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**The Rival Positions in the
IRM-GBC Controversy
within ISKCON**

**Authorised statements by
KRISHNAKANT DESAI
and
CHRISTOPHER SHANNON**

**edited by
RAHUL PETER DAS**

Halle (Saale) 2006

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am

Institut für Indologie und
Südasienwissenschaften

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Editor's Introduction

Studying various religious groups in Bengal which require initiation and guidance through a preceptor, I had found that, regardless of the classification of such groups as “Hindu”, “Muslim” or something else, as a common characteristic they seemed to share the notion of the divine status of this preceptor. In the given contexts this also made sense, for in groups such as those analysed by me, what is ultimately striven for is the realisation or achievement of the oneness of macrocosm and microcosm through mental or physical means; so the preceptor cannot serve his function unless himself characterised by such oneness, as one cannot teach what one does not know. But being one with the macrocosm can be seen as being this macrocosm itself in some way — as its part, its manifestation, or the like, or even without further qualification.

However, it seems that this notion of the oneness of preceptor and what we may, perhaps, call the cosmic principle, is also found in groups which do not necessarily belong to the same category as those which I have personally studied. In these cases too, the ways in which this oneness is conceived varies. Graham M. Schweig has attempted to describe this variety in the following manner:¹

God and the soul combine in their own ways within the archetype of the spiritual guide. For both, the spiritual master is a type of extraordinary confluence of divinity and humanity, as each tradition exalts ways in which the guide becomes directly and effectively the grace of God in the flesh.

This is, of course, not the only possible mode of looking at the matter. Thus, Śaktināth Jhā writes on certain Vaiṣṇava groups in Murshidabad District of West Bengal that call themselves, according to Jhā, *rāgānugā* and *anumān'panthī*²; though they respect Kṛṣṇa, Caitanya and the Gosvā-

¹ “Viśvanātha's *Gurvaṣṭakam* and the Understanding of Guru in Chaitanyaite Vaishnavism”, *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 12,1 (Fall 2003): 113-126. Quote from pp. 124f.

² In the transliteration adopted here, written, but not spoken *a* is denoted by a raised stroke (◌̣), except at the end of a word, where it is disregarded; a *virāma*-sign in the original is denoted by a raised dot (◌̣). In the following standpoints, by contrast, New Indo-Aryan is treated like Old Indo-Aryan, i.e. pronunciation is disregarded.

mins, their own preceptor (*guru*) is regarded as the living God.³ This is in keeping with what seems to be the prevailing view in various Vaiṣṇava groups of the Bengali speaking region. But the details of the individual systematics vary, for instance with regard to the question of whether the preceptor is directly the divinity or a channel for the latter to reveal itself. But despite such differences in detail, the predominantly accepted status accorded the preceptor seems to be in some way or the other divine, which has led Måns Broo to attempt an overarching characterisation of this phenomenon in Gauṛīya⁴ Vaiṣṇavism by characterising the preceptor as being “as good as God”.⁵

How widespread similar beliefs are may be illustrated most tellingly by an example found in a booklet elucidating doctrines of the Ānanda Mārga group. This states (in Sanskrit⁶) that the *guru* is the Highest Principle, here called *īśvara*, *parameśvara*, *bhagavat*, *saguṇabrahman*, *nirguṇa[brahman]*, *hari* and *mahādeva*,⁷ and this is further explained in a Hindi commentary which makes it clear that all this is meant literally: because the *guru* is himself the Highest Principle (*svayaṃ bhag'vān*), whose power (*śakti*) is *prakṛti*,⁸ he is omnipotent (*sarv śaktimān*).⁹ Later

³ “Murśidābād jelār baiṣṇab dharmer itibṛtta”, in: Pratibhārañjan Maitra (ed.), *Murśidābād carcā*. Khāg'ra/Baharam'pur/Murśidābād: Murśidābād Carcā Kendra 1395 (Beng. Era), pp. 93-122. Quote from p. 110: *kṛṣṇa, caitanya, gosbāmīder śraddhā kar'leo nijaguru jībanta īśbar hisābe e dhārāy' grhīta o mānya hay*.

⁴ This is the Bengali form, deemed appropriate here because of the connection of this form of Vaiṣṇavism with Bengal and Bengali; the more commonly used Sanskrit form is Gauḍīya.

⁵ Måns Broo: *As Good as God. The Guru in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*. Åbo: Åbo Akademis Förlag 2003. Broo has, of course, utilised the older secondary literature on this subject, so that there is no need to discuss or list this here.

⁶ Which, as in much of the publication, is faulty.

⁷ Ācārya Samanvayānand Av'dhūt: *Guru-tattvam*. Kal'kattā: Ānand Mārg Pracārak Saṃgh 1991, pp. 6f.

⁸ Given the so-called tantric nature of the group in question, and the fact that some of its doctrines are secret, *prakṛti* could be ambiguous.

⁹ Op.cit., p. 9.

on in the same text, explicating the Sanskrit statement that the *guru* is Brahman himself/itself¹⁰, the Hindi commentary states that Brahman, after having created, takes human shape to impart knowledge and be active for the good of humankind, namely in the form of the *sadguru*, who is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent.¹¹ In fact, the latter is everything,¹² and when one attains him, one attains the Highest Principle.¹³

There are various other similar statements in this booklet, but these examples — which one could easily cull from sources of other traditions too¹⁴ — should suffice as an illustration of what I mean. I was thus intrigued when I came across an article which appeared to be referring to the possibility of being appointed a *guru* within ISKCON by a process which could be described as consensual or democratic, since this seemed not to be in keeping with what I had come across so far.¹⁵ On an impulse, I wrote a letter to the editor of the journal in question setting forth my difficulties with reconciling these two views, and also voicing my inter-

¹⁰ We have here the masculine nominative *brahmaḥ*. Is this wrong for the masculine nominative *brahmā*, or a mistake for the neuter nominative *brahma*?

¹¹ Op.cit., pp. 40f.: *brahm ne sṛṣṭi sarjan kiyā. to jñān dene ke liye, parā jñān tathā aparājñān kā ucit jñān dene ke liye, tathā mānav kalyāṇ, jīv kalyāṇ kā kārya sārva-bhaum rūp meṃ kar'ne ke liye samkalp lekar ve mānav śarīr dhāraṇ kar'te haiṃ. is'liye sad'guru śarīr'dhārī brahm hī haiṃ. ve sarv'jña, sarv'saktimān tathā sarv'vyāpak haiṃ. is'liye jo un'kī prāpti ke liye jahā cēṣṭā kareṃge, vahīṃ un'kī anubhūti prāpti kareṃge.* Note that the Hindi text presupposes either the masculine Sanskrit nominative *brahmaḥ* mentioned in the last note (with the nominative ending *-ḥ* elided, as usual in masculine Sanskrit loanwords ending on *-a*), or else the neuter form. Similar ambiguous usages of *brahm* are found several times in the booklet.

¹² *tantr sād'h'nā meṃ guru hī sab kuch haiṃ* (p. 41).

¹³ *sadguru'prāpti[r] hi bhagavat'prāptiḥ* (loc.cit.). This is explicated by repeating that the *guru* is Brahman in human form (pp. 41f.: *brahm hī brahm sād'h'nā kī śikṣā dene ke liye manusya śarīr dhāraṇ kar'te haiṃ. ...sad'guru aur bhag'vān ek hī haiṃ*).

¹⁴ An interesting example is found in a Bengali song by Hāure, used by the Kartābhajās: *guru thāken sahasrāre, – ṣaṭ-cakra upare* “The guru resides in the Sahasrāra [within the human body], on top of the six *cakras*”. See Adbaita Candra Dās: *Śrī satīmā candrikā*. Kalikātā: Phārmā KeEIEem 1986, p. 87.

¹⁵ “Panel Discussion: ‘Can Cultic Groups Change: The Case of ISKCON’”, *ISKCON Communications Journal* 7,2 (December 1999): 41-52; see p. 44.

est in knowing how what I perceived to be a problem was being solved within ISKCON. After some time the editor wrote to me asking if I had any objection to Hridayananda Dasa Goswami writing an article explicitly in response to my query. Since I knew Hridayananda Dasa Goswami (Howard J. Resnick) to be not only a senior leader within ISKCON, but also an intellectual with academic credentials, who had, moreover, also been a most gracious host to me on one of my lecture tours in California some years ago, I gladly consented.

When the article appeared,¹⁶ however, I realised that matters were much more complicated than I had taken them to be. For my questions seemed to have touched a very sensitive spot within ISKCON, and thus the article was not so much an answer to my query as a refutation of its premises and deductions. I at once saw that this would make it appear as if I had challenged one party in what was clearly an ongoing dispute, and therefore made haste to issue a clarification, which the journal published,¹⁷ to the effect that a rather personal and off-the-cuff query had here become part of a controversy and thus assumed an importance it was not meant to have. How necessary this clarification was has subsequently been demonstrated by several articles and statements, some of which can still be found on the internet, in which my query has transmuted into a “challenge” to the doctrines held by the opponent.

Curious to know more, I began researching into the matter, and soon came across the controversy, between the ISKCON Revival Movement (IRM) and the Governing Body Commission (GBC), on authority within ISKCON. This led into what seemed at times a veritable maze: of various claims, statements and accusations; of alleged skulduggery, forgery of documents, strong-arm tactics and other misdeeds including attempted and actual murder, poisoning and rape; of extensive publicity in the media in various quarters of the world; of court cases; and of rights to property and assets of great value — all apart from the more fundamental question of authority in spiritual matters.

¹⁶ Hṛdayānanda Dāsa Gosvāmī: “The Role of the Guru in a Multi-Guru Society”, *ISKCON Communications Journal* 8,1 (June 2000): 45-53.

¹⁷ “Disclaimer by Rahul Peter Das”, *ISKCON Communications Journal* 8,2 (March 2001): 89.

But I soon found that it was not easy to come across clear statements on the core doctrinal issues involved in this ongoing dispute, which made it difficult for an outsider like me to comprehend it. I also began to suspect that even within ISKCON some might have difficulties in this regard. I thus approached both the IRM and the GBC with the request to set forth what they see as the fundamental issues, and their respective positions on these, for a general readership possibly ignorant of all the relevant intricacies, but nevertheless desirous to understand the issue. Happily, both sides acquiesced; their respective statements, edited by me, have been scrutinised and, after several revisions, passed by the respective authorities, and are now available for public perusal.¹⁸

Before I now leave the reader to study these statements, I would like to remark on one important notion that might be helpful in understanding some of the arguments in what follows, but may seem rather unfamiliar if one does not approach these arguments from within South Asian religious traditions. This is the notion of persons with special faculties being able to transfer themselves at will from one sphere or reality to another, and of being able to act or exert influence regardless of where they actually are at any given moment. Famous preceptors of various traditions are prominent examples of persons held to have such powers.

ISKCON too bears witness to the notion of existence in alternative spheres or realities; a common term used within ISKCON to describe these is “planet”.¹⁹ Moreover, ISKCON texts also relate of beings capable of moving from one such sphere or reality to another.

It is, however, possible to go even further. I shall demonstrate this by

¹⁸ One might take this readiness to cooperate with an outsider like me, and to make the internal debate more public, as further evidence of the change within ISKCON towards more interaction with its surroundings, in accordance with the “paradigm shift” Federico Squarcini has described in his “In Search of Identity within the Hare Krishna Movement: Memory, Oblivion and Thought Style”, *Social Compass* 47,2 (2000): 253-271.

¹⁹ Further information on multiple realities, as well as bibliographic references, can be found in Rahul Peter Das: “Stranger in a Strange Land”, in: Renata Czekalska, Halina Marlewicz (eds.), *2nd International Conference on Indian Studies. Proceedings*. Cracow Indological Studies 4-5. Kraków: Jagiellonian University, Institute of Oriental Philology 2003, pp. 153-177.

drawing attention once again to the Ānanda Mārga booklet already cited. This states unequivocally that the *guru* can be present everywhere through his divine (*divya*) or subtle (*sūkṣma*) body (*śarīra*), and thus care for the disciple (p. 10). The text further explicates on how the *guru* only occasionally shows himself on earth in an earthly body, but is always present in other forms, especially in an “astral body” (the English words are used).²⁰

I have adduced this example because the Ānanda Mārga grouping too is an internationally active religious movement, well known not only in South Asia, but also in other parts of the world. Though the particulars of, and deductions from, the basic notion underlying this example are not necessarily the same as in the traditions of other religious movements, it nevertheless demonstrates quite well what consequences for doctrinal issues may result from the application of the notion of abiding in various spheres or realities.

The extent to which the notion mentioned is relevant to the controversy between the IRM and the GBC, I leave to the reader to discern, particularly as regards the idea of being active in one sphere or reality while being present in another. For those dealing professionally with the analysis of notions originating in South Asia, the matter remains intriguing regardless of the extent of relevance, especially since suddenly the supposedly “exotic” turns out to be no longer so: like the Ānanda Mārga, ISKCON too is an international organisation whose issues impinge also on societies outside South Asia, even if this be only to a limited extent. The wall of exoticism often separating the non-South Asian researcher on South Asia from the object of study is thus suddenly found to have been breached, even if only a little.

There is another notion alluded to in the following, which might strike some as difficult to comprehend. It is that of the transference from the devotee to the preceptor of what, for lack of a better terminology, is often called “sin” in English. This too is, however, nothing peculiar to ISKCON. In fact, the belief in such transference is so common that I can

²⁰ Cf. in the booklet, e.g., pp. 39ff. and 58ff., the latter with particular reference to the departure of Ānandamūrti (Bābā).

dispense with references to normative ritual, legal or similar texts, but quote, instead, from a description of beliefs in a contemporary North Indian rural setting:²¹

Just as the sins of a family are ultimately the responsibility of the head, so too the sins of the village are the responsibility of the dominant caste, in this case the Brahman landlords. Here again individuality is muted. Whereas an individual can sin and hence affect his own life course by altering his destiny (*karma*), he also alters that of his family, lineage, caste, and village, for an individual is not a unique entity but shares substance and moral codes with all of those with whom he or she is related, in ever larger circles. All those belonging to the nation of India also share in the same way.

In this case too, it thus pays to look at the larger South Asian context out of which ISKCON developed.

Finally, I wish to reiterate here that it is only professional interest which has led me to embark upon this enterprise of requesting the proponents of the two rivalling views on legitimacy within ISKCON to submit their respective authoritative statements for public scrutiny. No overt or covert sympathy for any one of the sides involved in the dispute is to be deduced from this endeavour.

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²¹ Susan S. Wadley: “One Straw from a Broom Cannot Sweep: The Ideology and Practice of the Joint Family in Rural North India”, in: Diane P. Mines, Sarah Lamb (eds.), *Everyday Life in South Asia*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2002, pp. 11-22. Quote from p. 18.

**The Evidence for
Srla Prabhupada's Position as the
Initiating Spiritual Master
in ISKCON**

Krishnakant Desai

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The Dispute

The dispute centres on what system His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (henceforth Srila Prabhupada) gave for the process of spiritual initiation (diksa, in Sanskrit *dīkṣā*) within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), the movement he founded.

The current Governing Body Commission (GBC) of ISKCON maintains that Srila Prabhupada ordered his own disciples to succeed him as diksa-gurus after his departure, whereas the Reformists (or Revivalists, as they prefer to be called), under the leadership of the ISKCON Revival Movement (IRM), contend that the system that was put in place for ISKCON just before Srila Prabhupada's departure should have continued to be followed.

The Evidence

July 9, 1977 Management Directive

The IRM points to the last signed directive from Srila Prabhupada on the matter of spiritual initiation, dated July 9, 1977. Appendix 1 contains a reproduction of the original of this directive,¹ whose authenticity and authority are accepted on both sides of the dispute; a transcript of the text is given below:

July 9th, 1977

To All G.B.C., and Temple Presidents

Dear Maharajas and Prabhus,

Please accept my humble obeisances at your feet. Recently when all of the GBC members were with His Divine Grace in Vrndavana, Srila Prabhupad indicated that soon He would appoint some of His senior disciples to act as “rittik” — representative of the acarya, for the purpose of performing initiations, both first initiation and second initiation. His Divine Grace has so far given a list of eleven disciples who will act in that capacity:

His Holiness Kirtanananda Swami
His Holiness Satsvarupa das Gosvami
His Holiness Jayapataka Swami
His Holiness Tamal Krsna Gosvami
His Holiness Hrdayananda Gosvami
His Holiness Bhavananda Gosvami
His Holiness Hamsadutta Swami
His Holiness Ramesvara Swami
His Holiness Harikesa Swami
His Grace Bhagavan das Adhikari
His Grace Jayatirtha das Adhikari

In the past Temple Presidents have written to Srila Prabhupad recommending a particular devotee’s initiation. Now that Srila Prabhupad has named these representatives, Temple Presidents may henceforward send

¹ See PRABHUPADA 1997, 77-07-09.

recommendation for first and second initiation to whichever of these eleven representatives are nearest their temple. After considering the recommendation, these representatives may accept the devotee as an initiated disciple of Srila Prabhupad by giving a spiritual name, or in the case of second initiation, by chanting on the Gayatri thread, just as Srila Prabhupad has done. The newly initiated devotees are disciples of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupad, the above eleven senior devotees acting as His representative. After the Temple President receives a letter from these representatives giving the spiritual name or the thread, he can perform the fire yajna in the temple as was being done before. The name of a newly initiated disciple should be sent by the representative who has accepted him or her to Srila Prabhupad, to be included in [His] Divine Grace's "Initiated Disciples" book.

Hoping this finds you all well.

Your servant,

(Signature)

Tamal Krsna Gosvami

Secretary to Srila Prabhupad

Approved

(Srila Prabhupada's signature)

The management directive above, issued to all the leaders of the movement, formalised and extended the system of initiation that was already in place at the time, via the deployment of ceremonial priests or ritviks (Sanskrit stem-form *ṛtvij*, nominative *ṛtvik*), who were to give initiation on Srila Prabhupada's behalf from that time onwards.

Srila Prabhupada stated in his Final Will² (which again is accepted as authentic by both sides):

The system of management will continue as it is now and there is no need of any change.

The ritvik system was undeniably a part of that management system, and thus the Revivalists argue that it should not have been changed or terminated. However, immediately on Srila Prabhupada's departure (November 14, 1977) the GBC suspended this ritvik system and introduced the "Zonal Acarya System", whereby the eleven ritviks appointed in the

² PRABHUPADA 1977; see Appendix 2 for a reproduction of the original.

directive cited above suddenly became powerful gurus, who divided the world into separate geographical zones and initiated thousands of disciples on their *own* behalf. This system was replaced in the mid-eighties with the “Multiple Acarya Successor System” (or M.A.S.S.) wherein it was now taught by the GBC that *all* of Srila Prabhupada’s disciples could become diksa-gurus as long as they acquired a majority “no objection vote” from them.

As stated, the Revivalists maintain that the ritvik system, as outlined in the directive above, should have continued unchanged, and this being the case, both the Zonal Acarya and M.A.S.S. guru systems are deviations from the original order of the Founder-Acarya (guru). In their view, Srila Prabhupada should have remained the sole initiating diksa-guru within ISKCON, with his disciples acting as siksa³-gurus; that is, in an “instructing” capacity only.

The reason this issue is so important is because the diksa-guru is authorised to initiate his own disciples, receiving good-as-God worship from them, whereas the siksa-guru (even if on the same spiritual platform as the diksa-guru) simply instructs and acts as a humble assistant to the diksa-guru. The Revivalists contend that the eighty or so ISKCON gurus, who are currently enjoying diksa-guru status, are acting illegally, and the IRM has recently launched a High Court action in Calcutta, where the GBC is officially registered as a society, against all the ISKCON gurus. Hence the dispute has now become legal as well as theological.

It is the ISKCON gurus and their supporters who have been controlling most of ISKCON since 1978. Revivalists point to a whole history of decline and scandal since Srila Prabhupada departed, and see this as being due to disobeying Srila Prabhupada’s orders via the establishment within the institution of an unauthorised system of competing gurus, all selfishly vying for control over people and assets at the expense of the overall mission. The Revivalists maintain that a return to the original ritvik system, with Srila Prabhupada as the sole diksa-guru, would help restore ISKCON back to its former glory, purity and philosophical chastity, and realign it with Srila Prabhupada’s original intentions.

³ Sanskrit *sīkṣā*.

Further Evidence from the Will

Srila Prabhupada's Final Will also states the following in regard to the procedure for selecting future executive directors for ISKCON's large permanent projects in India, which were expected to last for thousands of years (PRABHUPADA 1977; italics added):

... a *successor director* or directors may be appointed by the remaining directors, provided the new director is *my initiated disciple* ...

A future director for these properties could be Srila Prabhupada's "initiated disciple" only if the July 9, 1977 directive continued to be applied in ISKCON, otherwise the pool of Srila Prabhupada's initiated disciples, and hence potential directors, would eventually dry up, since no more initiated disciples of Srila Prabhupada would have been produced. Thus this clause from the Will proves that Srila Prabhupada had intended that, via the ritvik system, he would have continued to initiate many more disciples and thus remain the diksa-guru for ISKCON.

Further Evidence from the Books

Srila Prabhupada's books also indicate that the ritvik system of initiation, as stated in the July 9, 1977 directive, should be followed in ISKCON. The procedure for conducting initiations in ISKCON is specifically mentioned only three times in Srila Prabhupada's books. (This is excluding the numerous references to the general principles of guru-disciple relationships, the meaning of initiation, or the rules and regulations required to be followed by initiates). Here are the three references:

Thus in the beginning the students of our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement agree to live with devotees, and gradually, having given up four prohibited activities — illicit sex, gambling, meat-eating and intoxication — they become advanced in the activities of spiritual life. When one is found to be regularly following these principles, he is given the first initiation (*hari-nāma*), and he regularly chants at least sixteen rounds a day. Then, after six months or a year, he is initiated for the second time and given the sacred thread with the regular sacrifice and ritual.⁴

⁴ Purport of CC AL 17.265 (p. 336).

Due to the necessity of these activities, we do not immediately initiate disciples in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. For six months, a candidate for initiation must first attend *ārati* and classes in the *sāstras*, practice the regulative principles and associate with other devotees. When one is actually advanced in the *purāścaryā-vidhi*, he is recommended by the local temple president for initiation. It is not that anyone can be suddenly initiated without meeting the requirements. When one is further advanced by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* sixteen rounds daily, following the regulative principles and attending classes, he receives the sacred thread (brahminical recognition) after the second six months.⁵

In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, the requirement is that one must be prepared to give up the four pillars of sinful life — illicit sex, meat-eating, intoxication and gambling. In Western countries especially, we first observe whether a potential disciple is prepared to follow the regulative principles. Then he is given the name of a Vaiṣṇava servant and initiated to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, at least sixteen rounds daily. In this way the disciple renders devotional service under the guidance of the spiritual master or his representative for at least six months to a year. He is then recommended for a second initiation, during which a sacred thread is offered and the disciple is accepted as a bona fide *brāhmaṇa*.⁶

On each occasion the following identical arrangement is described:

- a) The candidate must follow four regulative principles and chant sixteen rounds for six months.
- b) If these requirements are met, he is automatically recommended for initiation by the Temple President.
- c) Then the candidate will automatically become initiated by Srila Prabhupada.

