened by some petty thief in the night, or by political or economic changes outside my control. The complete solution was to develop an identity that nothing could change – but what could that be?

The theft and resulting crises redirected my attention to the pact I had made with the inner voice and soon it appeared to me that the incident was arranged to accomplish just that. With renewed enthusiasm I began again to search out the means to serve and repay the one who successfully helped me avoid combat duty.

By this time I had re-married and was living a very simple back-to-the-land existence on a fifteen acre farm north of Spokane, Washington. My wife and I were trying our best to avoid becoming small screws in the corporate machine and passive accomplices to a government dedicated to funneling the fruits of the many onto the plates of the few. We were making an idealistic attempt to live self-sufficiently while cultivating spiritual knowledge.

In a pristine natural setting, we focused on the study of Bhagavad-gita and found there information concerning the difference between the body and soul: the body is born and dies, whereas the soul is eternal. The soul is the spark of life that animates the body and just as we change our clothes daily, the soul similarly changes bodies when the one it wears no longer functions. The Gita explains that we are actually the spirit soul, not the body, and that our constitutional activity is service to God. It made sense to me that Servant of God is the identity that remains constant under all circumstances as it is not dependent on the possession of equipment, degrees, titles or anything else. That identity is based only on having a desire to serve and an absolute object to serve.

The Gita also expresses that the Absolute Object (God) manifests in three aspects: an all-pervading form; a localized form; and a personal form. It struck me that the inner voice who had guided me through the ordeal in the Army was the localized form of the Supreme Lord.

The Gita declares itself to be mysterious, the secret of all secrets, and expresses that in order to properly understand the message one requires a professor to learn from. So over the next months I located and examined a few teachers and in 1975 committed myself to a prolonged study under the guidance of the one I considered most genuine and impeccable in character. Specifically, one who was oriented towards giving rather than taking. Since graduating from college
I had longed to keep a distance from hypocrisy and pretense and the company of his students, dedicated to honesty, integrity and authenticity, was a great relief and rewarding experience for me.

Realizing this commitment would alienate me from my parents and most everyone else I knew, I returned to Mexico City to visit my family with the hope of communicating to them my intentions. While I respected my parents for having made so many sacrifices to raise and educate me, I always felt like a stranger in their home. I lived two lives: one struggling with existential concerns, and the other trying to be what my parents and society wanted me to be—the college grad who should embrace corporate culture, land a job in USA, get transferred to Mexico, buy a nice house, drive prestigious conveyances, raise a family, play golf on week-ends and socialize while sipping Kahlua and cream at the 19th hole.

While in their presence I played the latter role, but it wasn’t me. Somehow I wasn’t able to articulate my disgust for commercial exploitation and distrust of unscrupulous governments resulting from my experiences in Dallas and the Army respectively. I feared expressing that would severely hurt and disappoint them and I would be taken as ungrateful.

I had never heard my parents inquire about the purpose of life or what happens after death and it was apparent they had no spiritual goals. I had observed that their lives demanded they concern themselves only with the daily affairs of the world and thus we were strangers. I returned to the States failing to accomplish the purpose of my visit—to have a heart-to-heart talk with my parents.

At this point in my life I had achieved my main material goals. I had found a like-minded companion (my second wife), a home away from the maddening crowd and a way to live without having sold my soul to the corporate world. Yet I was not satisfied. I intuitively knew that there was more to life than the satisfaction of the body and mind, which the Gita states is like the cage of the soul. As by polishing the cage the captured bird cannot be satisfied, so by exclusively attending to the demands of the body and mind the soul cannot be satisfied. Though I had achieved what I wanted, a certain emptiness nagged me.

Upon my return to the States I stopped in Seattle and received preliminary guidance on how to further my practice of Bhakti Yoga and then returned to our farm to apply myself. The instructions involved regulated diet, mantra recitation, scriptural study and worship. I shared these with my wife and we put the process to the test for one year and found it substantially transforming and satisfying. My wife, however, was not as enthusiastic as I.

