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My Dear GBC Godbrother,

Please accept my humble obeisances at your lotus feet. All glories to Srila Prabhupada. There appears to be a growing feeling among a significant number of senior devotees of ISKCON that the GBC should authorize and bless many more disciples of Srila Prabhupada to give diksa initiation on behalf of the Society. Since limited time at the annual Mayapur meeting sometimes prevents an in-depth analysis of significant issues, I suggest we begin our discussion of the delicate "Guru issue" now, to allow time for patient and thoughtful dialogue before next year's meeting.

The Governing Body Commission keeps the Society united through the enlightened exercise of authority. As a GBC member, it is my understanding based on Srila Prabhupada's books, letters, and statements, that in his absence his disciples should qualify themselves, if they so desire, to initiate new candidates for devotional service. The qualifications are well known and nicely summarized in the Bhagavatam:

tasmāt gurum prapadyeta / jīnāsuh sreyā uttamam  
sabde pare ca nīnatam / brahmany upasamasrayam

"Therefore, one who wants to know the highest good should surrender to a bona fide spiritual master who is well acquainted with the Vedic conclusion and solidly established on the spiritual platform."

Thus our Godbrothers who have reasonably mastered the philosophy found in Srila Prabhupada's books, and who are fixed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, without falling down, dedicated to Prabhupada's ISKCON, are in fact qualified to act as Vaiṣṇava spiritual masters.

Of course discussion of this issue has gone on for several years and many intelligent devotees have expressed differing views. The most disquieting new factor, is a clearly growing disenchantment, among numerous senior devotees, with ISKCON as it now stands. In my analysis of this emerging problem, I have utilized the realized wisdom of many Godbrothers, both the conservatives and the liberals. It is natural that differences arise. After all, we are discussing issues of 'time, place, and circumstances', i.e. the details of devotional service, since the general principle of becoming a Guru is directly declared by Srila Prabhupada.

I think you will find that my proposals are not 'radical' in the sense of disturbing the peaceful progress of the Society. Rather I now perceive that the lack of new opportunity itself threatens to become a type of radical conservatism which is manifestly unhealthy for Srila Prabhupada's body, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

In my own zone, Brazil and Florida, the movement is flourishing under the present system, the Godbrothers are ecstatic, and the issues in this paper, though interesting as future guidelines, have almost no immediate urgency. The same is true in other zones as well. And yet that does not in any way eliminate the growing problem of disenchantment among many senior men. ISKCON is especially meant to be a house in which the whole world can live, and certainly it must first be comfortable for all of Prabhupada's children who have dedicated their lives to the institution.

There is, in fact, a growing number of dedicated Godbrothers who feel increasingly discouraged in the present system. They seem to have an ominous sense of not fully belonging any more to

ISKCON as it now stands, and they tend to doubt that their greatest hopes for serving Srila Prabhupada can be fulfilled, or even tried for, in ISKCON, and wonder whether in fact the Governing Body even cares about the emerging crisis in their spiritual lives. In fact, we do care, and we are sworn to make ISKCON the broad, mature spiritual society Prabhupada envisioned.

Since the current problem seems to gurn on the well-known "Guru issue", that is the focus of this paper, which I humbly present for your careful consideration. Since there are not serious problems everywhere, this paper does not impetuously call for universal reform. Rather it is a humble appeal to Vaishnava reason, as to why the Society should and must expand the Guru principle to those Godbrothers who need this trust to inspire them in their attempt to preach Krishna consciousness.

In the following discussion I have listed two series of arguments: arguments against expansion, and arguments for, but in both cases, I have listed arguments which I find to be extreme, and in each case I explain why I feel that way. I humbly present my thoughts at your lotus feet and beg for your impartial consideration.

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The following arguments may be given to resist a significant expansion of the Guru principle:

1. Our Godbrothers shouldn't be ambitious. They should be enlivened without being Gurus.

When I first became a temple president in 1971, Srila Prabhupada wrote to congratulate me and said, "It is Krishna's special mercy upon you because now as a leader you will be forced to set a good example." Harikesha Visnupada often gives the example of how his preaching career was virtually dormant until Srila Prabhupada gave him a major responsibility. Now he is one of our greatest preachers. Undoubtedly, all of the GBC men have the experience of being spiritually invigorated by increasing the scope of their duties.

It is the grave command of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Srila Prabhupada to become a Guru, and many of our Godbrothers, who for various reasons may not have an intimate working relationship with a present Guru, have grown and matured to the point where they hanker to carry out what they know to be Srila Prabhupada's desire for them. It is unbecoming and stifling for us to forcibly engage them as unfit dependents if they are willing and able to do their own programs.

By Krishna's arrangement, those actually plagued by gross material ambition are now, generally, outside of our Society. The genuine brahminical inspiration of our loyal Godbrothers can hardly be reduced to "mundane ambition", and to make this charge, at the present time, is a grave injustice.

