

## THE GURU IN ISKCON

Much current debate in ISKCON centers on the position of the spiritual master in ISKCON, and his relationship with the GBC. Sriman Rabindra Swarupa has written a well-known paper on the subject, titled "Under my Order," in which he attacks what he perceives to be the current "Guru-system," in ISKCON. I wish to consider herein some of the more important arguments of that paper.

As we know, Srila Prabhupada ordered that ISKCON be governed by the GBC. At the same time, upon Srila Prabhupada's disappearance from this world, several senior disciples assumed duties as initiating spiritual masters. It was and is the duty of the GBC to see that all of the various spiritual and social elements of ISKCON unite together harmoniously under the common cause of service to Srila Prabhupada. Because Srila Prabhupada so powerfully established the principle of Guru, both by his own extraordinary example, and by his constant preaching, naturally the relationship between the ISKCON spiritual master and the ultimate authority, the GBC, was of prime concern.

Rabindra states that when the issue of the relationship between the GBC and the ISKCON Gurus first arose, the ISKCON Gurus, arrogantly declared that "We are absolute...No one can require or demand our compliance with the GBC; rather, out of our own magnanimity, we agree to cooperate."

Thus there are Godbrothers who prefer to believe that ISKCON Gurus thought that even Srila Prabhupada could not demand their compliance with the GBC. Rabindra himself paints this monstrous portrait: "No one can require or demand our compliance..."

Our actual statement that the Guru "agrees" to submit to the GBC does not mean that the Guru has the choice not to agree. For example, a bona fide disciple "agrees" to follow the four principles and chant 16 rounds. The word "agrees" does not mean that he can disagree and still be a bona fide disciple. Similarly, when a Guru agrees to follow the GBC, clearly he cannot otherwise be a bona fide Guru.

Certainly, at the lotus feet of his own bona fide Guru, a Vaishnava spiritual master is absolute in his relationship with his bona fide disciples. It was therefore quite reasonable, and inevitable, that the GBC would have to confront, philosophically, the issue of a) the Guru's absolute position, as emphatically taught by Srila Prabhupada, and b) the simultaneous ultimate authority of the GBC. Therefore, I am confused by Rabindra's statement,

"The very fact that this question was raised shows how these disciples did not understand their guru's order (that the GBC govern ISKCON.)"

By his practical example, and by his teaching, Srila Prabhupada established the bona fide spiritual master as a powerful element in Vedic