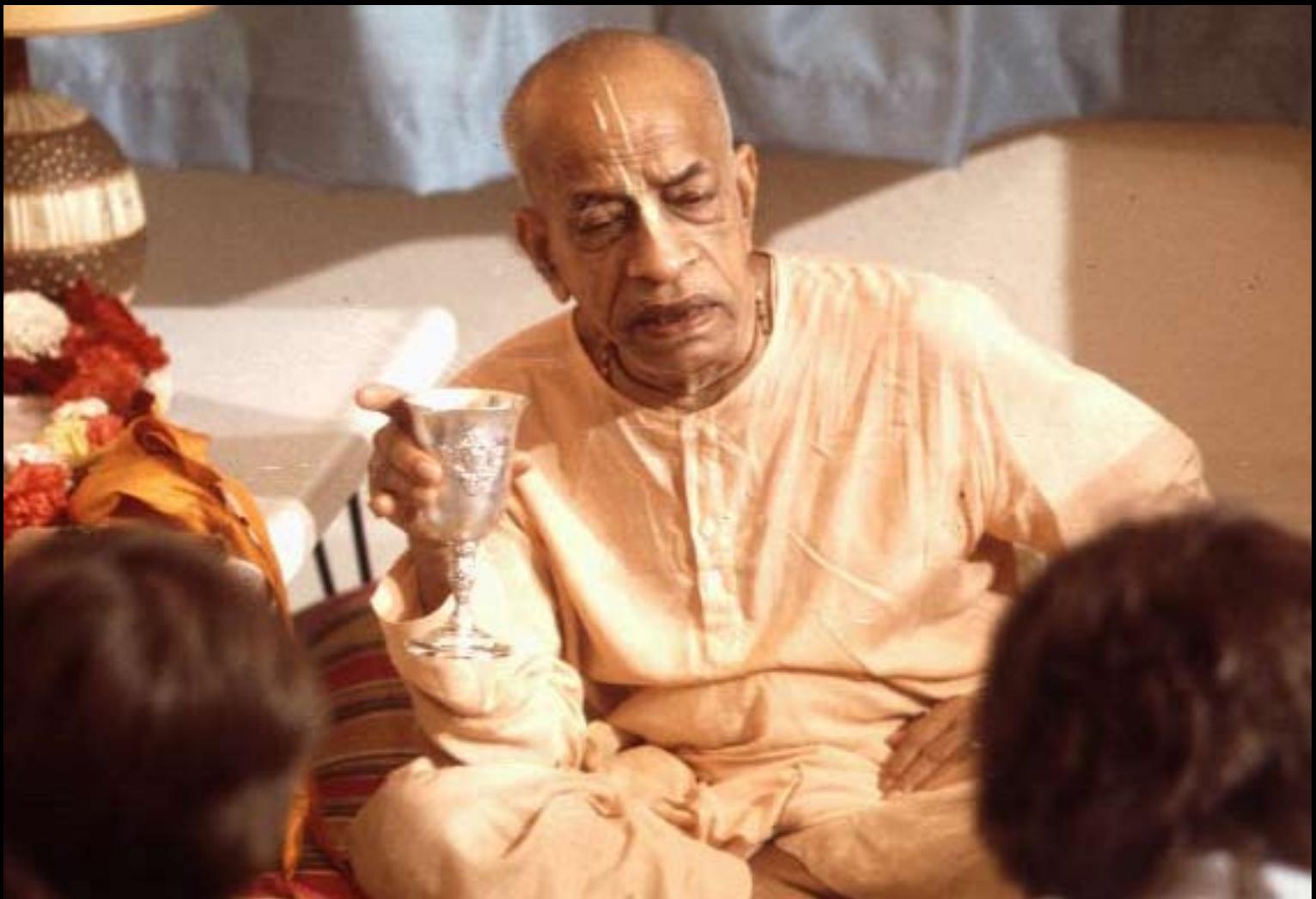


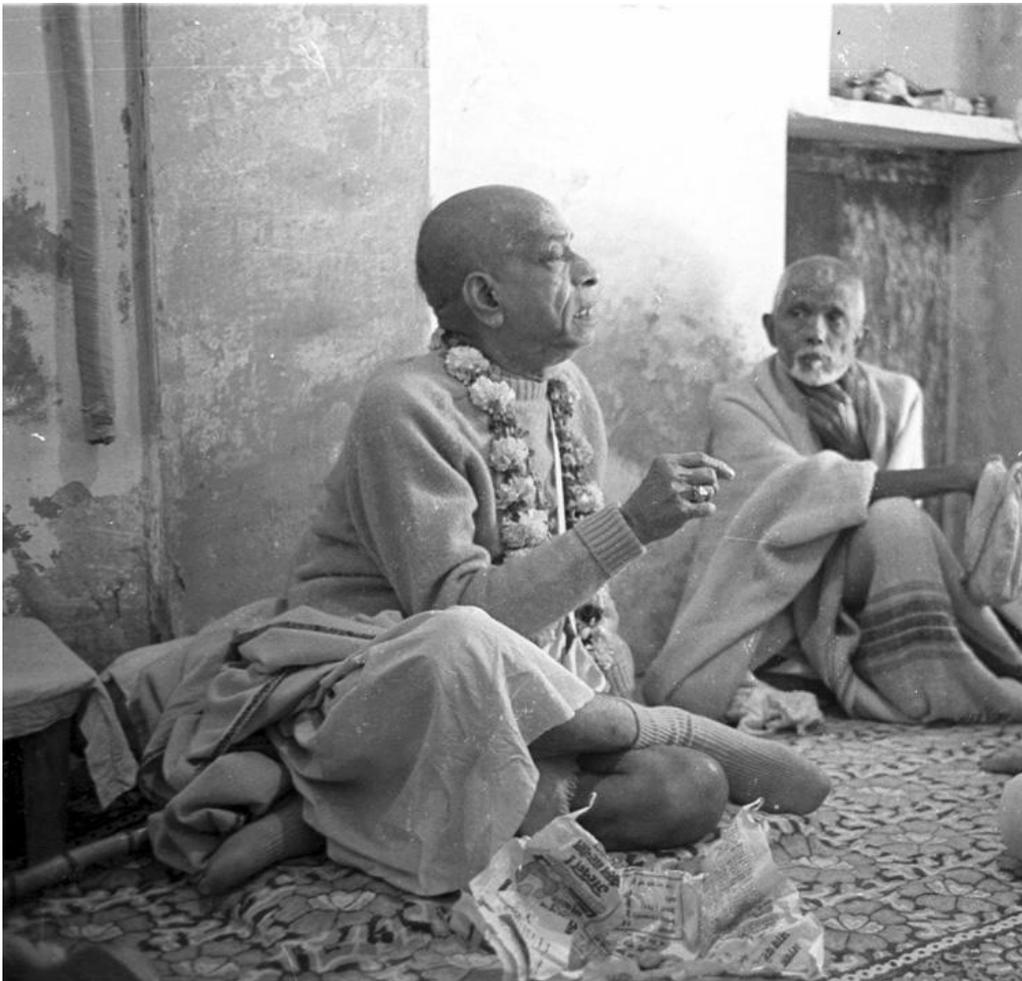
a reply to: 'Conversation with H.H. Narayana Maharaja'

Where H.H. Narayana Maharaja **Diverges**

from Srila Prabhupada's Teachings



Where H.H. Narayana Maharaja Diverges from Srila Prabhupada's Teachings



“One should take initiation from a bona fide spiritual master coming in the disciplic succession, who is authorised by his predecessor spiritual master. This is called *diksa-vidhana*.”

(S.B. 4.8.54, purport)



by Krishnakant

Where H.H. Narayana Maharaja Diverges from Srila Prabhupada's Teachings

a reply to: '*Conversation with H.H. Narayana Maharaja*'

This is a short paper giving examples of where His Holiness Narayan Maharaja teaches differently from Srila Prabhupada on important philosophical points. In no way is our purpose here to make any judgements about Narayana Maharaja's spiritual stature or devotional purity. He has our utmost respect as a senior practitioner of the principles of *bhakti* yoga. We are merely presenting factual information to adjust an impression some of his followers are promulgating, i.e., that his teachings are identical and fully in line with Srila Prabhupada's. Thus the purpose of this paper is not to show that Narayana Maharaja is in anyway inferior to Srila Prabhupada - only different. Obviously those wishing to increase their surrender and attachment to Srila Prabhupada will not be assisted by persons who contradict him, whether it is Narayana Maharaja or anyone else.