Interestingly, this arrangement is identical to the ritvik system.

Step c) above follows from the fact that the books are describing the exact system that was in place when Srila Prabhupada was on the planet — the system in which he was the sole initiator. Thus if we are to properly follow the books we would have to reconstruct the same system that was in place when they were written. That system had Srila Prabhupada

⁵ Purport of CC ML 15.108 (p. 800).

⁶ Purport of CC ML 24.330 (p. 1138).

as the only *initiator*. This is identical to the ritvik system.

It may be argued that Srila Prabhupada was only describing the system as it was then, not necessarily the system that was to continue in ISKCON. This proposition suffers from the following problems:

- a) There is no mention of this relevancy restriction in the books themselves.
- b) The instructions are given in a generic sense, and not restricted in applicability to any limiting time frame (“In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement”). There is no reason why someone receiving and reading this book now would not conclude that this system was still operative within the “Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement” at the present time. The only time limit implied in Srila Prabhupada’s books is the duration of the “Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement” itself.
- c) Why would Srila Prabhupada describe a system that would only have relevance for two years, in books which were to remain the standard teachings for ISKCON, a movement which was to last for up to ten thousand years?⁷ (The *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* was fully published only in 1975, with Srila Prabhupada departing in 1977).

It is quite clear Srila Prabhupada never said that the system of initiation, as described in his books, should be restricted to only when he was on the planet. Nor would we expect him to, since, as mentioned above, his books were meant to guide the movement and humanity at large for many thousands of years to come — something wholeheartedly agreed on by the GBC, since they fully support the distribution of Srila Prabhupada’s books for the duration of ISKCON. Significantly, the GBC have never argued, either, that these initiation instructions were only applicable for whilst Srila Prabhupada was on the planet (unlike the July 9, 1977 order); indeed they themselves have borrowed some of the details of it for their own M.A.S.S. system. However, the very notion that the initiation system, as outlined by Srila Prabhupada in his books, can be adapted for use by all future successor diksa-gurus, in itself raises serious questions.

⁷ Srila Prabhupada stated that ISKCON or the “Hare Krishna movement” was not different from the mission of Lord Caitanya, which was meant to last for 10,000 years (purport of BP 8.5.23; canto 8, p. 161).

Different initiating gurus in the history of our disciplic succession have demanded of their disciples different vows at the point of initiation. These vows may differ greatly from one acarya to the next. Thus the package of sixteen rounds and four regulative principles that allow one to be initiated by Srila Prabhupada was unique to him, and him alone. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, his spiritual master, had insisted on 64 rounds. If one went back a thousand years one would find gurus in our line preaching a different philosophy, not to speak of initiation vows. Thus successive diksa-gurus are not restricted to prescribing the same diksa vows, or even the same exact teachings. If a devotee is required to follow the vows given by a particular diksa-guru then it can only mean that *the devotee is initiated by that particular diksa-guru*.

In ISKCON we have a situation where some people are presented as “successor” diksa-gurus to Srila Prabhupada. These successor gurus are *obligated* to have their disciples follow Srila Prabhupada’s initiation vows. This implies the following theoretical sastric rule:

Successor diksa-gurus must always have their disciples follow exactly the same initiation vows as established by the previous acarya.

This principle is enshrined in ISKCON law. No future ISKCON guru can legitimately alter these basic initiation vows. This situation will remain for as long as the Society exists, which is ideally expected to be for many thousands of years, as mentioned above (p. 19).

In point of fact, the rule just cited violates Srila Prabhupada’s teachings:

Śrīmad Vīrarāghava Ācārya, an *ācārya* in the disciplic succession of the Rāmānuja-sampradāya, has remarked in his commentary that *caṇḍālas*, or conditioned souls who are born in lower than *sūdra* families, can also be initiated according to circumstances. The formalities may be slightly changed here and there to make them Vaiṣṇavas.⁸

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu was an ideal *ācārya*. An *ācārya* is an ideal teacher who knows the purpose of the revealed scriptures, behaves exactly according to their injunctions and teaches his students to adopt these principles also. As an ideal *ācārya*, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu devised ways to capture all kinds of atheists and materialists. Every *ācārya* has a specific

⁸ Purport of BP 4.8.54 (canto 4, p. 366).

means of propagating his spiritual movement with the aim of bringing men to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, the method of one *ācārya* may be different from that of another, but the ultimate goal is never neglected. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī recommends:

*yena tena prakāreṇa manaḥ kṛṣṇe niveśayet
sarve vidhi-niśedhā syur etayor eva kiṅkarāḥ*

An *ācārya* should devise a means by which people may somehow or other come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. First they should become Kṛṣṇa conscious, and all the prescribed rules and regulations may later gradually be introduced. In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we follow this policy of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. For example, since boys and girls in the Western countries freely intermingle, special concessions regarding their customs and habits are necessary to bring them to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The *ācārya* must devise a means to bring them to devotional service. Therefore, although I am a *sannyāsī* I sometimes take part in getting boys and girls married, although in the history of *sannyāsa* no *sannyāsī* has personally taken part in marrying his disciples.⁹

However, according to the three references given previously, wherein the initiation system for ISKCON is described, any future theoretical diksa-gurus:

- 1) could not alter diksa vows,
- 2) could not alter preordained initiation standards, or any other aspects of the initiation process,
- 3) could not refuse any disciples initiation as long as they followed the standards given in Srila Prabhupada's books,
- 4) would not need to first interact with, or give their permission to accept, any future disciples.

The above system is standard law for as long as ISKCON exists. This being the case, those performing initiation cannot, by definition, be diksa-gurus, since as shown by the two quotations just adduced, such entities could never legitimately have such restrictions imposed upon them:

The formalities may be slightly changed here and there to make them Vaiṣṇavas.¹⁰

⁹ Purport of CC AL 7.37 (p. 147).

¹⁰ Purport of BP 4.8.54 (canto 4, p. 366).

Therefore, the method of one *ācārya* may be different from that of another, but the ultimate goal is never neglected.¹¹

Nowhere did Srila Prabhupada ever revoke these sanctions with regard to bona fide initiating acaryas. Thus we know that the entities presently operating in ISKCON cannot be current-link¹² acaryas in an initiating capacity, since they are *only* allowed to operate within the terms and conditions set out by the supposedly predecessor acarya, Srila Prabhupada.¹³

These restrictions are nevertheless perfectly befitting a system in which Srila Prabhupada remained the diksa-guru, with ritviks as his representatives performing initiations on his behalf.

Srila Prabhupada's insistence in his books that all future initiated disciples *must* be following *his* prescribed diksa rules and regulations is found again in his Last Will and Testament (PRABHUPADA 1977):

... provided the new director is my initiated disciple following strictly all the rules and regulations of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness as detailed in my books ...

This is the continuation of the clause from the Will, reproduced on p. 17 above, wherein the system for selecting future directors for ISKCON properties in India is given. Here the Will is stating that in addition to being initiated disciples of Srila Prabhupada, the successor directors *must* also be following the initiation rules and regulations as given by Srila Prabhupada. The latter point alone leads to this clause in the Will meaning only one of two things, namely

- 1) that all future disciples are to be initiated by Srila Prabhupada, or,
- 2) that all future initiations are to be conducted by persons who cannot function with the basic freedoms and rights Srila Prabhupada taught were available to all bona fide initiating acaryas. They would be restrict-

¹¹ Purport of CC AL 7.37 (p. 147).

¹² *Current-link* is a technical term used adjectively to denote a person with the authority to initiate others, and forming the current link in the chain of initiators to which Srila Prabhupada also belonged.

¹³ The argument that there are initiating Acaryas and acaryas is refuted in KRISHNA-KANT 2002: 69-74.

ed to initiating their own disciples employing terms and conditions identical to Srila Prabhupada's, for the next ten thousand years.

Please note that though there is nothing to prevent one acarya from having the same initiation standards as the previous acarya, it is not *obligatory* — there is a choice. However, Srila Prabhupada has specifically set up a situation in his Society in which there is no choice whatsoever. It seems that within ISKCON, the type of entities presently initiating bears little resemblance to the current-link diksa-gurus Srila Prabhupada describes in his books. These ISKCON entities are required only to enforce the diksa terms and conditions (and identical teachings) of their supposedly predecessor acarya, Srila Prabhupada. These are the types of restriction one might expect in a system employing officiating priests, or ritviks, but not fully-fledged current-link initiating acaryas. According to the GBC then, we have the self-referentially incoherent situation whereby future prospective disciples are supposed to follow Srila Prabhupada's books, but must select diksa-gurus who are not allowed the basic freedom expressed in these very same books!

It may be argued that Srila Prabhupada has given a standard that does not *need* to change for the next ten thousand years, and that that is why he has insisted on this standard for all future initiations. However, this is simply avoiding the most obvious conclusion:

For a guru to institutionalise just his own specific diksa standards, denying others even the choice of being able to change them, is proof that it was his intention to remain the diksa-guru for as long as that institution existed. *In this way Srila Prabhupada has institutionalised himself as the only diksa-guru for ISKCON, for as long as it exists.*

Srila Prabhupada would be contradicting himself quite badly if on the one hand he asked all his disciples to become the next current links in the succession of initiating gurus (as the current GBC claim is), and then at the same time denied them the freedom to change standards, as and when they saw fit, the basic prerogative of any current-link diksa-guru. One would at least have expected Srila Prabhupada to mention that the above sanction to make changes to standards would not apply to any future diksa-gurus within ISKCON. The fact that he did not do this further supports our contention that there were not meant to be any future diksa-gurus within ISKCON — other than Srila Prabhupada.

Further, we note the following statements:

As far as the time of *dīkṣā* (initiation) is concerned, everything depends on the position of the guru. ... If the *sad-guru*, the bona fide spiritual master, agrees, one can be initiated immediately, without waiting for a suitable time or place.¹⁴

So without waiting for me, wherever you consider it is right ... That will depend on discretion.¹⁵

In the first quote above Srila Prabhupada states that as far as initiation goes, everything is dependent on the agreement of the diksa-guru. We have seen Srila Prabhupada give that agreement via the July 9, 1977 letter transcribed on pp. 14f. above, wherein he outlines the “discretion” he has given to the ritviks, as mentioned in the room conversation of July 7, 1977, from which the second quote above is extracted.

In conclusion, therefore, we can note that:

- 1) Srila Prabhupada’s books contain instructions detailing a system fully supporting himself as the only diksa-guru for ISKCON.
- 2) Srila Prabhupada’s books contain instructions which are applicable only if Srila Prabhupada remains ISKCON’s diksa-guru.

Thus the initiation system mentioned in Srila Prabhupada’s books was intended for the duration of ISKCON, and entails Srila Prabhupada being the sole diksa-guru of ISKCON.

This same system was also, of course, outlined in the July 9, 1977 letter, with the elaboration of an extra detail not specified in the books — namely the use of priestly representatives to accept the initiates by giving them their spiritual names *on Srila Prabhupada’s behalf*. Controversy has thus engulfed a very simple issue, purely because this last detail involves the entities who perform this ceremonial function being given the unusual designation of ritviks.¹⁶

¹⁴ Purport of CC ML 24.331 (p. 1139).

¹⁵ PRABHUPADA 1988-1991, vol. 34: 256.

¹⁶ The term *ritvik* is mentioned in Srila Prabhupada’s books, however.

Why Is the Revivalists' Position Correct?

The Revivalists consider their position correct since it is based on signed legal documents and instructions from Srila Prabhupada's books that were directed to the whole movement, and which do not in any way conflict with his general teachings on the guru and initiation in general. On the other hand, the GBC's position rests on presenting at least three completely contradictory official positions (none of which are supported by legal documents or instructions directed to the whole movement) and thus do not technically *have* a position, not to speak of a superior one. This is explained in detail below and summarised in the "GBC Contradictions Chart", Appendix 3 of this paper.

Contradictory GBC Positions

Of course, we have no idea what position the GBC will put forward in this current round of the debate, but it will necessarily contradict at least one of their previous ones if it is to actually confront the issue in detail. By saying “in detail”, we mean giving exact specifics of how, when and where Srila Prabhupada authorised his displacement as ISKCON’s sole diksa-guru.

The GBC generally claim that the July 9, 1977 directive quoted was a temporary measure, applicable only for the brief remainder of Srila Prabhupada’s physical presence (even though this is never stated either in the directive, or by Srila Prabhupada himself). Yet the GBC are apparently unable to produce any similar directive from Srila Prabhupada on how initiations should be conducted for the *long term*. Thus we are told that for a temporary measure we have over a hundred identical official letters sent out by the Society’s secretary, with the Founder-Acarya’s signed approval, to every leader in ISKCON; yet for the longer term we have nothing approaching such magnitude or clarity of purpose. Instead, the GBC have had to dig around in the archives to present snippets of private correspondence, or passing conversations with visiting guests, to make their case. In other words, the GBC tend to rely on evidence that was never intended to be used to direct the entire mission, but instead fragmentary sentences from private letters and archival tapes, many of which were never released till years after Srila Prabhupada had already physically departed.

Perhaps wary of being caught out in self-contradiction, we have noted that in recent publications the GBC tend to shy away from too much specific detail on exactly how, when and where Srila Prabhupada ordered his replacement. They instead tend to opt for a more scatter-gun approach, bombarding the reader with masses of irrelevant information and objections that do not directly answer, or in some cases even touch on, this central key issue. In these papers, the GBC representative will try to occupy some purely philosophical platform, and imply that Srila Prabhupada could not possibly have wanted the ritvik system to continue because of this or that scriptural reason. We shall look at some of the most common “reasons” later, and demonstrate that they are in any case with-

out philosophical merit or scriptural support.

For Revivalists, the issue is quite simple. Srila Prabhupada issued a directive to all his followers, and the Revivalists wish to see relevant evidence justifying its termination.

We shall now examine the following previous papers that are all approved by the GBC, are all currently promoted as authorised justifications for the current M.A.S.S., and all contradict each other as to how exactly Srila Prabhupada is alleged to have authorised his replacement as ISKCON's diksa-guru: "On My Order Understood"¹⁷, "Disciple Of My Disciple"¹⁸ and "Prabhupada's Order"¹⁹

We should point out that not only do these various accounts contradict each other, but on occasion contradict themselves too. We shall go through each paper asking whom, how and when did Srila Prabhupada authorise his replacement as the diksa-guru for ISKCON?

Who Was Ordered As Diksa-Guru?

1) "On My Order Understood": Although there was no appointment of successor gurus, Srila Prabhupada did say he would "appoint" devotees who would initiate on his behalf during his lifetime and their own disciples after his departure. In that sense the eleven ritviks were also sort of appointed as gurus.

2) "Disciple Of My Disciple": Srila Prabhupada appointed eleven diksa-gurus on May 28, 1977. In that conversation there is no mention of anyone acting on Srila Prabhupada's behalf even whilst he is present.²⁰ The term "officiating *ācārya*" proves that Srila Prabhupada was appointing diksa-gurus.

3) "Prabhupada's Order": The eleven ritviks were all appointed as diksa-gurus and were almost fully operational even before Srila Prabhupada

¹⁷ GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1995a.

¹⁸ DASA/SWAMI/SWAMI 1997.

¹⁹ GOSWAMI/GOSWAMI/SWAMI/SWAMI/DASA/DASA/DASA/DASA/DAS/PAI/BARRETT 1998.

²⁰ PRABHUPADA 1988-1991, vol. 33: 269f.

left, since he did not want to absorb any more bad karma due to his illness.

Supporting evidence

1) “On My Order Understood”:

In 1977 Srila Prabhupada repeatedly said he would “select,” “choose,” “appoint,” or “designate” some disciples to take up the service of initiating new disciples. When Srila Prabhupada was asked who would initiate after his physical departure he stated he would “recommend” and give his “order” to some of his disciples who would initiate on his behalf during his lifetime and afterwards as “regular gurus,” whose disciples would be Srila Prabhupada’s grand-disciples.²¹

2) “Disciple Of My Disciple”:

The present paper will show that on May 28th, 1977, Srila Prabhupada ordered his disciples to become initiating spiritual masters.

... terms such as *rtvig-guru* and *rtvig-acarya* simply do not exist. ... In other words our friends are proposing something that does not exist in vedic culture.²²

3) “Prabhupada’s Order”:

We should note that even after giving this letter, which says that the people those 11 men would accept would be his disciples, Prabhupada indicated that the 11 were in fact to all intents and purposes performing the full-fledged function of gurus in his own presence, for on October 18 he was approached for initiation by an Indian man who flew in all the way from New York: ... From the above conversation it is clear that Prabhupada was not willing to accept the new initiate because of his condition — he didn’t want his karma. This had already been pointed out by Tamal Krishna Goswami on July 7 — the reason for stopping initiations was so that Prabhupada would not be burdened by the new initiates’ karma. Therefore he handed the duty of giving initiation to the men he named.²³

²¹ Also in GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1995b.

²² From Appendix D of op.cit. by Hridayananda dasa Goswami.

²³ From Appendix 3 of op.cit.

It seems that 1) above is not sure whether there was an appointment of diksa-gurus or not. It agrees that the eleven ritviks were appointed, and that their appointment incorporated the expectation that they would go on to be diksa-gurus. However, it goes to great lengths to cover over the idea that there was an appointment of diksa-gurus, even though this is effectively what it is saying. Once more 1) directly contradicts 3) and partially contradicts 2), since 2) does not accept that the May 28, 1977 conversation²⁴ said anything about ritviks acting on Srila Prabhupada's behalf (even though Srila Prabhupada actually says "so on my behalf").

How Were Diksa-Gurus Ordered?

1) "On My Order Understood": Srila Prabhupada issued a conditional mandate that anyone who followed his order could become guru. This is clear from his use of the *āmāra ajñāya* verse²⁵ in the May 28, 1977²⁶ conversation tape. Those who first acted on his behalf as ritviks would naturally go on to become diksa-gurus. This was "understood".

2) "Disciple Of My Disciple": In the May 28, 1977 conversation Srila Prabhupada makes no reference whatsoever to anyone initiating on his behalf. Therefore the term *ritvik-acarya* is synonymous with the term *diksa-guru*, and eleven of these were appointed on May 28, 1977.

3) "Prabhupada's Order": The initial eleven were ordered on July 9, 1977²⁷ to practically be diksa-gurus immediately, even absorbing karma etc.

Supporting evidence

1) "On My Order Understood":

Although Srila Prabhupada did not repeat his earlier statements it was understood that he expected these disciples to initiate in the future. ... It is therefore clear that Srila Prabhupada's use of words like "appoint," "recommend" or "select" ... is rather a conditional mandate dependent on the

²⁴ PRABHUPADA 1988-1991, vol. 33: 269f.

²⁵ CC ML 7.128cd: *āmāra ajñāya guru hañā tāra' ei deśa*.

²⁶ PRABHUPADA 1988-1991, vol. 33: 269f.

²⁷ See PRABHUPADA 1997, 77-07-09 (pp. 14f. above).

follower's "strictly following" the "order" of the spiritual master.²⁸

2) "Disciple Of My Disciple":

The definition of "ritvik" in the Sanskrit dictionaries and in Srila Prabhupada's books is not "proxy" or "non-initiator" or anything of the sort. ... Thus Srila Prabhupada does not give any weight to the idea that "ritvik" means "proxy". ... In the present conversation, Srila Prabhupada does not refer to proxy initiations at all, not even in connection with the word "ritvik".

3) "Prabhupada's Order":

We should note that even after giving this letter, which says that the people those 11 men would accept would be his disciples, Prabhupada indicated that the 11 were in fact to all intents and purposes performing the full-fledged function of gurus in his own presence²⁹

Apart from the obvious contradictions, it can be seen that 1) above supports a definition of ritvik that completely contradicts 2) and 3). In 1), a ritvik acts completely on behalf of the guru as a proxy, whereas in 3) ritviks are almost diksa-gurus, and in 2) they are not differentiated from diksa-gurus. 1) is nebulous about how exactly gurus were authorised, especially since the main evidence put forward — the *āmāra ājñāya* verse — is only an order for *instructing* gurus. In an accompanying purport to the *āmāra ājñāya* verse Srila Prabhupada writes:

It is best not to accept any disciples.³⁰

So this is hardly clear evidence supporting the acceptance of disciples. The explanation given in 1) is not supported by any explicit evidence, only the speculations of the author. 2) and 3) appear much more strong and convincing, but only at the expense of defining the word *ritvik* in a way that completely contradicts Srila Prabhupada's definition (as given in the July 9, 1977 directive³¹ itself), Hridayananda's definition as given in ap-

²⁸ Also in GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1995b.

²⁹ From Appendix 3 of op.cit.

³⁰ Purport of CC ML 7.130 (p. 538).

³¹ See PRABHUPADA 1997, 77-07-09 (pp. 14f. above).

pendix D of “Disciple of My Disciple”, and, of course, the GBC’s implied definition of the word in 1).

When Were Diksa-Gurus Ordered?

1) “On My Order Understood”: Srila Prabhupada gave the order for gurus at the same time as the order for devotees to act on his behalf, and this occurred on July 7, 1977.

2) “Disciple Of My Disciple”: Eleven diksa-gurus were all set up and ready on May 28, 1977, since *ritvik* means *officiating acarya* which means *diksa-guru*.

3) “Prabhupada’s Order”: On July 9, 1977 the eleven were fully functioning as gurus but simply observing the etiquette in Srila Prabhupada’s presence.

Supporting evidence

1) “On My Order Understood”:

When Srila Prabhupada was asked who would initiate after his physical departure he stated he would “recommend” and give his “order” to some of his disciples who would initiate on his behalf during his lifetime and afterwards as “regular gurus,” whose disciples would be Srila Prabhupada’s grand-disciples. Srila Prabhupada repeatedly cited Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu’s statement “amar ajna guru hoiya” and stated that one would be eligible to act as an initiating guru based “on my order”, i.e. on the “order” of Srila Prabhupada as the representative of Lord Caitanya. (2) Subsequently Srila Prabhupada named some disciples to initiate on his behalf, as he had previously stated. (3) Although Srila Prabhupada did not repeat his earlier statements it was understood that he expected these disciples to initiate in the future.³²

2) “Disciple Of My Disciple”:

The present paper will show that on May 28th, 1977, Srila Prabhupada ordered his disciples to become initiating spiritual masters.

3) “Prabhupada’s Order”:

³² Also in GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1995b. The numbers (2) and (3) refer to references made in the paper to footnotes supporting the statements made.

Thus the July 9 letter was not, as falsely claimed by the author, a “final order,” a “policy statement on how he wanted initiations to run within ISKCON,” but merely an interim order which got the named persons functioning as gurus even in his own presence yet while still observing the etiquette.³³

As demonstrated above, we see that the GBC have given three different dates for when gurus are meant to have been appointed, or selected or hinted at. Quite clearly the GBC are confused over when diksa-gurus were called into existence. The Revivalists would argue that this is inevitable since Srila Prabhupada never created any, but only ritviks, and it was this ritvik system he left running with no order for it to be stopped.

Conclusion

It is on the basis of the three contradictory, yet GBC-authorized, papers cited from above that the Revivalists claim that, to date, the GBC have no position.³⁴ If the GBC were now to present a new paper, it would inevitably contradict a previous one. What they need to do is come up with a paper having officially denounced all the others as false. Once they do this, the academic community would be better placed to judge whether or not it is superior to the position of the ritvik supporters, or Revivalists.

