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Dear Bhavananda Maharaj,

Please accept my most humble obeisances at your lotus feet. All glories to our lord and savior, Srila Prabhupada, the remembrance of whom dispels all dirty things from the core of the heart.

I was glad to have the chance recently to see you just before you left Los Angeles for India, although we didn't really have a chance to speak. Thank you for calling me over to your apartment for a brief but sweet darshan. I have resolved that someday, in order to get some intimate association with you, I will spend a month at least with you during which I will arrange meetings with important people in the field of religion in the major eastern U.S. cities. Working together, I think we can accomplish something of importance. The religious leadership in America (and elsewhere of course) is simply waiting for us to open dialogue. What do you think of this idea, Maharaj?

In recent months, both in Australia and here in the U.S., I have become disturbed to see that the faith of newer, and even older, devotees in our movement is being damaged by the recent unfortunate incidents involving three of the eleven spiritual masters appointed by Srila Prabhupada. Although the GBC acted with obvious wisdom and dispatch in dealing with the situations, these troubles have caused crises in faith, small in large, in many devotees. A question commonly heard nowadays from disciples of the "new" gurus (I've heard this in three different zones, including Australia) is, "If so-and-so, who is a pure devotee, can fall down [or get off the track], then can't the same thing happen to my spiritual master?" These recent crises in spiritual leadership have sparked a good deal of discussion among older devotees. Some discussion has, certainly, been motivated by envy and has been counter-productive. Some, however, has involved mature, intelligent, and sincere devotees who are trying to understand what is going on and to propose solutions. I myself have recently been drawn into the dialogue and have had fruitful conversations with, among others, Srila Ramesvara Maharaj, Srila Hridayananda Maharaj, H.H. Dhira Krsna Maharaj, etc. One fundamental question has been, Are these three incidents merely separate, isolated, problems requiring different kinds of solutions, or is a pattern evolving? That is, is there something about the "system" itself--something about how the establishment of the new spiritual masters has evolved--that has contributed to these recent unhappy events? It is difficult, naturally, to talk about these things. There are the dangers of unleashing envy, of mental speculation, of creating offenses, of further eroding faith. Yet, the matter cannot be ignored. In the course of various discussions, I've evolved a personal analysis of the situation, which Srila Ramesvara Maharaj, and others, substantially agree with. In summary, that analysis is:

Formerly, our only conception of "pure devotee" or "spiritual master" was Srila Prabhupada. He was our only and absolute model. With the establishment of the "new" spiritual masters, it seems as if we all thought that for these new gurus to be "taken seriously," so to speak, by their disciples (and by their God-brothers), they would have to be established on a similar, or the same, platform as Srila Prabhupada. Thus, the emphasis on the principle of "guru is one," guru-

tattva. In our eagerness to see things go on nicely as before, and to see all newcomers to Iskcon become fully enthusiastic in spiritual life, we all erected an enormous burden upon the eleven acaryas to "play Prabhupada" as it were. The gurus, by force of circumstance, were made to become Spiritual Superstars and to perform like Srila Prabhupada. There is no criticism, here, that they tried to take that position out of pride or lust for power (although, in at least one case, that later did happen). They were, in a sense, swept up in the enthusiasm. Quite suddenly, and with little time for mental preparation, the acaryas were thrust into a position of receiving a tremendous amount of honor, worship and veneration, and material facilities, virtually on the level of that received by Srila Prabhupada himself. But, as we all know, unless one is on the most exalted and sublime platforms of pure devotion, such absolute veneration can have a subtly intoxicating effect. In such a situation, even a very, very advanced devotee can become affected, first in a subtle way, and later in a gross way. There is some truth to the adage, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Put into a position in which one is worshipped more or less as a Deity, in which one's every word is venerated as infallible sastra, in which one's every wish is satisfied at once by dotting disciples, it is not hard to imagine how even a very elevated devotee can, perhaps, lose perspective. Being worshiped as "absolute," it may become difficult for one to deal in a non-absolute way in situations such as mutual cooperation with other GBC men and so forth. One may feel oneself perfect and independent from external spiritual authorities. This, clearly, has already happened more than once, as you well know. In very recent conversation, I was a little surprised by one acarya in "good standing," one for whom I have the highest respect, who does not appear to recognize that those to whom he's awarded brahminical initiation who have first initiation from Srila Prabhupada have, through that first initiation, a direct link to Srila Prabhupada independent of second initiation--making virtually no distinction between those who have received both and those who have received only second initiation from him. Another potential seed of calamity.