It is neither true nor fair to insist that our qualified Godbrothers, who desire to be Gurus, can or should be just as enlivened without this significant responsibility. Ironically, some GBC members resist such expansion on the grounds that they themselves will not be as enlivened if they have to share their wide responsibilities.

Horizontal expansion is a wonderful thing, but it does not justify an artificial freezing of spiritual leadership. Certainly many present acharyas have organized extraordinary preaching zones, and count on the cooperation of loyal, dedicated Godbrothers who are enthusiastic with the present arrangement of ISKCON. At the same time, we cannot simply deny and suppress other Godbrothers who are bona fide Vaishnava teachers seeking the freedom to develop

their own programs. We should humbly remember the story of Hanuman and the spider.

2. It's very heavy to be a Guru. Why take the burden?

Certainly "guru" means heavy, but as mentioned above it is the heaviness of the duty that forces a devotee to be serious. Srila Prabhupada trained us to share the burden. If it is so difficult, why should we be reluctant to share the burden?

In the near future we will not see a repeat of the 'super-gurus' of recent times who quickly initiated hundreds of disciples. New gurus will have much fewer disciples in the beginning, and many will 'start from scratch', something which, to my vision, they can clearly handle.

3. The world's already divided among the present gurus. There's no need.

I find this argument dangerously out of touch with Prabhupada's mood and intention. To deny a faithful Godbrother a service for which he is both desirous and qualified, simply on the ground that "we want it all for ourselves", makes us appear selfish and insensitive. Srila Prabhupada scoffed at the scientists' warning of "overpopulation," and would hardly support the claim that his few remaining disciples cannot become Gurus because "there's not enough to go around". Seeing the whole world as "already taken" reflects an alarming bias toward institutional administration over direct grass-roots preaching.

4. A wide expansion of Gurus may subvert our ability to control the Society, and thus weaken the central authority, the GBC.

The loyal, senior members of ISKCON are able to relate to one another on a mature platform of love and trust. If we can work with GBC Gurus, who are the heaviest of all, we can certainly deal with our non-GBC Godbrothers who become initiating Gurus. To be quite frank, if we unfairly repress these Godbrothers, they will gradually drift away from us anyway, and completely reject our authority. As we all know from years of management, properly rewarding and engaging a loyal man keeps him loyal, and undue restriction simply has the opposite effect. If we say, "This man might become a Guru, but if he does, he will not respect the authority of the GBC and their decisions," we are in effect saying, "This man is not mature enough to be a Guru within ISKCON. Power will corrupt him and spoil his spiritual understanding." At this point in time, to level this accusation directly or indirectly against our patient Godbrothers who have stood behind us through all of our own learning experiences, would be insensitive, ungrateful, and unrealistic. It is not the way to keep the Society tightly unified. Love and trust must move both ways.

If we have qualified Godbrothers who are feeling discouraged in the present circumstance, let us accord them this simple trust and dignity, that in the absence of their Guru, now after seven years, they may take complete spiritual responsibility for those whom they train.

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The following arguments, in my opinion, carry the expansion principle to an illogical extreme:

1. The present acharyas and/or GBC have stifled the Society by not making new Gurus.

I clearly see the current need to expand the number of Gurus in ISKCON, but I don't see the need to tie this urgent appeal to a provocative criticism of past GBC policy. In fact, the GBC has worked sincerely and faithfully in the physical absence of Srila Prabhupada, and ISKCON has flourished in many ways during

the last 6½ years. Prabhupada's disciples (Gurus or not) who faithfully worked within ISKCON, as Prabhupada ordered them, have grown and matured in their personal and public life.

Unfortunately, past appeals for expansion were of ten articulated in such a belligerent way, they tended to discredit the speaker rather than persuade the audience. Regrettably, in such an agitated situation, the earnest voices of thoughtful Godbrothers were sometimes unheard. But Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur instructs us, "Forget the past that sleeps, and ne'er the future dream at all. But act in times that are with thee and progress thee shall call." A GBC man may agree that we need more Gurus but may not agree that past policy was misguided. Why passionately demand that he agree to both, when agreement to the first point is sufficient to satisfy the real need of the moment?

2. Srila Prabhupada didn't want zonal Gurus. Guru zones should be broken up.

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and His followers, including Srila Prabhupada, consistently employed the principle of "prabhu-datta-desha". Srila Prabhupada carefully distributed his preachers geographically for two obvious reasons:

1. To insure that preaching goes on everywhere.
2. To avoid conflict among preachers.

Srila Prabhupada personally established ISKCON in terms of zones and zonal responsibilities, and proposals to change this system reflect poorly on the material and spiritual insight of the proposer.

A few years ago at our Mayapur meeting, Srila Bhagavan Goswami intelligently argued that it is natural for a present acharya to accept new Gurus from among his own faithful men with whom he has an established friendship, in order to keep perfect harmony in the zone. However, GBC men must give special consideration to Godbrothers with an established, long-term commitment to a particular place. If a Godbrother desiring to initiate does not have a long working relationship with a particular zone or acharya, he should be willing, if necessary, to open a new preaching field, and it is the duty of the GBC to provide him one.