We recognise that there have been previous efforts to present the ritvik viewpoint which have also been contradictory. Even today there are other ritvik groups with variant philosophies. However, the IRM represents the largest and only officially organised pro-ritvik group, and their foundational paper, *The Final Order* (KRISHNAKANT 2002), was commissioned by the GBC to present the definitive ritvik position as long ago as 1996. This definitive position has never been contradicted by the IRM since that time, though the GBC may now be presenting their fourth official contradictory position during a similar time period.

³³ From Appendix 3 of op.cit.

³⁴ To see these contradictions at a glance please view the chart in Appendix 3 below.

Common GBC Objections

We shall now look at some common objections given by the GBC to following the initiation system for ISKCON as given by Srila Prabhupada in the July 9, 1977 directive,³⁵ in his Last Will and Testament,³⁶ and in his books.

“Anyone Can Become Guru”

This position states:

Many times Srila Prabhupada said that it was easy to become guru, anyone can do it. So why do the Revivalists argue that *only* Srila Prabhupada can be diksa-guru?

The Revivalists fully accept that anyone can become an instructing guru, called a vartma-pradarsaka³⁷ and siksa-guru, by simply following strictly and preaching what Srila Prabhupada taught. The vast majority of quotes offered by the GBC allegedly proving that it is easy to be a guru can actually only be referring to some type of instructing guru. This is because Srila Prabhupada unequivocally stated that the diksa-guru *must* be a maha-bhagavata (*mahābhāgavata*) (in the most advanced stage of God-realisation) *and* be specifically *authorised* by his own spiritual master to act in that capacity. He had always strongly condemned the assumption of guruship by those who were not suitably qualified and authorised. We quote below passages in Srila Prabhupada’s books where the qualifications of the diksa-guru are stated (bolding added):

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.³⁸

When one has attained the topmost position of *mahā-bhāgavata*, he is to

³⁵ PRABHUPADA 1997, 77-07-09 (pp. 14f. above).

³⁶ PRABHUPADA 1977; see Appendix 2 for a reproduction of the original.

³⁷ Sanskrit *vartmapradarsaka*.

³⁸ Purport of CC ML 24.330 (p. 1137).

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.³⁹

Aside from the qualification, Srila Prabhupada also taught that specific authorisation from the predecessor acarya was also essential before anyone could act as a diksa-guru (underlining added):

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.⁴⁰

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 *dikṣā-vidhāna*.⁴¹

Indian man: When did you become the spiritual leader of Krsna Consciousness?

Srila Prabhupada: What is that?

Brahmananda: He is asking when did you become the spiritual leader of Krsna Consciousness?

Srila Prabhupada: When my Guru Maharaja ordered me. This is the guru-parampara.

Indian man: Did it

Srila Prabhupada: Try to understand. Don't go very speedily. A guru can become guru when he is ordered by his guru. That's all. Otherwise nobody can become guru.⁴²

Thus, according to Srila Prabhupada, one can only become a diksa-guru when both the *qualification* and *authorisation* are in place. As far as the Revivalists are concerned, there is no authorisation for Srila Prabhupada's disciples to act as diksa-gurus within ISKCON. Thus, even if a disciple reaches this most elevated platform of maha-bhagavata, they will still need specific authorisation from Srila Prabhupada before they can initiate. Srila Prabhupada's final July 9, 1977 order on how initiations were

³⁹ Ibid. (p. 1138).

⁴⁰ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 1: 386 (letter to Janardana of April 16, 1968).

⁴¹ Purport of BP 4.8.54 (canto 4, p. 367).

⁴² PRABHUPADA 1997, 751028BG.NAI (BG lecture in Nairobi of October 28, 1975).

to run within his institution,⁴³ proves that only Srila Prabhupada is so authorised. The many other calls to become guru refer to becoming instructing spiritual masters, not diksa-gurus. This is clear since they will incorporate one or more of the following elements:

- 1) no mention of Srila Prabhupada's physical departure being necessary before they can act as guru (in other words, the order was immediate, and thus the order could not have been for diksa-gurus since this would have clashed with the fact that Srila Prabhupada was the only diksa-guru for his movement until 1977),
- 2) little mention of qualification required, except to faithfully repeat and preach what Srila Prabhupada has taught them (whereas above we see that the diksa-guru must be on the topmost level of realisation),
- 3) mention of the famous *āmāra ājñāya* verse⁴⁴ (Prabhupada's purport for the relevant passage stating: "It is best not to accept any disciples"⁴⁵),
- 4) word *guru* used to indicate teacher/instructor— no mention of terms *initiate* or *diksa*.

The Monitor Guru

Some devotees point to the section in *Easy Journey to Other Planets* dealing with *monitor gurus*⁴⁶ as evidence supporting the M.A.S.S., and the resultant dismantling of the ritvik system. However, this clever classroom analogy is clearly defining the position of siksa, not diksa, gurus. In this passage the monitor acts *on behalf of* the teacher. He is not a teacher himself. He may become qualified as a teacher, but that is a *process*, and is not described as automatic on the departure of the teacher (who obviously corresponds to the diksa-guru). A monitor guru can only have, by definition, siksa disciples; and a limited number at that. Once such a monitor has become qualified, i.e. attained the platform of mahabhagavata, and then been authorised by his predecessor acarya, there is no sense in calling him a monitor any longer; he will be a teacher in his

⁴³ See pp. 14f. above.

⁴⁴ CC ML 7.128cd.

⁴⁵ Purport of CC ML 7.130 (p. 538).

⁴⁶ PRABHUPADA 1978: 28.

own right. Once he is a teacher in his own right, he may accept unlimited disciples. So the monitor is the siksa-guru, the teacher is the diksa-guru, and by strictly following the diksa-guru, the siksa-guru may gradually rise to the platform at which he may at least become qualified to be a diksa-guru. Furthermore, a monitor merely assists the teacher whilst the teacher is *present*, and is not a replacement once the teacher departs. A monitor is not an entity that comes into being to replace or succeed the teacher, but exists to run in parallel or alongside the teacher. We do not see how this description supports the GBC's assumptions that: a) the ritvik system was meant to stop at Srila Prabhupada's departure, and b) that the ritviks could then automatically become diksa-gurus.

“Disciples Ordered to Be Guru”

This position states:

Srila Prabhupada many times ordered his disciples to accept their own disciples after his departure.

This is a common assertion made by the GBC, and it is one they seem to feel excuses them from coming up with a countermanding order to the July 9, 1977 directive. What we really need to see is evidence proving that Srila Prabhupada released other generally applicable instructions that modified this directive in the following way:

- a) The ritviks were meant to stop acting as ritviks on the departure of Srila Prabhupada.
- b) They were then meant to transmogrify into fully functioning diksa-gurus.

Let us see if the GBC's counter evidence comes close to supporting these two critical modifications.

We will now discuss all statements made by Srila Prabhupada in the eleven year period that ISKCON was running during his physical presence, where he mentions his disciples taking their own disciples once he departs. There are actually only six examples in all. We have not been able to find any other quotes in this category, neither have the GBC ever presented any, so we shall take the list below as complete. We are only dealing with quotes in which there is specific mention of accepting disci-

ples after Srila Prabhupada's departure, since only this evidence could conceivably be used to support the removal of Srila Prabhupada as the initiating guru for ISKCON, and the subsequent construction of the M.A.S.S. We have not included other quotes where only the issue of being guru and acarya when Srila Prabhupada departs is mentioned, since, unlike the quotes below, there is no reference to Srila Prabhupada's disciples taking their own disciples. As stated, Revivalists fully accept that Srila Prabhupada wanted all his disciples to become good *instructing* gurus, acaryas, spiritual masters etc.

The first thing, I warn Acyutananda, do not try to initiate. You are not in a proper position now to initiate anyone. . . . Don't be allured by such maya. I am training you all to become future spiritual masters, but do not be in a hurry.⁴⁷

Sometime ago you asked my permission for accepting some disciples, now the time is approaching very soon when you will have many disciples by your strong preaching work.⁴⁸

I have heard that there is some worship of yourself by the other devotees. Of course it is proper to offer obeisances to a *Vaishnava*, but not in the presence of the spiritual master. After the departure of the spiritual master, it will come to that stage, but now wait. Otherwise it will create factions.⁴⁹

So far as your taking initiation from Brahmananda Maharaj, I have no objection, but it is the etiquette that in the presence of one's Spiritual Master, one does not accept disciples. In this connection, Swami Brahmananda may write me and I will instruct him.⁵⁰

Keep trained up very rigidly and then you are bona fide 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 ac-

⁴⁷ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 1: 486 (letter to Acyutananda and Jaya Govinda of August 21, 1968).

⁴⁸ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 3: 1998 (letter to Acyutananda of May 16, 1972).

⁴⁹ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 4: 2599 (letter to Hansadutta of October 1, 1974).

⁵⁰ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 3: 1605 (letter to John Milner of March 24, 1971).

cept disciples without any limitation. This is the law of disciplic succession. 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.⁵¹

Mohsin Hassan: Yeah, the tenth. After you, is it any decision has been made who will take over?

Prabhupada: Yes. All of them will take over. These students, who are initiated from me, all of them will act as I am doing. Just like I have got many initiated from me, all of them will act as I am doing. Just like I have got many Godbrothers, they are all acting. Similarly, all these disciples which I am making, initiating, they are being trained to become future spiritual masters. Now, they're competent. They can, not only the swamis, even the grhasthas, they are called dasa adhikari, and brahmacaris, everyone can, whoever is initiated, he is competent to make disciples. But as a matter of etiquette they do not do so in the presence of their spiritual master. This is the etiquette.⁵²

General Points

1) All evidence is in the form of private and personal letters (except the Detroit conversation), which of course cannot necessarily be taken as universally applicable. They were sent after all to only one person in a sealed envelope.

2) Usually the letters were issued as a reaction to some ambitious attempt to pose as a diksa-guru, which needed to be blocked.

3) All the evidence above exists only because some external circumstance prompted its release. In other words, the evidence only exists because someone deviated or (in the case of Detroit) personally asked Srila Prabhupada a question. If Srila Prabhupada wanted something enacted by the whole movement he would either get the GBC to pass a resolution, or send a letter to all his leaders. Thus the July 9, 1977 letter is in a category entirely different to the GBC's so-called modifying evidence.

4) None of this evidence was available publicly at the point of Srila Prabhupada's departure. The letters were released only through what may

⁵¹ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 5: 3001 (letter to Tusta Krishna of December 2, 1975).

⁵² PRABHUPADA 1997, 710718RC.DET (Detroit room conversation of July 18, 1971).

be called unauthorised activity in 1986, while the Detroit tape was only available for the first time in 1997, in either recorded or transcript form.

5) Such letters were only ever sent to some of the most ambitious deviants in the Society. (Why seriously promise diksa-guru-hood only to those least qualified?)

6) Srila Prabhupada never insisted on the letters being published. Even when he was asked if one could print them, he said it could be done only if it did not “detract from your other important engagements”.⁵³ Therefore how could their contents be considered vital appendages to the final order on initiation sent to all the Movement’s leaders on July 9, 1977?

7) The whole emphasis of the letters is to stop the devotees concerned from being diksa-gurus at that time, and at least waiting until after his departure. Delaying something is not the same as recommending it.

8) In the case of room conversations, they cannot possibly be considered a guaranteed means of relaying important policy decisions to the entire movement since:

- a) There was no guarantee that any given recording would come out audibly.
- b) There was no guarantee the recording would be transcribed.
- c) There was no guarantee that the tapes would be listened to in time to act at the point of Srila Prabhupada’s departure.
- d) Even if the tapes were listened to, the right devotee would need to pick out the one or two relevant sentences from literally hundreds of tapes in order to obtain instructions on how to manage initiations within ISKCON.
- e) There is not a single example of Srila Prabhupada issuing important directives simply through some casual chat with visitors, or private letters to problem disciples.
- f) With such serious unpredictable hurdles, it is unreasonable to assume that information given in private letters or a room conversation, and which is not then repeated in his books or instructions to the whole Society, is intended to be used to modify an order which *was* issued to the entire movement.

⁵³ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 2: 749 (letter to Gargamuni of February 17, 2, 1969).

9) It is unbelievable that anyone would direct a massive world-wide organisation by telling a few people something, but omit to tell the whole movement. Would Srila Prabhupada say something to a one time visitor (Detroit), then rely on the tape being audibly recorded, then rely on it being accurately transcribed, then count on all his disciples subscribing to the BBT tape ministry, then hope against hope that they all listen to the important bit before he leaves the planet — and as a result develop the correct initiation system? It is a desperate man who would rely on such an argument.

To illustrate our point, as we said, the Detroit conversation, which is arguably the GBC's best evidence, was not available in either a recorded or transcript form until 1997. How can it thus be maintained that this tape contains information crucial to the running of ISKCON, or which was meant to somehow displace an order which was sent to the entire movement in 1977? If it was vital information, it was only generally available twenty years too late to have been of any use.

Specific Points

We will now examine each of the pieces of evidence in detail. In each case it appears that Srila Prabhupada only made these statements, according to the context, to deal with a situation. The letters to Acyutananda, Hansadutta and Tusta Krishna were dealing with ambitious individuals whose rampant guru ambitions, even whilst Srila Prabhupada was still on the planet, needed to be curbed. The private letters were clearly worded in order to control these ambitious, potentially deviant disciples. Such letters always tell them that they can not become guru now, and that to think of doing so is not correct, and that they must at least wait until Srila Prabhupada has departed. Hardly enthusiastic encouragement. In the case of Acyutananda this ambition manifested very early on. He had practically only just joined ISKCON when he began to consider himself worthy of worship, thus prompting Srila Prabhupada to admonish him with the words: "Don't be allured by such maya".⁵⁴ In 1972, less than four years later, Srila Prabhupada is again having to deal with the same ambition from Acyutananda. In the case of the letter to Hansadutta in 1974, where-

⁵⁴ See p. 37 above.

as Acyutananda at least took the trouble to ask for permission, Hansadutta had already started to accept worship. When news got back to Srila Prabhupada he rebuked him thus: “it will create factions”.⁵⁵ These letters are clearly warnings against unauthorised behaviour, not authorising future guru-ship to those least qualified to take it up.

In the case of the letter to Tusta Krishna, the following evidence will show that our judgment on Tusta Krishna’s ambitious nature is not without justification. Srila Prabhupada was *continually* trying to keep him under control:

Do not try to make a faction.⁵⁶

I have heard that you are having some difficulties ... Of course, our serving Krishna is voluntary affair, so what can I say? If you think that is the best choice, I must agree, otherwise you might go away altogether.⁵⁷

News has come to me that you want to sell our temple to somebody else which I cannot believe. Even that you have been in charge of the New Zealand center, now you have taken it as your personal property and you have demanded from Madhudvisa Swami the price of the temple. This is all amazing to me. I do not know what is your decision. Tusta Krsna has already left and is in Hawaii with Siddha Svarupananda Maharaja. I never believed that again you would go back to your old habits, giving up the Krsna Consciousness Movement in a whimsical way. Please do not do this mistake ... Now all of a sudden you have changed that program and taken to your original ways? I am so much aggrieved to receive all this news. For Krsna’s sake, do not do these things. I request Tusta Krsna to go back to New Zealand and take charge of your duties. Please do not leave Krsna. You will not be happy. That is my request.⁵⁸

I may inform you that I have today sent the following cable to Tusta Krsna Maharaja: “DO NOT SELL NEW ZEALAND TEMPLE TO OTHERS.

⁵⁵ See p. 37 above.

⁵⁶ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 4: 2174 (letter to Tusta Krishna of December 14, 1972).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ PRABHUPADA 1997, 73-10-15.Tus (letter to Tusta Krsna and Beharilal of October 15, 1973).

IF YOU WANT MONEY I SHALL PAY TO YOU. REST ASSURED —
BHAKTIVEDANTA SWAMI.”⁵⁹

I have not heard from Tusta Krsna or Siddha-Svarupa Goswamis nor do I know anything of their plans to return to New Zealand. Try to convince them to return to our Society and work co-operatively. That they have gone away is not good thing and it is a deviation from our line of parampara. Rather, avoiding faultfinding and anarchy, they should keep our standard and work maturely and not cause factions and splitting. I am not at all pleased at what they have done.⁶⁰

So far I have studied Siddhasvarupa, he is not a bad boy, but he has his own philosophy, from the very beginning.⁶¹

Please note that Tusta Krishna was a follower of another guru, Siddhasvarupa, who already had initiated disciples before he met Srila Prabhupada. *That the GBC would use such a private letter to such a poor disciple as their principal evidence for how Srila Prabhupada wanted his entire movement to be run would tend to highlight the weakness of their case.*

Even in the case of John Milner and Brahmananda, just *six months before* the writing of this letter which the GBC have enthusiastically presented as being evidence of Srila Prabhupada endorsing Brahmananda’s diksa-guru or “sum total of all the demigods”⁶² status, Srila Prabhupada severely rebuked him for “spreading contamination in our society”, being a “rascal”, doing “nonsense” etc., since he was one of the “four *sannyasis*” spreading deviant *māyāvādi* philosophy throughout the Society.⁶³ Later on Srila Prabhupada did not even consider him fit to be a ritvik, according to His Holiness Tamala Krishna Maharaja’s “Pyramid House Talks” (see KRISHNAKANT 2002, appendices).

We do not wish to drag up all these incidents unnecessarily, especially

⁵⁹ Ibid., 73-10-22.Mad (letter to Madhudvisa of October 22, 1973).

⁶⁰ Ibid., 73-12-15.Mad (letter to Madhudvisa of October 15, 1973).

⁶¹ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 5: 2866 (letter to Paramahansa of July 16, 1975).

⁶² PRABHUPADA 1982b: 71 (quoting BP 11.17.27).

⁶³ PRABHUPADA 1997, 70-09-14.Hay (letter to Hayagriva of September 14, 1970).

since some of these devotees may now have mended their ways. But if the GBC seriously consider the above quotes as their strongest evidence then the full facts must be known.

As regards the Detroit room conversation, Srila Prabhupada is also endorsing the activities of his god-brothers, even though he said that none of them were “qualified to be acarya”⁶⁴ and that they were all “dead men” and “envious”.⁶⁵ So it is clear here that Srila Prabhupada is just giving general encouragement, since he emphasises the following points:⁶⁶

- that his grhastha disciples are just as qualified as his sannyasis,
- that *all* of his disciples are “competent” to become diksa-gurus,
- that anyone who is simply “initiated” is automatically “competent” to become a diksa-guru,
- that even at that time (1971) they were *all* already qualified to become fully-fledged diksa-gurus: “NOW, they’re competent.”

Otherwise we have to seriously accept that Srila Prabhupada is stating that anyone, just by being initiated, is automatically qualified and authorised to become a diksa-guru. Thus, if the GBC want to take this quote literally, then all of Srila Prabhupada’s 10,000 disciples, men and women, should all be free, regardless of their spiritual standing, to initiate without the need for the elaborate voting and “no objection” arrangements that occur at present. For he says: “NOW, they’re competent.”

Also, it should be noted that as little as one year later Srila Prabhupada had to suspend the whole GBC for gross unauthorised behaviour.

The encouragement given in Detroit was never repeated to the entire movement, nor written into any GBC resolution, directive or published book. It is just one mention in a conversation to a one-off visitor to a temple in 1971, and which was not in any case uncovered until twenty years after Srila Prabhupada’s departure. Moreover, as the full conversation reveals right at the beginning, *the visitor Mohsin Hassan had come to investigate ISKCON to possibly include the findings in his thesis. Srila Prabhupada immediately seizes on this as an opportunity to promote ISKCON*

⁶⁴ Ibid., 74-04-28.Rup (letter to Rupanuga of April 28, 1974).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 740713mw.1a (morning walk conversation of July 13, 1974).

⁶⁶ Ibid., 710718RC.DET (Detroit room conversation of July 18, 1971).

(underlining added):

Mohsin Hassan: ... quite, came four weeks ago, and I received the response from you. I think I had a (indistinct) with me, and you indicated that you would like to meet me and give me some hint, a suggestion for my thesis writing. So here I am first to introduce myself to you and hope to learn some more about the objective of the movement. Maybe I could put in the thesis.

Srila Prabhupada: We require help from personalities like you, because it is very important movement, checking a great mistake in the modern world.⁶⁷

Naturally for such a purpose, from this point on in the conversation, Srila Prabhupada is going to emphasise the positive aspects of ISKCON and the spiritual tradition his movement represents. He obviously was not going to use *this* opportunity to wash any dirty laundry in public. Had he presented the full facts, namely,

- that his god-brothers had deviated from the orders of his own Spiritual Master,
- that, despite Srila Prabhupada’s enormous success, not one of them had lifted a finger to help him,
- that far from helping him they were openly criticising him in an envious and hostile way,
- that some of his own disciples were highly ambitious neophytes, just itching to replace him as the initiating guru, and bask in his reflected glory,

it would have been unlikely that the purpose of taking “help” from Mohsin Hassan would have been served. Thus for the purposes of preaching, Srila Prabhupada chose to give a more encouraging picture.

Conclusion

The explanations above give the background to these instructions. The key points regarding the validity of this so-called evidence offered by the GBC to the matter in hand, is that these six instances in eleven years

- do not match the claim for the existence of “*many other references*”

⁶⁷ Ibid.

wherein Srila Prabhupada had generally expressed his desire, intention, request, and order that in the future all his disciples should become qualified as spiritual masters and also initiate new generations of disciples”⁶⁸ and “*overwhelming* evidence to support the acceptance by the GBC that Srila Prabhupada wanted many initiating spiritual masters who would accept disciples on behalf of Lord Krishna and the disciplic succession”⁶⁹ commonly made by the GBC,

- were not generally available to the movement in 1977 and thus cannot be used to support modifications a) and b)⁷⁰ that were supposed to have been enacted on Srila Prabhupada’s departure,
- do not give a general and clear specific authorisation for all his disciples to start initiating as soon as Srila Prabhupada leaves the planet. Rather, the emphasis usually seems to be on them not doing so at least while Srila Prabhupada is present, and encouraging them.

Only if all three conditions above were present could the evidence be even considered as supporting the GBC’s position.

So, in summary, there is no instruction from Srila Prabhupada thus far produced by the GBC that can justifiably be used to support modifications a) and b) to the July 9, 1977 directive, thus displacing the ritvik system that Srila Prabhupada instituted in ISKCON just before he departed.

“Will Only Deals with Properties”

This position states:

The Revivalists quote Srila Prabhupada’s Final Will as stating there should be no change to the systems of management, in support of not changing the system of initiation — whereas the Will is only referring to how certain ISKCON properties are to be managed.

Below is the relevant section from the Will:⁷¹

⁶⁸ SWAMI, J. 1999 (emphasis added).

⁶⁹ GOSWAMI/GOSWAMI/SWAMI/SWAMI/DASA/DASA/DASA/DASA/DAS/PAI/BARRETT 1998 (emphasis added).

⁷⁰ See p. 36 above.

⁷¹ See Appendix 2 below.

1. The Governing Body Commission (GBC) will be the ultimate managing authority of the entire International Society for Krishna Consciousness.
2. Each temple will be an ISKCON property and will be managed by three executive directors. The system of management will continue as it is now and there is no need of any change.