Another danger of escalating the pomp and circumstance surrounding the worship (etc.) of the eleven acaryas is that we may tend to become more and more concerned with the ritual and symbols of devotion than devotion itself. Especially if the ritualized devotion is over-blown or artificial, it can undermine real faith. If we begin to measure a person's spiritual importance by the facilities employed in his glorification, we can become lost in symbols and forget the real thing, and become habituated to applying quantitative measures to spiritual feelings. Such is the unfortunate position of the modern world's religious establishments and institutions. All pomp and tinsel, but no genuine bhakti--the King's New Clothes. How ghastly if this were to happen to Srila Prabhupada's movement!

Anyway, these points are not yet fully developed. They need to be very carefully and maturely considered and intelligently articulated by non-jealous persons, or those whose motivation is not that of envy or self-service. Although I do not feel at all qualified to enter serious discussions on this issue, I've been strongly encouraged to do so by some leaders of our society--at least I can help articulate in writing various points-of-view.

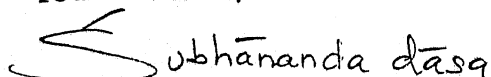
My dear Srila Bhavananda Maharaj, I have always been so impressed by your personal refusal to put yourself in Srila Prabhupada's position. You are so natural; you don't put on pretentious airs. By your gutsy humility and your consistently stressing the paramount importance of Srila Prabhupada in Iskcon, you have won the respect and love of your Godbrothers. Yours is a model for all to follow. Falling at your feet with straw in my teeth I beg to submit one fear that I have, though. I am concerned, personally, by your interest in certain kinds of material opulence, especially gold and other valuables. I've heard about your recent difficulties in passing through customs in the United States with \$30,000

worth of rings alone, and large sums of personal cash or large personal bank-account. Is this true? No matter what attractive rationalization may present itself, you know that there can develop a subtle intoxication with material opulence. It is very risky. Perhaps this is your Achilles' heel. This frightens me because other devotees have, in the past, become entrapped in the spell of material opulence pacified by the best of rationalizations. Such opulence, such as gold and jewels worn on the body, is not necessary for preaching. It may, for sure, impress some people, but is this what we want to impress them about? Will anyone, really respect us or take us more seriously in a way we'd like them to take us more seriously merely by adorning ourselves with such things? You don't need any jewels or gold. You are a jewel! Your spiritual attributes are naturally effulgent and golden and are merely mocked by the mundane luminiscence of jewels and gold! People will forever be attracted to you for your purity of character, your brilliant personal spiritual example, the power of your words, your heart-melting love for Srila Prabhupada, your surrender to Krsna. Your mundane ornaments can only serve as a distraction from these sublime qualifications. People will respect a genuine sadhu but become immediately suspicious of a spiritual person who flaunts material opulence. Opulence only invites envy, especially in the West. Even in India, Srila Prabhupada preached that his Western disciples have given up everything to serve Krsna. We don't need personal opulence. Krsna is our opulence. Our renunciation is our wealth. Let people laud or defame us on our our qualification, not for any external reason. Let them see the real thing--Krsna consciousness. Let us not become distracted by external, material glitter. (For our temples, Deities, of course, it is another matter, and for our worship of Srila Prabhupada.) What to speak of our financial priorities--where the lakshmi is needed--the BBT, the samadhis, etc? I remember that when I came to visit you just before you left L.A., you mentioned that you want to sell all that gold. That's good. Also you mentioned that you wanted to contribute the cost of an expensively-produced Vyasa-Puja book to the samadhi-fund. This is exemplary. Perhaps there is no longer any need to bring up this subject.

I beg you to understand, Maharaj, that it is only in reverence and love that I brought up this matter of gold, etc. You know I have only the highest respect for you. You are a great inspiration for me. If I have made any offence, if I have been too presumptuous, please forgive me. I don't want to make any offence. I just want to see you become greater and greater. I have numerous faults, as you know, and hardly have the strength to correct them. But I love Srila Prabhupada, and I have complete faith in this process of Krsna consciousness, and a strong sense of loyalty to Srila Prabhupada's movement, and am thus becoming more and more concerned about dangerous tendencies in our movement. I hope I can make a small contribution to rectifying things, although I am certainly unqualified. Our movement needs powerful spiritual exemplars and leaders. You have an immense responsibility in your hands. I pray that the opportunity may come in the not too distant future when I can render some significant personal service to you, perhaps in the way I've mentioned hereinbefore, perhaps in some other way. Please give me your association. Could you please tell me your exact itinerary from now until Janmasthan-Vyasapuja? Especially, when you will be in the U.S., and where. Will you be in New York in late August before returning to India? Are you making a short stop in Europe on the way back? If the circumstance presents itself, I will come for your good association.

I hope this letter meets you in good health and blissful, devotional mood. I will be eagerly awaiting your reply. I beg to remain,

Your servant,

 Subhananda dasa