In order to make absolutely certain we have not misunderstood Maharaja, English not being his first language, we have only taken quotes from an article that appeared in the 1990 ISKCON journal entitled '*Conversation with H.H. Narayana Maharaja*' where he was interviewed by H.G. Ravindra Svarupa. Prior to publication the article was read to Maharaja in Hindi by Satyanarayan das, and he was allowed to make whatever adjustments he wanted. Thus we know for certain that the quotes given below fully and correctly represent his views; especially since, to this very day, he has never retracted a single word of the article. We shall give subject headings followed by Narayan Maharaja's statements, and then point out where he differs from Srila Prabhupada.

Narayan Maharaja accepts the concept of re-initiation

"And in the case of a fallen guru- when one has taken *diksa* from a guru who falls down, and again he takes from a Bhananda or someone, and again he falls. In that case we should watch and see that the guru is reliable (.) And when a reliable *brahmana-nistha* and *sabda-brahma*-knowing guru is found, then he certainly should be re-initiated."

(GBC 1990 ISKCON JOURNAL p.21)

According to Srila Prabhupada, authorised members of the disciplic succession never deviate for a second, what to speak of fall into gross sinful life:

"A bona fide spiritual master is in the disciplic succession from time eternal and he does not deviate at all from the instructions of the Supreme Lord."

(Bg. 4.42, purport)

He taught that if a so-called guru falls down then he was never properly authorised to initiate:

"sometimes a spiritual master is not properly authorised and only on his own initiative becomes a spiritual master, he may be carried away by an accumulation of wealth and a large number of disciples."

(NOD p.116)

Rather than preach that such fall-downs are indicative of a lack of authorisation, Maharaja fully accepts that such things occur, and that when it happens one must be '*re-initiated*'. The term '*re-initiated*' was never used by Srila Prabhupada, and for good reason. If the guru was unauthorised then he was never giving *diksa* in the first place, and therefore there is no question of the

disciple ever having been *'initiated'*. If he has not been *'initiated'* then where is the question of *'re-initiation'*.

Remember initiation is not just a ceremony, but is defined as the authorised transference of transcendental knowledge from guru to disciple. The term *'re-initiation'* is thus meaningless and implies a deviation from the teachings of our *parampara* as given to us by Srila Prabhupada. If a guru falls down then he could not have been authorised by the predecessor *acarya* in the disciplic succession, and could therefore not have initiated anyone with transcendental knowledge. There is not one single example in all of Srila Prabhupada's teachings of a former authorised member of the disciplic succession falling into illusion.

Narayan Maharaja teaches 'living guru' philosophy

"And for a newcomer, it is sure that he should be initiated by a living guru."

In answer to Ravindra Svarupa's point that the Vaisnava guru is always living, Maharaja said:

"And for a newcomer, it is sure that he should be initiated by a living guru."

He later added

NM : "In the *parampara* system living guru is essential."

RS : "The meaning of *parampara* is living guru, present guru."

NM : "Correct."

(all from p.22 ISKCON Journal)

The Maharaja offers no scriptural support for his *'living guru' 'physical presence'* philosophy. Certainly the above statements are never made by Srila Prabhupada, and hence must be rejected by anyone claiming to follow Srila Prabhupada:

'The potency of transcendental sound is never minimised because the vibrator is apparently absent'

(S.B.2.9.8, purport)

'So we should associate by the vibration, and not by the physical presence. That is real association.'

(SP Lecture, 18.8.68, Montreal)

'Therefore we should take advantage of the vani, not the physical presence.'

(SP letter to Suci Devi dasi, 4.11.75)

If it was a fact that in order to be initiated the disciple must have the guru in his *'eyesight'*, then many hundreds or even thousands of Srila Prabhupada's disciples were not properly initiated, since they never saw his physical body even once. This *'physical presence'* idea was rejected by Srila Prabhupada over and over again and is never mentioned in any *sastra*, yet it forms a corner stone of Maharaja's particular brand of Vaisnavism.

Furthermore nowhere does Srila Prabhupada ever teach that the current link in the disciplic succession must be *'living'*, as in *'physically present'* in order to remain current.

