

a response to: Bhagavan's letter dated Gaura Purnima 2000

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(C.c. Madhya, 24.330, purport)



by Krishnakant

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In a letter dated Gaura Purnima 2000 Bhagavan das, former zonal *acarya*, apologises to all devotees for his past mistakes, from being overly proud to not spending enough time with his kids. Unfortunately he still has yet to come to terms with the biggest mistake of his life, his unauthorised assumption of the post of initiating *diksa* guru. It was this monumental error that actually lead to many of the other offences and mistakes he writes about in his letter. He still believes that somehow or other he was meant to stop acting as a *ritvik* on November 14th 1977, even though there is absolutely no instruction from Srila Prabhupada that he should do so. Here we briefly examine how he rationalises his blunder. We shall quote the relevant sections from his letter boxed followed by our comments.

His departure became somewhat more of a poignant reality when we had the now famous meeting in his room on May 28th, 1977. He began as you all know, by saying that he would name some to act as his officiating *acaryas*, to perform initiations on his behalf while he was alive and ended the short but highly consequential meeting by stressing the creation of his grand disciples, the disciples of his disciple that would be born in his absence.

Above Bhagavan simply fabricates a non-existent conversation. Nowhere did Srila Prabhupada say that the *ritviks* would only function whilst he was 'alive'. The word 'alive' never occurs in the entire conversation. Neither does he ever link the 'creation of his grand disciples' to the issue of his 'absence'. Srila Prabhupada prefaces his mention of 'grand disciples' with the words '**when I order**'; not 'in my absence', or 'when I depart' as anyone can see:

- **Srila Prabhupada: When I order you become guru, he becomes regular guru. That's all. He becomes disciple of my disciple.**

Thus we can see that even after so many years to reflect on his mistakes Bhagavan is still unable to take Srila Prabhupada's instructions directly, without twisting them to his own ends. Srila Prabhupada never said that anyone could become *diksa* guru merely by dint of the fact that he was no longer physically present. He always stressed the point that they could not become *diksa* guru in his presence (there were many ambitious disciples who wanted to) and that before they could they must be strictly obedient and be specifically ordered. Bhagavan goes on:

I must admit that although it was our duty to clarify these very pivotal issues for posterity, to concentrate on asking him these terribly painful questions about what to do if he should no longer be present, was so spiritually borderline, repulsive and bizarre to me, that I found myself in an incredulous state of mind and not fully present. My respects go to Satsvarupa for that burden of responsibility.

Above Bhagavan admits that he was not mentally '*fully present*' during the May 28th conversation. He was not alone in that affliction. Satsvarupa Maharaja for instance, who Bhagavan praises, emerged from the meeting thinking that Srila Prabhupada had just appointed 11 zonal *acaryas*. It was this terrible mistake that wrought havoc on the society forcing away anyone who dared to question what was happening. Bhagavan was perhaps one of the most ruthless and unrelenting of these zonal enforcers. Yet sadly he still seems to think that the mistaken idea that inspired this massive deviation, and ruthless hounding, was in fact correct. He continues:

What I gleaned from the meeting was as follows. Srila Prabhupada would name some older disciples most likely Satsvarupa and Kirtanananda to act as the officiating gurus to perform initiations on his behalf. In his absence they would take the new initiates as their own disciples. Prabhupada had fully trained us that there would be no one *acarya* named but all would work under the Governing Body Commission. That was always a given.

- Bhagavan starts with the words: '*What I gleaned from the meeting was as follows*', yet why would anyone rather hear his '*gleanings*' than read for themselves what Srila Prabhupada actually said?

Indeed we would strongly advise the latter course since Bhagavan once more invents things that do not appear in any of the four different official GBC transcripts of the conversation. Nowhere, for example, does Srila Prabhupada say the words '*in his absence (the ritviks) would take the new initiates as their own disciples*'. This is the same type of speculative wishful thinking that lead to all the deviations, false worship and intimidation that Bhagavan now feels he must apologise for (rather belatedly it might be said). He writes:

Approximately six weeks later, came the letter of July 9th, 1977, approved and signed by our spiritual master. Based on this July 9th letter, we became, on his order, the officiating gurus who would give the spiritual names and final approval for Prabhupada's new initiates.

The letter says nothing about '*officiating gurus*', neither did Srila Prabhupada ever once use this term in any of his books, lectures, morning walks, conversations or management directives. Sticking the word 'guru' in there is simply a fabrication. A fabrication to blur the real issue, the fact that the letter only authorises **ritviks** - nothing more. This stubborn fact simply cannot be pushed aside by such blatant fabrication.

