

Is There Substance To Anti-*ritvik* Rhetoric?

by Krishnakant

In your last issue serious charges were levelled against the growing band of vaisnavas who wish to see Srila Prabhupada's final order on initiation re-instated. One article even accused us of setting fire to ISKCON. Given such inflammatory and emotive allegations, and the large number of column inches dedicated to such opinion, it seems only fair that we should be allowed to respond at similar length.

It should not be forgotten that the GBC promised to give a full response to the *ritvik* paper '[The Final Order](#)' way back in October '96. Since then the only direct evidence they have produced in support of disbanding the *ritvik* system is the [May 28th tape](#). Aside from the fact that the GBC's interpretation of this conversation changes every few years, as do the tape transcripts; it now emerges that the tape from which the segment of conversation is lifted may itself have been edited. This follows from a preliminary analysis, undertaken with the GBC's co-operation, which exposed strong evidence of falsification. So the current situation is that the GBC's only evidence for stopping the system of initiation set up personally by Srila Prabhupada, is itself inadmissible as evidence. In light of the above we humbly beg the devotees to please be patient and open minded enough to first hear what the *ritvik* position actually is so they can decide for themselves on its validity.

I thought I might take this opportunity to analyse some of the arguments used in Trivikrama Maharaja's response to Rupunuga, Akhilesvara das's letter and Bhakti Tirtha Swami's lecture to see if there is any substance to this recent anti-*ritvik* rhetoric.

I shall start with Trivikrama Swami's response to Rupunuga Prabhu, which opened with the following:

"My contention is that Rupunuga Prabhu is failing to be a transparent medium for Srila Prabhupada when he claims that "If one cannot find a bona fide guru to accept *diksa* from, he can still accept Srila Prabhupada as his *siksa* guru", and thus be connected to the *parampara* - and when he states that Srila Prabhupada's purports "are indeed darshan or going to the guru." Srila Prabhupada was asked this very question by Madhudvisa prabhu on a morning walk in Melbourne, May 21, 75:

From the very outset Trivikrama Maharaja's argumentation lacks precision. He falsely claims that 'Srila Prabhupada was asked this very same question', when in fact Rupanuga is not actually asking a question. What exactly is Maharaja referring to? Neither does the quoted conversation between Srila Prabhupada and Madhudvisa in any way contradict the points made in Rupanuga's article; rather they support them. The two questions asked of Srila Prabhupada by Madhudvisa are:

1. "Is it possible to become a devotee without actually having personal association with you? Just by reading your books."
2. "But can your, would your purports serve as explanation besides."

Srila Prabhupada answers as follows:

Answer to question 1) A disciple does NOT have to associate with him directly.

"No, it is not that you have to associate with the author."

Answer to question 2) If you have a question then just ask anyone familiar with his books to explain.

"Simply someone who knows the subject matter, he can explain"

The answers Srila Prabhupada gives completely support Rupanuga's position: that it is spiritually sufficient to read Srila Prabhupada's books and associate with devotees. Rupunuga has never claimed that if a devotee does not understand some point in Srila Prabhupada's books he cannot approach someone more learned for help.

Taking things a little further, it should be noted that nowhere in this, or any other conversation, does Srila Prabhupada ever state that one must take initiation from someone other than himself once he leaves the planet. In fact Srila Prabhupada never once stated that *diksa* was in any way dependent on the physical proximity of the guru; rather he taught the precise opposite over and over and over again (see '[The Final Order](#)' Appendices - Does the guru need to be physically present?).

We can be absolutely certain that the conversation quoted by Trivikrama Maharaja cannot be referring to Srila Prabhupada's disciples giving *diksa*, since Srila Prabhupada's answer was also applicable in the PRESENT TENSE. In other words Madhudvisa was being instructed to do this even in Srila Prabhupada's presence. We all know that at the time of this conversation Srila Prabhupada was the only *diksa* guru in ISKCON, so how could he be talking about his disciples acting as *diksa* gurus then and there? Trivikrama Maharaja offers no evidence whatsoever to support his contention that one is expected or obliged in some way to take *diksa* initiation from somebody other than Srila Prabhupada, just because they happen to be able to explain something in his books.