Narayana Maharaja teaches that a *madhyama adbhikari* can give full initiation

"If a man is not *uttama* Vaisnava, even if he is *madhyama adbhikari* stage, if he is simple and sincere, he should be treated as guru and we can take initiation from that person." (page 22)

In a section of the C.c dealing specifically with initiation Srila Prabhupada says the exact opposite:

'The guru must be accepted from the topmost platform of devotional service. There are three classes of devotees, and the guru must be accepted from the topmost class.'

(C.c. Madhya, 24.330, purport)

As is self-evident this directly contradicts Narayan Maharaja's assertion. Certainly a *madhyama* can accept disciples in an instructing sense, but such followers are warned:

'they cannot advance very well towards the ultimate goal of life under his insufficient guidance.'

Therefore:

'One should not become a spiritual master unless he has attained the platform of *uttama-adbhikari*.'

(The Nectar of Instruction, text 5, purport)

Narayana Maharaja teaches that a *madhyama adhikari* can only give partial initiation.

At another point in the conversation, Narayana Maharaja seems to contradict this concession for *madhyama adhikari diksa* Gurus when Ravindra Svarupa asks the following question:

RS: "Let me ask another question. You said earlier that a *madhyama adhikari* is qualified for giving diksa."

NM: "To some extent"

RS: "To some extent"

NM: "Yes, to some extent."

As well as contradicting his own previous assertion; in downgrading the *madhyama adhikari's* ability to give initiation, and saying they can only do it 'to some extent', Narayana Maharaja presents us with the novel concept of 'partial initiation'.

Certainly Srila Prabhupada never taught that some authorised *diksa* gurus can only transmit a portion of the transcendental knowledge required for liberation. The *diksa* guru who only initiates 'to some extent' is an entity never mentioned by Srila Prabhupada, and therefore no ISKCON devotee can accept this idea as bona fide.

Narayan Maharaja teaches that a *kanistha adhikari* can initiate

"Say there is no *madhyama adhikari*. Suppose we are all *kanishta adhikari*. Then within the *kanishta* group, if one is on a higher level than me, he should be treated as guru. He will be *vartma-pradarsaka-guru*, or he can initiate." (p.24)

Above Narayan Maharaja clearly states that a *kanishta adhikari*, or someone on the lowest platform of devotional service, can initiate disciples. This seriously contradicts Srila Prabhupada's teachings on *guru tattva*:

"When one has attained the topmost position of *maha-bhagavata*, he is to be accepted as a guru and worshipped exactly like Hari, the Personality of Godhead. Only such a person is eligible to occupy the post of a guru."

(C.c. Madhya, 24.330, purport.)

Narayan Maharaja teaches that a *kanistha adhikari* can not initiate

Later in the conversation the Maharaja seems to contradict himself:

'*Uttama adhikari* and *kanishta adhikari* cannot be guru.'

We understand from Srila Prabhupada that in order to preach, an *uttama adhikari* will act on the *madhyama* platform; but he is still an *uttama adhikari*. Indeed he 'must' be on the topmost platform before there is any scope for occupying the post of initiating guru, on this Srila Prabhupada could not be more emphatic.

- And if *kanishta adhikaris* cannot be guru we wonder why the Maharaja had just said they could initiate?

In summary, Maharaja has presented the surprising scenario that the less qualified one is, the more qualified they are to give initiation. Let us look again at the statements he has made:

- 1) *Uttama adhikari's* cannot initiate.
- 2) *Madhyama's* can only initiate to 'some extent'.
- 3) *Kanistha adhikari's* can initiate fully.

However Maharaja simultaneously contradicts the above statements by saying that a *kanistha adhikari* can not initiate, and also that a *madhyama adhikari* gives full initiation.

Narayan Maharaja teaches one does not need specific authorisation to initiate.

"Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati has not said or given any document that Swamiji (Srila Prabhupada) will be guru. But yet he is guru. (.) Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura has not mentioned that so many others will do *acarya*, yet they have done. This is the system." (P.23)

Srila Prabhupada clearly taught that one must only take initiation from someone who has been authorised by his own predecessor *acarya*:

"One should take initiation from a bona fide spiritual master coming in the disciplic succession, who is authorised by his predecessor spiritual master. This is called *diksa-vidhana*."