In one of their papers the GBC argued as follows:

The quote is taken out of context. In the will “system of management” refers to the management of ISKCON properties. A change from proxy to regular gurus does not change the “system of management” for the properties as outlined in the will.⁷²

Part of the way temples were managed was that when candidates emerged who were suitable for initiation, their names would be sent to the respective ritvik. Thus the ritvik system was part and parcel of the way temples were managed. In one sense the primary purpose for temples even existing in the first place was to train devotees up to the standard required for initiation, not just to be able to boast “three executive directors”.

It seems the GBC authors are making the assertion that the only aspect of temple organisation Srila Prabhupada did not want changed was the principle of having “three executive directors”. In other words, you could scrap everything else, such as having a Temple President or a Treasurer, or donating proceeds of book sales to the BBT or maintaining the Deities, just as long as you proudly keep “three executive directors” somewhere in the temple building!

From a purely legal angle:

- a) The clause concerning “three executive directors” could only be exclusively linked to the “no need of any change” clause if the latter were preceded by the word *this*.⁷³
- b) In legal documents, only words in the form of clauses have significance, not necessarily the juxtaposition of one sentence with another, unless a word such as *this* is used to exclusively link one sentence to

⁷² GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1998.

⁷³ “This system of management will continue”

another.

- c) Even if one tries to argue a linkage to “system of management” based on the occurrence of the word “managed” — i.e. “managed by three executive directors” — we are still left with the problem that no linkage can be established to the first part (“Each temple will be an ISKCON property”) since there is no mention of management here.
- d) In this instance the two sentences in section 2 are not exclusively linked. Therefore the “no need of any change” clause must apply to the Will as a whole.

If the above were not the case then the following point would need careful consideration by the GBC: *The “no need of any change” clause only comes in section 2 of the Will, not in section 1 which mentions the GBC, so unless it can be applied to the entire Will the GBC could legitimately be disbanded.*

However tempting the above scenario might sound to some, we could not support such an interpretation of the Will since we know it is not what Srila Prabhupada wanted. We might even muster the support of the GBC itself on this point.

Certainly the ritvik system was a system of management. It was the way in which Srila Prabhupada wanted Temple Presidents to manage initiations within ISKCON. And, as the Will attests, the GBC had no authority to stop it. As the “ultimate managing authority” it was their duty to maintain it, not destroy it and invent the M.A.S.S:

The standards I have already given you, now try to maintain them at all times under standard procedure. Do not try to innovate or create anything or manufacture anything, that will ruin everything.⁷⁴

May 28, 1977 Conversation

This position states:

In the May 28, 1977 conversation Srila Prabhupada clearly ordered all his disciples to become gurus after his departure.

⁷⁴ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 4: 2115 (letter to Bali Mardan and Pusta Krsna, who were acting as GBC members, of September 18, 1972), as quoted in KRISHNAKANT 2002: 88.

The following analysis of the May 28, 1977 conversation⁷⁵ is taken from the Revivalists' main position paper *The Final Order* (KRISHNA-KANT 2002).

As we have already seen,⁷⁶ the GBC claim in their "On My Order Understood"⁷⁷ that the *sole* justification for the replacement of Srila Prabhupada with his disciples as Guru for ISKCON, and hence for modifications a) and b)⁷⁸ to the final July 9, 1977 order, comes from a taped room conversation which took place in Vrindavan on May 28, 1977 between Srila Prabhupada and some of his leading disciples. These modifications are rephrased below for greater clarity:

Modification a): That the appointment of representatives or ritviks was only temporary, specifically to be terminated on the departure of Srila Prabhupada.

Modification b): Having ceased their representational function, the ritviks would automatically become diksa-gurus, initiating persons as their own disciples, not Srila Prabhupada's.

This section therefore will be dedicated to a close scrutiny of the May 28, 1977 conversation to see if it can be legitimately used to modify the final order in terms of a) and b) above.

Since the GBC position rests on just this one piece of evidence it is quite worrying that they and their GBC Gurus have already published at least *four* different versions, or transcripts, of this very same evidence. These differing transcripts appeared in the following publications: DASA 1985, GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1990, SWAMI, S. 1994 and GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1995a.

To be presented with four different versions of the same taped conversation in itself raises a number of serious questions. For example, it would not be unreasonable to ask, which is the correct version? Why are there differing versions in the first place? Is the transcript a composite of more

⁷⁵ Prabhupada 1988-1991, vol. 33: 269f.

⁷⁶ Cf. pp. 29f. above.

⁷⁷ GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1995a.

⁷⁸ See p. 36 above.

than one conversation? Has the tape itself been edited from more than one conversation? Has there been more than one version of the tape released? If so, can we be sure that any version is true to any actual conversation? Thus already, even before the evidence is examined, we are placed in the invidious position of being expected to modify a signed letter through the analysis of a tape transcript, over which hang serious questions of authenticity. *Thus, as well as having three different and contradictory position papers to support their position, the GBC also have four different versions of their main evidence!* This is hardly a position worthy of consideration; indeed, as we have said before, it is no position at all!

However, since a large part of the transcript is common to all versions, we shall allow a composite of the four different transcripts, to be considered as evidence. So here is the conversation, with the variations in brackets:

- (1) **Satsvarupa dasa Goswami:** Then our next question concerns initiations in the future,
- (2) particularly at that time when you are no longer with us. We want to know how
- (3) first and second initiation(s) would be conducted.
- (4) **Srila Prabhupada:** Yes. I shall recommend some of you. After this is settled up
- (5) I shall recommend some of you to act as officiating *ācārya(s)*.
- (6) **Tamal Krsna Goswami:** Is that called *ṛtvik-ācārya*?
- (7) **Srila Prabhupada:** *Ṛtvik*. Yes.
- (8) **Satsvarupa dasa Goswami:** (Then) What is the relationship of that person who gives the initiation and ...
- (9) **Srila Prabhupada:** He's guru. He's guru.
- (10) **Satsvarupa dasa Goswami:** But he does it on your behalf.
- (11) **Srila Prabhupada:** Yes. That is formality. Because in my presence one should not become guru,
- (12) so on my behalf. On my order, *āmāra ājñāya guru hañā*, (he is) (be) actually guru.
- (13) But by my order.
- (14) **Satsvarupa dasa Goswami:** So (then) (they) (they'll) (may) also be considered your disciples?
- (15) **Srila Prabhupada:** Yes, they are disciples, (but) (why) consider ... who

- (16) **Tamal Krsna Goswami:** No. He is asking that these *ṛtvik-ācāryas*, they are officiating, giving *dīkṣā*,
 (17) (their) ... the people who they give *dīkṣā* to, whose disciples are they?
 (18) **Srila Prabhupada:** They are his disciples.
 (19) **Tamal Krsna Goswami:** They are his disciples.(?)
 (20) **Srila Prabhupada:** Who is initiating ... (his) (he is) grand-disciple ...
 (21) **(Satsvarupa dasa Goswami:** Yes.)
 (22) **(Tamal Krsna Goswami:** That's clear.)
 (23) **(Tamal Krsna Goswami:** Let's go on.)
 (24) **Satsvarupa dasa Goswami:** Then we have a question concerning ...
 (25) **Srila Prabhupada:** When I order you become guru, he becomes regular guru.
 (26) That's all. He becomes disciple of my disciple. (That's it). (Just see).

Neither the July 9, 1977 order, nor any subsequent document signed by Srila Prabhupada, ever refers back to the conversation above. This is quite peculiar since the central argument of “On My Order Understood”, is that this brief exchange of words is absolutely crucial to the proper understanding of the July 9, 1977 order.

This was not the regular way in which Srila Prabhupada issued instructions to his vast world-wide organisation, i.e., by releasing incomplete and misleading written directives which could only be properly understood by rummaging through archived taped conversations.

When one considers the magnitude of the order in question, namely the continuation of the Sankirtan mission for up to ten thousand years, and what happened to the Gaudiya Math over precisely this issue, it seems inconceivable that Srila Prabhupada would have managed things in this way. However, this is what we must believe if we are to accept the present GBC position. Let us now proceed carefully through the composite transcript, paying particular attention to all the lines which “On My Order Understood” claims support the modifications to the July 9, 1977 order mentioned above.

Detailed Analysis

Lines 1-3: Here Satsvarupa dasa Goswami asks Srila Prabhupada a specific question regarding how initiations will run in the future: “*partic-*

ularly at that time when you are no longer with us” (italics added). Whatever answer Srila Prabhupada gives, we know it will be *particularly* relevant to after his departure, since that is the time frame Satsvarupa is clearly concerned with, i.e. “when you are no longer with us”.

Lines 4-7: Here Srila Prabhupada answers Satsvarupa dasa Goswami’s question. He says he will be appointing some disciples to act as “officialiating *ācārya*”, or “*rtvik-ācārya*”. Having clearly answered the question Srila Prabhupada remains silent. He offers no further elaboration at this point, nor does he qualify, nor attempt to qualify his answer. We therefore must assume that this was his answer. The only alternatives to this view are either:

- 1) Srila Prabhupada deliberately answered the question incorrectly, or,
- 2) he did not hear the question properly and thought that Satsvarupa dasa Goswami was only asking about what was to be done whilst he was still present.

No disciple of Srila Prabhupada would even consider option 1), and if option 2) were the case, then the conversation can tell us nothing about the future of initiation after his departure; hence we would still be left with an unmodified July 9, 1977 order as his only statement on future initiations.

Sometimes people have argued that the full answer is only properly revealed, piecemeal as it were, throughout the rest of the conversation. The problem with this proposition is that, in issuing instructions in such a manner, Srila Prabhupada would only correctly answer the original question posed by Satsvarupa dasa Goswami if the following conditions were satisfied:

- That somebody took it upon themselves to ask more questions.
- That by sheer luck they would happen upon the right questions to get the correct answer to Satsvarupa Maharaja’s original question.

This would be an eccentric way for anyone to answer a question, not to speak of direct a world-wide organisation, and was certainly not Srila Prabhupada’s style. Indeed if, as is being proposed by the GBC, he went to all the trouble of issuing a letter to the whole Movement with instructions on initiation which were only to have relevance for four months, surely he would not have dealt in such an obscurest manner with instruc-

tions which could run for as long as ten thousand years.

Clearly if we are looking to this transcript to incontrovertibly support modifications a) and b) we are not doing very well so far. Srila Prabhupada is asked what will happen about initiations, particularly when he leaves: he answers he will be appointing ritviks. This completely contradicts both of the GBC's proposed modifications and simply reinforces the idea that the July 9, 1977 order was meant to run "henceforward". But let us read on:

Lines 8-9: Here Satsvarupa dasa Goswami asks what relationship the *initiator* has with the person being initiated. Satsvarupa dasa Goswami does not quite finish his question when Srila Prabhupada immediately answers "he's guru". Since ritviks, by definition, are not the *initiators*, Srila Prabhupada can only have been referring to himself as the "guru" of those being initiated. This is confirmed in the July 9, 1977 letter where it states three times that those being initiated were to be the disciples of Srila Prabhupada. Sometimes the theory is put forward that when Srila Prabhupada says "he's guru", he is really talking about the ritviks themselves. This is quite bizarre since Srila Prabhupada has only just defined the word "*ritvik*" as "officiating *ācārya*", literally a priest who conducts some type of religious or ceremonial function. In the July 9, 1977 letter Srila Prabhupada clarifies precisely what ceremonial function these priests will conduct. They were supposed to give spiritual names to new initiates, and, in the case of second initiation, chant on their Gayatri thread — all on Srila Prabhupada's behalf. That was it. There is no mention of them being diksa-gurus, initiating their own disciples or being Spiritual Masters on their own behalf. The letter specifically defines ritviks as "*representative of the acarya*" (italics added).⁷⁹ They were to act on behalf of the Acarya, not as acaryas in their own right. This being the case, why would Srila Prabhupada cloud the issue by calling the ritviks "guru"? If they were initiating gurus all along, why not just call them that to save confusion?

When discussing philosophical or managerial issues surrounding his position as Acarya, Srila Prabhupada would often speak of himself in the third person. It is particularly understandable that he should do so here

⁷⁹ See p. 14 above.

since Satsvarupa dasa Goswami's questions at this point are posed in that tense.

Thus the conversation can only make sense if we take it that Srila Prabhupada is the "guru" who was initiating new disciples, through his representatives, the ritviks.

Although Srila Prabhupada's answers are quite clear and consistent, it does seem as though there is some confusion in the mind of the questioner at this point. This is where Satsvarupa dasa Goswami asks in line 10: "But he does it on your behalf." The "he" Satsvarupa dasa Goswami is referring to is the ritvik, whereas the "he" that Srila Prabhupada was referring to, as we have shown, could only have been himself, since he is the only *initiator* within the ritvik system. Despite his disciples apparent confusion Srila Prabhupada deftly adapts his next answer to match Satsvarupa dasa Goswami's actual concern, namely the status of these future ritviks.

Lines 11-13: This is where it is claimed by the GBC that there is evidence for modification a). Before considering whether or not these lines do constitute such evidence, we should first remember the analysis of lines 1-7.

If lines 11-13 do establish modification a), this will only be at the expense of contradicting lines 1-7 where Srila Prabhupada has already clearly answered that ritviks were to be appointed "particularly" for *after* his departure. So if indeed modification a) is established in lines 11-13, the implication is that Srila Prabhupada contradicted a statement he himself made just moments before. Should this be the case, then it would once more render the transcript useless for determining anything about future initiations, since two totally contradictory positions would be equally validated in the same conversation. Again we would be forced to refer back to the final July 9, 1977 order in an unmodified condition.

Let us see if this did in fact happen. Remember we are looking for a specific statement that the ritviks *must* cease their duties once Srila Prabhupada departs. In other words that they can *only* operate in his presence.

On reading lines 11-13 we see that all that is stated is that the ritviks must operate in his presence because in his presence they can not be guru. Thus Srila Prabhupada is simply restating a principle he occasionally invoked in his dealings with ambitious disciples: that in the presence of the

guru one must act only on his behalf. However what Srila Prabhupada does not say is that this acting “on your behalf” *must* cease once he leaves the planet. He also does not say that acting “on your behalf” can *only* happen whilst he is present. Indeed nowhere thus far has he directly linked his *physical presence* in any way with the concept of *acting on his behalf*, but rather simply states it as a reason that prevents his disciples from being guru, and it is this not being guru which is linked to acting as a ritvik.

In other words, at the time of this conversation, one of the reasons they could not be diksa-guru was Srila Prabhupada’s physical presence. But this is not the only hurdle preventing his disciples from taking on the diksa-guru mantle, as we learn in the very next line.

In line 12 we see that being guru also depends on receiving a specific order from Srila Prabhupada: “*On my order*” (italics added). He repeats this condition in line 13, namely “*But by my order*” (italics added), and once more in line 25: “*When I order*” (italics added). It is quite clear then that this cannot be the order proper, otherwise why say “*When I order*”? If this was the actual order to become guru after his departure, as the GBC maintains, then surely he would have said something like: “I am now ordering you, that as soon as I leave, you stop being ritviks and become diksa-gurus.” Such a statement would certainly have lent some credibility to the current GBC position and the M.A.S.S. doctrine. However, as can be seen, nothing even remotely resembling such a statement can be found anywhere in the May 28, 1977 conversation. It is further argued that the use of the *āmāra ājñāya* verse⁸⁰ at this point means that the order to be diksa-guru had *already* been given, since this order from Lord Caitanya had been repeated many times by Srila Prabhupada. However, the *āmāra ājñāya* order, as we have seen, refers only to the siksa-guru; we know that the order to become diksa-guru had not yet been given since Srila Prabhupada states “*When I order*” (italics added). Therefore Srila Prabhupada’s use of the verse at this point is simply to convey the notion of an order needed to be given before guruship, of whatever type, is taken up.

There is certainly nothing on lines 11-13 which in any way modifies Srila Prabhupada’s clear reply to Satsvarupa’s original question (lines 1-

⁸⁰ Cf. p. 29 above.

7). Thus our understanding of lines 1-7 remains intact. Srila Prabhupada did not contradict himself, the July 9, 1977 order stands so far unmodified.

What lines 11-13 do establish is that the ritvik system was to operate whilst Srila Prabhupada was still present, but not that it can *only* operate whilst he is present. The July 9, 1977 letter makes this clear anyway by the use of the word “henceforward”. The word “henceforward” can encompass all possible time frames from that day onwards, regardless of Srila Prabhupada’s physical proximity. But let us read on:

Lines 14-15: Interestingly, at this point Satsvarupa dasa Goswami asks a question directly of Srila Prabhupada: “So (then) (they) (they’ll) (may) also be considered your disciples?” Srila Prabhupada therefore answers *in the first person*, “Yes, they are disciples”, Once more confirming the ownership of any future disciples. Although it is not clear what Srila Prabhupada is going on to say, his initial answer is quite definite. He is asked a direct question requiring him to answer in the first person, and he answers “Yes”. If the GBC had any hope of upholding modifications a) and b), Srila Prabhupada would have had to answer this question something along the lines of: “No, they are not my disciples.” Whatever Srila Prabhupada was going on to say is irrelevant since no one can ever know. We only know that when asked whether future initiates were to be *his* disciples, he answered “Yes”. Again not a good sign for the modifications a) and b).

Lines 16-18: Tamal Krsna Goswami seems to sense some confusion here and interrupts Srila Prabhupada. He further clarifies Satsvarupa dasa Goswami’s question by asking Srila Prabhupada whose disciples are those who are being given diksa by the ritviks. Once again Srila Prabhupada answers in the third person (having been asked the question in the third person): “They are his disciples.” As we have discussed he can only be referring to himself, since ritviks do not, by definition, possess their own disciples. Furthermore, we know that he was definitely referring to himself since he answers the question in the singular (“*his* disciples ... Who *is* initiating”; italics added), having been asked the question about the ritviks in the plural (“these *ritvik-ācāryas*”; underlining added).

One idea, which is sometimes put forward, is that at this point in the

conversation Tamal Krsna Goswami is asking the question in some vaguely futuristic sense, about an unspecified time frame in which the ritviks have somehow transformed themselves into diksa-gurus. According to this theory, when Srila Prabhupada, who is now presumably mystically attuned to Tamal Krsna Goswami's mind set, answers that future initiates are "his disciples", what he actually means is that they are disciples of the ritviks, who are now not ritviks at all, but diksa-gurus. Leaving aside the fact that this fanciful meeting of minds is both unlikely and highly speculative, there is at least one other problem with this hypothesis:

Up till this point Srila Prabhupada has not stated that the ritviks, which he has yet to appoint, will ever act in any capacity other than as ritviks. So why would Tamal Krsna Goswami have assumed their status was to change?

Lines 19-20: Tamal Krsna Goswami repeats the answer, and then Srila Prabhupada continues: "Who is initiating ... (his) (he is) grand-disciple." We have chosen the transcript version "his grand-disciple" over the version "he is grand-disciple" since it most closely resembles the tape, and seems to flow best with the sense of the conversation. (Otherwise the person initiating would simultaneously become a grand-disciple!: "*Who is initiating ... he is grand-disciple*"; italics added).

The argument that when speaking here in the third person, Srila Prabhupada must be referring to the ritviks and not himself, can be tested by modifying the conversation in accordance with this view, replacing the actual third person pronoun with "the ritvik's" (shown in brackets), for lines 17-20:

- (17) **Tamal Krsna Goswami:** ... whose disciples are they?
- (18) **Srila Prabhupada:** They are (the ritvik's) disciples.
- (19) **Tamal Krsna Goswami:** They are (the ritvik's) disciples.
- (20) **Srila Prabhupada:** (The ritvik) is initiating ... (the ritvik's) grand-disciple ...

Given the premise that ritviks are only *officiating*, and that their role is only *representational*, it should be self-evident to the reader that this interpretation of lines 17-20 does not make sense. It is a contradiction in terms for ritviks to have their own disciples, not to speak of grand-disciples.

The accusation has been made that we are in some way twisting Srila

Prabhupada's words by taking third person statements to be first person statements. However, we feel our interpretation is consistent with the function Srila Prabhupada assigned to his ritviks. There appears to be just two possible options for interpretation in considering this conversation:

- 1) Future new disciples were to belong to ritvik priests, who by definition are not diksa-gurus, but officiators who have been set up specifically to act as proxies. Further the Ritvik priest will not only be having disciples, but also having disciples of his disciples: "his grand-disciple"!
- 2) Future new disciples were to belong to the diksa-guru, Srila Prabhupada.

Option 1) is just absurd. Therefore we have gone for option 2) as the only rational choice, and have thus interpreted the tape accordingly.

Lines 25-26: Srila Prabhupada concludes with the unequivocal stipulation that *only* when he orders will anyone become guru. At such a juncture new initiates would be "disciple of my disciple".

A great deal is made of the use of the term "grand-disciple". For many, the use of this phrase by Srila Prabhupada acts as a clincher, since you can only have grand-disciples if there are diksa-gurus. This is true. Unfortunately, the words following the term "his grand-disciple" are usually ignored. Srila Prabhupada goes on to state that a grand-disciple and hence a diksa-guru will *only* exist when Srila Prabhupada orders his disciple to become a diksa-guru. In other words Srila Prabhupada is simply saying that when a guru orders his disciple to become a diksa-guru, he will have grand-disciples ("his grand-disciple"), since the new diksa-guru will *then* be initiating in his own right ("He becomes disciple of my disciple").

This seems straightforward enough, a point nobody could dispute. But where is the order for this guruship to occur? Certainly not in lines 25-26, nor for that matter anywhere else in the conversation.

In actuality, the May 28, 1977 conversation is not ordering any specific person to do anything at all. Srila Prabhupada is simply making known his intention to appoint ritviks at some point in the future. He then goes on to answer slightly muddled questions about guru-disciple relationships within the ritvik system. He then concludes with a statement about what would happen should he ever decide to give the relevant *order* to someone to become a diksa-guru. It is clear though that the only specific order naming specific people to perform specific functions was given in the

signed letter of July 9, 1977. But as can be seen from reading the July 9, 1977 letter, there is no mention whatsoever of the eleven appointed ritviks *ever* becoming diksa-gurus; or for the ritvik system to ever stop.

After our exhaustive analysis of the May 28, 1977 conversation, it is clear that *what the GBC is presenting is a classic circular argument*:

In order to support modifications a) and b), which are absolutely vital to the current position on gurus within ISKCON, we are told we must modify the July 9, 1977 letter using an “order” which Srila Prabhupada gave in the May 28, 1977 transcript. However, having read the transcript carefully we see that Srila Prabhupada says they can only be gurus “When I order”. So how can it be asserted that this “When I order” was the same “order” that was finally put in place on July 9, 1977, since this “order” is purely for the creation of ritviks, and is the very same “order” which was required by the GBC to be modified in the first place in order to support their crucial a) and b) modifications?

Unfortunately, in adopting the line of reasoning championed in “On My Order Understood” we find ourselves drawn inexorably towards the above absurd dialectical impasse.

Ultimately, the biggest problem with the whole “modification” theory, apart from the obvious absence of any supportive evidence, is that *you cannot legitimately modify an instruction with information which was not available to the very people who were supposed to carry out the instruction*.