All Srila Prabhupada says is that if you do not understand something you should take help from someone who is more learned. This is called taking *siksa* or instruction from a senior Godbrother, and is the system that was established when Srila Prabhupada was physically present. There is nothing to justify jumping from this authorised system of instructing spiritual masters, as sanctioned by Srila Prabhupada, to inventing a new system whereby potentially unlimited numbers of variably qualified *diksa* gurus initiate all and sundry just because they can explain something from Srila Prabhupada's books. How Trivikrama Maharaja is able to reach his conclusion is a mystery his article fails to illuminate.

Next Maharaja makes the astonishing, and frankly rather offensive claim, that Srila Prabhupada's books are "passive". Srila Prabhupada taught the precise opposite:

"In my books the philosophy of Krsna Consciousness is explained fully so if there is anything you do not understand, then you simply have to read again and again. By reading daily the knowledge will be revealed to you and by this process your spiritual life will develop."

(Letter to Brahmarupa Dasa, 22/11/74)

Srila Prabhupada: Even a moment's association with a pure devotee - all success!

Revitananda: Does that apply to reading the words of a pure devotee?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes

Revitananda: Even a little association with your books has the same effect?

Srila Prabhupada: Effect. Of course it requires both things. One must be very eager to take it.

(Room Conversation, 13/12/70)

"Passive" is the opposite of "active." It means idle and inert. Now how can something which is passive "do everything", "reveal knowledge" and have the same effect as "associating with a pure devotee"? According to Srila Prabhupada his books are extraordinarily potent pro-active little things which will ultimately change the entire course of human destiny. A long way from 'passive' one would have thought. Maharaja completely misunderstands that transcendental literature is not like mundane literature which may indeed just be 'dots on a page' and thus 'passive'. Transcendental literature has the same potency as transcendental personalities:

"There are two types of Bhagavatas, namely the book Bhagavata and the devotee Bhagavata. Both the Bhagavatas are competent remedies, and both of them or either of them can be good enough to eliminate the obstacles."

(S:B 1:2:18, Purport)

What to speak of Srila Prabhupada's Bhagavatam where we also have the person Bhagavata, in the form of Srila Prabhupada's purports.

Next Maharaja quotes from the *CC, Antya 7:53*:

"One should not proudly think that one can understand the transcendental loving service of the Lord simply by reading books. [...] One must accept a Vaisnava guru (adau gurv-asrayam), and then by questions and answers one should gradually learn what pure devotional service to Krsna is."

Maharaja fails to mention that the phrase "proudly think" relates to Vallabha Bhatta's assumption that he was qualified to approach Lord Caitanya simply because he had read lots of books:

"Vallabha Bhatta was greatly proud of his knowledge in devotional service, and therefore he wanted to speak about Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu without understanding the Lord's position."

Of course one must accept a vaisnava guru in a humble mood. No-one is disputing that. Problems start when so-called 'scholarly' devotees read a few books and then immediately think they know more than their guru. We are certainly not advocating that. However, nowhere in the above quote does it state that the initiating guru must be physically present in order to be humbly approached. Nor is that implied by the need to have questions answered, since Trivikrama Maharaja has already implicitly admitted that this can be fulfilled by ANYONE who understands the subject matter (see above). Furthermore Srila Prabhupada clearly taught us that any questions we may have can in any case be answered by carefully studying his books:

Devotee: Srila Prabhupada when you're not present with us, how is it possible to receive instructions? For example in questions that may arise...

Srila Well the questions are answ...answers are there in my books.

Prabhupada: *(Morning Walk, Los Angeles, 13/5/73)*

So utilise whatever time you find to make a thorough study of my books. Then all your questions will be answered.

(Letter to Upendra, 7/1/76)

Paramahansa: My question is, a pure devotee, when he comments on Bhagavad Gita, someone who never sees him physically, but he just comes in contact with the commentary, explanation, is this the same thing?

Srila Yes. You can associate with Krsna by reading Bhagavad-Gita. And these saintly persons, they Prabhupada: have given their explanations, comments. So where is the difficulty?

(Morning Walk, Paris 11/6/74)

For more quotes on this subject see ['The Final Order' appendices](#) - ['The books are enough.'](#)

Next Maharaja quotes Srila Prabhupada stating the importance of having a spiritual master to "guide" us, since one does not become a medical man "simply by reading books". Again there is no disagreement. We all agree that everyone must accept a spiritual master. It is no good just reading the Bhagavad Gita verses and paying no heed to Srila Prabhupada's lucid commentaries for example. We must accept a bona fide spiritual master to understand all the purports of the vedas, and to have our sinful reactions annihilated (the definition of *diksa*), otherwise there is no question of advancement. For members of ISKCON that spiritual master is Srila Prabhupada.

