

Heidelberg, Sept. 4, 1985

His Grace Sesa Prabhu
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Dear Sesa Prabhu,

Please accept my most humble obeisances - all glories to Srila Prabhupada!

H.H. Devamrta Maharaj has just returned from his trip to America. He graced our Heidelberg temple with his presence for a few hours, before catching his onward flight to Copenhagen. Besides giving me a verbal run-down of his journey (which inadvertently turned out to be quite a fact-finding mission), he also handed me a copy of the very materials you promised to send me (as of yet not post-delivered). I thought I'd drop you a line and let you know about my impressions of what I've seen and heard from Devamrta Swami.

I'll start with the essence, and then move on to a few details to explain the essence. From what I can see (and I tried to explain this point to H.H. Tamal Krsna Goswami), the proper forum for discussing the problems that plague ISKCON has unfortunately still not yet emerged. Of course, it is a good thing that moves are being made to create a "dialogue" (or is it a trialogue, pentologue, decalogue? How many points of view are really involved?). But I for one don't place much faith in democracy, and my grounds for mistrust are Srila Prabhupada's own statements. I am very surprised to read, for instance, Jagat Guru Swami's praise for the U.S. Constitution - my mind immediately poses a question about the role the "American modes" are playing in this whole drama. For me, it doesn't matter how "open" or "democratic" the forum may be - after all, Plato rules that democracy is merely an entré to anarchy. What matters is the principle upon which the forum is supposed to rest. Is it political? If it is, then the whole thing is, as the Germans say, "zum Scheitern verurteilt" - condemned from the very start.

Everyone claiming to be a sincere disciple of Srila Prabhupada will say that politics is destructive - that's clearly stated in Srila Prabhupada's books. Everyone claiming to be a sincere disciple of Srila Prabhupada will agree that the forum in which devotees should meet and discuss issues should be one based on philosophy. But I have a very strong suspicion that something else is going on here. I think a few parties are smoke-screening the rest of the movement with politics disguised as philosophy. This is

what I was referring to when I mentioned in my letter to TKG about "vociferous minorities with axes to grind".

I feel in my heart of hearts that Srila Prabhupada would place the responsibility for ISKCON's current problems squarely on the GBC. I cannot claim to be an expert on the whys and the wherefores, but this only stands to reason, because the GBC is responsible to Srila Prabhupada for the state of his movement. I do feel ~~certain~~ that there's enough well-known historical evidence to show that the GBC has sometimes substituted utilitarian and stop-gap policies born out of political "necessity" for the real need: sound decision-making based upon a deep and unbiased understanding of Krsna conscious philosophy. I am not saying that the ISKCON GBC is composed of men who don't have a deep realization of Krsna conscious philosophy, or that it is a purely political body, that it is power-mad, etc. ad nauseum. I have sufficient experience to know that it is very easy to get carried away by even simple administrative problems. Thus one may act rashly and make mistakes. How much more pressure of this kind a GBC man must experience I don't think I'd like to know. Compound this with guruship, and you've got a man backed into a kind of "absolute corner" - once he's made a rash move, it's difficult for him to backtrack or admit he made an error.

The sometimes devious maneuverings of individual GBC men and the GBC body as a whole to keep the movement, their zones and their profiles in order are difficult to justify philosophically, to say the least. As the rest of the movement matured in its vision, this fact has become more and more apparent.

Now I feel we are being confronted with a faction or factions of devotees who, having seen through the GBC smokescreen, have decided to lay down their own smoke-screen. And in my humble (and perhaps lonely) judgement, I'm not so sure their motives are always all that noble.

OK, there have been scandals and instances of some very callous mismanagement on the part of certain GBC men. Rank-and-file Prabhupada disciples have experienced ignominy and suffering as a result. These injustices should be admitted and redressed. That the GBC has neglected this has brought down the current fracas upon its head. But as I've indicated, I have what I feel are very good reasons to doubt the integrity of certain leaders of the agitprop front, behind whom, unfortunately, many nonpolitical devotees have gathered in order to push for the redresses the GBC has not given.