If it was indeed the case that the May 28, 1977 conversation had contained clear instructions supporting modifications a) and b), then surely the July 9, 1977 directive should have contained at least some hint of them. Indeed the main purpose of the meeting on May 28 was to clearly establish what was to be done about initiations *after* Srila Prabhupada left the planet. And yet it is being proposed that when Srila Prabhupada finally releases his last written directive on initiation, he somehow only addressed what was to be done *before* he left the planet.

In other words, the subject Srila Prabhupada was *not* being asked about he supposedly gave clear and emphatic directives on; whilst the really important matter, the one which everyone *did* want to know about, i.e. the future of initiations for up to ten thousand years, he entirely omitted to address in his last signed instruction on the issue.

We can find no example of Srila Prabhupada ever directing his Society by

- 1) issuing important directives which fail to even address the main purpose of their being issued,
- 2) deliberately withholding vital information pertaining to an important new system of management,
- 3) expecting the recipients of his instructions to be mystic mind readers in order to correctly follow an instruction.

There is one further attempt made in “On My Order Understood” to extract something from the May 28, 1977 conversation in support of modifications a) and b) when it points to Srila Prabhupada’s use of the verse *āmāra ājñāya guru hañā*⁸¹ in line 12. The verse is also repeated further along in the May 28, 1977 conversation after discussion relating to the translation of his books. According to this view the ritvik order is identical to the order to be a diksa-guru, simply by merit of Srila Prabhupada mentioning this famous instruction of Lord Caitanya for “everyone to become guru” in the same conversation as he discusses ritviks. But all Srila Prabhupada states is that:

... one who understands his guru’s order, the same *paramparā*, he can become guru. And therefore I shall select some of you.⁸²

The essential points to consider here are:

- 1) What was the “guru’s order” they had to understand? — To act as ritviks. (“I shall recommend some of you to act as officiating *ācārya(s)*.”⁸³)
- 2) What are they eventually selected to do? — To act as ritviks. (Please refer to the July 9, 1977 letter.⁸⁴)
- 3) And by following the order of the guru, what sort of guru do they become? — As was seen earlier (p. 33) from the analysis of Lord Caitanya’s order to “become guru”, *anyone who faithfully executes this order*

⁸¹ CC ML 7.128cd.

⁸² Op.cit. in note 75.

⁸³ Cf. p. 49 above.

⁸⁴ See PRABHUPADA 1997, 77-07-09 (pp. 14f. above).

is automatically qualified as a siksa-guru.

“On My Order Understood” presents the contradictory proposition that *in following the guru’s order to act as ritvik only (not as a diksa-guru), one should automatically act as a diksa-guru.*

By this logic anyone who follows any order given by the guru, has also somehow automatically received a specific order to become a diksa-guru! Unfortunately the GBC does not offer any evidence to support this thesis. As shown previously, the use of the *āmāra ājñāya* verse is simply an order for everyone to become a siksa-guru *only* (“It is best not to accept any disciples”⁸⁵).

Conclusion

1) On July 9, 1977 Srila Prabhupada appointed eleven ritviks to carry out first and second initiations.

2) There is no evidence in the May 28, 1977 conversation which can be used to modify the July 9, 1977 order, such that the appointed ritviks *must* cease their duties on Srila Prabhupada’s departure.

3) There is also nothing in the May 28, 1977 conversation which can be used to modify the July 9, 1977 order such that the ritviks were to metamorphose into diksa-gurus as soon as Srila Prabhupada left the planet.

4) The one thing clearly established in the May 28, 1977 conversation is that the ritviks were to operate *after* Srila Prabhupada’s departure.

It should be noted that there are at least four different transcripts, and four differing “official” GBC interpretations of this very same conversation. Many devotees feel that for this reason alone the conversation cannot be considered as conclusive evidence. Should this be the reader’s conclusion too then he will have no choice but to return once more to the July 9, 1977 letter as the final order, since it is a signed letter, clearly written and sent to the entire Movement. This would certainly be the conclusion in a court of law; signed written evidence always takes precedence over tape recordings. The only reason we have examined the May 28, 1977 conversation so carefully here is because the GBC have put it forward as their main evidence in support of modifications a) and b).

We are forced then to reject totally modifications a) and b), the very

⁸⁵ Purport of CC ML 7.130 (p. 538).

foundations of the GBC's current position on initiation within ISKCON, since there is no evidence to support them. Consequently, *the instructions given in the July 9, 1977 policy document do indeed constitute Srila Prabhupada's final order on initiation.*

“Ritvik System Unprecedented”

This position states:

The ritvik system is entirely without historical precedent, no previous acarya has ever adopted anything like it in the entire history of Gaudiya Vaisnavism, and thus whatever seemingly cunning arguments the Revivalists may come up with, they must have misunderstood Srila Prabhupada's intentions as regards the July 9, 1977 directive.

This objection was answered in a paper by the IRM entitled “The Unprecedented Objection”⁸⁶, the arguments of which we reproduce below:

One of the most common objections to the ritvik system of initiation being reinstated within ISKCON is that it is not in line with historical tradition. It is often pointed out that to operate such a system is completely unprecedented, and thus cannot be what Srila Prabhupada had intended. The most obvious problem with this objection is that it is in itself unprecedented. Nowhere in sastra is it ever stated that a guru's order can be ignored if it is unprecedented, or that lack of historical precedent somehow invalidates a direct instruction from a guru to his followers. Neither is there any mention in Srila Prabhupada's books of any previous acarya who taught such a principle. Therefore the objection itself is unprecedented, and thus by its own logic self-defeating and contradictory.

The following points can be used to defeat this objection:

- 1) The conclusion that the ritvik system is unprecedented follows from an analysis of its properties, i.e. that it appears to be unique. However, such an analysis is totally unrelated to the central question: was such a system ordered by Srila Prabhupada? Just because the ritvik system may have been previously unheard of, does not in itself prove that Srila Prabhupada did not sanction its continued application within ISKCON.

⁸⁶ ISKCON REVIVAL MOVEMENT 1997.

This central question can only be properly addressed by analysing Srila Prabhupada's actual instructions in this regard. These instructions, along with their analysis, have been presented in *The Final Order*⁸⁷, wherein it has been clearly demonstrated that Srila Prabhupada *did* order such a system. For disciples it is only such orders that have any relevance. Srila Prabhupada did not train his disciples to evaluate his orders on the basis of historical considerations, nor did he ever teach that such considerations could be used to evaluate the validity of such orders, not to speak of terminate them.

- 2) Srila Prabhupada taught that our guide is sastric injunctions, *not* historical tradition. There are *no* sastric injunctions preventing a diksa-guru from initiating just because he is not physically present on the same planet as his prospective disciple.
- 3) It is just plain historical fact that Srila Prabhupada did many things which were unprecedented, such as giving the Gayatri mantra by having a female disciple administer it to her husband, giving initiation through the mail, etc. Every acarya in our line set his own precedents, albeit in harmony with sastric injunctions. If an acarya never set a precedent, then logically nothing could ever be *unprecedented*, since no precedents would exist in the first place to act as a comparative standard. Thus to reject something based on lack of precedence is a self-contradictory argument, since something can only be unprecedented if you assume that there already exist precedents set by someone, at some time previous, to act as a standard. But in accepting this possibility, we are admitting that an acarya can set precedents!
- 4) Certainly there is no mention in his books that any type of *physical* barrier or consideration can obstruct the transcendental process of diksa between guru and disciple. In fact the *opposite* is stated:

Just like Krishna can be present simultaneously in millions of places. Similarly, the Spiritual Master can be present wherever the disciple wants. A Spiritual Master is the principle, not the body. Just like a television can be seen in thousands of places by the principle of relay moni-

⁸⁷ KRISHNAKANT 2002.

toring.⁸⁸

Physical presence is immaterial.⁸⁹

So we should associate by the vibration, and not by the physical presence. That is real association.⁹⁰

For other references please see the appendices of KRISHNAKANT 2002.

- 5) One could argue that there is no mention in Srila Prabhupada's books of a ritvik system having previously been used when the guru is still on the same planet as the prospective disciple. Yet we know that such a system was used by Srila Prabhupada to initiate the vast majority of his disciples. Thus if we used historical precedent as a guide we would need to discount many of the initiations conducted by Srila Prabhupada as being bogus. This is a clear example of Srila Prabhupada sanctioning the use of a previously unprecedented system. The very same system in fact which is now being objected to on the basis of lack of precedent!
- 6) Furthermore, what we *do* know about the parampara supports the ritvik system. The most famous example of diksa transmission in our parampara is given in BG 4.1:

The Blessed Lord said: I instructed this imperishable science of yoga to the sun-god, Vivasvān, and Vivasvān instructed it to Manu, the father of mankind, and Manu in turn instructed it to Ikṣvāku.⁹¹

And yet Srila Prabhupada describes this primary example of the parampara system as involving inter-planetary diksa:

So there was no difficulty in communicating with Manu or Manu's son Ikṣvaku. The communication was there, or the radio system was so nice that communication could be transferred from one planet to another.⁹²

⁸⁸ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 1: 401 (letter to Malati of May 28, 1968).

⁸⁹ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 1: 119 (letter to Brahmananda et al. of January 19, 1967).

⁹⁰ PRABHUPADA 1997, 680818SB.MON (BP lecture of August 18, 1968).

⁹¹ Translation by PRABHUPADA 2000: 214.

⁹² PRABHUPADA 1997, 680824BG.MON (BG lecture of August 24, 1968).

The fact that diksa can be transmitted from one planet to another proves the viability of the ritvik system, since we know Srila Prabhupada is still present in the universe:

You have asked if it is true that the spiritual master remains in the universe until all his disciples are transferred to the spiritual sky. The answer is yes, this is the rule.⁹³

We also know that as a maha-bhagavata Srila Prabhupada is at least as powerful as demigods such as Ikshvaku. So transferring or transmitting diksa to receptive disciples should present him no difficulty at all, from whichever planet he may presently reside.

- 7) Also in the Gaudiya parampara coming from Lord Caitanya, Srila Prabhupada always presents as the record of the parampara: Narottama Dasa Thakura > Visvanatha Cakravarti > Jagannatha Dasa Babaji. Yet there would appear to be hundreds of years separating them. Srila Prabhupada teaches us that *this* is the parampara, without any additional clarification regarding “siksha/diksa”, “gaps” or the need for “living diksa”. Rather he calls it a “clear line of disciplic succession”⁹⁴. Why would Srila Prabhupada do this if he wanted to emphasise the need for “living diksa”? One may go and research other books not authored by Srila Prabhupada to present an alternative explanation, but only the above is what *Srila Prabhupada* taught us.
- 8) Also it does not make sense to use “tradition” as a benchmark by which to evaluate our parampara since it is difficult to identify, for our parampara, a package of “traditional” standards from which nothing must deviate. For example, a few hundred years ago Madhavendra Puri introduced something completely new: Radha-Krishna worship. Srila Prabhupada states that up until then Krishna had been worshipped on His own. Lord Caitanya then appeared to completely change Vaisnava philosophy. Until then the philosophy of our parampara had been pure dualism, not simultaneous oneness and difference. With all this in mind it seems odd we should worry unduly about Srila Prabhupada using ceremonial priests in seemingly novel ways. After all, he is not changing

⁹³ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 2: 938 (letter to Jayapataka of July 11, 1969).

⁹⁴ PRABHUPADA 1997, 690611SB.NV (BP lecture of June 11, 1969).

any principle of philosophy merely by using priests to give names and accept disciples on his behalf. He is only installing a relatively minor procedural detail with regard to a ceremony which is itself merely a formality, not an essential aspect of diksa initiation. The key overriding principle that a disciple should always get initiated by a maha-bhagavata who is in the parampara, remains intact. This is the system Srila Prabhupada left us, whereby potentially unlimited numbers of people in the future can be initiated into the parampara, using the same system that was used to initiate large numbers of new disciples when Srila Prabhupada was physically present.

- 9) Sometimes people bring in books not authored by Srila Prabhupada to prove that the ritvik system is a deviation from tradition. This tactic is employed since there is no mention of these so-called vital “traditional” principles in Srila Prabhupada’s books. The very fact that outside books need to be consulted proves that Srila Prabhupada’s books were not intended to be guidebooks for evaluating how “traditional” a particular practice maybe. This fact alone should tell us that tradition cannot be an issue. If tradition was supposed to be a vital tool by which to evaluate the validity of any particular practice, then Srila Prabhupada would have provided us with the necessary information about “traditional” practices with which to make these judgments. We would not need to consult other books, since Srila Prabhupada’s teachings are not “deficient” in any area of spiritual life. Obviously, if we are sincerely trying to follow and understand what Srila Prabhupada wanted, we should stick solely to his teachings. If there is some so-called principle of tradition that Srila Prabhupada did not mention, we are not interested in it. Such principles cannot be important to our spiritual lives if Srila Prabhupada did not mention them.
- 10) Finally, the whole process of trying to draw comparisons with the past is entirely meaningless unless you are comparing like with like. Srila Prabhupada was a totally unique acarya, who came in unique circumstances, and achieved unique results. No previous acarya can compare with Srila Prabhupada. No one before has left his own land and spread Krishna Consciousness all over the world. Unless you can find other examples of how initiations were conducted in a *worldwide* religious *institution* during some previous Kali-yuga just after the appearance of

the Golden Avatar, you do not even have a basis for comparison.

Summary

The July 9, 1977 order proves that Srila Prabhupada definitely set up a ritvik system of initiation. We also know that he issued no countermanding order for it to be terminated. Therefore it should still be running. This system may not marry up with our speculations about how we think Srila Prabhupada *should* have done things, or what we might have *expected* him to do; but this is Srila Prabhupada's final order on how initiations were to run within ISKCON. Thus we have no choice but to follow it if we want to follow Srila Prabhupada. That's the bottom line. Therefore, the burden is on the GBC to show why the system that Srila Prabhupada set up for initiations was supposed to be drastically altered immediately after his passing away.

Furthermore:

- 1) The ritvik system as used by Srila Prabhupada himself when he was present is unprecedented.
- 2) Historical precedent is in itself no basis for determining truth.
- 3) We follow sastra, which does not give any injunctions against the ritvik system.
- 4) Srila Prabhupada did many things which were unprecedented.
- 5) Previous acaryas all set their own precedents.
- 6) Parampara examples and teachings support lack of physicality in guru-disciple relationships.
- 7) The parampara has no standard pattern to be followed.
- 8) We do not have enough authorised information to evaluate if the system is "untraditional".
- 9) The whole situation is too unique to make any valid comparisons.
- 10) The very objection itself is unprecedented, and thus by its own internal logic should be rejected.

“No Support from Guru, Sadhu and Sastra”

This position states:

To reimplement the ritvik system would go against guru, sadhu (*sādhu*, saintly person) and sastra (*sāstra*, scripture).

This is a variation on the previous objection, and was answered by the

IRM in *The Final Order* (KRISHNAKANT 2002).

One common objection to keeping Srila Prabhupada as ISKCON's diksa-guru, through the use of representatives as outlined in the July 9, 1977 letter, is that it is not supported by guru, sadhu and sastra. There are two forms to this objection:

- A) It is argued that the July 9, 1977 letter alone, whilst admittedly issued by a guru, is not in and of itself sufficient evidence to substantiate the pro-ritvik position since it is not supported by sadhu and sastra.
- B) It is also argued that the July 9, 1977 letter could not possibly be endorsing the ritvik system for after Srila Prabhupada's departure, since to do so would be out of line with guru, sadhu and sastra.

One point which is often missed by those who quote this "guru, sadhu, sastra" principle is that, if the guru is bona fide, then his teachings and instructions will *automatically* be in line with sadhu and sastra:

Sadhu sastra guru-vakya, tinete kariya aikya. Sastra is never changed. And the sadhu ... Sadhu means who follows the sastras. He is sadhu. He also does not change. Sadhu, sastra. And guru? Guru means who follows the sastra and sadhu. So there are three, the same.⁹⁵

Since Srila Prabhupada is such a bona fide guru, a fact that is not disputed by anyone in ISKCON, we know that when we follow his orders, sastra and sadhu will automatically be satisfied.

If we accept any generally applicable teaching or instruction issued by Srila Prabhupada we are automatically, by definition, situated in line with sadhu and sastra. Such teachings and instructions, when issued by a bona fide guru, are all "Vedic version", sastric or as good as scriptural evidence (as long as we only accept a *mukhyavṛtti*, or "face-meaning interpretation",⁹⁶ of them) and are thus accepted by all genuine sadhus as proper and sublime. It is thus not necessary to try and satisfy each of

⁹⁵ PRABHUPADA 1997, 761130SB.VRN (BP lecture of November 30, 1976).

⁹⁶ In other words, a direct meaning or *abhidhāvṛtti*, which "one can understand immediately from the statements of dictionaries", as opposed to an indirect meaning or *gaunāvṛtti*, "that one imagines without consulting the dictionary", and that Lord Caitanya rejected with regard to the understanding of Vedic literature (from Srila Prabhupada's purport of CC AL 7.110 on p. 164).

these three elements separately. To argue, as some have done, that we must check Srila Prabhupada's teachings against the opinions of other sadhus, or with some lesser mortal's limited understanding of sastra, is tantamount to arguing that Srila Prabhupada is not actually a bona fide guru. After all, only a bogus guru would propose something that was not in line with sadhu and sastra.

Having established this point, let us now return to A) and B) above.

Since the July 9, 1977 letter is an order issued by our bona fide guru, objection A) can be seen as false. We know that whatever Srila Prabhupada ordered us to do in the July 9, 1977 letter would automatically be in line with guru, sadhu and sastra.

Furthermore, we can know if a teaching is against sadhu and sastra simply by testing if it violates the teachings of the guru. Since, thus far, no one has been able to locate a single teaching or general instruction from Srila Prabhupada that the continued application of the ritvik system would contravene, the ritvik system cannot be against guru, sadhu and sastra. Thus objection B) is also shown to be false. Hence any instruction from Srila Prabhupada must automatically be in line with guru, sadhu and sastra since he is a bona fide spiritual master.

“Ritvik Not in Books”

This position states:

Ritvik “philosophy” is not in Srila Prabhupada's books.

The above is a common objection to the arguments that have been put forward in favour of reinstating the ritvik system. These arguments sometimes presented by the GBC and their apologists present the ritvik system as some sort of alien “philosophy”, or *vāda*, which is nowhere to be found in Srila Prabhupada's books, and is therefore bogus. Although this is just a variation on the previous objection, since an institutional directive is still the word of the guru, let us nevertheless explore what is stated in Srila Prabhupada's books. And we already saw in the earlier section titled “Further Evidence from the Books” (pp. 17ff. above), that Srila Prabhupada's books clearly support an initiation system with only Srila Prabhupada as the sole diksa-guru for ISKCON. Before we can discuss the alleged lack of reference to the so-called “ritvik philosophy”, we must first

define exactly what the “ritvik system” involves. There are two principal aspects:

Aspect A: Initiations are performed through the use of representatives with no external involvement from the guru.

Aspect B: The guru gives initiation even though he is not on the same planet as the disciple.

Aspect A

We know for a fact that aspect A was implemented and directly approved by Srila Prabhupada *before* he left the planet (i.e. pre-samadhi), and that this system is not *specifically* mentioned anywhere in his books. So immediately the argument that the ritvik system *must* be rejected, simply because it is not specifically described in the books, is proven to be false, since its bona fide operation “pre-samadhi” is not mentioned either.

To get around this, the GBC would need to locate the following sastric rule:

Only post-samadhi (after departure) activities need to be mentioned in the books. Pre-samadhi activities can be bona fide even if they are not mentioned in Srila Prabhupada’s books.

Leaving aside the fact that this rule is clearly a concoction, with no authority from Srila Prabhupada, we can immediately point to bona fide “post-samadhi” activities that are also not mentioned in his books, such as *managerial* details surrounding the functioning of the BBT and the GBC.

To overcome this anomaly, the GBC would need to locate the following sastric rule:

Only post-samadhi activities that the GBC decide are not managerial need to be specifically mentioned in Srila Prabhupada’s books to be deemed bona fide.

The following rule would then logically follow:

All post-samadhi activities that the GBC decide do fall under the category of management can be considered bona fide, even if they are not mentioned in Srila Prabhupada’s books.

Again leaving aside the fact that the above rules are concocted out of thin air, and constitute a highly complex metaphysical system in their own right, we also now have the added complication that the GBC's classification of what constitutes *management* may also be inaccurate.

Even accepting this two-level arbitrary system of rules, we know for a fact that the "method of initiation" employed within ISKCON has in the past fallen under the umbrella of *management* since the GBC, the ultimate *managing* authority for ISKCON, passed related resolutions when Srila Prabhupada was still on the planet, for instance the "Method of initiating Sannyasis"⁹⁷.

The use of representatives for the "purpose of performing initiations" within the ritvik system is clearly another "method" which was to be employed within the institution. As shown above, such methodologies were all part and parcel of ISKCON *management*. This is not in dispute since even to this day ISKCON accept that the issue of when and how initiations can take place is a *management* issue, to be controlled and voted on by the GBC.

Being that all the above rules are concocted, the GBC's position suffers from self-referential incoherence; since, in claiming to enforce Srila Prabhupada's real instructions on initiation the GBC would need to invent all kinds of intellectual structures which were never once instructed by Srila Prabhupada! So from every angle of vision, there is no legitimate objection to aspect A of the ritvik system.

Aspect B

Let us look now at aspect B of the ritvik system, which states that the guru gives initiation even though he is not on the same planet as the disciple.

To object to the ritvik system in relation to aspect B is to assume that the *distance* between the guru and disciple, at the time of diksa initiation, is somehow profoundly significant. Now, in proposing that aspect B must be explicitly mentioned in Srila Prabhupada's books in order for such initiations to be bona-fide, the GBC are proposing yet another concocted sastric rule which would go something like:

⁹⁷ GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1975.

In order for any initiation to be bona fide, the distance between the guru and disciple at the time of initiation must be stated in Srila Prabhupada's books.

By studying Srila Prabhupada's books we find there is no mention of all these possible *distances* between gurus and disciples at which initiation can legitimately take place. *Distance* is never an issue as far as diksa transmission is concerned. As far as we know, no previous acarya ever used sophisticated measuring equipment to ensure he was within the correct radius of his prospective disciple's ceremonial fire pit. Again to get around this problem, the GBC would need to come up with the following sastric rule:

There is no need for specific sastric references to all the possible distances between gurus and disciples at which bona fide initiation can be performed, just as long as they are both on the same planet when the ceremony is performed.

As before, the above inclusive sastric allowance for all possible earth-bound distances has no mention in Srila Prabhupada's books. Such a rule does not exist in Bhagavat philosophy. In fact, in the most famous example of diksa transmission in Srila Prabhupada's books we have evidence of inter-planetary diksa taking place. BG 4.1 states:

The Blessed Lord said: I instructed this imperishable science of yoga to the sun-god, Vivasvān, and Vivasvān instructed it to Manu, the father of mankind, and Manu in turn instructed it to Ikṣvāku.⁹⁸

So there was no difficulty in communicating with Manu or Manu's son Ikṣvaku. The communication was there, or the radio system was so nice that communication could be transferred from one planet to another.⁹⁹

The GBC would then be forced to concoct the following sastric rule:

Only if the guru and disciple are on different planets at the time of initiation, does there need to be any mention in Srila Prabhupada's books in order for it to be bona fide.