The question is can we be guided by Srila Prabhupada through his books even in his physical absence? That Srila Prabhupada's books alone are sufficient to answer all our questions and give all guidance is evidenced in the following:

- Srila Prabhupada clearly stated that everything we needed to know about spiritual life was in his books.
- Should we not understand something we simply need to approach an older Godbrother for help.
- This older Godbrother will always base his instruction on the contents of Srila Prabhupada's books, since they will be the standard for the next ten thousand years.
- Thus even when approaching an instructing spiritual master one is still being directly guided by Srila Prabhupada through his books and teachings.

Srila Prabhupada never said that his physical absence would in any way inhibit his ability to offer guidance. He taught us that he was non-different from his books, and that in time they would do everything. The very same books Trivikrama Maharaja now describes as merely 'passive'. Trivikrama Maharaja is therefore saying that Srila Prabhupada is now only 'passive'. We are sure that on reflection Maharaja will want to retract this statement since it is a serious deviation from Bhagavat philosophy.

Srila Prabhupada specifically set up a system for people to accept him as their spiritual master and be guided by him. Even when he was *on* the planet this system was never dependent on his physical presence. Many hundreds of devotees were initiated and guided by Srila Prabhupada without any form of physical contact with him at all. Ultimately this whole bogus 'physically present guru' argument is completely contradicted by Srila Prabhupada's own practical example over the 12 years he spent building ISKCON:

- He initiated the majority of his disciples without ever having met them.
- The majority of his disciples never received personal instruction from him. In fact he actively discouraged such interaction so he could write his potently active books.
- He never wrote to the majority of his disciples.
- He did not personally perform the initiation ceremony for the majority of his disciples.

These are just undeniable historical facts which fly totally in the face of Trivikrama Maharaja's *physically present guru* thesis. Certainly we need a physical guru, since pure reliance on the Supersoul is impossible in the conditioned stage. Srila Prabhupada is the physical manifestation of the Supersoul, and thus we have the benefit of his physical books, physical murti, physical society, tapes and videos. So 'physical guru' yes, 'physically present guru' not essential.

At the moment new bhaktas coming to the movement are expected to get initiated by an ISKCON approved *diksa* guru so as to receive "physical guidance". However these 'gurus' had either limited, or in some cases absolutely no "physical guidance" from a *diksa* guru themselves. We know for certain that no ISKCON guru has had *any* guidance from a physically present *diksa* guru for the last 20 years. To maintain this position on physical gurus is thus absurd, and patent hypocrisy. The absolute need for a physically present *diksa* guru for the purpose of spiritual guidance is supported neither by Srila Prabhupada's teachings, nor his personal example (nor by the example of the very persons who are putting forward this thesis!):

"I shall remain your *personal* guidance, *physically* present or not *physically* present, as I am getting guidance from my Guru Maharaja."
(Room Conversation, Vrindavan, 14/7/77)

Next Maharaja quotes the need to "hear" as well as read. But Srila Prabhupada states in relation to his books, that it is the same thing:

"These are not ordinary books. It is recorded chanting. *Anyone* who reads, he is hearing."
(Letter to Rupanuga Das, 19/10/74)

Please note who the above letter was written to. Perhaps the Maharaja might begin to appreciate why Rupanuga prabhu has the conviction he does.

Maharaja then quotes the need to accept a guru. Who would disagree with this? However none of the quotes given state that the guru needs to be physically ensconced before the disciple in order for the transcendental process of *diksa* to operate properly. We would not expect such quotes to exist, since Srila Prabhupada would otherwise have been preaching a philosophy which he himself did not practice.

Maharaja then tells us to look up page 53 of Nectar of Devotion to understand the difference between a 'regular' initiating guru and a great *acarya*. We did look at the page but could find no mention of the term 'regular guru' anywhere. According to the CC madhya 24 verse 330 the initiating guru must be a Mahabhagavat. Nothing regular about that. (See also pages 41- 42 of [The Final Order](#) on small a - big A *acaryas*).