I wonder about the leaders of the U.S. temple presidents, who at the last Mayapur meeting schemed to elect

Mahakrama Swami as chairman of the world-wide committee of temple presidents, simply to prevent a "European" from getting elected (because of fright of Bhagavan Maharaj, and because "an American has traditionally held that post"). You yourself admitted to me that there were serious doubts about Mahakrama's spiritual health - but for political expediency, they could be forgotten. Think about this small but significant example in the light of what I've remarked about smokescreening learned from the GBC. This man, Mahakrama, is in your own words, "a dog." But the U.S. TP's eagerly pushed him forward as their fearless leader in the fight against dreaded Europe. Where were the philosophical considerations when this decision was made?

Now while we're on the subject of smokescreens, let's turn to Ravindra Swarupa Prabhu's paper, which I understand from Devamrta Swami is enjoying great popularity among the U.S. TP's. There's not enough space here for an in-depth examination, so I must limit myself to a few cursory comments. The use of loaded terminology like "illicit" and "illegal" you've already noted. Use of the word "illicit" is, of course, smokescreen-talk for saying that someone is a bastard. But here's something else too blatant for belief - he takes, unquestioningly, an explanation of acarya lock, stock and barrel from the Gaudiya (Sridhara?) Matha, as it was introduced by the long-gone Pradumnya. I fail to find the "3 senses of the word acar-ya" in Srila Prabhupada's books, where we find instead such definitions as are given by Lord Krsna Himself (acar-ya mam vijnaniyan ...) which I don't need the Gaudiya Matha to explain for me, thank you. And when I read the transcripts of Srila Prabhupada's instructions on the matter of his disciples becoming gurus, I do not see why I "must clearly understand" what Ravindra Swarupa expects me to understand on page 3 of his paper. To me, there is nothing in Srila Prabhupada's statements that cause me to question the status and function of the present initiating spiritual masters.

As I mentioned to you on the telephone, I question the integrity of those who draw sweeping conclusions about what is going on in this part of the world while they are comfortably ensconced in some palatial ~~temple~~ temple setting in the sunny West Coast or other such North American locations. I question the integrity of those who can't seem to understand that their generalizations about

ISKCON clearly reflect to me and others on this shore of the Atlantic their myopic regionalism. Do they not ever stop to consider that by attempting to legislate the position of the guru they may also legislate away the faith of disciples behind the Iron Curtain who know only their guru, not having the luxury of even a single book of Srila Prabhupada in their possession, for fear of their very life?

I seriously question those who make emotional appeals that we should go into a morbid dance of self-flagellation for our alleged mistakes that drove some of our dear God-brothers into the arms of the Sridhara Matha. Personally, I cannot countenance this bit of masochism at all. I'm sorry if I sound callous to some, but those who have gone to Sridhara deserve him, because they obviously were never Srila Prabhupada's men. I seriously question why ISKCON in American still tolerates the continued presence of a sannyasi who has so obviously defected to the Sridhara camp in word and deed that one must be spiritually blind not to see it. And that I should come and attend a meeting attended by such people is simply too much for me to handle. Devamrta Swami had the most curious honor of attending a sannyasi meeting in Los Angeles at which a sannyasi disciple of a sannyasi disciple of Sridhara also attended (albeit without voting power!). This meeting was dominated by certain ISKCON swamis who are known far and wide as "revolutionaries."

Meanwhile, the real preaching goes on - book distribution, prasadam distribution, harer-nama sankirtana - manned largely, if not exclusively in some places, by the disciples of the present initiating spiritual masters. I must confess that I feel I am protecting Srila Prabhupada's real interests by serving these very sincere and self-sacrificing young boys and girls by trying to project the teachings of Srila Prabhupada to them in word and deed than by getting caught up in this contentious network of politics that this constantly being spun in the USA. I know that sounds self-righteous, "holier-than-thou", etc., and I'm sorry. But that is the way I feel, and there's nothing I can do about it.