The daily spiritual practices began to fill the spiritual vacuum and gradually other activities appeared dry and futile. Over the next few months I announced to my wife, who was also my best friend, that I wanted to leave our idyllic farm and live in a community dedicated to the practice of Bhakti Yoga one hundred miles away in British Columbia. She was apprehensive but decided to accompany me, though reluctantly.

In a letter I announced the happy news to my parents that my non-committal period had come to an end for I had found a meaningful way to dedicate my life. I thought they would share my excitement and was surprised by their response: “If you become a disciple of that Indian guru, you are no longer our son.” It was an emotional jolt but I took it that my determination for spiritual life was being tested and pushed ahead.

My commitment to spiritual practices next tested my marriage as my wife’s existential concerns were not as pressing as mine and thus she applied herself with lesser intensity. Over the next three years the gap widened between us until she announced she was not being herself and returned to the farm. I was distressed but nevertheless pushed on. Her leaving in 1978 opened a door for me to visit India for the first time. I visited the holy village of Vrindavan, which according to Vedic texts, is the place where Krishna appeared and performs pastimes of herding cows and loving exchanges with His devotees. Though unfamiliar with the customs and language, I had a profound feeling I had returned to a long-forgotten home.

My spiritual master had left this world from
that holy place a few months prior to my arrival and the beginning of a long, painful and embarrassing power struggle for control of his institution was sprouting. He had warned us that there would be turmoil after his departure and it was quickly coming to pass. (Lamentablemente allí también entraron coyotitos.)

At the end of my one month visit, I petitioned to stay but instead was assigned to serve as an assistant teacher for aspiring monks in an ashrama in New York City. For the next six years I remained there teaching practical aspects of Bhakti Yoga and in 1984 was finally granted permission to reside in Vrindavan to train boys from 8-18 in a monastic school. From 1984 to 1998 I primarily taught in that school and during the two-month summer breaks I taught adults in Moscow, Finland, Germany, Austria, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and Mexico.

In 1994 I was asked to begin an internal publication for the school and ashrama community in Vrindavan and to do so re-kindled my abilities in photojournalism. I educated myself in computers and all the software required for desk top publishing and since have been involved in editing, writing, designing, and printing newsletters, brochures, magazines and books concerning the practice of Bhakti Yoga.

Due to the coyote factor by 1998 my spiritual master’s institution had transformed into something quite different than it had been originally and I could no longer participate with a clear conscience. I had joined the institution to get away from hypocrisy and pretense and now ironically found myself stepping outside to avoid them. However, I continue publishing and teaching Bhakti Yoga independently. My dear elder sister Cindy has been consistently affectionate toward me despite the negativity of our mother and father and to this day remains one of my closest friends. Not because of family ties, but because of genuine consistent well-wishing and love. With her permission I made a trip to Mexico to visit our parents, now retired and no longer concerned with how their son’s unconventional life style might affect their social standing. I visited them once a year for three years and we made amends before they both passed away.

While living alone in Vrindavan, still teaching and publishing, I began looking after abandoned cows in my neighborhood, an activity which has developed into a full-time concern today. Cow protection is intrinsically related with service to Krishna (God) and for thousands of years has been a wide-spread practice among all followers of the Vedas. At present a few friends and I maintain a herd of 200 cows and are preparing to network with others to expand the number. (For more info visit careforcows.org)

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Nowadays, owing to the diligent work of los coyotes, India is gleefully trading its golden culture for the plastic beads of Western Ways and the innocent cows are being turned into fast food and fashionable garments for the growing number of affluent barbarians. What are my plans now? The Gita teaches that the accumulated thoughts and attitudes cultivated during one’s life consolidate to form the final thought one has upon leaving the body; and that final thought or attitude is what guides the eternal soul to his next destination. If one is able to remember God at the time of leaving the body, he is transferred to the Eternal Abode where he revels in His blissful company eternally. No more birth, death and the concomitant suffering.

So my present hope is to remain in this holy place cultivating a devotional service attitude while protecting cows and becoming a more effective teacher. (hasta que los mariachis se quedan calladitos y las guitarras y trompetas tocan Tan tan!)