3. The present acharyas are not advanced. Let's make many Gurus and reduce their false prestige.

In the past, some advocates of expansion have been so tastelessly critical of the present acharyas and the GBC itself that they aroused unnecessary hostility toward themselves and thus helped to defeat their own mission. I would immediately agree that the present acharyas stand to benefit immensely by the association of many new Guru Godbrothers, and that by not making new Gurus we are ignoring the fact that many of our Godbrothers have an advanced spiritual understanding and are not as inferior to some of their Guru Godbrothers as we might imagine. Our often visible learning experiences, as Gurus, do indicate to our Godbrothers that they can also perform this service, and we should not proudly deny it.

Nonetheless, several times in the past, proposals for new Gurus have been accompanied by criticism, which can only be described as malicious and destructive, directed toward the leaders of the Society. Cynical, self-righteous attacks on sincere Godbrothers with real or imagined personal problems constitute a sad deviation from Srila Prabhupada's clear examples of desertion and compassion in such cases. A Vaishnava who is loyal to Prabhupada and trying to preach is to be considered saintly according to the Gita. Obviously the GBC will hesitate to award the highest spiritual authority to persons who show themselves to be cynical or even inimical toward the Governing Body of the Society and its present acharyas.

At the same time, if the present leaders relax their own standards, of personal conduct and simultaneously claim that they and they alone are qualified to be Gurus, there will inevitably be resentment and skepticism from the Godbrothers. Our Godbrothers have worked very hard for us, making disciples, managing temples, etc. If on the basis of prestige thus garnered we become proud and deny them the same opportunity, even when they are sadly begging for it, many people will wonder if things are as they should be, if we are precisely carrying out the will of Srila Prabhupada. The seeds of doubt will be sown and they will fructify.

And yet, to expand the Gurus is to expand preaching and to expand our enthusiasm, and it should be pursued in a positive, brahminical spirit. The arguments for it cannot rest on criticism of Vaishnava preachers.

4. Prabhupada disciples content to work under Godbrother Gurus are weak and misguided.

Many Godbrothers are performing essential tasks within various zones, and obviously all of them are not desirous or capable of immediately becoming Gurus, nor would it be the best thing for preaching. A successful preaching zone is a delicate balance, often constructed after years of hard work and experience, and sudden changes or additions of Gurus, as I have practically experienced, can jeopardize or dismantle valuable preaching programs, and the spiritual lives of the devotees involved. Thus Godbrothers who are, in fact, ready and anxious to initiate should not rashly go for the "bandwagon effect", preaching that Prabhupada wants all of his disciples to become initiating Gurus right now. Clearly that would disturb Prabhupada's movement, and cause grave doubt on the maturity of the speaker. Indeed there are sincere and advanced devotees who have found the lotus feet of Srila Prabhupada in service to their Godbrothers, and their conviction is confirmed by Caitanya Mahaprabhu in His famous statement, gopi-bhartuh pada-kamalayor dasa-dasanudasah. It cannot be over-emphasized that those Godbrothers wishing to become initiating Gurus will most persuasively prove their point by their own mature, Vaishnava approach to the issue. Their ability to seek this important devotional service on the brahminical platform, free from material passion, will be the most powerful testimony to their spiritual qualification.

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#### CONCLUSION

The moral burden has, in my view, visibly shifted. The nagging question is no longer:

"Why are they so anxious to be Gurus?", but rather  
"Why are we so anxious that they not be Gurus?"

The crux of the problem is clear: The current alignment of spiritual duties tends to almost exclusively facilitate the work of the present Acharyas and their loyal associates and followers. With the exception of a few international ministers, the present system leaves little tangible space for senior Godbrothers who are loyal to the institution, respectful of the GBC, but strongly inclined to pursue their own programs. It is these men who find themselves in a disheartening dilemma. Although armed with an impressive array of quotes from Srila Prabhupada praising brahminical self-reliance, and urging them to become Gurus, they find that the actual structure of ISKCON today squeezes them into a painfully narrow range of options which seemingly ignore the broad, encouraging statements of their eternal spiritual master. In my humble opinion, it has become our immediate duty to expand the range of spiritual opportunities available to mature Godbrothers, in accordance with Srila Prabhupada's stated intention. I very much fear the consequences if we fail to do this now.



I hereby request the GBC Chairman, Srila Charyapada, to form a special ad-hoc committee to study the problem described above, and to compile accurate and reliable information about these Godbrothers who are actually in need of our help. I would like to be a member of this committee which would then prepare a systematic report for the GBC members. I request that my GBC Godbrothers send me their learned opinions on these matters, so that the mature dialogue mentioned the beginning of this letter actually takes place.

Hoping for your blessings, and praying that this letter finds you well, I beg to remain

Your servant,

sd/

Hridayananda das Goswami

PS August and September please reply to Rio de Janeiro - Brazil.