Since my first days as a temple president and GBC in Detroit, we were chanting on beads and performing initiations on his behalf. Later we also chanted the *gayatri mantra* for his new initiates. However, this signed order, officially began the momentum of how initiations would also proceed after his departure: "They are his disciples.....who is initiating..... he is grand-disciple.....when I order....he becomes regular guru."

Above Bhagavan clumsily tries to link different bits of the May 28th conversation to make his case, yet in doing so correctly quotes Srila Prabhupada saying '**when I order**', so he must know deep down that the theoretical emergence of *diksa* gurus was not linked to '*absence*' at all, but rather to an **ORDER**. Bhagavan admits that the July 9th letter sets in place something that would proceed '*after departure*'. Whatever happened after departure must also then be dependent on an **ORDER**. Yet the only **ORDER** is for *ritviks*, not *diksa* gurus, as anyone who reads the directive will see. The July 9th letter is Srila Prabhupada's final **ORDER** on how initiations were to run from that time onwards, and as Bhagavan admits it was nothing particularly new or novel anyway since it was common practice for Srila Prabhupada to employ representatives to chant on beads and perform the ceremony etc. The July 9th directive thus set into a state of perpetuity a practice and way of doing things that everyone accepted as the norm. Please bare this point in mind when we come to what Bhagavan says later:

The bantering back and forth about the room conversation of May 28th and the letter of July 9th will probably go on until all of Prabhupada's disciples die and have gone to the planet of the munis where souls are born with highly developed debate genes.

Of course when Bhagavan joins the fray with his demonstrable fabrications it is not '*bantering back and forth*'. If there is such a planet for persons with highly developed debating skills, it is not somewhere Bhagavan will be visiting in a hurry. He goes on:

Not that it matters to some, but for me, I took the appointment of "officiating guru" in the way Prabhupada said, "... that is formality because in my presence one should not become guru."

As stated previously Srila Prabhupada never says anything about '*officiating guru*'. Also taking a statement in which Srila Prabhupada once more repeats his edict that no-one can be guru in his presence, does not in any way prove that Srila Prabhupada was meant to cease being guru on his departure, or that the *ritviks* must stop being *ritviks* on his departure, or that they could only act on his behalf in his presence. None of these things are stated by Srila Prabhupada, only that there cannot be gurus in his presence, and that *diksa* gurus will only emerge when he '*orders*'. That is all that is said in the conversation.

The argument is that Prabhupada never went beyond the order to become *ritvik*. And so it goes on and on.....

If Bhagavan and his cohorts simply accepted the first sentence above, which is the only position supported by the facts, then no-one would need to go '*on and on*'. We only need to go on and on because people like him insist on fabricating things that Srila Prabhupada never said, and distorting the things he did.

At what point will the *ritvik* proponents allow someone to take their "own" disciples as Prabhupada did? Would it require a unanimous vote?

Above Bhagavan is clearly confused. There is no question of votes being any sort of method for creating new current links to the discipal succession. They come about when an *acarya* in the sacred inviolable succession authorises his successor. He says:

I do not believe for a moment that Prabhupada ever intended to take on disciples after his disappearance i.e. that the officiating *ritvik acaryas* would continue to increase the number of names in his "initiated disciple book". I do not believe he expected a guru pageant where ones spirituality got '10' for being an *uttama*, and could then initiate and have his or her "own" disciples.

- Who cares what Bhagavan '*believes*' with all due respect?

He has already admitted to the most appalling behaviour, he is a committed felon, and even now insists on fabrication and distortion.

- Also who ever suggested the '*guru pageant*' he alludes to above?

Certainly not the IRM. He thus invents a totally ridiculous scenario in order to falsely discredit the correct scenario given by his own Spiritual Master. Bhagavan has the same types of misconceptions over *guru tattva* as the GBC:

As a new parent is expected to evolve to be able to liberate the child, as a new husband and wife are expected to evolve to liberate each other, as friends evolve to enlighten each other, so I believe Prabhupada expected the “new” gurus and their disciples to evolve together in Krishna Consciousness. The question arises, should one initiate disciples and should someone take a guru who is still doing internal work? This is a matter of intelligence and love. It is possible that both teacher and student grow higher and higher together and this I believe is what Prabhupada hoped would take place after his departure.

The above is simply new-age nonsense and is never taught anywhere by Srila Prabhupada. There is no question of a *diksa* guru evolving or growing higher and higher into someone who can eventually give enlightenment. This ‘post-dated cheque’ guru *tattva* was completely rejected by Srila Prabhupada. The *diksa* guru must already be liberated before he occupies the post:

“The guru must be situated on 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)

“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.”