Swimming Against the Current
My mother has been kidnapped by terrorists and being tortured. They allow her one phone call and she pleads that I do something to help her. I respond, “Don’t worry Mom. I’ll go to your home and offer all the food in your kitchen to Krsna and distribute the remnants to my family and friends. Krsna will be soooo pleased with you for this.” She responds, “But my dear son, isn’t there any thing else you can do? These devils are causing me so much pain!”

I answer, “OK Mom. Don’t worry. We’ll use your savings to purchase Bhagavad-Gita’s and your car to distribute them on sankirtana! Be assured that Srila Prabhupada and Lord Caitanya will bless you for this!” She sobs.

To console her, I say, “Don’t worry Mom. You’re not the body and remember, we love you soooo much!”

It rings hollow doesn’t it? Do you think attending to one’s spiritual wellbeing while completely ignoring one’s material plight indicates compassion, concern and love? I don’t.

The above scenario parallels the attitude some devotees have towards serving those cows imprisoned and tortured by the commercial dairy industry. They think that to purchase commercial dairy products and offer them to Krsna serves the spiritual well-being of those cows, and perhaps it does, if offered with sincere devotion. But offering commercial dairy products to Krsna is the very LEAST one can do for those cows. Offering their milk without making any effort to relieve those cows’ suffering leads one to ask, “Are such people actually serving the cows, or are they just serving their tongue?”

The above attitude announces an unwillingness to do more than the minimum. It indicates that avoiding personal inconvenience and staying within one’s comfort zone takes priority over protecting Mother Cow.

What I find uglier still is the insidious attempt to pass off this complacency and indolence as the virtue of compassion. Some propose that the tortured cows’ only hope is that we continue purchasing their milk mixed with pus, blood and anxiety to offer to Lord Krsna for if we stop, those cows are doomed.

Purchasing commercial dairy products only fuels the slaughterhouse industry and keeps those horrible works alive. It guarantees that the female calves of the tortured cows will soon meet the same fate. What such people propose is a perfect formula for the slaughterhouse industry as it inspires those who favor and those who oppose the cruelty to purchase their products! And the bloody butchers cheer and encourage this indolence masquerading as compassion.

You will remind me that Srila Prabhupada allowed us to offer commercial milk to Krsna. Yes, he did. But simultaneously he told us to start farm communities where we could obtain milk from protected cows and grow our own vegetables and grains to offer to Krsna. It’s clear that his allowing us to offer commercial dairy products is a temporary concession much like that made by Narada Muni to Mrgrari the hunter. Narada told Mrgrari that instead of half-killing forest animals, he should kill them fully. Narada did not advocate or sanction animal killing; rather he gave an incremental instruction meant to bring Mrgrari one step closer to Vaisnava behavior. Similarly, forty years ago when Srila Prabhupada told us savages we should offer milk to Krsna, he wanted us to take one short step towards serving Krsna. As service to Krsna must be favorable (anukulyena) he ordered us to establish farms for cow protection and offer their milk as the next step.

Narada ultimately told Mrgrari to break his bow and desist from animal killing -- that was his intent from the start. Similarly, as there was nothing else, Srila Prabhupada allowed us to offer commercial milk but simultaneously ordered us to establish farm communities to protect cows. We are too lazy and attached to follow his full instruction and we rationalize obedience by following only half of it. Shame on us!

One may shrug and say, “I don’t have the power to stop the monstrous dairy industry.” And it may be that no individual has that power. But each of us does have the power to control our tongue, and if enough of us do, and refuse to purchase slaughterhouse products, it will have a detrimental effect on the industry.

By following Srila Prabhupada’s order to establish farms to produce and offer milk, vegetables and grains to Krsna we automatically boycott commercial dairy products and all junk foods which are tailored to reduce longevity. Then we will have the potency to preach with conviction and influence others to do the same, and by our united effort, the commercial dairies will dry up! If we are too entrenched in the urban lifestyle and require more dairy products than our farms can...
Here are some excerpts from an Ayurvedic doctor, regarding whether milk is sattvic or not:

This pale and polluted fluid we call milk – steeped in human greed and ignorance and squeezed from the udders of intense anguish – is not the milk that flows from the earth’s bosom. Pure unadulterated milk is the primal food of sattva, of peace and calm.

