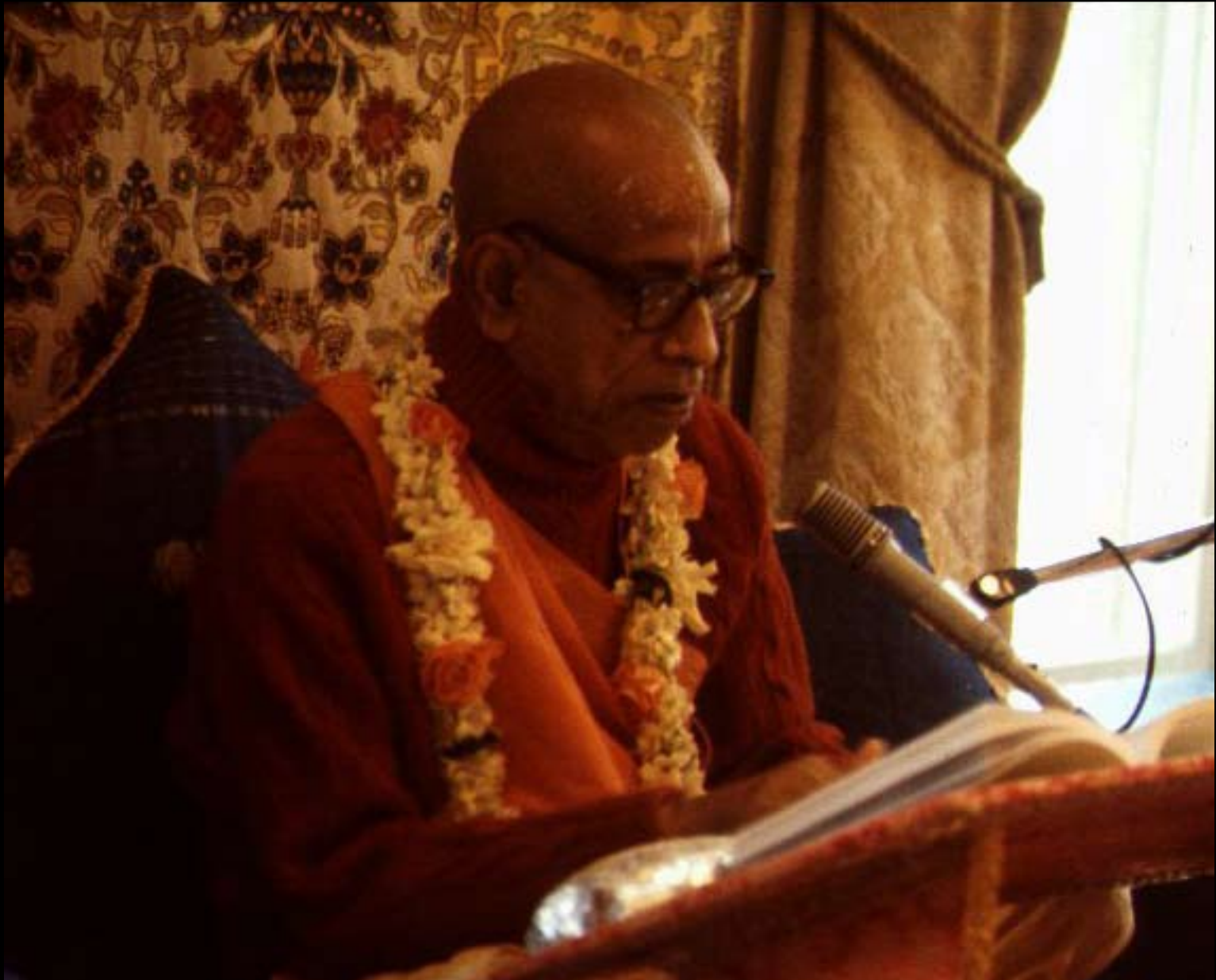


a response to: Sripad Bhakti Bhavana Visnu Maharaja

Illuminating Srila Prabhupada's Order



Illuminating Srila Prabhupada's Order



"After 80 years, no one can be expected to live long. My life is almost ended. So you have to carry on, and these books will do everything."