In all the papers coming out of America I never read so much as a word of appreciation from the "revolutionaries" for the young people who are carrying on Srila Prabhupada's mission. I never read a word of concern for them, what they might be feeling, what their needs might be. That's kind of logical - appreciate the disciple, and you appreciate the master. Awkward to do if one is a revoluzzer intent on pulling the masters down. OK, sure, revolution is as American as apple pie, like H. Rap Brown said, but as the American TP maneuvering last Mayapur clearly showed, we're not all so fortunate to be Americans - even if we

were born there. Some folks gets other value systems. Some folks, as unfortunate as they are, find more happiness in a clearly ordered and peaceful structure in which individual differences are put aside for the benefit of the whole. That's usually the way things work over in Europe. And that's precisely why I am here - because I like it that way. The American mentality has become alien to me, I'm afraid. But I retain still a sense of independence which I guess comes from my upbringing. I am not, for instance, going to be railroaded into accepting American-style solutions for American problems which have little or no relevance to the circumstances on this side of the Atlantic. Of that, the revoluzzers should be most aware. Remember the old Yankee motto: DON'T TREAD ON ME!

This, no doubt, makes me a GBC apologist for some. No way. As I stated before, I think Srila Prabhupada holds the GBC responsible for all the real or imagined ills of his movement at this present time. They've got a hard road ahead of them in rectifying their mistakes. But everybody understands this fact, I think. Even most of the GBC are ready to admit it.

ISKCON's troubles at the high levels of management are a historical inevitability. Whenever a great personality departs this world, such troubles are to be expected. And let's not avoid the admission why - because his successors are not as qualified as he. Still, I see no reason to begrudge the accomplishments of the GBC - and especially the GBC gurus. I have seen clearly, first hand, how this zone was built up from almost nothing by the sheer enthusiasm and determination of Harikesa Maharaj - no matter what characters like Bhakti Dayal (I don't know his new Sridhara name) and Vegavan or their US sympathizers may say. I challenge any of their sympathizers to come over to see for themselves how this zone is run, how the God-brothers of the GBC-guru relate to him, how much independence of action in management we have, and most of all, how we relate to the disciples of the present spiritual master. Let them come and preach over here and see what it is like before they draw their high-falutin' conclusions based only upon the testimony of direct or indirect supporters of Sridharism.

Because of my own experience in working with the local GBC rep, and because of my acute awareness of my own shortcomings, and because of my skepticism about this North American uprising, I am afraid I cannot get very worked up about this upcoming meeting that everyone is talking about. I am not saying that nothing good will come out of it (although I'll be very surprised if any lasting good comes out of it). I certainly don't believe that such meetings, even if they result in us all being "made" gurus, will stop the

defections, the schisms, the falldowns. I expect we'll be seeing these events for as long as there is a material world (and as long as we remain in it). I do not share in the millinarianism of the Ravindra Swaurups of this movement who seem to think that a heaven on earth is waiting around the corner for ISKCON if we just root out our institutionalized evils and open the door to the heady breezes--of--enlightenment--and freedom. The Western World has been reeling under the intoxication of this chiliastic idealism since A.D. 1000. This phenomenon began concomitantly with a widespread dissatisfaction with the "way things were" in the Church, a dissatisfaction that was soon aimed at the office of the Pope and which led to the Reformation and a lot of pseudo-religious fanaticism which ended in totalitarian political structures based on absolutist concepts. Anyway, that's all karmi history, but it shows that you can't get away from absolutism, no matter how hard you blow the trumpet of freedom. Another thing it shows is that too much attachment to the dream of some ideal state here in this material world leaves us wide open to defeat by maya.

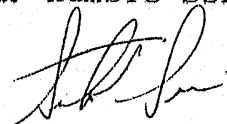
The historical comparison could be the subject of another paper. My point is simply this: this insistent drumbeat of a kind of dissatisfied, truculent idealism that I keep hearing behind all the rhetoric is mighty suspicious. It is definitely something not aligned with our philosophy. In fact, Devamrta Swami's impression is that among the "avant-garde" in America, it has become commonplace to dispense with philosophy with a comment like, "We've got to put a gun to their heads just to get some action." This according to Devamrta, was Bhurijana's reply to his observation that the good gurukula teacher was not being philosophical in his presentation of the goals of the revolution.

I am not going to march to this drumbeat, no matter what the North American temple presidents or even the North American GBC's decide. And since this drumbeat is setting the rhythm of the meeting in September, I am not attending. I am sure my presence won't be missed - after all, populist appeals are always, well, popular.

So in lieu of my speaking with you personally, I am sending this letter along. I am also forwarding copies to others who might be interested.

Hoping this meets you in good health, I remain

Your humble servant



Suhotra Swami