

[Retyped for clarity]

Sri Sri Guru Gauranga Yayatah

7 August, 1978

Dear Satsvarupa Maharaja,

Please accept my most humble obeisances. Maharaj, I am writing you this letter with great anxiety in my heart and after days and nights of thought and careful consideration.

I have been staying in Vrindaban now for some time and have not visited any other center recently except Delhi. Therefore, my information I have about what is happening at our other centers comes only from devotees visiting here, occasional letters, newsletters and our society's magazines and other publications. But what news I hear from these sources is very alarming and therefore I am writing you in some anxiety.

The matter concerns the Godbrothers who were selected by Srila Prabhupada to accept disciples. At the time of Srila Prabhupada's disappearance, it was most clearly understood by all of us present that Srila Prabhupada had made no successor. Everyone admitted that fact and understood it clearly. Instead, the GBC was to jointly manage all affairs of ISKCON just as had been the case previously. This was the same solution as desired by Om Visnupada Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, who also had not made any successor, although his wishes were not followed. In addition to the GBC management, Srila Prabhupada also selected 11 somewhat advanced disciples to grant initiation to newcomers. However it was never mentioned at any time by His Divine Grace that these 11 were to be known as acaryas. He simply instructed that they may now accept disciples. Otherwise, as it was understood and practiced at that time, there was no special position given to these 11, either in the society as a whole or in relation to their other Godbrothers. Management would depend on the joint GBC and among Godbrothers and sisters all are on the same level, with the exception of some special regard and respect shown to older (senior) disciples by these Godbrothers and God sisters who are junior.

Now at present, I understand that the 11 gurus are all 1) adopting the title of acarya, 2) sitting on high Vyasaasanas in front of Srila Prabhupada's Vyasaasana and their own Godbrothers, 3) accepting worship and great respect normally reserved for a guru from the rest of their Godbrothers and 4) that the previous GBC zones have all been given my mutual agreement or by invitation among the different acaryas.

First of all, the word acarya may be taken in 3 senses. Etymologically the word means "one who practices" or "one who practices what he preaches." This is the general meaning and may be used in relation to any pure devotee. Secondly, the word

means "one who grants initiation to a disciple." This is specifically indicating one who is a guru. Anyone who grants initiation or is a guru may be called as "acaryadeva," etc.—by his disciples only! Whoever has accepted him as guru must give all respects to him in every way, but this does not apply to those who are not his disciples.

Thirdly, the word acarya indicates "the spiritual head of an institution or pitha." This meaning is very specific. It does not mean just anyone. It means only one who has been specifically declared by the previous acarya to be his successor above all others to the seat of the spiritual institution which he heads. He alone, among all of his Godbrothers, is given a raised seat and special honor. No other Godbrother may receive such respect and he is the authority in all spiritual and material matters. This is the strict tradition in all of the Gaudiya Sampradayas. Now Srila Prabhupada, it is clear, did not appoint any such successor because no one of his disciples at present is advanced to the level of Krsna consciousness necessary to assume such a position. Nor did Srila Prabhupada make 11 such acaryas. This was never mentioned by Him. They were only given permission to make disciples and the GBC was to jointly manage, materially and spiritually. There was never any distinctions made by Srila Prabhupada between material management and spiritual management. Both are the concern of the GBC. The 11 gurus may be known as acaryas only in the second sense of the word—to their disciples as mantra-giving gurus, not in the third sense, as "the" spiritual successors of Srila Prabhupada. That was never meant to be by His Divine Grace.

Secondly, among Godbrothers it is not correct that any one of them sit above the others, especially in the presence of Gurudeva. If Gurudeva is not present, sometimes the sannyasi Godbrothers may be given an asana, but that asana does not mean a huge gigantic seat. It simply means a square piece of cloth or wool not more than 1/8" or 1/4" thick. This is asana. If any one Godbrother or many Godbrothers sit above the others it is not at all proper.

Sometimes in an assembly there may be raised platform or table on which the sannyasi speakers sit, but all sannyasi Godbrothers must be invited to sit in an equal place on the speaker's platform. Sometimes a grhastha or brahmachari Godbrothers may also be invited to sit there if they are deserving by their advancement. If there is an appointed acarya as mentioned before (third sense of the word) then he alone may sit higher than the other Godbrothers. Indeed in the different Gaudiya Mathas, even if one Godbrother is in the position of acarya, he usually, out of humility, takes only a thin cloth asana, not anything higher. It is the symptom of a Vaisnava to be extremely humble. He must always be extremely careful of putting himself in a position where he may become conceited. A guru may take a higher seat than his disciple—that is bonafide. But he cannot illegally take a higher seat than his Godbrothers. The relation between the guru and his Godbrothers and a guru and

his disciples is entirely different. He should not sit higher than Godbrothers other than if he is a sannyasi, on a thin cloth as already mentioned if offered by his Godbrothers, or accept respect from them without offering respect in return. This is the general niti or etiquette. Besides this, there are, among Godbrothers, some further rules to be observed between those who are senior and those who are junior. Seniority is calculated according to the time of receiving 1st (Harinam) initiation or by his ability to perform bhajana.