Next Trivikrama Maharaja quotes Srila Prabhupada from a lecture where he says- "everyone of you should be spiritual master next". This quote along with others are analysed extensively in the papers "The Final Order" and ["Best Not to Accept Any Disciples"](#) - (copies of which can be obtained from the author), wherein it is shown that the above quote can only refer to becoming *siksa* gurus, and not *diksa* gurus. This is because the instruction is given in the **PRESENT TENSE**. It is not limited in applicability to after Srila Prabhupada leaves the planet, which it would need to be if Srila Prabhupada was authorising *diksa* gurus. No-one is disputing that Srila Prabhupada wanted all his followers to become effective spiritual masters, there are dozens of quotes supporting this. The issue is whether they were to be instructing or initiating spiritual masters. The final July 9th order, along with other supporting instructions, made it clear they were to be the former.

To sum up, though Maharaja does correctly point out the need to be initiated by a bona-fide spiritual master, he then mistakenly assumes that this spiritual master must be physically present on the same planet as the disciple in order to initiate and guide him. Unfortunately we cannot find anything to support his contention in Srila Prabhupada's books, and can therefore only assume that it is bogus, with all due respect.

"Physical presence is immaterial..." (SP letter 19/1/67)

"So we should associate by the vibration, and not the physical presence. That is real association."
(SP letter 13/11/69)

"Therefore one must take advantage of the vani, not the physical presence".

(C.c. Antya, concluding words)

"Physical presence is not important"

(SP Room conversation, 6/10/77)

etc, etc...

[Akhilesvara](#) prabhu's article "Quiet the *ritvik* Rhetoric", also makes the same erroneous point about the necessity of a physically present *diksa* guru. Once again he offers no evidence to support his contention. On top of this he does nothing to counter the clear direct evidence offered in favour of the *ritvik* system, such as the July 9th order which was personally signed by Srila Prabhupada. Thus quite how he thinks his article will contribute towards 'quieting' anything is not at all clear.

Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja

Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja, in his Mayapur meeting speech, accuses *ritvik* philosophy of setting fire to Srila Prabhupada's movement. He also says that this "*ritvik* philosophy is like a monster coming out of ourselves". Bhakti Tirtha was addressing the entire GBC when he spoke these words, so if we are to believe him it is they who have unleashed this fiery demon from the dark recesses of their own collective psyche. We wonder if the GBC would agree with this analysis.

Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja then speculates that people are only attracted to the *ritvik* philosophy due to bad experiences with the ISKCON institution. Regardless of whether or not this is the case, simply trying to stop devotees becoming attracted to *ritvik* philosophy is rather silly and futile if it happens to be the truth. Surely this must be the issue, to establish whether or not Srila Prabhupada wanted a *ritvik* system of initiation to continue within ISKCON. Is not the search for truth the very reason we became devotees in the first place? Making ISKCON a better place is a good sentiment, but can it really be fully better if the truth is suppressed?

If the GBC are serious about putting out the *ritvik* fire they will need to answer the definitive *ritvik* position paper - 'The Final Order' - an 80 page treatise that was requested by and presented to the GBC in October 96 as already mentioned. All that the combined might of the GBC have been able to come up with to put out the 'fire' of 'The Final Order', is a 13 page paper - 'Disciple of My Disciple', which...

- a. ... contradicts the current GBC position - "Gurus and Initiation in ISKCON" (1995) which was supposed to be the "official final *siddhanta*" on the initiation issue, and is officially still part of "ISKCON Law";
- b. ... is based solely on the highly questionable interpretation of a tape recording - the so called 'Appt Tape' - which has now been proven unreliable by a world expert audio forensic examiner, after an investigation which was set up by the GBC themselves! The examiner's report states that the tape shows strong signs "suggestive of falsification", and that until a full forensic analysis is done on the ORIGINAL tape, it cannot be deemed admissible as any sort of evidence at all.

Thus the GBC currently have no evidence to justify their dismantling of the *ritvik* system, and the subsequent construction of the 'multiple *acarya* successor system' presently in operation within ISKCON.

So it is one thing for Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja to talk about the house being on fire, but if he really believes that the *ritvik* philosophy is so wrong and so evil why is he not demanding from the GBC a swift and immediate response. Why are he and his GBC associates simply standing by and letting it burn?! Where are these powerful arguments based on Srila Prabhupada's books and written instructions that completely expose the *ritvik* philosophy as fallacious nonsense? All we have so far is an argument based on a tape that can no longer be used. In short we see no substance to any of this anti-*ritvik* rhetoric. Please forgive any offences that I may have made.

All glories to Srila Prabhupada.