(S.B.4.8.54, purport.)

One might argue that all Srila Bhaktisiddhanta's disciples were authorised to initiate. However, there are several problems with such a hypothesis.

At the time of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta's passing there was only an instruction to co-operate under a GBC. There was no order for everyone to start initiating.

That no one was authorised is evidenced by the fact that the most senior and influential disciples of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta decided to vote in one initiating *acarya*, Vasudeva.

- If they had all been clearly authorised to initiate then why did they not all just start initiating straight away?

This proves that the 'system' Narayan Maharaja confidently refers to above was not known to most of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta's leading disciples.

Certainly Srila Prabhupada never taught it.

Srila Prabhupada said none of his Godbrothers were qualified to be *acarya*, and stressed that authorisation was essential. When advising one of his disciples against taking initiation from one of his Godbrothers he wrote:

"On the whole you may know that he is not a liberated person, and therefore, he cannot initiate any person to Krishna Consciousness. It requires special spiritual benediction from higher authorities."

(SP Letter to Janaradhana, 26.4.68)

Yet according to Maharaja the 'guru' in question (Bon Maharaja) had received such a benediction, along with every member of the Gaudiya Matha who began initiating.

Narayana Maharaja cannot possibly claim to know the content of every single exchange between Srila Prabhupada and his Spiritual Master.

- So how can he, in good faith, state so categorically that Srila Prabhupada was not the recipient of such a "special spiritual benediction"?

Since Narayan Maharaja accepts Srila Prabhupada as a perfect *acarya*, then he must accept Srila Prabhupada would not preach that one needed authorisation from ones own guru before initiating, if he had not gained such a 'benediction' before he himself started initiating. Srila Prabhupada practised what he preached, the definition of *acarya*.

Narayan Maharaja rejects the *ritvik* system "We don't follow any *ritvik* system".

(page 23)

His main reason for rejecting the July 9th order seems to be based on the idea that he has not heard of such a system being employed previously:

"In our Gaudiya Vaisnava line there is no *ritvik*".

Of course this ignores the fact that there was a *ritvik* system running within ISKCON for the last few months of Srila Prabhupada's appearance. In rejecting the very notion, Narayan Maharaja is rejecting a system Srila Prabhupada personally set up and allowed to run 'in our Gaudiya Vaisnava line'. This 'precedent' argument is itself illogical and self-defeating since there is no example of a disciple rejecting the order of his guru purely on the basis that such an order had not been issued previously. All *acaryas* set precedents, otherwise there would be nothing to look back and compare with. So Maharaja's assertion that such a system has not occurred before, even if it were true - (and we have no way of knowing what went on in all the world movements in previous *Kali yugas* just after the appearance of the Golden Avatar) - would still be irrelevant, since *acaryas* invariably set new precedents; albeit in line with *sastric* injunctions.

Since Maharaja fails to offer any injunction from Srila Prabhupada's books that might prohibit the deployment of officiating priests to carry out initiations on behalf of a departed *acarya*, we can only assume he has no real philosophical validity to his opposition. Thus he remains conspicuously at odds with Srila Prabhupada's explicit orders, such as the July 9th institutional directive.

Narayana Maharaja accepts the *ritvik* system but states it is not called *ritvik*

"Only in a case where a guru is very far away from someone. (.) But it is not called *ritvik*." (p.23)

Yet Srila Prabhupada himself called the 11 nominated devotees "*ritvik*- representative of the *acarya*" (July 9th letter). And what happened to the idea of the disciple needing to be within the 'eyesight' of the guru.

- How will the disciple see the guru if he is 'very far away'?

"If someone is in America and the guru is in India, and the guru cannot go to America and the American cannot come to India, then, at that time, a devotee in America can officiate and give hari-name, japa-mala and so on, if the guru orders."

The disciple would certainly need exceptional eyesight to see a guru from that distance!

- And where are the previous examples of such a system?
- If the Maharaja feels that a system is invalid if it has not been practised in the past, how is it that this type of initiation is suddenly so acceptable?
- When has inter-continental *diksa* ever taken place before with no physical contact between the guru and disciple?
- What happened to the physical eye to eye contact that Maharaja previously deemed so essential?