⁹⁸ Translation by PRABHUPADA 2000: 214.

⁹⁹ PRABHUPADA 1997, 680824BG.MON (BG lecture of August 24, 1968).

The above rule is also absent from Srila Prabhupada's books, and hence does not exist in our philosophy. As mentioned previously, the GBC's proclivity to invoke non-existent sastric rules is itself an example of self-referential incoherence, and thus renders their position philosophically untenable.

Perhaps the biggest flaw in such an approach, at least as far as clear thinking is concerned, is that the GBC has decided in advance what the truth must be, regardless of what Srila Prabhupada's books actually state. They determine what the books should or should not contain based on what they have already decided is the truth. A vigorous knowledge filter is thus in place, whereby devotees are only seeing in Srila Prabhupada's books the things they are told they should see. For example, many times we have heard the most senior "gurus" in the movement stating categorically that one must have a "living guru"; and yet this is never once stated anywhere by Srila Prabhupada. Not only does no one challenge such statements, but more frighteningly, devotees have actually come to believe that these statements are truth, and that the truth is a lie!

Ultimately we are dealing with yet another example of institutionalised circular thinking:

In order for X to be correct it must be — or not be — in the books.

Then, *regardless of what actually is in the books*, a conclusion is reached:

Since X is — or is not — in the books it must be correct.

For the sake of clarity, let us see what is actually stated in Srila Prabhupada's books with regards aspect B. When we do, we see that the only consideration for taking initiation is that the spiritual master must be agreeable to the arrangement, and be the current bona fide link in the chain of disciplic succession:

Unless one is initiated by a bona fide spiritual master, all his devotional activities are useless. A person who is not properly initiated can descend again into the animal species.¹⁰⁰

... in order to receive the real message of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* one should

¹⁰⁰ Purport of CC ML 15.108 (p. 800), quoting *Haribhaktivilāsa* 2.6.

approach the current link, or spiritual master, in the chain of disciplic succession. After being initiated by the proper spiritual master in that chain of succession, one should engage himself in the discharge of *tapasyā* in the execution of devotional service.¹⁰¹

There is certainly no mention that the principles stated above must be modified by a consideration of the distance between the guru and disciple at the time of initiation. On the contrary, the desire of the guru is the paramount factor:

As far as the time of *dikṣā* (initiation) is concerned, everything depends on the position of the guru. ... If the *sad-guru*, the bona fide spiritual master agrees, one can be initiated immediately, without waiting for a suitable time or place.¹⁰²

Thus the real sastric rule is to get initiated by the bona-fide spiritual master who is the current link. This is the actual principle. *This is what Srila Prabhupada taught.*

The ritvik system was set up personally by Srila Prabhupada in order for future devotees to take initiation from him as their bona fide spiritual master. It is the GBC who have proposed a modifying *restriction* to this general principle of taking initiation from the bona fide spiritual master. Their sastric rule in this regards appears to be along the lines of:

Initiation can only be bona fide if the distance between the guru and the disciple, at the time of initiation, falls within whatever diameter the planet inhabited by the disciple happens to measure.

Thus it is this modifying *restriction* that needs to have specific mention in Srila Prabhupada's books, not the so-called ritvik system, which is simply following the general process of initiation mentioned throughout the books and perpetuated by an explicit final order.

When we look at the curious features of this restriction, we wonder how anyone could possibly take it seriously:

— Notice how the restriction is specific not only in terms of distance, but also in terms of time: *only* at the *exact moment* of initiation does it ap-

¹⁰¹ Purport of BP 2.9.7 (canto 2, pp. 498f.).

¹⁰² Purport of CC ML 24.331 (p. 1139).

ply. After the initiation yajna (ceremony) takes place, this over-riding *need* to be within this arbitrary distance, is for some reason no longer relevant.

— Notice also how the restriction serves no discernible purpose. The guru *does not need to*: perform pariksa (mutual examination between disciple and guru), accept the disciple, chant on the beads, give the spiritual name, give the Gayatri mantra or perform the fire yajna. He must simply *be existing* on the same planet! And even then only for the exact moment the initiation takes place. Thus the restriction appears to exist just for the sake of existing; it serves no practical purpose whatsoever.

Furthermore, the whole non-material, spiritual nature of the guru-disciple relationship, as described in Srila Prabhupada's books, in any case renders this restriction absurdly obsolete, as the following quotes will demonstrate:

So we should associate by the vibration, and not by the physical presence. That is real association.¹⁰³

It is sometimes misunderstood that if one has to associate with persons engaged in devotional service, he will not be able to solve the economic problem. To answer this argument, it is described here that one has to associate with liberated persons not directly, physically, but by understanding, through philosophy and logic, the problems of life.¹⁰⁴

Reception of spiritual knowledge is never checked by any material condition.¹⁰⁵

The potency of transcendental sound is never minimised because the vibrator is apparently absent.¹⁰⁶

The spiritual master by his words, can penetrate into the heart of the suffering person and inject knowledge transcendental which alone can extin-

¹⁰³ PRABHUPADA 1997, 680818SB.MON (BP lecture of August 18, 1968).

¹⁰⁴ Purport of BP 3.31.48 (canto 3, part 2, p. 763).

¹⁰⁵ Purport of BP 7.7.1 (canto 7, p. 336).

¹⁰⁶ Purport of BP 2.9.8 (canto 2, p. 500).

guish the fire of material existence.¹⁰⁷

He lives forever by his divine instructions, and the follower lives with him.¹⁰⁸

The influence of the pure devotee is such that if someone comes to associate with him with a little faith, he gets the chance of hearing about the Lord from authoritative scriptures like *Bhagavad-Gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. This is the first stage of association with pure devotees.¹⁰⁹

Krishna and His representative are the same. Similarly, the Spiritual Master also can be present wherever the disciple wants. A Spiritual Master is the principle, not the body. Just like a television can be seen in thousands of place by the principle of relay monitoring.¹¹⁰

These are not ordinary books. It is recorded chanting. Anyone who reads, he is hearing.¹¹¹

Eternal bond between disciple and Spiritual Master begins from the day he hears.¹¹²

Since the elements of initiation, or diksa, are not in any way related to physical considerations, we thus have clear evidence from Srila Prabhupada's books that physical distance is not a consideration for the successful transmission of diksa. Also, by his own practical example, Srila Prabhupada demonstrated that diksa could occur without any physical contact either before or after the initiation. So from every angle of vision there is no legitimate objection to aspect B.

“Ritvik System Ends Parampara”

This position states:

¹⁰⁷ Purport of BP 1.7.22 (canto 1, p. 366).

¹⁰⁸ From the dedication at the beginning of PRABHUPADA 1987a.

¹⁰⁹ PRABHUPADA 1982a: 146.

¹¹⁰ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 1: 401 (letter to Malati of May 28, 1968).

¹¹¹ PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 4: 2620 (letter to Rupanuga Das of October 19, 1974).

¹¹² PRABHUPADA 1987b, vol. 4: 2104 (letter to Jadurani of September 4, 1972).

The ritvik system by definition means the end of the parampara (disciplic succession).

The disciplic succession, or guru parampara system, is eternal; there is no question of it stopping. However the system itself includes the following features:

- Acaryas sometimes remain current for long periods of time, even thousands of years (e.g. Srila Vyasadeva).
- Several bona fide successions run concurrently.
- There are occasions when a particular succession ends, often requiring Lord Krishna, or one of his incarnations, to appear on Earth to re-establish a new one.

As stated, according to Srila Prabhupada the sankirtan movement, (and hence ISKCON), will only exist for a maximum of 9,500 more years. Compared with eternity 9,500 years is nothing, a mere blip in cosmic time. This would appear to be the time period during which Srila Prabhupada shall remain the “current link” to the succession within ISKCON.

To some this notion appears to be quite shocking. Yet everyone in ISKCON, if they thought about it, would have to accept that there will inevitably be a last acarya in our particular line, since Srila Prabhupada clearly states that this sankirtan movement must end in 9,500 years time:

When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu appeared, He ushered in the era for the *saṅkīrtana* movement. It is also said that for ten thousand years this era will continue ... the 10,000 years of the *saṅkīrtana* movement inaugurated by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu 500 years ago provide the opportunity for the fallen souls of Kali-yuga to take to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* and thus be delivered from the clutches of material existence and return home, back to Godhead.¹¹³

After this 10,000 year period there will be no more chanting Hare Krishna, no more ISKCON, etc, etc:

Allen Ginsberg: 400,000 years. Will people still be chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa in 400,000 ...

Srila Prabhupada: No. Hare Kṛṣṇa will be finished within ten thousand

¹¹³ Purport of BP 8.5.23 (canto 8, p. 161).

years. There will be no more Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Allen Ginsberg: Ah. So what will be left?

Srila Prabhupada: Nothing. Left will be I'll kill you and eat you, and you shall kill me. You shall eat me. That will be left.

Allen Ginsberg: After ten thousand years?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes. There will be no grain, no milk, no sugar, no fruit. So I have to eat you, and you will have to eat me. Full facility for meat-eating. (laughter)¹¹⁴

In such circumstances, there clearly could be no acarya preaching Lord Caitanya's specific message of salvation. So everyone must agree that at some point in time there will have to be a last acarya in our particular Gaudiya Vaisnava line. The Revivalists merely insist that for ISKCON that last acarya is Srila Prabhupada. Whether Srila Prabhupada is physically present or not is irrelevant, since he taught over and over that physical presence has no relevance to guru-disciple relationships. It seems arbitrary to insist that:

Although we all agree there will inevitably be a last acarya in our line, that last acarya cannot be Srila Prabhupada.

We wonder what could be the basis for such an assertion? The succession can only be considered "ended" if the science of devotional service is lost. As long as Srila Prabhupada's books are in circulation, this "science" shall remain vigorously intact, and perfectly accessible. Indeed the very definition of the parampara as given by Srila Prabhupada makes it clear that Srila Prabhupada's continued position as the diksa-guru of ISKCON does not end the parampara:

Paramparā means to hear the truth from the spiritual master.¹¹⁵

Parampara means they do not change the word of Kṛṣṇa. That is parampara.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ PRABHUPADA 1988-1991, vol. 1: 348 (room conversation of May 13, 1969).

¹¹⁵ PRABHUPADA 1988-1991, vol. 27: 340 (room conversation of December 20, 1976).

¹¹⁶ PRABHUPADA 1997, 740811SB.VRN (BP lecture of August 11, 1974).

As can be seen, the parampara is *not* defined as a continuous succession of physically present persons, but simply hearing the message from someone who is the current representative of the parampara. Srila Prabhupada is in the parampara, is the spiritual master, and does not change the word of Krishna. Thus the parampara *continues* with Srila Prabhupada.

“No Mention of Departure in July 9, 1977 Directive”

This position states:

The July 9, 1977 directive¹¹⁷ makes no mention that it is applicable for after Srila Prabhupada’s departure, and hence could only be applicable before his departure.

This argument is illogical for the following reasons:

- 1) The directive does not explicitly say that it is applicable *before* Srila Prabhupada’s departure either, and hence by the above logic was only applicable for after his departure. In other words, one is concluding that the directive is applicable for time-period X because the directive does *not* say it is applicable for time-period Y. But by simple logic, if time-period X is also not explicitly stated, then this logic is self-contradictory or circular, because then it cannot be applicable for time-period X either. The conclusion of the above twisted logic is that the directive could therefore *never* be applied, since *no* time-period at all is given, and was written, one can assume, simply to use up some paper.
- 2) If, however, it is accepted that the directive was supposed to be applied, then a time-frame is not required to be specified to determine when it should operate, since it is accepted that the directive will run “henceforward” or from the moment the directive is issued, just as the directive states. Then a time-frame only needs to be specified to determine when the directive should *stop* operating, not *when* it should operate. This logically leads to the following being the only argument which is applicable: The July 9, 1977 directive makes no mention that it was to *stop* on Srila Prabhupada’s departure, and hence continues to be applicable for after his departure.
- 3) The directive was an institutional directive, and actually makes no

¹¹⁷ See PRABHUPADA 1997, 77-07-09 (pp. 14f. above).

mention of a limited time-frame in which it is to be applied. An institutional directive would only have a specific time-frame mentioned for its applicability if the directive was to be terminated by the institution at some point in time. It is the contention of the GBC that the directive was to be terminated by the institution at some point in time i.e., the departure of the institution's Founder Srila Prabhupada. The IRM's contention is that the directive was *not* supposed to be terminated by the institution at a specific point in time, and therefore the directive would *not* need to have a specific time-frame mentioned, since it is *not* meant to be terminated by the institution. Its applicability is therefore tied only to the life-time of the institution which is to implement it. The absence of a time-frame in the directive therefore directly supports the case of the IRM that it was to be applied and not terminated by the institution, and directly contradicts the contention of the GBC that the directive was to be terminated by the institution at a specific point in time.

- 4) If directives issued to ISKCON were tied, a priori, to the life-time of its Founder, then every directive issued to ISKCON should have come to a halt in 1977 when the founder departed, and ISKCON would effectively have stopped functioning. Thus the argument that the directive should terminate simply because the Founder has departed is also illogical.
- 5) Also, none of the arguments above depend on the existence in the directive of any particular word such as "henceforward". As we have already shown, if it is accepted that the directive was to apply at all for *any* time-frame, then it must be accepted a priori that it must operate at least from the time it was issued, or "henceforward". Thus the existence of the word merely confirms what already necessarily needs to be accepted. However, you can take this word *out* of the directive, and you still have a directive requiring implementation in ISKCON, without any instruction regarding when it should be terminated by the institution, or a specified predefined time-frame for its application. This would mean that the directive requires implementation and not termination, within the institution. And this is all the IRM is requesting.

We are left then with the position that the GBC must give a compelling and explicit reason for the termination of the directive on the departure of the Founder. Simply saying it should stop because the directive does

not say it should stop, or that it should stop simply because the Founder has departed, etc., are not valid reasons.

Neither does the IRM need to make its case based on any specific word present in the directive. A directive was issued to ISKCON to be implemented in ISKCON. We simply ask that it be implemented. And that if it be terminated then some reason be put forward. We have seen that to date the GBC have put forward no such reason. As demonstrated, such a reason is *not* to be found in the May 28, 1977 conversation tape, private letters issued to disciples, any other instructions issued by Srila Prabhupada, historical precedent, philosophical or scriptural arguments or in the wording of the directive itself.

Final Conclusion

In the section regarding the GBC's contradictory position papers¹¹⁸ we demonstrated that the GBC have yet to give a clear explanation as to exactly how, when and where Srila Prabhupada authorised them to disband the ritvik system, and take his place as initiators within ISKCON. Not one of the three official contradictory explanations stands up to scrutiny, and until they formally renounce the ones they no longer wish to use, they do not at this point in time even have a position, not to speak of a correct position.

Unless their current paper recognises this absurd situation we see little hope of progress, not to speak of resolution.

If they were to retract their contradictory papers the GBC would then need to offer a proper, self-consistent explanation as to why they still refuse to reinstitute the system Srila Prabhupada ordered them to follow. This position would need to contain within it clear instructions from Srila Prabhupada, to all his followers, supporting unequivocally modifications a) and b)¹¹⁹ to the final order on initiations issued by Srila Prabhupada on July 9, 1977.¹²⁰ As we have thus far seen, it will not be possible for the GBC to ever come up with such a position since we have examined the entire canon of Srila Prabhupada's teachings, giving special emphasis to those instructions quoted by the GBC, and *none support modifications a) and b).*

¹¹⁸ See pp. 26ff. above.

¹¹⁹ Cf. p. 48 above.

¹²⁰ PRABHUPADA 1997, 77-07-09 (pp. 14f. above).

Abbreviations

AL	Ādilīlā
BBT	Bhaktivedanta Book Trust
BG	<i>Bhagavadgītā</i> (see PRABHUPADA 2000)
BP	<i>Bhāgavatapurāṇa</i> (see PRABHUPADA 1987a)
CC	<i>Caitanyacaritāmṛta</i> (see PRABHUPADA 1975)
ML	Madhyalīlā

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APPENDIX 1: Copy of the July 9, 1977 Directive

ISKCON

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS
Founder-Acharya : His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

July 9th, 1977



To All G.B.C., and Temple Presidents

Dear Maharajas and Prabhus,

Please accept my humble obeisances at your feet. Recently when all of the CBC members were with His Divine Grace in Vrindavana, Srila Prabhupad indicated that soon He would appoint some of His senior disciples to act as "rittik" - representative of the acarya, for the purpose of performing initiations, both first initiation and second initiation. His Divine Grace has so far given a list of eleven disciples who will act in that capacity:

His Holiness Kirtanananda Swami
His Holiness Satsvarupa das Gosvami
His Holiness Jayapataka Swami
His Holiness Tamal Krsna Gosvami
His Holiness Hridayananda Gosvami
His Holiness Bhavananda Gosvami
His Holiness Hamsadutta Swami
His Holiness Ramesvara Swami
His Holiness Harikesa Swami
His Grace Bhagavan das Adhikari
His Grace Jayatirtha das Adhikari

In the past Temple Presidents have written to Srila Prabhupad recommending a particular devotee's initiation. Now that Srila Prabhupad has named these representatives, Temple Presidents may henceforward send recommendation for first and second initiation to whichever of these eleven representatives are nearest their temple. After considering the recommendation, these representatives may accept the devotee as an initiated disciple of Srila Prabhupad by giving a spiritual name, or in the case of second initiation, by chanting on the Gayatri thread, just as Srila Prabhupad has done. The newly initiated devotees are disciples of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupad, the above eleven senior devotees acting as His representative. After the Temple President receives a letter from these representatives giving the spiritual name or the thread, he can perform the fire vana in the temple as was being done before. The name of a newly initiated disciple should be sent by the representative who has accepted him or her to Srila Prabhupad, to be included in His Divine Grace's "Initiated Disciples" book.

Hoping this finds you all well.

Your servant,

Tamal Krsna Gosvami

Tamal Krsna Gosvami
Secretary to Srila Prabhupad

Approved

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's International Society for Krishna Consciousness, 17860 E. Irving Ave., Suite 100, Denver, Colorado 80231, U.S.A. Phone: (303) 751-1313. Fax: (303) 751-1314. Website: <http://www.iskcon.org>

APPENDIX 2: Copy of Srila Prabhupada's Last Will (Relevant Portion)

Sridandi Goswami 65/76

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

Founder-Acharya:
International Society for Krishna Consciousness

CENTER: Krsna-Balarama Mandir,
Bhaktivedanta Swami Marg,
Bamanareti, Vrndavana, U.P.

DATE JUNE 1977..

DECLARATION OF WILL

I, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder-acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Settler of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, and disciple of Om Visnupada 108 Sri Brhad Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Goswami Maharaj Prabhupada, presently residing at Sri Krsna-Balarama Mandir in Vrndavana, make this my last will:

1. The Governing Body Commission (GBC) will be the ultimate managing authority of the entire International Society for Krishna Consciousness.
2. Each temple will be an ISKCON property and will be managed by three executive directors. The system of management will continue as it is now and there is no need of any change.
3. Properties in India will be managed by the following executive directors:
 - a) Properties at Sri Mayapur Dhama, Panihati, Haridaspur and Calcutta: Gurukrupa Swami, Jayapataka Swami, Bhavananda Goswami and Gopal Krsna das Adhikari.
 - b) Properties at Vrndavana: Gurukrupa Swami, Akshoyananda Swami, and Gopal Krsna das Adhikari.
 - c) Properties at Bombay: Tamal Krsna Goswami, Giriraj das Brahmachary, and Gopal Krsna das Adhikari.
 - d) Properties at Bhubaneswar: Gour Govinda Swami, Jayapataka Swami, and Bhagawat das Brahmachary.
 - e) Properties at Hyderabad: Mahamea Swami, Sridhar Swami, Gopal Krsna das Adhikari and Bali Mardan das Adhikari.

The executive directors who have herein been designated are appointed for life. In the event of the death or failure to act for any reason of any of the said directors, a successor director or directors may be appointed by the remaining directors, provided the new director is my initiated disciple following strictly all the rules and regulations of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness as detailed in my books, and provided that there are never less than three (3) or more than five (5) executive directors acting at one time.

4. I have created, developed, and organized the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and as such I hereby will that none of the immovable properties standing in the name of ISKCON in India shall ever be mortgaged, borrowed against, sold, transferred, or in any way encumbered, disposed of, or alienated. This direction is irrevocable.
5. Properties outside of India in principle should never be mortgaged, borrowed against, sold, transferred or in any way encumbered, disposed of, or alienated, but if the need arises, they may be mortgaged, borrowed against, sold, etc., with the consent of the GBC committee members associated with the particular property.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS
P.O. BOX 171
108 SRIBRADHARAN MARG
BAMANARETI, VRINDAVANA, U.P.

W. Prabhupada

Witnessed by Srila Prabhupada and Srila Bhakti...

APPENDIX 3: GBC Contradictions Chart

GBC Paper	Who Was Ordered?	How Was Order Given?	When Was Order Given?
“On My Order Understood” (1995)	Eleven ritviks	Conditional mandate implied by selection of ritviks in conjunction with <i>ā-māra ājñāya</i> verse and words /phrases “appoint”, “recommend”, “select”, “strictly following”	July 7, 1977
“Disciple of My Disciple” (1997)	Eleven diksa-gurus	Through selection of ritviks which are same as diksa-gurus	May 28, 1977
“Prabhupada’s Order” (1998)	Eleven ritviks/ diksa-gurus	By sending letter appointing ritviks who would absorb karma	July 9, 1977

The ISKCON Revival Movement and the Ritvik Doctrine

An ISKCON Member's View

Christopher Shannon
(Krishna-kirti das (HDG))

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Introduction

This paper has been endorsed on December 24, 2004 by the Governing Body Commission (GBC) for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) with the following words:

This paper is compatible with previous papers on the ritvik position, that have been endorsed by the GBC. In view of this the GBC Executive Committee welcomes this contribution as a positive addition to the existing body of work on this subject.

It is the author's hope that it will help those endeavouring to understand ISKCON's ritvik controversy.

The ritvik controversy, as it is known in ISKCON, first appeared in 1989, and centres around the question of whether or not ISKCON's Founder-Acarya, Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (Śrīla A. C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Prabhupāda), continues to accept disciples after his passing. ISKCON's current leadership endorses the view that Srila Prabhupada's disciples may accept disciples, while those who accept the ritvik doctrine consider that Srila Prabhupada continues to posthumously accept disciples. Considerable resources in ISKCON have been diverted to defending ISKCON's core teachings against the ritvik doctrine. The ritvik controversy has indeed forced ISKCON's leadership to critically review their own understanding of the theology concerning guru-disciple relationships.

In the first five to ten years after the passing of ISKCON's founder, many of those who succeeded him as gurus and leaders became implicated in morally questionable behaviour. Ten years after Srila Prabhupada's passing, a guru-reform movement in ISKCON arose among the junior leadership — comprised mostly of temple presidents and some less prominent members of the GBC. In 1987, their movement replaced the old establishment. The ritvik movement itself emerged as a parallel reform effort. The first ritvik movement advocated that Srila Prabhupada would continue to accept disciples until someone suitably qualified — an acarya of Srila Prabhupada's calibre — manifested. Due to the moral turpitude of some of ISKCON's most prominent (and former) leaders, the ideas of the ritvik movement had wide appeal. This ritvik movement soon

challenged the GBC, ISKCON's highest decision-making body, which quickly condemned their conclusions. The ritvik doctrine was soon listed in ISKCON's law books as a "dangerous philosophical deviation".¹ Soon after their doctrine was officially declared heretical, some of the intellectual leaders of the ritvik movement themselves became implicated in immoral activity. This lent further legitimacy to the GBC's ruling.