(SP Room conversation, 18/2/76)



by Krishnakant

Illuminating Srila Prabhupada's Order

a reply to 'Illuminations on Guru Parampara.

An Essay Addressing the *Ritvik* Misconception in light of bona-fide *siddhanta*'

This is in response to the paper -'Illuminations on Guru Parampara. An Essay Addressing the *Ritvik* Misconception in light of bona-fide *siddhanta*' by Sripad Bhakti Bhavana Visnu Maharaja.

The author starts by explaining why it is some people can understand points of *siddhanta*, whilst others cannot:

"Similarly, many devotees are disqualified from understanding finer *siddhantic* truths by virtue of their impurities, material desires, subtle and gross deviations from the strict line of Sri Rupa, and particularly because of their offenses to other Vaisnavas."

We assume the author must believe that he is in a category that can understand these subtler truths, at least as far as the *ritvik*/guru controversy goes. Truths that sadly evade *ritviks* and GBC's alike. The author explains the GBC's shortcomings:

"Nor have they been able to answer the internal *ritvik* challenge and defeat it. Due to iskcon's leaders having made many offenses to higher Vaisnavas, they seem to have lost the *sakti* to deal properly with such challenges to the true line of Gaudiya Vaisnavism"

The irony is that the author uses exactly the same arguments to try to defeat *ritvik* as the GBC. So it is hard to see of what benefit all this higher understanding of '*finer siddhantic truths*' has construed upon him. He even uses the same old quotes that the GBC use, such as the private letter to the ambitious Tusta Krishna that was not published till years after the GBC would have needed to see it, were it to have any direct bearing on this issue. So we shall ignore all the posturing about higher understandings, and simply point out all the inconsistencies and deficiencies that plague every facet of the author's paper, just as they infect the writings of the GBC.

We shall also not be considering any statements from other gurus or previous *acaryas* that have not been mentioned in Srila Prabhupada's books. The reason for this should be obvious. Since we are considering what Srila Prabhupada wanted for ISKCON, it is clearly sensible to start with what he himself taught. As far as we are concerned he is also the current link, from whom everything relating to devotional service, or the message of the *Bhagavatam*, must be primarily understood. If these conditions are not acceptable then there will never be any scope for mutual understanding; we are simply on different planets. Quotes from the author shall be boxed thus "".

It seems the author would have us all going to the Gaudiya Matha for higher guidance, yet it is clear from this article that they have exactly the same misconceptions as the GBC ('living guru' *siksa* vs *diksa*' etc). Indeed, to a large extent they are the source of them, which is why we were warned to respect them from a distance. Excluding the above, the author's main points are as follows:

1. Srila Prabhupada did not leave clear instructions on how initiation would be managed within ISKCON:

"Taking into consideration all the available documents, tapes and instructions of Srila Prabhupada we see that he did not leave clear instructions regarding the managerial aspect of the process of initiation after his departure, although he did give a clear understanding of its spiritual principles."

The above flies in the face of the facts. On July 9th 1977 an order was sent to the entire movement outlining what the system of initiation was to be within ISKCON. This directive was extremely clear, and was addressed to all the movement's managers. The author admits that Srila Prabhupada did indeed establish a *ritvik* system whilst he was present, so something clear and specific must have got through. It is for the author to prove that this clear specific system was meant to stop on Srila Prabhupada's departure. That is how the burden of proof works. It is for him to prove that a system that was established and running within ISKCON should be stopped, not for us to prove that it must continue. That everything should go on as it was established in the Final Will, in the clause stating that the systems of management should not change. Therefore if the author

wants to change something he must provide evidence of authorisation for such change. That authorisation must clearly be of the same magnitude as that which set the system running in the first place. In other words, it must be an order to the entire movement that directly relates to the issue of future initiations. As we shall see, the author falls as short on such evidence as the GBC.

2. "Srila Prabhupada did not appoint any successor *acaryas*."

"We can understand from these statements that it is highly unlikely that Srila Prabhupada would appoint any successor *acaryas*."

We completely agree with the above. Yet it is interesting that Narayan Maharaja, one of the learned advanced Vaisnavas that we are often told to seek guidance from, stated the opposite in the 1990 ISKCON journal. He claims the *ritviks* were appointed to succeed Srila Prabhupada as initiating *acaryas*. We are glad to see the author does not subscribe to such nonsense.

3. "It is also clear from a thorough study of Srila Prabhupada's teachings that he desired that the traditional *parampara* system be followed in his mission, and that his consistent desire is that his disciples initiate disciples when qualified."

We find absolutely no mention of the term '*traditional parampara system*' on folio. The *parampara* system is certainly mentioned, and in no sense does the *ritvik* system violate this. We shall now see what evidence the author can produce relating to this alleged 'desire' for his disciples to initiate 'when qualified':

"I wish that in my absence all my disciples become the bona fide spiritual master to spread Krsna consciousness throughout the whole world.

(SPL Madhusudana, Nov. 2, 1967)"

Bona fide spiritual master can refer equally to *siksa* as *diksa*. The above is also a private letter that was not published till the mid-eighties, and thus can not in itself be used to stop the *ritvik* system that was up and running in 1977.

"Regarding your question about the disciplic succession coming down from Arjuna, it is just like I have got my disciples, so in the future these many disciples may have many branches of disciplic succession.

(Los Angeles, 25 January, 1969)"

In the above private letter to Kirtananda, Srila Prabhupada is simply giving an example to illustrate a point- '*it is just like*'. Clearly he is not giving an order here, or saying that this is what will happen. Again this letter was not published till years after it would have been needed by the GBC in order to stop the *ritvik* system on his departure.

"Every one of you should be spiritual master next.

(Hamburg, September 5, 1969)"

The phrase Spiritual Master can equally refer to *siksa* as the following quote demonstrates:

'There are two kinds of instructing spiritual masters. One is the liberated person fully absorbed in meditation in devotional service, and the other is he who invokes the disciple's spiritual consciousness by means of relevant instructions.'

(Adi, 1:47)

"These students, who are initiated from me, all of them will act as I am doing. Just like I have got many God-brothers, they are all acting.

Similarly, all these disciples which I am making, initiating, they are being trained to become future spiritual masters.

(RC Detroit, July 18, 1971)"

The above conversation with a one-off student visitor to the temple was not discovered until just two years ago. That is twenty years too late to have any direct bearing on this issue. Also it is clear Srila Prabhupada is just giving a general picture since he had also said he did not think any of his Godbrothers were actually qualified to be *acarya*.

"You, all my disciples, everyone should become spiritual master.

(London, August 22, 1973)"

As before, spiritual master need not necessarily means *diksa* guru.

"Every student is expected to become *acarya*. *Acarya* means one who knows the scriptural injunctions and follows them practically in life, and teaches them to his disciples. I want to see my disciples become bona fide

Spiritual Master and spread Krishna consciousness very widely, that will make me and Krishna very happy. Keep trained up very rigidly and then you are bonafide Guru, and you can accept disciples on the same principle. But as a matter of etiquette it is the custom that during the lifetime of your Spiritual master you bring the prospective disciples to him, and in his absence or disappearance you can accept disciples without any limitation.

This is the law of disciplic succession.

(SPL Tusta Krsna, December 2, 1975)"

This private letter was not published until the mid-eighties, and therefore, in itself, could not be used as a reason to stop a system that was set up to run globally in 1977.

Furthermore the letter was sent to an ambitious disciple who was also a follower of Siddhasvarupa, and thus the circumstances were not generally applicable. Such a *'law of disciplic succession'* is not mentioned in any of Srila Prabhupada's books, nor did Srila Bhaktisiddhanta follow it. Generally Srila Prabhupada invoked it when dealing with neophyte devotees who were anxious to initiate even when he was still present.

We note that the author has not found any instruction that supports his position unambiguously from Srila Prabhupada's books, or instructions to the whole society.

Furthermore such evidence as has been offered can be easily countered by the following quotes where Srila Prabhupada is specifically asked about who would succeed him:

Guest: Are you planning to choose a successor?

Srila Prabhupada: It is already successful.

Guest: But there must be somebody you know, needed to handle the thing.

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. That we are creating. We are creating these devotees who will handle.

Hanuman: One thing he's saying, this gentlemen, and I would like to know, is your successor named or your successor will...

Srila Prabhupada: My success is always there.

(SP Room conversation, 12/2/75 Mexico)

"So there is nothing to be said new. Whatever I have to speak, I have spoken in my books. Now you try to understand it and continue your endeavor. Whether I am present or not present it doesn't matter."

(SP Arrival conversation, 17/5/77, Vrindavan)

Reporter: What will happen to the movement in the United States when you die?

Srila Prabhupada: I will never die Devotees: Jaya! Haribol! (laughter) I will live from my books and you will utilise.

(SP Press Conference, 16/7/75, San Francisco)

Reporter: Are you training a successor?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, my Guru Maharaja is there.

(SP Press conference, 16/7/75, San Francisco)

"Only Lord Caitanya can take my place. He will take care of the Movement."

(SP Room conversation, 2/11/77)

Interviewer: What happens when that inevitable time comes a successor is needed.

Ramesvara: He is asking about the future, who will guide the Movement in the future.

Srila Prabhupada: They will guide, I am training them.

Interviewer: Will there be one spiritual leader though?

Srila Prabhupada: No. I am training GBC, 18 all over the world.

(SP Interview, 10/6/76, Los Angeles)

Notice Srila Prabhupada says nothing about his disciples going on to succeed him as initiator *acaryas*. There are other points on all these quotes that were made in response to the GBC. We suggest the author reads *'Institutional Cataclysm'* and our response to *'Prabhupada's Order'*.

4. The 'amara ajnaya' verse where Lord Chaitanya orders everyone to become guru is somehow linked to the 'yei krsna-tattva' in such a way that the order is for everyone to become diksa guru.

"Srla Prabhupada, quoting his Guru Maharaja, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura, writes very clearly that the order of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is for everyone to become spiritual master (*yare dekhi tare kaha krsna upadesa amara ajnaya guru hana tare ei desa*) and that one is qualified to become guru if he knows the science of Krsna consciousness (*yei krsna-tattva vetta sei guru haya*)."

We need to unpack the above. These are two entirely different verses that deal with two entirely separate issues. In the purports following the 'amara' verse Srila Prabhupada states:

'it is best not to accept any disciples.'

(C.c.Madhya 7.130 purport).

Thus clearly this order, as relayed to us by Srila Prabhupada, is not for everyone to become *diksa* guru. The other verse deals with the *Smarta* misconception, and is very important since Srila Prabhupada himself was from a *vaisya* family. Not that we are all automatically instructed to become *diksa* guru.

"The word guru [in this verse, *yei krsna-tattva sei guru haya*] is equally applicable to *vartma-pradarsaka-guru*, *siksa-guru* and *diksa-guru*. Unless we accept the principle enunciated by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, this Krsna consciousness movement cannot spread all over the world.

(C.c. Madhya-lila 8.128, purp.)"

Srila Prabhupada thus authorises all his disciples to become *vartma pradarsaka* and eventually *siksa* guru, whilst he remain the *diksa* guru. The movement could not spread without this allowance for people born in lower than Brahmin caste to become gurus of whatever the applicable category may be. If Lord Caitanya had already authorised everyone to become *diksa* guru 500 years ago then the following statement in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* would be redundant:

'...in order to receive the real message of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* one should approach the current link, or spiritual master, in the chain of disciplic succession.'

(S.B. 2.9.7, purport)

5. Siksa, or the transfer of transcendental knowledge, is the most essential aspect of the guru disciple relationship.

"Regarding the guru-disciple relationship, *siksa* is the most essential element: the transferal of transcendental knowledge (*divya-jnanam*) comprises the essence of initiation."

We completely agree with the above. According to the GBC Srila Prabhupada is the *siksa* guru for everyone for as long as ISKCON exists. This must be the case since everyone is getting *siksa* from his books. Of course they are not just reading books of knowledge, they are absorbing the lucid purports and practicing strictly the rules and regulations etc. The author has been caught in his own logistical trap; for if he concedes that Srila Prabhupada can still impart *siksa* (transcendental knowledge) without being physically present, then he must accept he can be the *diksa* guru. This is because he has already stated that *siksa* is the most 'essential element'. If the most essential element of *diksa* is still available from Srila Prabhupada, then clearly the author should have no problem with the *ritvik* system.

"This substantial *siksa* is essential to help one extract and understand the teachings of Srila Prabhupada and the previous *acaryas*."

Srila Prabhupada is already giving the *siksa*, this is accepted. If someone is having a problem then a more learned Godbrother can point him in the right direction by showing him where Srila Prabhupada deals with such an issue. But that is *vartma pradarsaka* guru, not *diksa*.

"Further, it is the injunction of the Bhakti-sandarbha of Sri Jiva Goswami that only one on the transcendental platform can associate with a non-manifest personality."

We would need to see what Srila Prabhupada says about this alleged injunction.

"Srila Prabhupada is always with the sincere disciple in the form of his instructions, but the degree to which we are able to associate with him is limited by our degree of realization."

But that is the case whether he is physically present or not. And as Srila Prabhupada always taught, physical presence is irrelevant to the guru disciple relationship:

"Physical presence is not important." (SP Room conversation, 6/10/77, Vrindavan)

or

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

Of course, we must have a guru who is external, since in the conditioned stage pure reliance on the Supersoul is not possible, but nowhere does Srila Prabhupada teach that this physical guru must also be physically present:

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

6. “Everything is in Srila Prabhupada’s books, and when properly understood, these books are sufficient in themselves for one to advance in Krsna consciousness and attain perfection.”

We completely agree with the above. That is why we are disinclined to read anyone else’s books. If one does, then one must be very careful to make sure Srila Prabhupada gives the same teaching, otherwise if he acts on separate instruction his behavior is most sinful.

7. “Srila Prabhupada mentions instructions for a number of essential areas of devotional service only in seed form, and we submit that he does have his reasons which are not always revealed to his disciples in their neophyte stages. An advanced Vaisnava is needed to help us in our progress beyond the neophyte stage we require specific instructions for our specific questions.”

The above contradicts the assertion made in point 6. We do not need to go outside of Srila Prabhupada’s teachings for our spiritual life. We thought this was conceded. Now the author is backtracking. We may need advice from a senior devotee in how to apply and where to study, but that does not mean Srila Prabhupada is not our *diksa* guru.

When Srila Prabhupada was here he wanted devotee’s everyday ‘specific questions’ to be answered by his TP’s, Bhakta Leaders and Sanyasis etc; but all the time he remained the sole *Diksa* Guru. We are suggesting that this situation should have continued.

8. Srila Prabhupada was not bothered if ISKCON was dissolved:

‘We are not attached to any organization,’ he said. ‘It is an instrument we will use and if it becomes troublesome we will dissolve it and go on chanting Hare Krsna.

(Acyutananda dasa, letter to Gaudiya Magazine, 1994)”

We do not accept such hearsay evidence. There is nothing on folio to this effect.

9. The ritvik system must be wrong since it is unprecedented.

“There is not a single example in our *sampradaya* nor by any of our *acaryas*, nor any other bonafide *sampradaya* where devotees take initiation from a guru by proxy after he has left this world.”

Before we can even entertain such an objection we need to see evidence that the objection itself is bona fide.

- Where did Srila Prabhupada ever say that the order of the guru can be ignored or disobeyed just because an identical order was not issued at some point in the past?

As we have explained many times, *ritvik* does not violate any *sastric* injunction. The use of priests to give names etc is merely a detail of the *diksa* process, and *Acaryas* are fully at liberty to change such details:

“Srimad Viraraghava Acarya, an acarya in the disciplic succession of the Ramanuja-sampradaya, has remarked in his commentary that *candalas*, or conditioned souls who are born in lower than *sudra* families, can also be initiated according to circumstances. The formalities may be slightly changed here and there to make them Vaisnavas.”

(S.B. 4.8.5, purport)

10. Srila Bhaktivinoda gives an example of an apasampradaya that is ideologically close to ritvik.

“Bhaktivinoda Thakura has mentioned thirteen *apasampradayas* that deviate from the strict line of Sri Caitanya. The *ritvik* conception is ideologically closest to the Kartabhaja *apasampradaya*; one of these thirteen:

In Bangladesh, a new version of the Kartabhaja sect was founded by one Anukul Chandra. Posing himself as a Supreme Lord, Anukul Chandra has been worshipped by his followers as such.”

Firstly we do not jump over Srila Prabhupada in order to find reasons to justify not following one of his direct orders. Secondly the example is nothing like the *ritvik* system Srila Prabhupada established since:

1.. The guru was claiming to be God Himself.

2.. The guru was thus bogus.

3.. Any type of initiation he did would thus also be bogus.

11. "The underlying diseased vision of the *ritvik* idea, that all are equally unqualified, is a sign of crippled faith in the process of Krsna consciousness."

We have never said anything like the above. Thus the author is merely insulting us without justification, the very thing he is supposed to be aloof from.

12. "To categorically reject all members of the Gaudiya Matha based on particular statements of twenty years past, without a proper look at their individual spiritual qualifications, is foolish, offensive and diametrically opposed to an honest endeavor to find the truth in a spiritually dynamic way."

Srila Prabhupada also writes about the Gaudiya Matha's deviations in his books, which shall be the law for ten thousand years to come.

13. "If we listen to the *ritvik* proponents, they will tell us even to reject the words of Jiva Goswami (*Sat-sandarbh*) and Bhaktivinoda Thakura (*Harinama Cintamani*) when they don't agree with their particular ideology. They argue that Srila Prabhupada did not present the points illuminated by these *acaryas*, therefore we can never consider them valid."

It is quite clear from all the above that the author still has a very poor grasp of Srila Prabhupada's instructions and teachings, and yet he is very eager to jump over to previous *acaryas*. He would be advised to start by trying to get to grips with his own guru's teachings. We do not reject any previous *acarya*; we just understand them through the current link. To do otherwise is very sinful.

14. "The deliberate attempt to create and maintain Vaisnavas on the plane of lower *adhikari* (*kanistha adhikari*) as is the case in iskcon and among *ritvik vadis*, is a symptom of the incapacity to surrender and reach a higher plane of self abnegation, the plane where the greatest necessity is being served."

Since we are not trying to do this, and have never written anything like this, we have no idea what the author is talking about. We are quite happy for everyone to become disciples of the topmost platform. And if they are on this platform they will want to follow Srila Prabhupada's direct order, rather than try to come up with every possible lame excuse under the sun why not to.

In Conclusion

Given the author's strong recommendation to take *siksa* from senior members of the Gaudiya Matha, we must assume that he has taken full advantage of such instruction himself. Yet in spite of this it is clear he has not the slightest grasp of the issues, nor of Srila Prabhupad's teachings on how initiation should continue within his society, nor of basic aspects of *guru tattva*. The author is all too ready to go anywhere and everywhere in his single-minded attempt to justify yet another deviation from a bona fide *acarya's* instructions (the Gaudiya Matha having already gone against the orders of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta and then failing to recognise or surrender to his clear successor). We hope he will reconsider his position in light of the above.

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