Narayana Maharaja accepts that *ritviks* were appointed for after departure.

Srila Prabhupada also referred to the 11 *ritviks* as 'officiating *acarya*' on May 28th 1977; and in the following exchange we see Narayan Maharaja confirm that these nominees were meant to act after his departure:

Ravindra Svarupa: In fact, that word (*ritvik*) was not introduced by Srila Prabhupada but by Tamal Krishna Goswami. Srila Prabhupada himself said "officiating *acarya*".

Narayan Maharaja: Well, that can be done. He has told me like this.

Ravindra Svarupa: He?

Narayan Maharaja: Swamiji. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. I asked him in Vrindavan, what arrangement have you done for after your. And he told me that in different countries I have given this trust to our devotees to do the work of *acarya*, and they will do. And that after his demise he said they will preach and give *hari-nama* and *diksa*. He has told me also.

Notice that Narayan Maharaja admits Srila Prabhupada had mentioned the term 'officiating *acarya*', and that they were meant to give *diksa* after his demise. Not only does Maharaja immediately accept a term with no direct mention in *sastra*, once more contradicting his earlier insistence on precedent, but he also inadvertently helps support the *ritvik* position.

- If Srila Prabhupada had wanted *diksa* gurus for after his 'demise' then why talk about something with no mention in any *sastra*, namely 'officiating *acaryas*'?
- Why did he not say 'I shall be ordering *diksa* gurus for after my departure' if that was what he had intended?

On the one recorded occasion where Srila Prabhupada used the term 'officiating *acarya*', he equated it with the word '*ritvik*' (May 28th 1977) and according to the final July 9th order *ritviks* were indeed meant to give *diksa* after his 'demise'. Since they were 'officiating *acaryas*', not *acaryas* in their own right, they would give *diksa* only on Srila Prabhupada's behalf. Please note that according to Maharaja, Srila Prabhupada gave this answer specifically with regards to what was to occur after his departure, not before. So Narayan Maharaja here accidentally supports the *ritvik* position by agreeing that Srila Prabhupada wanted 'officiating *acaryas*' or '*ritviks*' for after his departure. Unfortunately Maharaja seems unaware of the clearly prescribed role of these 'officiating *acaryas*'. Perhaps he had not been shown the July 9th letter by the GBC.

Narayan Maharaja applies the term '*acarya*' to persons Srila Prabhupada criticised.

"Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Goswami Thakura- he did not mention who will be guru after his demise. But there is a system in our *sampradaya*. So Tirtha Maharaja, Madhav Maharaja, Sridhar Maharaja, our Gurudeva, Swamiji- Swamiji Bhaktivedanta Swami- they all became *acaryas*."

Above Maharaja mentions persons such as Tirtha Maharaja as being *acaryas* as part of a bona fide system 'in our *sampradaya*'. Yet Srila Prabhupada described such persons as envious rascals. Srila Prabhupada described Tirtha Maharaja as an '*envious snake*' intent on causing trouble; he said Madhava Maharaja was '*especially*' in the business of '*poison*'; and that Sridhara Maharaja had '*disobeyed the order of his guru maharaja*'. Though Srila Prabhupada encouraged his Godbrothers to co-operate with ISKCON, and was affectionate to them, he clearly did not endorse them as being qualified *acaryas*:

"But Sridhara Maharaja is responsible for disobeying this order of Guru Maharaja, and he and others who are already dead unnecessarily thought that there must be one *acarya*. [...] So Sridhara Maharaja and his two associate gentlemen unauthorizedly selected one *acarya* and later it proved a failure.

[...] Actually amongst my Godbrothers no one is qualified to become *acarya*."

(Letter to Rupunuga, 28/4/74)

Obviously there is a vast gulf in the perception of what constitutes a bona fide *acarya* between Maharaja and Srila Prabhu-

pada.