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Bhagavan needs to re-acquaint himself with Srila Prabhupada’s teachings before he writes anything else. He asks:

Is having a child any less of a responsibility than initiating one’s own disciples?

That is why the parent is meant to put their children into ‘*Gurukula*’ (when they are run properly), so the bona fide Guru can instruct them. It is not that the parent himself must be a member of the disciplic succession, but he is responsible for giving his child access to the person who is. For us that person is Srila Prabhupada.

In our line the *siksa* guru is held as most significant. Because Srila Prabhupada was and is the jagat guru and *siksa* guru for all time for the movement he founded, my understanding was that all initiates naturally claimed Prabhupada as their *siksa* guru and were his “grand disciples” as well.

Above Bhagavan falls into the old *siksa diksa* trap.

- Clearly if a guru can give *siksa*, which means to impart *divya jnana* (the main constituent of *diksa*) then why can he not give *diksa*?

How did the idea of zonal *acarya* develop? This idea first came from Prabhupada’s plan that the those wanting to take initiation from him in his final days, should contact the officiating, *ritvik acarya* who was “nearby”. (“.....you divide, who is nearest.”) From there, after his disappearance, the *ritviks*, who under GBC auspices could accept disciples, began by accepting initiates closest to them. The problem came when there was force rather than *bhakti* that directed who they should take initiation from, much the same as when a devotee was pressured to do a service s/he was not inclined to do.

Bhagavan claims the zonal *acarya* system originated from ‘*Prabhupada’s plan*’. This is complete rubbish, nowhere did Srila Prabhupada say anything about the 11 *ritviks* initiating their own disciples, this was ‘*Bhagavan’s plan*’. Whether people were forced or not is irrelevant. The simple fact is they should not have been initiating at all, bas.

On the positive side, in the European and South African zone which I was responsible for, myself and many of the national secretaries, regional secretaries and temple presidents saw the zonal *acarya* system as a means to facilitate co-operation and camaraderie between disciples of diverse countries and cultures, much as Prabhupada did. My idea was to maintain and capture the enthusiasm that Srila Prabhupada began and so expertly channeled to expand ISKCON all over the world. I believe that we were successful in this regards as was apparent in the establishment of inspiring and impressive properties, the creation of thousands of devotees, and the free flow of manpower from one country to another to accomplish large projects.

Above we see Bhagavan proudly basking in those glorious hazy zonal days. His unauthorised worship may have created a false burst of activity, but it was short-lived, and the damage done to the faith of thousands has never been repaired. Rajneesh also had much success, along with the Moonies and many other unauthorised cults and sects. Had he acted as a *ritvik* and achieved all those things then he might have something to feel good about. If a *ritvik* falls down the disciples are still left with their bona fide Spiritual Master, Srila Prabhupada. When Bhagavan ran off with a woman and his ‘*dakshina*’ all he left behind was chaos, confusion and disillusionment. Hardly something to boast about.

A serious gap in detailed information about how to assume the role of a guru within ISKCON was left open which has turned into a full on bible quoting Catholic-Protestant septic schism.

Bhagavan admits that there are no instructions from Srila Prabhupada on how to run a multiple *acarya* successor system. Yet instead of realising the obvious point, that the reason there is no information is because there was never meant to be such a system, he instead implies that Srila Prabhupada accidentally forgot to tell them what to do:

Having recently reread the Declaration of Will of June 4th, 1977 of which I signed as a witness and the Will codicil of November 5th, 1977, I stand amazed that more space, detail and clarity was given to issues of property and how 1,000 Rs (\$75) was to be divided amongst potentially dissident family members than how to perform initiations and have multiple gurus in the face of a potentially large number of dissident members of the ISKCON family. How we allowed these final moments of his personal presence to slip by without milking more detailed answers to quintessential questions needed for the future peace of his spiritual corporation, will always haunt me.

Instead of realising that Srila Prabhupada did not need to rely on some young upstart to *'remind'* him to explain how the movement would go on, Bhagavan insists that the lack of information is all some dreadful oversight. Yet before he admitted that using representatives for initiation was the standard way initiations were done within ISKCON, and the only system left in place by Srila Prabhupada simply carried on that which was standard practice. Thus it is clear Srila Prabhupada left out nothing. He gave all the information we needed to continue initiations, and since in effect nothing was changing there was clearly no need to do any more than he did; which was to issue a clear directive to all his leaders.

- How is this not enough information?

It is only the speculations of ambitious young men anxious to carve up the world for themselves that has obscured Srila Prabhupada's clear instructions for so long. But hopefully not for much longer.

www.iskconirm.com
irm@iskconirm.com