If one Godbrother has disciples, the guru-puja and Vyasa-puja of that God-brother should be conducted in a separate place or his private room—not in front of all his other Godbrothers. In an assembly of Vaisnavas, all sit on the same level together, Godbrothers along with their sisyas. No one is permitted to accept separate respect from disciples in any gathering of other Godbrothers. In Gaudiya Math, the Vyasa-puja of one Godbrother who has disciples is usually performed in the following manner. The guru takes his raised seat in his private place and invites all his Godbrothers to come to the function also. If his Godbrothers come to offer him some flowers, that God-brother guru immediately first worships his other Godbrothers and offers them garland, candana, etc., and in some cases presents like cloth, umbrella, etc. They honor each other and are seated properly, then that guru's disciples may come forward and offer their worship. This is the system being observed. Incidentally, the words of Om Visnupada Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura found in the English book Sri Caitanya's Teachings regarding the sitting above everyone else are from a speech delivered in response to the offerings of his disciples on the occasion of his Vyasa-puja. Those words are in relation to his disciples—not to his Godbrothers, of which there weren't any. The niti in regard to Godbrothers is completely different from that to disciples.

One who is actually guru may make disciples anywhere he finds someone who is worthy. The connection between guru and disciple is arranged by Krsna directly—and it is not subject to legislation. All the world-wide temples of ISKCON are controlled by the GBC. The temples are managed by them jointly and they decide each year which member of the GBC will manage in which place. The GBC who is appointed to be responsible for a certain zone somewhere on this planet, if a guru, will naturally make many disciples in that place—but how can he be illicitly restricted from accepting a disciple from someplace else. That is material consideration. It has nothing to do with transcendental order, by which guru and disciple make their meeting. It is not geographical.

Secondly, no GBC who is guru may make that zone of which he is temporarily in charge by appointment of the joint GBC, into his own private place. If some other guru visits there and some newcomer wishes to accept him as spiritual preceptor, how can he be prohibited? Furthermore, all the temples of ISKCON are to be run by the GBC. No one GBC who is a guru may use the title acarya of such and such a zone. Srila Prabhupada never appointed

one acarya of the whole ISKCON nor did He appoint several acaryas for parts of ISKCON. This will only lead to an ultimate division of the one ISKCON into many different fragments and destroy our united preaching work.

If someone sets up his personal seat as acarya in different temples, how can it be removed? Who else can sit in it? Then does that temple belong to that guru or does it belong to the GBC? That means the power or control is switched from joint GBC to the 11 gurus. Srila Prabhupada never intended this arrangement. Moreover, in the future, in accordance with His Divine Grace's instructions, other qualified Godbrothers may also become gurus. Where will they go? In Srila Prabhupada's temples no raised seat should be given to any but Srila Prabhupada—all Godbrothers should sit on the same level. One exception may be made in the case of one speaking from the sastras like Srimad-Bhagavatam, Bhagavad-gita, Caitanya-caritamrita, etc. during the class. But that seat is very special. It is not for the reader—it is meant for the book. After paying obeisances to that seat, he who is to read, may, after taking permission from his senior Godbrothers and sannyasis, ascend to read from Bhagavatam. After finishing, he may again pay his obeisances.

Much of the knowledge written here is not found in sastra, but is called sistacara—that which has been taught by the conduct of the past guru parampara. It has not been specifically mentioned in any sastra, but still it is accepted as authoritative because of being seen to be the conduct of previous acaryas and their disciples.

Maharaja, after very much consideration and consultation and also confirmation by older members of our sampradaya I am writing to you to see if you can rectify the present situation. Many of us here, older Godbrothers, are very concerned in two ways—
1. that the 11 gurus not having been appointed to the position of acarya and for which they are unqualified both by 1) the insufficient knowledge of sastra and 2) the incomplete realization of Krsna consciousness, are accepting worship on that level—and this may lead to anomalies in the society and personally, because of lack of complete detachment in atmajñana, to a build up of pride and subsequent falldown, and
2. That the United society ISKCON, because of illegal division and control by a few members instead of the joint GBC will become broken up in separate societies and the unified preaching effort very much hindered.

Hoping for your immediate attention and kind reply,

Pradyumna das Adhikari

P.S. These are not good signs for our society. Older Godbrothers and sannyasis here are very concerned that if the present trend is not checked immediately, it will have passed beyond that point and ISKCON will be in chaos in the near future.

I hereby formally request that all these points be immediately brought to the attention of the GBC so that a very tactful solution for all concerned may be decided and amicably implemented in our society. Please note that there is nothing personal in this letter. It is some pertinent spiritual knowledge meant for the good of all. If anyone takes offense, I very humbly beg pardon at his feet.

I would like to request your kind acknowledgement of the receipt of this letter and information on what action you intend to take as soon as possible, preferably before this coming Janmastami (Aug. 26).

Hoping that this meets you in the best of health,

In the service of Srila Prabhupada,

Pradyumna das Adhikari