Looking at the above quote from Narayana Maharaja in relation to his professed conversation with Srila Prabhupada just prior to his departure, the following is worth thinking about:

If Srila Prabhupada had told Narayan Maharaja he was going to appoint just 11 officiating *acaryas* for after his departure, according to Maharaja, he would have gone completely against the 'system in our *parampara*'. Remember in Maharaja's 'system', after the departure of the guru any disciple can give initiation as and when he feels ready. For Srila Prabhupada to appoint just 11 of his thousands of disciples as officiating *acaryas* would go completely against what Maharaja considers correct practice. Thus just why Maharaja felt the appointment of 11 'officiating *acaryas*', or *ritviks*, was the 'system in our *sampradaya*' is far from clear, especially since he completely rejects the very notion now. It would seem he is rather confused over just what is acceptable practice in our *sampradaya*, and what Srila Prabhupada actually ordered for after his departure.

Narayan Maharaja rejects the very existence of the word ritvik.

I have not seen the word "ritvik" in our Vaisnava dictionary. (.) We have seen no such word as "ritvik" . (p.23)

In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* the word "ritvik" and its derivatives are mentioned over thirty times. Thus the Maharaja is not only at odds with Srila Prabhupada, but also with one of the most important Vaisnava scriptures!

Conclusion:

Narayan Maharaja teaches the following in opposition to Srila Prabhupada:

1. That authorised initiating gurus can fall down.
2. That the term 're-initiation' has some place in Vaisnava theology.
3. That *diksa* is dependent on the physical presence of the guru.
4. That the guru must be within the 'eyesight' of the disciple in order for initiation to take place.
5. That a madhyama can initiate.
6. That a madhyama can give partial *diksa*
7. That a kanishta can initiate.
8. That one does not need to be authorised by one's guru before starting to initiate.
9. That we should not follow *The Final Order* on initiation issued by Srila Prabhupada on July 9th 1977.
10. That envious persons who spent decades fighting over property, and who voted in a bisexual initiator, are examples of bona fide *acaryas*.
11. That the word *ritvik* does not exist in vaisnavism.

Narayana Maharaja also contradicts himself by simultaneously stating the following:

1. That a *madhyama adhikari* gives full *diksa*.
- 1a. That a *madhyama adhikari* only gives partial *diksa*.
2. That a *kanistha adhikari* can initiate.
- 2a. That a *kanistha adhikari* cannot initiate.
3. That he rejects a *ritvik* system in toto.
- 3a. But he accepts the *ritvik* system that Srila Prabhupada set up both for his presence and for after his departure.
4. That he rejects a system based on the fact that there is no precedence for such a system.
- 4a. That he accepts the *ritvik* system Srila Prabhupada set up in his presence even though there is no precedence for such.
5. He states that the initiating guru must be 'living' in the 'eyesight' of the disciple.
- 5a. He accepts that one can be initiated even if the guru is not in the 'eyesight' of the disciple by ordering an officiator to act on his behalf from another continent.
6. That the standard system of disciplic succession in our *sampradaya* involves every disciple initiating on his own initiative.
- 6a. That a system of only appointing 11 officiating *acaryas* is also bona fide.

It should be noted that we have only looked at one brief exchange between Narayana Maharaja and a member of the GBC. Yet even in such a short text we have found many serious discrepancies. It may be that Maharaja or his followers can justify his views on the basis of teachings outside of Srila Prabhupada. But it should be clear to the reader that no amount of justification will make Narayana Maharaja's teachings the same as Srila Prabhupada's - and that is what is at issue here.

Most significantly we have shown how Narayana Maharaja admits that not only did Srila Prabhupada appoint officiating *acaryas* to perform initiations for after his departure, but that Srila Prabhupada actually personally revealed this intention to him when he was ill in Vrindavan. Srila Prabhupada defined 'officiating *acarya*' as meaning the same as '*ritvik*' - both on the May 28th tape, and in the July 9th letter that refers back to the May 28th tape. Thus by Maharaja's own words we learn that Srila Prabhupada told him he wanted to remain as the initiating *acarya* for ISKCON. Hence there is no need for any ISKCON devotee to seek *diksa* from Narayana Maharaja, since he agrees that only Srila Prabhupada should be giving *diksa* within ISKCON.

In light of all the above we would humbly suggest that whatever Maharaja's spiritual credentials, and we are sure they exceed our own many times over; as aspiring followers of Srila Prabhupada, wishing to remain chaste to his teachings, His Holiness Narayan Maharaja is not someone we can take guidance from. Respect from a distance has to be the only safe policy in this instance. We hope His Holiness will forgive any offence as none was intended.

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