In spite of the improvements the newly established guru-reform movement brought to ISKCON, some who were appointed as gurus under the new regime had episodes of moral inebriety. After several more years, it was not uncommon to find among the younger generation of devotees persons who had taken shelter of two, three or more gurus, many of whom at some later point abandoned their vows. This revived interest in the ritvik doctrine. Between 1995 and 1996, the document entitled *The Final Order* appeared and expounded the ritvik doctrine of the IRM (ISKCON Revival Movement).

There is no doubt that both ISKCON's leadership and the IRM have acted and are acting to establish what each considers the correct theological conclusion with regard to the affairs of gurus and disciples. The debate centres on this question: What is the correct understanding of Srila Prabhupada's instructions with regard to initiating or accepting disciples after his passing? Is Srila Prabhupada the initiating spiritual master (diksa-guru), or are his disciples the initiating spiritual masters?

This paper proposes to answer this question from the point of view of a member of ISKCON who is a well-wisher and supporter of the GBC and who is himself currently an active participant in ISKCON's missionary activities. In exploring this question, three sections of this paper are presented: (1) the history of the controversy, (2) what is commonly understood as established doctrine on the issue (siddhanta), and (3) this ISKCON member's view of the IRM's position. The first section explains the circumstances and appearance of the ritvik doctrine and ISKCON's struggle in dealing with it. Also in this section, contemporary reasons for the waning popularity and influence of the ritvik doctrine in ISKCON are examined. The second part establishes the siddhanta, or authoritative conclusions, on the matter of gurus, disciples, and initiations, with supporting evidence. Reading this section is essential for those who are

¹ GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1997-1998, § 6.4.7.2.

unfamiliar with the theology concerning gurus and initiations as it is commonly understood within ISKCON. The third section of this paper takes a critical look at the ritvik doctrine, as espoused by the IRM. This section includes a detailed analysis of the techniques and arguments presented in the IRM's foundational paper *The Final Order* (TFO). The last section of the paper briefly describes what may be the possible results of either the IRM understanding of gurus and initiations or the GBC understanding of gurus and initiations being established.

It will be useful, in this discussion, to distinguish between two main categories of view, namely the "soft ritvik" and "hard ritvik" views. "Soft ritvik" is the term associated with the doctrine of the ritvik movement that first appeared in 1989. This view is distinguished by the belief that Srila Prabhupada will continue to accept disciples after his passing until the appearance of one or more exceptionally qualified individuals, who will then accept disciples. The "hard ritvik" view, on the other hand, holds that none of Srila Prabhupada's spiritual descendents will ever be allowed to accept disciples, even if someone qualified appears within ISKCON. The view held by the IRM is that of hard ritvik.

The term "ritvik(s)", as used in this paper, will generally refer to those who endorse the IRM's point of view, except where used in cited references or where the word "ritvik" is differently qualified or is explicitly stated to mean something else (e.g. "soft ritvik").

Krishna-kirti das (HDG)²

August 18, 2004

² The initials HDG are those of the author's spiritual master, Hṛdayānanda Dāsa Gosvāmī. Because some disciples of other initiating gurus may have the same name, as given by their gurus, these initials sometimes help distinguish the name of one devotee from another.

Origins of the Ritvik Controversy

Background

ISKCON's Founder-Acarya, Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, was ISKCON's undisputed head from ISKCON's beginning in 1966 to his passing away in 1977. Srila Prabhupada had the practical and legal authority to single-handedly override the decisions of ISKCON's highest managerial body, the Governing Body Commission (GBC). Sometimes he exercised this authority to its fullest extent.

Srila Prabhupada's departure brought significant changes: He was no longer present to override the GBC; this made the GBC the ultimate managerial authority for ISKCON. Furthermore, the eleven disciples Srila Prabhupada picked to accept disciples on his behalf, before his passing, became recognised as full-fledged gurus in almost every respect that Srila Prabhupada himself was. Future initiates dedicated to these new gurus their faith and fervour in much the same way Srila Prabhupada's disciples offered their devotion to Srila Prabhupada. These eleven gurus presided over particular geographical zones, and they were considered the acarya, or saviour and guru, for all people who came to ISKCON within their geographical area (GOSWAMI 1997: 23). This policy, its application, and the thinking that underlay it later became known as the "Zonal-Ācārya" system (GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1997-1998: 6.4.7.2).

The effects of this policy were presaged by a scholarly god-brother of the zonal-acaryas in a letter to a GBC member, which noted:

Maharaja, after very much consideration and consultation and also confirmation by older members of our sampradaya, I am writing to you to see if you can rectify the present situation. Many of us here, older god brothers, are very concerned in two ways — 1) that the 11 gurus not having been appointed to the position of acarya and for which they are unqualified both by a. the insufficient knowledge of sastra and b. the incomplete realisation of Krishna consciousness, are accepting worship on that level — and this may lead to anomalies in the society and personally, because of lack of complete detachment in atmajnana, to a buildup of pride and subsequent fall down, and 2) that the united society, ISKCON, because of illegal division and control by a few members, instead of the joint GBC will become broken up in separate societies and the unified preaching ef-

fort very much hindered.³

Both concerns in the above letter in the course of a decade became realised. Tamal Krishna Goswami writes:

The stormy decade following Prabhupada's demise left many casualties in its wake: perhaps as many as 90% of Prabhupada's initiated disciples were now marginalized; disciples of fallen gurus felt they had no shelter; the preaching mission as a whole lost momentum and cohesion.⁴

At the end of this decade of disintegration emerged what is now known as the Guru-Reform Movement (GOSWAMI 1997: 24). This movement brought about many changes: The Zonal-Acarya System was repudiated and dismantled. Ultimate spiritual and managerial authority was restored to the GBC body, irrespective of who does or who does not have disciples. The GBC body itself was expanded to include some of the main proponents of the Guru-Reform movement. Some of Srila Prabhupada's direct disciples who were deemed fit by the GBC to act as gurus were given the authority to accept disciples. These changes brought greater stability to the institution as a whole and a tangible sense of humility to the leadership itself:

Gurus with large followings sat on an equal level with non-guru god brothers. And they were not the only ones to be humbled. The GBC itself, the "ultimate managing authority," had seen its own authority collapse, only to be resurrected by a "lower house" of temple presidents. Assuming extraordinary powers, the temple presidents had made the GBC submit itself to the judgement of its own appointed committee of 50 non-GBC godbrothers, thus in effect temporarily suspending itself, something that only Prabhupada while alive could have done. This action put the GBC and everyone in ISKCON on notice that no individual or group was beyond scrutiny. Even "ultimate authorities" have limits. As Shinn notes shortly after the momentous meetings of 1986 and 1987, "the impressive fact for any careful observer of ISKCON's history is that it has been able to evolve in a very short time from a charismatic movement to a relatively stable institution in the face of a hostile external environment and a vola-

³ PRADYUMNA DAS 1978.

⁴ GOSWAMI 1997: 24.

tile governing structure within” (Shinn, 1987: 60).⁵

Along with the Guru-Reform Movement came the reaffirmation of Srila Prabhupada’s position as not only the Founder-Acarya of ISKCON, but as the pre-eminent siksa-guru and shelter of all devotees in ISKCON.⁶ One application of this principle is that, according to ISKCON Law, new devotees, before initiation, are encouraged to take shelter of Srila Prabhupada and are required to recite his pranama-mantra⁷ when appropriate.⁸ This is just one of many expressions of the principle of Srila Prabhupada’s status as the overall shelter and pre-eminent siksa-guru for all devotees within ISKCON. So it seemed the Guru-Reform Movement gave ISKCON a humbled leadership and officially reestablished Srila Prabhupada as the shelter of ISKCON. To say the least, it was a vast improvement over ISKCON under the Zonal-Acarya doctrine. However, in the years to come, it would become apparent that the Guru-Reform Movement was unfinished business.

⁵ GOSWAMI 1997: 24f.

⁶ GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1997-1998 states as ISKCON Law: “Śrīla Prabhupāda, the Founder-Ācārya of ISKCON: 2.1 Definition: To fulfill the previous ācārya’s desire for a united worldwide preaching organisation to expand Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s mission, Śrīla Prabhupāda founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness as a distinct branch of the *Brahma-Madhva-Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava-sampradāya*. Therefore he is the Founder-Ācārya of ISKCON.

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda is the Founder-Ācārya of ISKCON. This means that he is ISKCON’s link with the the *Brahma-Madhva-Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava-sampradāya*, that his writings, oral teachings, and exemplary actions remain the permanent and irreplaceable basis for all subsequent teachings and activities of ISKCON. He is and will remain always the instructing spiritual master of all devotees in ISKCON.”

⁷ Mantra that specifically glorifies any divine personality (especially the guru) and is usually recited at the beginning of any religious activity, including the offering of foodstuffs to the Deity or on entering or leaving the temple area.

⁸ GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1997-1998 states as ISKCON Law: “7.2.1.1.2: First Six-month Period. During the first six months of following the four regulative principles and chanting sixteen rounds daily, a new devotee who is aspiring for initiation should not commit himself to a particular initiating *guru*. Rather, he should chant Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *praṇāmamantra* and worship him as Founder-Ācārya of ISKCON and as his *sikṣā-guru*.”

Appearance of the Ritvik Doctrine

Not long after the Guru-Reform Movement became fully established in 1987, another reform movement emerged that sought to address similar concerns as the Guru-Reform Movement. It can be said that this alternative movement developed in parallel to the more visible Guru-Reform Movement. However this other reform movement sought to ameliorate the excesses of the former zonal-acaryas not by reforming gurus and making them subordinate to an interdependent system of checks and balances but by abolishing all gurus except for Srila Prabhupada. This alternative system was at that time better known as the proxy-guru doctrine, or ritvik doctrine. This doctrine advocated that Srila Prabhupada never intended the disciples he picked to actually be gurus and themselves accept charge of disciples. Rather, these proxy-gurus would accept disciples on Srila Prabhupada's behalf — even after his passing. Devotees in the New Jaipur community disseminated this doctrine throughout ISKCON via the *Vedic Village Review*.⁹

In 1989, the conflicts between the proponents of the Guru-Reform Movement and the proponents of the proxy-guru doctrine came to a head, with the *Vedic Village Review* publishing an article titled “A Challenge Horse for the GBC!”. The GBC responded with the excommunication of the proxy-guru proponents and a repudiation of the proxy-guru doctrine. In ISKCON Law, the ritvik, or proxy-guru, doctrine became the second officially recognised heresy after the Zonal-Acarya doctrine. The GBC's swift action to expunge the proxy-guru heresy from ISKCON seemed effective. However, the established Guru-Reform Movement itself was still young and relatively untested.

Over the next decade, more of Srila Prabhupada's senior disciples were authorised to act as initiating gurus. But in spite of the strong mood

⁹ “Proxy-initiation proponents then established their own community, New Jaipur, in Louisiana, and published the ‘Vedic Village Review’ to propagate their philosophy. They have also conducted initiations in which new recruits are deemed to be Prabhupāda's disciples, although there have only been a few such ceremonies. Ironically, the community and ‘Review’ were both closed due to the moral and legal transgressions of the organisers, survived only by the proxy-initiation cause itself, which has since attracted new champions” (GOSWAMI 1997: 26f.).

of reform and efforts not to repeat the mistakes of the past, some of the new gurus (along with some notable supporters) were later obliged to give up their positions and status. The reasons were simple: the same moral unsteadiness that forced their predecessors to abandon the mantle of acaryas persisted — a significant section of the new gurus could not maintain the moral and spiritual standards required of a guru.

If for some reason a spiritual master was found to be unfit¹⁰ to act as a spiritual master and could not be reformed, it was considered that the disciple of the former spiritual master became disconnected from the disciplic succession — even if the disciple was faultless. Thus it was considered mandatory that devotees of these fallen gurus had to be initiated again from another guru who was considered to be in good standing. Otherwise, a disciple of a fallen guru would not be allowed to perform particular services, such as worship of the Deity in the temple. As early as 1990, after scriptural research the conclusion was reached that being reinitiated by another guru was imperative for any devotee who was serious but whose guru had fallen.¹¹

In good faith many again accepted another spiritual master within ISKCON, but it sometimes happened that the new guru himself became implicated in immoral activity and thus had to voluntarily step down as a spiritual master or be forcibly removed. Many devotees were initiated two times, others three times or more, and endured the misfortune of each successive spiritual master abandoning his vows and duties. Consequently, over time a wave of doubt and cynicism spread among devotees loyal and active in ISKCON. Many questioned whether or not the officers of the GBC had properly understood Srila Prabhupada's instructions regarding gurus and initiations.

Many also started questioning the reforms of the Guru-Reform Movement. If these reforms were actually in line with Srila Prabhupada's teachings, then why were so many who were approved by the GBC to

¹⁰ “Unfit” has typically meant that the spiritual master in question indulged in sinful behaviour — usually illicit sexual connection with a woman, taking drugs, or sometimes overtly criminal activity.

¹¹ GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1995: 70 (“Questions and Answers About Reinitiation”, Question 4).

be gurus unable to maintain acceptable moral standards? Thus the very doubts that gave birth to the Guru-Reform Movement now created doubt about the Guru-Reform Movement itself. The Guru-Reformers of yore became the gurus to be, yet again, reformed — or expelled. The ability of the GBC to correctly understand Srila Prabhupada's instructions itself was now widely doubted, because thus far the GBC had endorsed and actively promoted the reform efforts which in many cases seemed to produce unsatisfactory results.

Revival of the Ritvik Doctrine

In 1996, a paper known as *The Final Order* (TFO), by Krishna-kant Desai, was published and widely circulated. Krishna-kant Desai was not known to have made any significant contribution to ISKCON's preaching efforts, and so the paper itself was not taken seriously by ISKCON's leadership when it first appeared. One GBC member, after reading TFO, had said no one would take it seriously. Another leader commented as follows:

Is it that the mission of Lord Caitanya, carefully received in the disciplic succession of great acaryas and spread all over the world by Srila Prabhupada, is finally to be revealed by a bank clerk from Birmingham who can't get up before six o'clock in the morning? As if none of the devotees Srila Prabhupada carefully trained could understand his words, but lo! — KK Desai has come to save us all.¹²

This remark would seem to indicate a degree of naiveté on the part of ISKCON's leadership. The simultaneous notoriety and popularity enjoyed by TFO soon demonstrated that the GBC were unaware of the extent to which their authority had eroded.

TFO itself gained greater popularity with the downfalls of Jagadish (1997)¹³ and Harikesh (1999)¹⁴. Both of these former gurus were well known in ISKCON, and both had many disciples. Because of their high profile, their downfall affected many more than just their own disciples.

¹² Private e-mail 1999 (name withheld).

¹³ GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1997: §107.1.

¹⁴ GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1999: §605(A).

Another reason the ritvik doctrine gained greater popularity is because at that time it was the only well-developed alternative doctrine that attempted to explain and reform the problems at hand. As noted by one scholar, “the doctrine of the *ṛitvik*” was “ISKCON’s first well thought out ‘heresy’” (BRZEZINSKI 1996-1997: 174).

A further cause for the popularity of the doctrine was that some of ISKCON’s leaders in prominent temples (temple presidents) sided with the ritvik cause. Some of them were soft ritviks, and a lesser but more vocal number were hard ritviks. Those who can be classified as hard ritviks used their positions of authority to influence the full-time devotees working under them as well as their general congregation. Some ISKCON members believe that a small but significant group of temple presidents endorsed the ritvik doctrine partially because of some notable conflicts between these temple presidents and some members of the GBC itself. One senior devotee remarked:

... the ritvik leaning temple presidents in India are not actually Ritviks but are in fact frustrated with the misbehavior of gurus and sannyasis, a separate issue distinguishable only by those who are sober. The TPs [temple presidents] in question have been blinded by their frustrations and emotions and consequently they can’t see the fallacy of the ritvik concoction. And so they let their unintelligent emotions drag them into the dangerous waters of not cooperating with GBC decisions.¹⁵

Besides the ritvik doctrine, there were other alternative theories as to why and how the Guru-Reform Movement had gone awry. In some of ISKCON’s intellectual circles, some of the more pronounced shortcomings of the Guru-Reform Movement were ascribed to neglecting to implement varnasrama-dharma.¹⁶ One senior devotee has remarked:

Look at our losses and you’ll find that in almost every case atyahara, over-endeavouring, or having to manage too much money and men, has killed our top men — vinaswati.

¹⁵ Private e-mail 1999 (name withheld).

¹⁶ Varnasrama-dharma: The four social and spiritual divisions of human society established in Vedic scriptures. For a better understanding of the significance of this term and the context of its usage within ISKCON, please see PRABHUPADA 1997a (conversation of February 14, 1977 in Mayapura).

In view of what is happening now to one of our biggest gurus [Harikesh], would it not be best if the varnasrama-dharma (VAD) implementation in ISKCON began with cleaning up the guru and sannyasa asrama by prohibiting them from burdensome hands on management and by forbidding them to get involved in the rajasic management of large sums of money?¹⁷

Although there were alternative theories and solutions to the guru issue, none of them were well developed.

The GBC has had to take the ritvik movement seriously. According to the North American Prabhupada Centennial Survey (ROCHFORD 1998: 18), “In North America one in four full-time members, and one in two congregational members (50%) and former ISKCON members (56%) agreed that ‘Prabhupada wanted the 11 *ritviks* he appointed to continue as *ritviks* after his departure’.” It should be noted here that the question agreed to by 25% and 50% of full-time and congregational members respectively covers two main but differing ritvik doctrines: the soft ritvik and the hard ritvik. TFO itself names and condemns the “soft ritvik” position, which would indicate that there are varying shades of the ritvik doctrine that are popular, and it would also mean that the number of devotees who actually agree with the conclusions espoused by the IRM are likely to be significantly lower than the 25% / 50% figures mentioned.

Today

Briefly, there are two main complaints made by the adherents of the ritvik position: (1) moral and spiritual deficiency of ISKCON’s leadership, and (2) that Srila Prabhupada’s orders regarding gurus and initiations in his absence were disobeyed by this leadership. Of these two claims, the second is considerably more prominent.

Regarding the first complaint, over the years the GBC has implemented higher standards for allowing its members to accept the sannyasa order, or renounced order of life.¹⁸ Although these higher standards have not completely prevented some sannyasis from abandoning their vows, it is

¹⁷ Private e-mail 1999 (name withheld).

¹⁸ The sannyasa order of life is a kind of guru status within society, and so is very visible and important to ISKCON’s members.

generally perceived as having reduced its frequency. This has led to a degree of confidence among many in ISKCON and weakens the ritvik argument that moral weakness indicates some theological misunderstanding. (Their second complaint will be dealt with at length later in this paper.)

During the past five years, the GBC itself has spent less energy on the ritvik issue than they did from 1995 to 2000. Discussion about ritvik (for and against) among ISKCON's rank-and-file can hardly be found either in public forums or smaller discussion groups — either online or off the internet. These facts seem to indicate that the IRM's influence on ISKCON is waning.

One of the fundamental premises of the ritvik doctrine is that the diksa-guru (initiating spiritual master) is superior to the siksa-guru (instructing spiritual master). This is noteworthy because only in 1999 had the GBC officially repudiated this concept of the diksa-guru being superior to the siksa-guru.¹⁹ It was further stated by the GBC that along with Srila Prabhupada's unique status as ISKCON's Founder-Acarya being obscured by this mistaken understanding, they considered that "... this long-running misunderstanding supported the zone system of gurus, a system which had led to a fragmentation within ISKCON's leadership and a consequent inability to address questions of abuse and malfeasance" (BOZEMAN 2000: 386).

This is not to say that ISKCON's original Guru-Reform Movement has not helped ISKCON. It was a vast improvement over the Zonal-Acarya system. Besides that, ISKCON under the Guru-Reform leadership itself has grown in many ways. At the time of Srila Prabhupada's departure, there were 108 ISKCON temples all over the world; now there are more than 400. Although we have mentioned some of the darker portions of ISKCON's history, one should keep in mind that there are many gurus in ISKCON who have been faithful to their vows and have been doing steady service for twenty years, thirty years or more. There are currently many of Srila Prabhupada's grand-disciples having deep and meaningful relationships with their spiritual masters, who are disciples of Srila Prabhupada. These grand-disciples are increasingly taking on the burden of the preaching work in ISKCON and are producing wonderful results.

¹⁹ GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1999, Sections 403 and 408.

Siddhanta

The word *siddhānta* literally means “conclusion(s)”. In the Vedic tradition, this term is often used to refer to the conclusions of a particular teacher or disciplic succession. Conversely, the word *apasiddhānta* is used to label a deviant philosophy, or a philosophy that is against the *siddhānta* of an established group. The ritvik doctrine, as defined by the IRM, is considered by ISKCON to be an *apasiddhanta*, since its conclusions run contrary to the established *siddhanta* officially endorsed by ISKCON. In order to help the reader better understand the ritvik controversy from the view of ISKCON’s members, a summary explanation of relevant key terms and concepts (guru, siksa, diksa, initiation, liberation, etc.) are offered here.

Understanding Transcendental Knowledge

*om ajñāna-timirāndhasya jñānāñjana-salākayā
cakṣur unmlitaṃ yena tasmai śrī-gurave namaḥ*

“I offer my respectful obeisances unto my spiritual master, who with the torchlight of knowledge has opened my eyes, which were blinded by the darkness of ignorance.”²⁰

The “darkness of ignorance” is called illusion, or *māyā*. Everyone in the material world is in *māyā*, and the nature of *māyā* is that one misidentifies himself (or herself) with his (or her) body. The real self is transcendental to the body and has nothing to do with it, but on account of *māyā* one believes himself to be something he is not.

The spiritual master’s duty is to dispel the ignorance of such bewildered people by imparting to them knowledge of their factual existence apart from the material body. This knowledge is called *divyaṃ jñānam*, or transcendental knowledge. The disciple who matures in his understanding of transcendental knowledge, as received from a spiritual master (guru), realises his factual existence apart from the material body and consequently becomes forever free from the ill effects of material existence. Without the guidance of the guru, the disciple can never become free from *māyā*.

²⁰ Quoted from the *Gautamīyatantra*, purport of BP 8.1.11 in PRABHUPADA 1982.

Qualifications of a Guru

In order to free others from the influence of maya, it is required that a guru be liberated, or free from the influence of the maya — the illusory energy.

Another meaning of *guṇa* is rope; it is to be understood that the conditioned soul is tightly tied by the ropes of illusion. A man bound by the hands and feet cannot free himself — he must be helped by a person who is unbound. Because the bound cannot help the bound, the rescuer must be liberated. Therefore, only Lord Kṛṣṇa, or His bona fide representative the spiritual master, can release the conditioned soul. Without such superior help, one cannot be freed from the bondage of material nature.²¹

Being free from the influence of the material nature (maya) means at the very least that one conducts his or her life according to the injunctions of the scripture.

