

Shukavak dasa
November 10, 1985.

Dear Maharajas and Prabhus,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories unto Srila Prabhupada and all ISKCON vartmana-acaryas .

I have recently reviewed a copy of Minutes of GBC Meetings held at New Vrindavan, Sept 16-20, 1985 and would like to humbly make a few comments about one resolution. Our society is presently going through a very important adjustment process and therefore it is incumbent upon us to move slowly and fully discuss all issues before we make final decisions. With this understanding, I would like to comment upon the following resolution:

September 19th, resolution five:

Photographs of any of Srila Prabhupada's disciples who are initiating gurus , when placed on the altar of any ISKCON temple, shall be placed on a level lower than that of the pictures of members of our disciplic succession (consisting of Srila Prabhupada, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta etc.)

There are three considerations behind this resolution, 1) the need to distinguish the position of Srila Prabhupada as unique within our society, 2) the matter of guru-disciple etiquette and, 3) the feelings of God-brothers. Regarding the first consideration, there is definitely a need to properly distinguish the importance and unique position of Srila Prabhupada within our society as the Founder- acarya . Today our society has at least a dozen initiating spiritual masters and the future will bring many more. In the past there was no question of misunderstanding the position of Srila Prabhupada; he was the only spiritual master and acarya . Now there is a distinct possibility that Srila Prabhupada's position may become gradually obscured in the course of a few generations. Regarding the matter of Vaisnava etiquette, there is naturally a feeling on behalf of a disciple of the impropriety to assume a position that is on par with the spiritual master. It seems that only out of an act of great disrespect or arrogance would a disciple dare to place himself, or have himself placed, on the same level as his spiritual master. Finally, the feelings of the Godbrothers must be considered. Many Godbrothers feel offended to see their colleagues placed on

the same level and worshipped to the same degree as their own spiritual master. With these three considerations, the above resolution appears to have been formulated.

Although this resolution seems harmless and appears to reasonably address each of these considerations, the implications to this resolution are subtle and far-reaching because a higher principal, viz., the proper understanding and representation of the disciplic succession, is involved. The resolution changes the manner in which we understand and worship our disciplic succession. Moreover, it disrupts the living nature of our sampradaya and will lead our society on a course similar to that of the Christian churches. In formulating this resolution, I feel that we have acted with a sense of immature humility. The good that was achieved at the New Vrindavan GBC meetings will be undone if we do not understand and take measures to properly represent and worship our disciplic succession.

In a previous paper I argued that our disciplic succession is a 'living' disciplic succession and I used the term 'living' in the sense that the succession is on-going and pluralistic. 'On-going' meant that the tradition could not be frozen at a particular spiritual point. Instead it continues with each new representative having the same spiritual status as the previous representative.(1) 'Pluralistic' meant that the succession cannot be restricted to one or a few representatives. There may be any number of representatives of the tradition at any given time.(2) The recent meeting in New Vrindavan has largely solved the problem of restricting who can initiate. In those meetings our society recognized the pluralistic nature of our sampradaya .(3) However, as we took this step forward we have taken two steps backward, because this resolution has the effect of freezing our tradition at the point of Srila Prabhupada by downgrading the position of the present and succeeding representatives of the disciplic succession. We have unknowingly disrupted the on-going nature of our sampradaya and have moved ourselves one step closer to a position similar to the Christian churches in their relationship to Jesus Christ.(4) Further, by downgrading the present representatives of the disciplic succession we have downgraded the whole disciplic succession.(5)

To downgrade or disrupt the ongoing nature of our sampradaya is to essentially change our philosophy. Each guru who is a bona fide member of the disciplic succession has a spiritual status equal to the others, because each member represents the whole disciplic succession. Granted, individual acaryas may personally appear more outstanding or accomplished from the view of their disciples or history etc., but on the spiritual level they are all equal. The guru is one. The guru has the same responsibility to deliver fallen

souls no matter what place he has in the disciplic succession. For this reason I see no reason why a guru who is coming in the line of disciplic succession after Srila Prabhupada should be considered lesser than the acaryas before Srila Prabhupada. Do they have less of a responsibility to deliver disciples or preach Krsna consciousness than the previous acaryas ? Has something happened to the potency of our sampradaya that it is not able to perpetuate itself properly? Is it now only capable of producing substandard gurus whom must I assume also have substandard disciples? What will happen in the next generation of gurus , will their pictures be one step lower than the present gurus ? Obviously the proposal is absurd. Let us closely examine what we have done and what we are saying in making this resolution.

