

TEMPLE PRESIDENTS MEETING

My dear Godbrothers,

Please read this brief statement before you begin the meetings. I am praying that it will give us some insight into the problems at hand. I am open to any suggestions that might be made concerning the contents of this statement, and am fully willing to assist in implementing the recommendations made in any way that you all may see fit.

Your servant,



Bir Krishna das Goswami

HIS HOLINESS BIR KRISHNA DAS GOSWAMI
FEBRUARY 3, 1984

ALL GLORIES TO SRI GURU AND GOURANGA!!!

My dear Godbrothers,

Please accept my obeisances. All glories to His Divine Grace Srila Prabhupada, the Founder-Acarya of ISKCON.

I am sitting here looking at the contents of two files. One file contains letters from various GBC members. These letters deal with several of our Godbrothers who have left the movement, or who are perceived to have deviated from the present credo of the movement. The other file contains letters from various non-GBC members. These letters contain commentaries about, or resolutions about the so-called aberrant behavior of various GBC members and/or the GBC as a whole.

Although these two classes of letters present opposing viewpoints, in reality they are quite similar. The mood of these letters is characterized by suspicion, distrust, and above all, a general lack of Vaisnava etiquette. The relationships between the two aforementioned groups seems to have degraded to the point of mundane political confrontation.

When His Divine Grace Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Prabhupada left this material world we found the Gaudiya Math breaking up into factions and engaging in this type of confrontation, name-calling, and even legal disputes. ISKCON has not at present broken down to this extent, although there are some instances of similar activities going on.

From our past experience we should by now recognize that spiritual conflicts can not be settled by legal or quasilegal bodies such as the GBC or Temple Presidents. These bodies can set up the basic managerial framework in which we can work. They can also set the spiritual standards for the movement. But it is a mistake to think that Vaisnava conflicts can be solved by resolutions. As Srila Prabhupada said, "Resolutions, revolutions, dissolutions, no solutions." We find at present that when one group resolves something, then the other group becomes so agitated by that resolution, statement, or action; that they respond with a similarly agitating resolution, statement, or action. It would seem that we as devotees would be cool headed enough to learn from history, both mundane and spiritual, but unfortunately we have not, and we go on with our suspicion, name calling, resolutions etc.

In my vision this political slant that we are so wont to is evidence of our spiritual and even material immaturity. When we call a sincere God-brother a "demon" it reminds me of Gurukula children engaged in fighting. As Srila Prabhupada said, "Call the dog a bad name and kick him." When we make overwhelming generalizations about a whole group of devotees we are displaying our childishness.

I personally am very much discouraged by my Godbrothers' immature dealings with each other, and would like to present some practical suggestions that can be utilized to rectify these difficulties. Also I would like to try to point out where we have gone astray in the areas of Vaisnava etiquette and philosophy.

We must first rid ourselves of designations that do not pertain to our spiritual identity. Any material attempt at unity is doomed to failure as we are well aware. We are all disciples of Srila Prabhupada. We may have a specific

service such as temple president, regional secretary, GBC, or even Guru. That's right, even the position of Guru or Sanyassi is not our identity. It is our service, or part of our service to our Guru. Nowhere in our scriptures do you find a self-realized personality identifying himself in terms of his designation. In fact this is discouraged. Of course in the case of the Guru, the relationship between himself and his disciples is a spiritual eternal relationship, but his relationships with his Godbrothers is as a Godbrother, and to them he is not a Guru, although they recognize his relationships with his disciples, and may encourage his disciples in their worship of their Guru. This is the way that Srila Prabhupada acted in relationship to his Godbrothers. Prabhupada acted on an equal basis with his Godbrothers.

The elimination of this designated consciousness is essential if we are to resolve our conflicts. We are all Godbrothers, and in the forum of Godbrothers the etiquette is dealings between equals, giving equal respect to all Godbrothers who are maintaining the spiritual principles.

This is not being done at present. There is to a large extent a condescending attitude on some devotees' parts toward their Godbrothers, and on the part of those who are subject to the condescending attitude there is a resentful frame of consciousness. Godbrothers have a difficult time of it when their Godbrothers who have taken the service of Guru, instruct (either directly or by attitude) their disciples to treat the Godbrothers of their Guru like siblings. This is a direct violation of Vaisnava etiquette. Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu always treated his Godbrothers in a special way, and he respected the Godbrothers of his spiritual master almost on the same level as his spiritual master. He did this even in the case of Ramachandra Puri. He never called Ramachandra Puri a "demon". We foolishly sometimes call Godbrothers of Srila Prabhupada similar names.

Prabhupada instructs in the CC that the Godbrothers of the Spiritual master should be respected almost on the same level as the Spiritual master, and in any case, even if they are "far off" or their association would prove dangerous they should simply be avoided. Prabhupada instructed us that the type of criticism leveled by him at his Godbrothers was correct for him but not for us.

So this inability on the part of some of the Godbrothers to recognize other Godbrothers as Godbrothers in the way Srila Prabhupada taught us, is a very divisive (and asastric) factor in the movement, and the immature response to this inability or refusal is further aggravating the matter.

In ordinary familial dealings one brother will not force his brother to live with him, accept him as authority, and accept his children as equals. He respects his brother as a brother and allows him to set up his own family. But in ISKCON brothers are forced to live as dissatisfied dependants of their brothers in order to remain in the movement. Our Godbrothers are grown up (at least most of them). They will eventually leave out of frustration and thereby irrevocably break the relationship. In other words what we have now is a completely unnatural situation for many of Prabhupada's disciples.

So in any case the first step to unifying the factions in ISKCON should be to understand the unifying factor (the Godbrotherly relationship), then one can proceed to deal with different specific issues, not the other way around as we are doing at present which is agitating the situation and perhaps will cause splits or other unwanted results. So I am begging you, my Godbrothers, please don't lay the seeds for something that will displease Srila Prabhupada.

We should all (whatever our designation) meet as equals, listen to our brothers and trust in them. I am speaking about a definite organized meeting. In India or wherever. But this meeting should not be dominated by a few as was the case in the sanyass meeting in Mayapura last year, where a few intimidated the rest. This meeting should last as long as necessary. Those who have assumed a higher position in ISKCON should not feel, "Why do I have to listen to him. What has he ever done for Prabhupada?", and those in other positions should not feel, "Why should I listen to him? He is simply overcome with power and position."

I am begging you my Godbrothers to arrange such a meeting. The communication gap grows wider and wider. The spreading of this movement must be based upon love and trust between the members, not resolutions or condemnations by any party. Please, let us not offend Srila Prabhupada.

Your servant,


Bir Krishna das Goswami

Disciple of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada