

ISKCON

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS
FOR WESTERN CANADA

PHONE (604) 433-9728
or 433-2824

5462 S.E. MARINE DRIVE
BURNABY, B.C.
CANADA V5J 3G8

Dear Rabindra Svarupa prabhu,

Dec 4, 1984.

Please accept my obeisances. All Glories to Srila Prabhupada.

I have received your letter and preliminary proposal and have read then carefully. Allow me to make some comments.

As we intensely examine the gurus it is natural and desirable that we also turn the spotlight on ourselves. We have also noted a tendency like that here and we have made some fairly significant changes such as having regular meetings with all the Prabhupada disciples in a sort of board meeting in which all the devotees have real input.

I think that many of your observations are true and it is about time that we began to examine ourselves honestly instead of rejecting all criticism as enviousness or faultfinding. There is no doubt that a great number of Prabhupada disciples are weak in their sadhana, perhaps the majority of them, and many devotees are not serious at all about always attending the complete morning program. These things must be rectified if we are serious about putting Srila Prabhupada and his instructions back in the center.

There is also a lot of truth in your description of the inclination to dishonesty and wariness in our relationships and that also must be addressed.

However, I have some reservations about your proposal also. If you intend it to be a preliminary prologue, a kind of overview before attacking the researching of Prabhupada's books and letters for some conclusive direction then it is a useful document and may catalyze some real improvement especially at our level. It certainly does not take the place of the kind of exhaustive researching of Prabhupada's books and letters that we had in mind. Essentially, this is your own subjective opinion, which some will agree with to various degrees and others may reject to varying degrees. I also think that many of the gurus are incapable of honest self evaluation and are moving down the road of self delusion and hypocrisy that has been so well travelled by two before them. I don't believe they would have the faintest idea your remarks might apply to them or if they did you would quickly be diagnosed as having the black plague disease.

I recently spent a few days with Bhakta Dayal Swamin who revealed the confidential pastimes of Harikesh Swami. I was shocked and galvanized by the situation in that zone and I believe that the greatest injustice has been done to our godbrother Vegavan, a

truly great Vaishnava, due to the paranoiac small mindedness of Harikesh Swamin. Bhakta Dayal Swamin spent two days from morning to night telling stories illustrating the outrages that go on in that zone. I also spoke with Mahavira prabhu in Toronto extensively about his long association in Hridayananda's zone. He was regional secretary there for many years and was serving in Brazil at the time of Srila Prabhupada. He was basically forced out because he finally brought himself to complain to Hridayanda Maharaja about his totally inappropriate relationship with that woman.

I will tell you frankly that I am disgusted and appalled at the behavior of the majority of the gurus and I believe that we must be prepared to take a very strong position. I believe that Prabhupada disciples all over the world are waking from the slumber of illusion and will and should demand sweeping changes in a system that is corrupt and entrenched. If one is non violent when violence is called for then that is also a sin. In other words, I believe strong action is called for and I believe Mayapur this year will be revolutionary in spirit. Your proposal is also necessary but I believe it will not be heard by those who most need to hear it.

We need some solid research to establish what should be the role and position of guru. With that paper we can push on strongly for real change. ISKCON as Prabhupada set it up has changed radically and the primary cause is the serious mistakes being made regarding the position of guru. How can we establish the importance of sadhana in our movement when the majority of gurus give the worst example in this regard?

Please let me know if your research work is going on nicely and if there is any way I can help in that work let me know. One suggestion is that Vipramuhkya Swamin could come there and assist as he is relatively free.

your servant,

Bahadur Das

ISKCON
41 W. Allens Lane
Philadelphia, Pa. 19119
December 21, 1984

Dear Bahudaka Prabhu,

Please accept my fallen obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

Thank you for your letter of Dec. 4 in response to my proposal.

I'm sorry I didn't make it clear to you that this proposal does not represent the conclusion of my research for the temple presidents. Vatsala and company are still going through the archives in Los Angeles. I have not received, however, any of the material they have extracted. Nevertheless, I thought I could still reflect upon the issues from my own angle. I have gotten input from a lot of people: Rupanuga and I have talked on the phone for some time; Atreya Rsi visited for two days; other have written. Those of us here have had much discussion. And out of all of this and extensive reflection, certain things became clear to me, and I wrote them down. I know there is more to do. And I submit this proposal only in my own name, and not in the name of the temple president's research committee.

Nevertheless, my considered conclusion is that the program outlined in the proposal must be embraced as a vitally necessary aspect of our approach to the gurus and GBC in our efforts to reform ISKCON. The proposal attempts to define the spiritual context in which all efforts of reform must take place. The report does not explore the various institutional and political changes that need to take place, so it is not and does not intend to be exhaustive. However, if there is no change in the spiritual climate of ISKCON of the sort discussed in my report, then I don't think we can successfully make the needed political and institutional changes. The two must take place together.

I believe Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura when he says that there is no lack of anything in the world but Krsna consciousness. This means that the only deficiencies is ISKCON are deficiencies in Krsna consciousness. Our problem is spiritual, and the solution must be spiritual. My paper was an attempt to identify precisely the spiritual problem and to suggest a spiritual solution. There is a specific way in which Krsna consciousness is lacking, and a specific way to remedy that lack.

You say "many of the gurus" aren't capable of honest self-evaluation and won't apply my remarks to them. How many? Do you have a number? I would rather send them the paper, try to initiate the sort of rectification it calls for, and see then how

many are capable of honest self-evaluation.

I'm sure you are right when you say that the proposal will not be heard by "those who most need to hear it." But the process I propose (and see working on a local level) does not require that we start with the hard cases. On the contrary, we save them for last. (Or we can start with them, but we don't have to wait for them.)

Let us say that just a few--three or four--gurus become convinced of the ideas in the proposal and undertake to reform relationships among themselves. Say that they become so encouraged by seeing the spiritual results of this effort, that they then approach a few more of their colleagues and together rectify those relations, dismantling the long-established barricades of fear and mistrust. Say there is success. Now you have six or eight, and because their numbers have increased, their enthusiasm and spiritual potency has increased, and they began to reform relationships with the more difficult cases. . . And so it spreads. Do we know for sure that this can't happen? Is there any harm in trying?

Satsvarupa Maharaja has read this paper and is very much behind it. Our relationship has consequently improve immensely and his and Sesa's relationship as well. So now, where before there was mutual distrust and fear, there is the beginning of real trust and of honest, open and friendly exchanges.

Then, a few days ago, a letter unexpectedly came from Tamal Krsna Goswami. A copy of my paper had come into his hands (I think from Mahabuddhi via Mahakrama Swami.) TKG says about the paper, "I embrace it in all respects completely." And "You have my firm commitment towards renovating this reformation in consciousness." Since he is supposed to be coming to Philadelphia early Jan. for the PR meeting, I may have a chance to explore his commitment first hand. So there are two who have applied my remarks to themselves and who have not accused me of having the "black plague disease." That's a start. Let us see in this way who our real friends are.

You want us to take a "very strong position" and "demand sweeping changes;" you call for "strong action" and a "revolutionary" spirit, and speak (metaphorically, I assume) of "violence." I can sympathize with your militant spirit, and I agree that there is plenty to justify it, yet I wonder just how fruitful militant action would be. Let's think matters through carefully and with a cool head.

The course of action you envision is, at least in your letter to me, presented very abstractly. Can you give us a more specific idea of what "strong action" you want us to take? Action is always concrete, and therefore we should envision specific, concrete acts undertaken in specific, concrete circumstances, and in that way think through to the different possible outcomes. All I know now is that you want to do

something "strong" and militant, demanding and uncompromising, at Mayapura. But what? If we do not have clear ideas of what we are going to do, of how that will produce the results we want, of what contingencies could arise and how we could meet them, then strong action would merely be stupidly suicidal.

Bhurijana Prabhu has cited to me a maxim of Mao Tse-tung's: "Never fight a battle you're not sure you're going to win." Let's recall Mayapura battle of '76. That was successful because 1) Srila Prabhupada stayed above the fray and let the water boil but kept it from boiling over and 2) Srila Prabhupada at last stepped in and took the decisive step of removing TKG. Image a confrontation like that now, without Srila Prabhupada. We can, of course, say we don't know what the outcome will be, but we are right, so let's just don the armor of righteousness, close our eyes, and charge at full tilt. Personally, I think that's foolishness. Because I know what the outcome will be.

A militant attack on the gurus will first of all tightly unite the gurus, who will put aside all differences to save the system. Second of all, with the first counterattack from the gurus, the temple presidents will lose their solidarity. You may be thinking that this time you can count upon the solid unity of the temple presidents, but that is mistaken. The gurus are very, very persuasive people; don't make the mistake of underestimating them. With sweet and strong words, they will soon raise doubts in the minds of many temple presidents, and the solidarity which is essential to militant action will dissolve. Remember the unified determination of the presidents in Ramesvara's zone at the first meeting? How long did that last? Third, a group of temple presidents and sannyasis will remain firm. These, most likely, will leave or be driven out of the movement. Finally the others, those cowed or conned into submission even though they know better--they will somehow go on with weakened enthusiasm; in a state of despair, which they cannot express to others and perhaps not even to themselves, they carry on in a semi-comatose way, sick at heart. Thus the result will be to further entrench a corrupt system in ISKCON, drive away good and mature devotees the movement needs desperately, and sap the spiritual strength of the remaining godbrothers.

This was, in fact, the outcome of the 1979 confrontation at Vrndavana. When I heard about this "victory," I thought, "One more victory like that and we're done for." Are you sure that you are not in fact setting the stage for that terminal victory in Mayapura next year?