I submit that any member of our disciplic succession who has assumed the position of guru has a responsibility to represent the entire disciplic succession. It is his duty as a representative of the whole disciplic succession and his responsibility to disciples to properly represent the whole sampradaya . Consequently, he must accept a level of worship befitting a representative of the disciplic succession. The Godbrothers should understand and accept this fact. An acarya who is sitting on the vyasasana or is pictured on the altar is not there for his own sake, he is there as a representative of the disciplic succession and ultimately as a representative of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Therefore, the level of worship that is offered to him must be appropriate to his position.

I greatly acknowledge Srila Prabhupada's position within ISKCON as unique. Therefore measures must be taken by the present members of the society to distinguish and safeguard Srila Prabhupada's position and memory. There is little doubt that if we do not distinguish his special position, then in a few generations his position will be obscured by the 'living' nature of our tradition. I simply take exception to the manner in which we are doing it. Why do we have to downgrade the status of every new spiritual master from Srila Prabhupada's time on, at the risk of offending the whole disciplic succession? Why risk killing our tradition in order to distinguish Srila Prabhupada's place? I humbly ask, can we not simply up-grade the worship of Srila Prabhupada instead of down-grading the worship of all other acaryas? Is there any limit on the amount of worship that can be given to the spiritual master? Certainly there is minimum limit, but I know of no maximum limit.(6)

Srila Prabhupada's position within our sampradaya is unique. Why should we hesitate to increase his worship. There is ample justification to arrange a special situation to honor Srila Prabhupada. Not only is he an initiating spiritual master, he is the Founder- acarya of the International

Society for Krsna Consciousness and also the Founder- acarya of a whole new phase of Krsna conscious preaching-- worldwide preaching. Can we not establish special Founder- acarya worship throughout ISKCON? Can we not establish shrines to Srila Prabhupada within all ISKCON temples and throughout the world? Can we not place Srila Prabhupada's murti on all altars within ISKCON? Can we not distinguish the worship of Srila Prabhupada so that he is worshipped in opulence on altars throughout our society? (dare I say it-- with a crown) Any possibilities such as these are a better way to distinguish the position of Srila Prabhupada and satisfy the feelings of Godbrothers than to downgrade and disrupt our sampradaya .

I humbly ask the leaders of our society to consider this matter. Do not freeze our sampradaya at the point of Srila Prabhupada. Allow it to expand unlimitedly, but recognize that we must take significant measures to safeguard the position of the Founder- acarya , Srila Prabhupada. Look to a time fifty generations from now and see that Srila Prabhupada's movement has grown to an extent where there are thousands of initiating spiritual masters each having their own disciples and published books. Ask ourselves "What are those measures that we must adopt today to ensure the position of Srila Prabhupada for the future, but conjointly agrees with the living nature of our disciplic succession?" Hare Krsna.

Footnotes

1. The Sanskrit term 'parampara', etymologically meaning "one coming after another", implies the concept of 'on-going'.
2. In a letter dated, 4/28/74 to Rupanuga Maharaja, Srila Prabhupada refers to and condemns the Acarya system introduced within the Gaudiya Matha by Sridhara Maharaja. The Acarya System is analogous to the system of balloted popes used by the Roman Catholic Church and is contrary to the living nature of our sampradaya.
3. September 19th, resolution number 1
4. I suggest the Christian tradition is frozen or fixed at the point of Jesus Christ in the sense that members of the Christian church may be regarded as disciples of Christ; not disciples of living representatives of the church. A bishop, priest or minister has no diksa disciples. It is Christ's responsibility to deliver them. In our tradition, members subsequent to Srila Prabhupada are not specifically disciples of Srila Prabhupada; it is not his responsibility to deliver them back to Godhead. In our tradition it is the responsibility of living spiritual masters (both diksa and siksa) to bring disciples to Krsna. In this sense our tradition is on-going. The distinction is very important.
5. In the Science of Self Realization Srila Prabhupada indicates that each guru represents Krsna and the previous acarya. He writes, "The guru is Krsna's representative, the former acarya's representative. Krsna says that all acaryas are His representatives; therefore the guru should be offered the same respect one would offer to God." p. 58.
6. Writing in the Nectar of Devotion, Srila Prabhupada quotes Rupa Gosvami in citing the following verse from the Eleventh Canto of the Srimad-Bhagavatam to show that the guru is a representative of Krsna and must be respected more than an ordinary man: "My dear Uddhava, the spiritual master must be accepted not only as My representative but as My very self. He must never be considered on the same level with an ordinary human being. One should never be envious of the spiritual master, as one may be envious of an ordinary man. The spiritual master should always be seen as the representative of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and serving the spiritual master, one is able to serve all the demigods." (11/17/27) To me this quotation indicates that there is a minimum level of respect that can be offered and also suggests that there is no maximum level. I suggest the maximum level of worship offered to the guru would appear to be only limited according to time and circumstance.