The insidious suffering of the cows is directly reflected in the diseases of our food body. It is no coincidence that every symptom the cow suffers in her captivity is mirrored in the present condition of the human species.

The mental agony of the cow is inherited by all those who drink the polluted ama, which used to be milk; we suffer the same conditions of fear, isolation, restlessness, and melancholia. The plagues of hyperactivity, discombobulation, muscle pain, digestive disorders, heart disease, abdominal cramps, excess gas, constipation, bloating, and atherosclerosis in humans are the result of the Vata dosha going mad in the cow’s body.

Ulceration, rashes, hives, fevers, infertility, poor absorption of nutrients, liver abscesses, and violent deaths are directly linked to the vitiated metabolic dosha of the cow.

The cow’s essential nature is nurturing, solid, stoic, and providing – like a mother. As her pure Kapha nature becomes distorted, her diseases filter into the human system and create havoc.

produce, then we should find alternative whole milk obtained with minimum violence and be willing to pay more for it. Moreover, we should be honest and admit our weakness and attachment and, instead of shunning those who do control their tongue, support them and seek their blessings so we can develop the strength and conviction to follow. By imagining that tortured commercial dairy cows are pacified when we offer their milk to Krsna, we indulge in the first of the five nescient activities created by Lord Brahma, self-deception (SB 3.12.2).

Sri Krsna Prabhupada writes (SB 1.17.3): “The cow’s calf not only is beautiful to look at, but also gives satisfaction to the cow, and so she delivers as much milk as possible. But in the Kali-yuga the calves are separated from the cows as early as possible for purposes which may not be mentioned in these pages of Srimad Bhagavatam. The cow stands with tears in her eyes, the sudra milk man draws milk from her artificially, and when there is no milk the cow is sent to be slaughtered. These greatly sinful acts are responsible for all the troubles in present society.

People do not know what they are doing in the name of economic development. The influence of Kali will keep them in the darkness of ignorance. Despite all endeavors for peace and prosperity, they must try and see the cows and bulls happy in all respects. Foolish people do not know how one earns happiness by making the cows and bulls happy, but it is a fact by the law of Nature.

Let us take it from the authority of Srimad Bhagavatam and adopt the principles for the total happiness of humanity.”
More Lessons from the Cowshed
By Kurma Rupa dasa

At dawn a villager came to the gate with his bellowing cow trailing behind. The bulls became alert understanding she was in heat. The man said, “My cow needs one of your bulls.” I asked him, “What’s the matter with your bull?” He answered, “I don’t have one.”

“Yes, so please do a little more since I am poor,” again smiling. “If you’re poor how do you feed your cow?” I asked. “We have hay, we have some wheat and barley.” he said.

“You don’t have one because you abandoned him in the street thinking he was useless, right?” He lowered his head and said, “That’s right.” “I took him off the street and now he’s healthy and strong. Do you still think he’s useless?” “No of course not,” he said shyly. “So he’s worth something, right? What will you offer him to service your cow?”

“I’m a poor Vrajabasi, please do some service for me.” “But I already have,” I said. “I have taken your bull off the street and fed him.”

“So then, can you offer some to my bull?” “No, I can’t.” “Will you give him one Vrajabasi roti, some gur, or a liter of milk?” “No.” “So what will you offer?”

“When my cow dries up, I’ll give you the calf. And when my cow gets old and yields no more milk, I’ll give her to you.”

While he tied her next to Kesava I contemplated, “Because I do him a favor, he reciprocates by offering me his debts, free of charge. How would he reciprocate if I did him no favors?”

This painting by BG Sharma is the inspiration behind the original Cow for Cows logo.