I have been running my small but hyperactive brain at full r.p.m.'s in consideration of these matters, and I confess that I have failed to think of a militant, challenging stand that does not run a strong risk of furthering the destruction of ISKCON. That doesn't mean that none exists, and I will give full consideration to your specific strategic proposals.

Above all, we need to find a position that will firmly unite

the temple presidents, sannyasis, etc. and, at the same time, divide the gurus. I have hopes, in this respect, for my proposal.

In my paper I wanted only to treat the essence of the matter, and I did not wish to make anyone shy away from considering that essence by spelling out the specific institutional changes it entails. But let me mention one.

One of the most prominent institutionalizations of the ISKCON kanistha adhikari society is the system of zonal gurus. ("They learn to get along by avoiding each other.") The defense of the zonal guru system is that it is necessary for management. True: but necessary for management only under conditions of war. If we want to get rid of the zonal guru system, we must get rid of the fratricidal war that makes the system a practical necessity. If right now you propose to toss out the system, the leaders will think of what it would be like to live under present battlefield conditions without the protective fortress of their impregnable zones, and they will reject the proposal as dangerously impractical.

I have the intuition that when devotees speak of getting rid of the zonal guru system, they envision, but do not articulate, the end of fratricidal war. My proposal is really an attempt to get clear about what we really mean when we say "abolish the guru-zones," and to spell out all the implications of that abolishment. So ending the war and abolishing the zones are part and parcel of each other, but the first, I believe, has temporal priority. Once devotees get a taste of what a true Vaisnava society is like, then they will be able to correctly consider the political reforms.

We could concentrate our initial demands for reform on three areas of ISKCON where the kanistha adhikari mentality is particularly evident. Evident because these three areas require GBC unity and cooperation, and the lack of it has shamefully perverted Prabhupada's instruction and undermined our service to him. They are 1., the gurukula system, 2., the BBT., and 3., the building of Prabhupada's samadhi. For the first two there is ample documentation of what Prabhupada wanted to contrast with what actually is, and analysis can show very concretely how fratricidal war and kanistha adhikari relationships have lead to the failure to follow Prabhupada's instructions. The samadhi is a scandal that stinks to heaven. Remember the boys from Bhagavan's zone? "If they had given us Vrndavana, we could have finished it!" I. e., they could devote their best effort to the samadhi only if it were in their zone. Consideration of all three areas highlights the spiritual immaturity of the zonal system. Zeroing in on the BBT has the additional virtue of focusing on Ramesvara Swami, whose usurpation of the BBT is not joyously accepted even among the GBC.

Here is another train of thought that lead to my proposal. Say all the presidents, etc., agree in wanting to get rid of

daily gurupuja and the big Vyasasana. The gurus protest that it would disturb the faith of their disciples, who would not stand for it. Right, it would--unless the gurus ~~themselves~~ ^{were} wholeheartedly in favor of the move themselves. If they were convinced fully that this was the right step to take, then they would have no problems convincing their disciples, and no ones faith would be at all disturbed.

But suppose they were forced or pressured into doing it. They would explicitly or implicitly convey to their disciples their lack of conviction or their resentment. Their disciples would understand: "Oh, my guru is being forced to do this to satisfy his envious godbrothers." The guru, mind you, doesn't have to say anything; he may even try to conceal his attitude, but his disciples would pick it up anyway. And if the disciples start to resent the godbrothers, then there is another nail in the coffin of ISKCON. Most likely, there would be such an uproar that the Vyasasanas would come back in the temple and the daily gurupuja cranked up again.

Consequently, I conclude that the only way to change the worship of the gurus is for them to become fully convinced that it ought to be changed. What confrontations, what demands, will bring that about? Rather, we must get ourselves into a relationship with them in which we can honestly openly and offensively talk about our views, in which they will listen to what we have to say. To do that we have to embark on the program of renovating relationships. This is my conclusion, and if you have some other way that you think will work or work better, please let me know about it so I can consider that too.

I realize that you probably find my proposal somewhat whippy, and I am open to the possibility that I am, in fact, a whimp. But still one should consider that there may be a place in the world for whimps and that whimps may have something to contribute.

I better stop here so I can mail this letter. I started it on the fourteenth and have been so busy that I am finishing it only today. Again, I thank you for your reply. This sort of discussion is needed. Bhurijana and Atreya Rsi have also written, and Rupanuga called last night, all in response to the proposal. I am sure more is to come. Rupanuga urged me to mail it out to all North American temple presidents sannyasis, etc., and to all GBC. I think I should do that. I'll make it clear, of course, that this represent only my own views. But the paper is all over the place, so I might as well not let anyone feel left out. It is so interesting, stimulating, and enlightening to receive these responses from different devotees, that I am eager to hear from as many as possible. Of course, there's no time for all this, but that's another thing.

Vipramukya Maharaja might be useful in L.A., if he wouldn't be too conspicuously irritating to the powers that be there.

I hope this finds you in good health and exuberant devotional spirits.

Your fallen servant,

Ramindra Svarūpa dāsa