Photography and design by Kurma-rupa dasa

World Vaishnava Association’s secretary, Sripad Priyananada Bon Maharaja gave the Audarya Award to Kurma Rupa.
A close associate of Kurma Rupa was Ananda Vidvan Swami who was an erudite scholar a naistika brahmacari, a renounced sannyasi, of spotless character, and a seeker of Krishna-prema. He served in ISKCON Columbia and Costa-rica, the Spanish BBT, and the Vrindavan Bhaktivedanta Swami gurukula. In preparation for taking sannyasa, he travelled more than 2,000 kilometers on foot throughout India, making pilgrimages to the most important holy places of Lord Krishna’s and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu’s pastimes. During this period he followed a vow of chanting at least 128 rounds daily, a vow he successfully accomplished. He passed away on 22 November 2012.

In a letter dated 27 August 2011, Kurma Rupa speaks of Ananda Vidvan Swami.

“"Yes it is true that Yadu took sannyasa about a year ago. His name is now Ananda Vidvan Swami. He has been preparing to do so for some time although he kept it quiet. He did it according to favorable astrological calculations and is not revealing who he took sannyas from. That is the first thing people ask... who did he take from? I do not know and am not really interested. I know that he is a genuine and natural renunciate and that is enough for me. He has taken his vows very seriously and is modelling his practices after Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

For the last three years he has increased his chanting and has been cultivating austerities, detachment and wandering further away from all those known to him in order to cultivate dependence on Krishna. During his 20 year stay in India he felt he accomplished the purpose of brahmacari life (study) and by breaking his dependence on the institution he accomplished the purposes of the kutichak and bahudaka stages of sannyasa.

After taking sannyasa he wandered alone in South India for about nine months like a mendicant cultivating parivrajaka refusing to accept money and food with salt, sugar, oil or ghee. His possessions fit in one small bag that he can lift with one finger. He said he has never felt more freedom in his life. He’s an inspiration for me.”
I had some interesting “visitations” and I wrote this:

They had come before to invite me, and though I was attracted, I couldn’t go. I knew they meant well but still something held me back. I told them I had other obligations, and politely declined, but actually I was reluctant to take the risk. What if I fail?

Nevertheless they returned, those carefree travelers, and again beckoned me with the chance to learn, to grow in experience, and while I was more prepared, still I was unable. They wanted to share with me the good they had found: they wanted to teach me how to soar. I was not perturbed that I could not see them, as their presence was so appealing. Though I could not hear their words, we exchanged thoughts, and I gained confidence.

I got strength from their assurances so the third time they came I was ready to take the chance. I knew they were well-wishers and I could learn from them. They were exciting to be with, and what a relief to be free from gross ailments. They encouraged me to soar like them, but I didn’t know how.

They took me to the uppermost peak of a mountain where I could see a great distance into the firmament. There was a light foggy cloud cover far below in the congenial atmosphere. They were soaring close by and invited me to join them. Something like a gentle breeze blew and I felt that if I just stretched out, I would smoothly lift off. They reassured me, and the mountain peak dissolved below, like sand covered by waves. I felt a new excitement. They cheered. I was no longer grounded and had entered a silent world. I was soaring!

Soaring
By Kurma Rupa dasa

Somehow in the excitement I had a selfish thought, and suddenly stopped ascending. Momentarily I was suspended — and then started to sink very slowly. I was struck with a mild panic and beckoned their guidance. I understood: “You have to respect, admire, and relish your environment. You have to generate good.”

I looked into the firmament and saw far below a spiral disc of clouds in a sea of fog. Grayish-white subtle matter gently swirling in a cool fire of burnt orange. I bathed in that sight and tried to emanate appreciation. My slow descent ceased, and I started to soar upwards and was showered with encouragement. IThat’s it! That’s it. Go on like this.

I understood if I generate good feelings, if I put out good vibrations, I could soar. As I became more familiar with the practice, they were free to concentrate on their own soaring and started moving swiftly, yet gracefully in the firmament and I marveled at their mastery. They were sporting like dolphins in a sea of clouds. I could not imagine the amount of good feelings one had to generate to be able to soar as expertly as they.

I absorbed all I could in that first lesson and understood they had many more worthwhile things to give. They wanted to see me grow more and more, and I felt empty as I had nothing to offer them that they valued. They excused themselves and went about their wandering. Feeling alone, I returned with the thought they had given: One who does good, my friend, is never overcome by evil.