Guru is considered to be liberated because he follows the scripture.²²

A person who is liberated acharya and guru cannot commit any mistake, but there are persons who are less qualified or not liberated, but still can act as guru and acharya by strictly following the disciplic succession.²³

*artha-jñāt saṁśaya-cchettā tataḥ śreyān sva-karma-kṛt
mukta-saṅgas tato bhūyān adogdhā dharmam ātmanaḥ*

“Better than the brāhmaṇa who knows the purpose of the Vedas is he who can dissipate all doubts, and better than him is one who strictly follows the brahminical principles. Better than him is one who is liberated from all material contamination, and better than him is a pure devotee, who executes devotional service without expectation of reward.”²⁴

Each of these three references speaks of an individual who is a strict follower of scripture — “follows the scripture”, “strictly following the disciplic succession”, “strictly follows the brahminical principles”. It

²¹ Purport of BG 7.14 in PRABHUPADA 1993a.

²² PRABHUPADA 1997c (lecture on CC ML 20.353f. on December 24, 1966 in New York).

²³ PRABHUPADA 1997b (letter of April 26, 1968 to Janardana).

²⁴ BP 3.29.32 in PRABHUPADA 1982.

should be noted that someone who is factually liberated²⁵ is distinguished from an individual who is a strict follower of the disciplic succession. When it is a question of what is the qualification to accept disciples, it is this latter category that is given as an answer. “Such a person ... is called an ācārya.”²⁶

In *The Nectar of Instruction*, a translation and commentary on Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī’s *Upadeśāmṛta*, is one most important verse describing the qualifications of a guru.²⁷ In this verse there are six urges²⁸ mentioned; one who can *tolerate* these urges is qualified to accept disciples *all over the world* (*sarvām apīmām pṛthivīm sa śīṣyāt*). The key word here is *viśah* (“tolerate”). A liberated person by definition is free from the influence of these urges and thus has nothing to tolerate. This verse therefore necessarily includes that category of persons who can tolerate these urges — those who are not yet liberated but who strictly follow the disciplic succession. Such people are also considered free from the influence of the material energy because they choose to live according to scripture and the directions of the acaryas. One who lives his life in this way is known as a *jīvan-mukta*, “or a liberated person even in the conditional existence”.²⁹

The Different Kinds of Gurus

There are three kinds of gurus: *śikṣā-*, *dikṣā-*, and *vartma-pradarśaka-guru*. The siksa-guru is known as the instructing guru, who trains his disciple in both the theory and practical application of Vedic knowledge. The diksa-guru, who is also known as the mantra-guru, is the one who

²⁵ A unique, distinguishing feature of the liberated state is that the liberated individual no longer is assailed by the urges of the mind and senses. This state of liberation, or *mukti*, is known as the *brahma-bhūta* stage of existence. More information on this can be found in the translation and purport of BG 18.54 in PRABHUPADA 1993a, and the purport of BP 4.30.20 in PRABHUPADA 1982.

²⁶ Purport of BP 3.29.32 in PRABHUPADA 1982.

²⁷ PRABHUPADA 1993b, text 1 (p. 1).

²⁸ The urges are of speech, mind, anger, tongue, belly, and genitals:

*vāco vegam manasaḥ krodha-vegam jihvā-vegam udaropastha-vegam
etān vegān yo viśaheta dhīraḥ sarvām apīmām pṛthivīm sa śīṣyāt*

²⁹ Purport of BP 1.3.33 in PRABHUPADA 1982.

accepts vows of obedience from a prospective disciple and imparts to him or her various Vedic mantras as appropriate. This transaction is known as initiation, or diksa. The vartma-pradarsaka-guru is the one who first introduces a person to the spiritual path by relevant instruction. Because the vartma-pradarsaka-guru helps deliver the disciple by offering instructions, this guru is also a type of siksa-guru. Since both siksa- and diksa-gurus are considered essential for the progressive enlightenment of the disciple, they are to be honoured on an equal level by the disciple.

Bilvamaṅgala Ṭhākura actually entered into the transcendental pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa. He has recorded his transcendental experiences and appreciation in the book known as *Kṛṣṇa-karṇāmṛta*. In the beginning of that book he has offered his obeisances to his different gurus, and it is to be noted that he has adored them all equally. The first spiritual master [vartma-pradarsaka-guru] mentioned is Cintāmaṇi, who was one of his instructing spiritual masters because she first showed him the spiritual path. Cintāmaṇi was a prostitute with whom Bilvamaṅgala was intimate earlier in his life. She gave him the inspiration to begin on the path of devotional service, and because she convinced him to give up material existence to try for perfection by loving Kṛṣṇa, he has first offered his respects to her. Next he offers his respects to his initiating spiritual master [diksa-guru], Somagiri, and then to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who was also his instructing spiritual master [siksa-guru].³⁰

The Siksa-Guru

A siksa-guru's primary purpose is to guide his disciple in the matter of understanding transcendental knowledge. Therefore it is said (MU 1.2.12cd):

*tad-vijñānārtham sa gurum evābhigacchet
samt-pāṇiḥ śrotṛiyam brahma-niṣṭham*

To learn transcendental subject matter, one must approach the spiritual master. In doing so, he should carry fuel to burn in sacrifice. The symptom of such a spiritual master is that he is expert in understanding the Vedic conclusion, and therefore he constantly engages in the service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.³¹

³⁰ Purport of CC AL 1.57 in PRABHUPADA 1996.

³¹ Translation taken from the purport of BP 4.28.65 in PRABHUPADA 1982.

Because the word *siksa* means “instruction”, this learning is the *siksa-guru*’s specific qualification. A *guru* should be conversant with all transcendental subject matters because the *siksa-guru* is required to dispel all doubts of the disciple. Since any person’s faith is in part connected to having his doubts dispelled, the more learned the *guru*, the more effective he will be at answering his disciple’s queries. The entire *Bhagavadgītā*, for example, is a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, wherein Arjuna queries Krishna in order to dispel his doubts about transcendental subjects. In this instance Krishna acted as a *siksa-guru* for Arjuna.

Siksa

Instruction which invokes the disciple’s spiritual consciousness through subjective and objective ways of understanding is known as *sikṣā*.³² Subjective instruction means explaining spiritual subject matters in a way that is just suitable for the disciple’s own point of view and understanding.³³ Subjective instruction typically relies on knowledge acquired from direct sensory perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*). Objective instruction consists of *śabda*, or verbal authority. What qualifies as *śabda* is of great importance and thus worth noting:

Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says, *sādhu-śāstra-guru-vākya, cittete kariyā aikya*. One should accept a thing as genuine by studying the words

³² Purport of CC AL 1.47 in PRABHUPADA 1996.

³³ In the famous story of Valmiki Muni’s enlightenment, his *guru*, Narada Muni, asked Valmiki (who at that time was a thief) to chant the name *Rāma* (the name of Lord Rama), but Valmiki replied that he was too sinful to chant it. Narada Muni instead asked him to chant the name *mara* (“death”), which was agreeable to Valmiki. Valmiki chanted the word *mara* incessantly, but when the word *mara* is repeated, the syllable *ra* follows the syllable *ma*, and their combination nonetheless is like the sound of *Rāma*. In this way, Narada Muni was able to induce his disciple Valmiki to chant Lord Rama’s name. As a result, Valmiki became the greatly purified sage who retold the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Śrīla Prabhupada sometimes related the humorous story of a Christian preacher who went to preach to miners. The preacher first told the miners that hell is a cold, dark place with no light. When he saw the miners were unimpressed with that description, the preacher then told the miners that hell was a place without newspapers. The miners on hearing this begged the preacher to save them from hell. These are examples of subjective means of instruction.

of saintly people, the spiritual master and the *śāstra*. The actual center is the *śāstra*, the revealed scripture. If a spiritual master does not speak according to the revealed scripture, he is not to be accepted. Similarly, if a saintly person does not speak according to the *śāstra*, he is not a saintly person. The *śāstra* is the center for all.³⁴

For the disciple, sabda is of three kinds: the words of the guru,³⁵ the sadhus (saintly persons) and sastra (scripture). The guru (sikṣa-guru) we have already discussed. The sadhus are acaryas who may be in the disciplic succession of the guru or may be acaryas in other recognised disciplic successions. In general, as accepted by Gaudiya Vaisnava lines, sastra consists of all the works of Srila Vyasadeva, which includes the four Vedas, the *Purāṇas*, *Vedāntasūtra* and the *Mahābhārata*. Other works accepted as sastra are the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Valmiki only), pancaratras (like the *Nāradapañcarātra* and others), dharma-sastras like *Manusmṛti*, *Parāśarasmṛti*, *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* and others. Some of the more contemporary writings of acaryas also have the status of sastra, such as the writings of the Six Goswamis, the writings of Vrndavana dasa Thakura (*Caitanyabhāgavatā*³⁶), and the writings of Krishnadas Kaviraja Goswami (*Caitanyacaritāmṛta*).

The Dikṣa-Guru

The dikṣa-guru, or mantra-guru, awards a qualified disciple with mantras of the sampradaya and accepts vows from the disciple as evidence of the disciple's commitment to spiritual realisation. The process of initiation, both the disciple's first initiation (hari-nama) and second initiation (dikṣa), is performed according to pancaratrika-vidhi.³⁷ Before describing the two different initiations most of ISKCON's members receive, as given by the dikṣa-guru, it will be helpful to understand briefly what initiation entails and why it is important for a devotional candidate's progressive enlightenment.

³⁴ Purport of CC ML 20.352 in PRABHUPADA 1996.

³⁵ *Guru* is actually considered to be plural in number, not singular (see CC AL 1.34 in PRABHUPADA 1996), but because we have been describing the sikṣa-guru in the singular, we have used the singular form.

³⁶ This is the Sanskrit name form; the Bengali name form is *Caitanyabhāgabāt*.

³⁷ PRABHUPADA 1982 on BP 4.31.10.

Diksa

This is the definition of *dīkṣā* in *Bhaktisandarbhā* 868 by Srila Jiva Goswami (Jīva Gosvāmin):

*divyaṃ jñānaṃ yato dadyāt kuryāt pāpasya saṅkṣayam
tasmād dīkṣeti sā proktā deśikais tattva-kovidaiḥ*

By *dīkṣā* one gradually becomes disinterested in material enjoyment and gradually becomes interested in spiritual life.³⁸

Diksa diminishes interest in material enjoyment and promotes interest in spiritual life in two ways: by altering the karma of the initiate and by giving the initiate spiritual association by means of mantra. When one is initiated, one's karma (reactions to past activities) is changed. The body itself is known as *prarabdha-karman* (karma that is currently manifest). Because one acquires a body as a result of previous pious or sinful activity, the body thus represents karma. Karma that has not yet manifested, or fructified, is called *aprarabdha-karman*; this karma will eventually manifest at some future time. Diksa changes both the *prarabdha*-³⁹ and *aprarabdha-karman* of an individual.⁴⁰

Specifically what changes is that all the karma from the sinful activities of the disciple, both past and future, is transferred to the diksa-guru:

“I will deliver you from all sinful reaction. Do not fear.” So Kṛṣṇa is so powerful that He can immediately take up all the sins of others and immediately make them right. But when a living entity plays the part on behalf of Kṛṣṇa, he also takes the responsibility for the sinful activities of his devotees. Therefore to become a guru is not an easy task. You see? He has to take all the poisons and absorb them. ...

After initiation, all sinful reaction is finished. Now if he again commits sinful activities, his spiritual master has to suffer. A disciple should be sympathetic and consider this. “For my sinful activities, my spiritual master will suffer.” If the spiritual master is attacked by some disease, it is due to the sinful activities of others.⁴¹

³⁸ Purport taken from PRABHUPADA 1993b, text 5 (p. 47).

³⁹ Purport of BP 4.21.31 in PRABHUPADA 1982.

⁴⁰ Purport of BP 5.1.35 in PRABHUPADA 1982.

⁴¹ PRABHUPADA 1997e, Chapter 6.

If a devotional candidate pursues spiritual life but avoids initiation, it will be very difficult for him or her to acquire the determination to succeed in spiritual life because of being adversely affected by the results of his or her past impious activities.⁴²

Another way that diksa emancipates someone is by giving the initiate access to association with spiritual entities by means of mantra. There are two mantras which are especially important among Vaisnavas, the Hare Krishna maha-mantra⁴³ and the Gayatri mantra.⁴⁴ The principle of acquiring spiritual consciousness by means of spiritual association with mantras is analogous to the association of an iron rod with fire (BS 5.25):

tapas tvam tapa etena tava siddhir bhaviṣyati

“O Brahmā, do thou practice spiritual association by means of this *mantra*; then all your desires will be fulfilled.”⁴⁵

When an iron rod is put in a fire, it takes on the qualities of fire (heat and light) and can then act like fire. This same principle of association is also found in other areas of spiritual development, e.g. eating prasada (foodstuffs first offered to the Deity in the temple), wearing cloth or other articles formerly worn by the Deity in the temple, etc. It should be understood that spiritual association by means of mantra, whether the Hare Krishna maha-mantra or the Gayatri mantra, purifies and spiritualises one’s consciousness.

Both of these mantras are received through the disciplic succession by the process of initiation, or diksa. It is said in the *Padmapurāṇa*:⁴⁶ *sampradāya-vihīnā ye mantrās te niṣphalā matāḥ* “unless you are initiated

⁴² Translation and Purport of BG 7.28 in PRABHUPADA 1993a.

⁴³ *Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare, Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare.*

⁴⁴ There are actually several Gayatri mantras chanted (at one time) by ISKCON’s members, as well as others in other Vedic religious societies. But generally, the collection of Gayatri mantras chanted is referred to singularly.

⁴⁵ Translation taken from THAKURA 1989.

⁴⁶ This line is widely referred to by Srila Prabhupada, but never with an exact reference.

by a bona fide spiritual master in the disciplic succession, the mantra that you might have received is without any effect". While the Hare Krishna maha-mantra is so powerful that one may chant it without diksa, or receiving it from the disciplic succession, if one receives it through initiation, it will have the additional power of the great devotees in the disciplic succession who have also chanted it.⁴⁷ Thus for chanting the maha-mantra, although initiation is not necessary, it is recommended because of the benefit of receiving the mantra through the disciplic succession and also because of the material contamination of one's body and one's karma.⁴⁸ But for the Gayatri mantra, it is essential to receive it through the disciplic succession by initiation. Otherwise chanting it will be ineffective.

In summary, diksa removes the negative reactions of a disciple's past (and future) sinful activities, alters the consciousness of the disciple's present subtle body⁴⁹ so that it is easier for him or her to practice spiritual life, and provides the opportunity for the disciple to become further purified by association with transcendental mantras.

Hari Nama (First Initiation)

The hari nama initiation is the first initiation all devotees in ISKCON receive. This initiation is also known as savitra, or the acceptance of a spiritual master. The qualification to receive it is that the prospective candidate for one year must chant 16 rounds of the Hare Krishna maha-mantra on beads⁵⁰ and follow these four regulative principles: abstain from eating meat, fish and eggs, abstain from taking intoxicants, abstain from gambling and abstain from illicit sexual activity. The candidate must also have the recommendation of a local temple president or other suitable authority. After meeting all these conditions, and at the time of initiation, the disciple in front of the spiritual master formally vows for life to continue chanting the minimum number of prescribed rounds of

⁴⁷ See p. 108 above.

⁴⁸ Purport of CC 7.76 in PRABHUPADA 1996.

⁴⁹ Mind, intelligence and false ego (*ahankāra*).

⁵⁰ The chanting beads, the japa-mala consisting of 108 beads. For each bead, one must chant the Hare Krishna mantra once. So chanting one round on the japa-mala means chanting the Hare Krishna maha-mantra 108 times.

the Hare Krishna maha-mantra and abstain from the four kinds of sinful activities just mentioned. At that time, the spiritual master (diksa-guru) awards the disciple a new name and receives the karma of his disciple's previous sinful activities. If the disciple again commits sinful acts, the diksa-guru also receives the reactions of those sinful activities committed by the disciple after initiation.

Diksa (Second Initiation)

The second initiation that a disciple undergoes takes place at least one year after a disciple undergoes hari nama initiation and he has demonstrated that he has steadily followed his vows. On the recommendation of a temple authority (and nowadays after passing a test), a guru may offer a second initiation to his disciple.

This second initiation is known as diksa, wherein the disciple is offered the sacred thread, or the savitra-samskara. This second initiation is offered more as a recognition that a person is indeed a Vaisnava because a Vaisnava is considered automatically a brahmana. However, in order to worship the Deity in the temple, one must undergo this initiation. At this initiation, a fire sacrifice is performed, the sacred thread is offered to the disciple, and the disciple hears the Gayatri mantra in his right ear from his guru. On being initiated in this way, a disciple is officially recognised as a dvija, or a twice-born — a brahmana.

Among ISKCON's members, hari nama, or the first initiation, is often referred to as diksa. But technically, the first initiation is called hari nama, and the second initiation described here is called diksa. Both hari nama and diksa are offered by the diksa-guru.

The Ritvik Doctrine

The following excerpts from the paper known as *The Final Order* (TFO) summarise the position of the ritviks — specifically that of the IRM:

On July 9th 1977, four months before his physical departure, Srila Prabhupada set up a system of initiations employing the use of ritviks, or representatives of the acarya. Srila Prabhupada instructed that this ‘officiating acarya’ system was to be instituted immediately, and run from that time onwards, or ‘henceforward’ — (please see Appendices, p. 108). This management directive, which was sent to all Governing Body Commissioners and Temple Presidents of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, instructed that from that time on new disciples would be given spiritual names and have their beads and gayatri mantras from the 11 named ritviks. The ritviks were to act on Srila Prabhupada’s behalf, new initiates all becoming disciples of Srila Prabhupada. Srila Prabhupada thus handed over to the ritviks total power of attorney over who could receive initiation, he made it clear that from that time onwards he was no longer to be consulted.⁵¹

As previously mentioned, the July 9th order states that the *ritvik* system should be followed ‘henceforward’. The specific word used, ‘henceforward’, only has one meaning, *viz.* ‘from now onwards’. This is both according to Srila Prabhupada’s own previous usage of the word and the meaning ascribed to it by the English Language. Unlike other words, the word henceforward is unambiguous since it only possesses one dictionary definition. On the other 86 occasions that we find on Folio where Srila Prabhupada has used the word ‘henceforward’, nobody raised even the possibility that the word could mean anything other than ‘from now onwards’. ‘From now onwards’ does not mean ‘from now onwards until I depart’. It simply means ‘from now onwards’. There is **no** mention in the letter that the system should stop on Srila Prabhupada’s departure, neither does it state that the system was to **only** be operational during his presence. Furthermore the argument that the whole *ritvik* system ‘hangs’ on one word — henceforward — is untenable, since even if we take the

⁵¹ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 1. The whole passage is in italics in the original.

word *out* of the letter, nothing has changed. One still has a system set up by Srila Prabhupada four months before his departure, with no subsequent instruction to terminate it. Without such a counter instruction, this letter must be seen as Srila Prabhupada's final instruction on initiation and should therefore be followed.⁵²

To summarise the ritvik position, they consider that (1) no one was qualified at the time of Srila Prabhupada's departure to accept disciples, (2) Srila Prabhupada was aware of this fact and therefore set up a managerial system whereby he would continue to accept disciples even after his passing away, (3) the July 9, 1977 letter is Srila Prabhupada's explicit instruction to follow (what the ritviks consider) the system of posthumous initiations, and (4) no one who claims to be in the disciplic succession from Srila Prabhupada can ever accept disciples because of the absence of any direct order from Srila Prabhupada to do so.

The Fallacies of the Ritvik Movement

Up to this point, a summary of the ritvik controversy's history has been given, along with a summary of scriptural conclusions (as understood by many loyal to ISKCON) regarding gurus, disciples, initiations, and methods of transferring transcendental knowledge. A brief summary of the IRM's position has also been given. This section details the disagreements many of ISKCON's members have with the IRM and the ritvik doctrine.

The proponents of the ritvik movement have devoted the main part of their energies to developing the doctrine of what they call Srila Prabhupada's continued status as a diksa-guru. This doctrine can be subdivided into arguments that establish Srila Prabhupada's physical presence, establish his ability to continue to accept disciples in spite of his passing away, and establish the institutional infrastructure necessary to implement this doctrine.

The ritvik doctrine also describes at length what its proponents consider the overall lack of qualification of those currently acting as gurus. Even though the subject of qualification is considered irrelevant to the ritvik doctrine, the IRM's supporters have nonetheless devoted to it con-

⁵² KRISHNAKANT 2002: 3f.

siderable time and public promotion.

In this section we will first examine the IRM's treatment of evidence, their arguments against anyone at present or in the future being qualified to accept disciples, and finally the core ritvik doctrine: Srila Prabhupada's posthumous continuance as a diksa-guru.

Evidence

This section examines techniques used by the ritvik proponents in rationalising their conclusions as presented in TFO.

Excluding Evidence

TFO liberally quotes from the body of Srila Prabhupada's recorded instructions (books, lectures, letters and conversations), but not all relevant references from the body of Srila Prabhupada's teachings are considered admissible. This inadmissible evidence (counter evidence) falls into two categories: (1) personal letters or statements made by Srila Prabhupada but not widely publicised at a particular time, (2) testimony of recognised acaryas other than Srila Prabhupada.

Personal Letters

Some of Srila Prabhupada's correspondence has been offered as counter-evidence for the idea that Srila Prabhupada's spiritual descendants may never accept disciples, and the ritviks have gone to great lengths to render them inadmissible. The ritviks disregard these letters because they consider them to be personal instruction meant for a particular individual which, hence, cannot be used to advocate a broad conclusion. In one letter, Srila Prabhupada has written:

Keep trained up very rigidly and then you are bona fide Guru, and you can accept disciples on the same principle.⁵³

Only a hardened doubter could believe that an instruction such as "keep trained up very rigidly" did not apply to the rest of Srila Prabhupada's disciples.

The first thing, I warn Acyutananda, do not try to initiate. You are not in a proper position now to initiate anyone. ... I am training you all to

⁵³ PRABHUPADA 1997b (letter of February 2, 1975 to Tusta-Krsna).

become future Spiritual Masters, but do not be in a hurry.⁵⁴

Similarly, the statement “I am training you all to become future Spiritual Masters” clearly applies also to those not recipients of this letter. These statements are too overtly suited to the general body of devotees in ISKCON. These instructions cannot be limited to only the recipients.

To get around this, the ritviks suggest that these letters contain benevolent untruths spoken to keep ambitious disciples in devotional service in order to rectify their pretentious mentalities.⁵⁵ Hence, these letters cannot be used as evidence.

In Srila Prabhupada’s letters like the ones quoted above and in others,⁵⁶ Srila Prabhupada has clearly told his disciples that they should become qualified. When the directive to become qualified is part of the instruction, there is no question that such instruction could be a falsehood, even if well intentioned. If one becomes qualified, there is no question that he or she is disqualified.

Finally, the ritviks themselves often refer to letters to validate their conclusions. Here is a partial list of letters they have used in substantiating their thesis: Letter to Janardana (April 26, 1968), Letter (January 19, 1967), Letter to Dinesh (October 31, 1969), Letter to Tamal Krishna (August 19, 1968), Letter to Rupanuga (April 28, 1974), Letter to Madhudvisa (August 4, 1975), Letter to Dayananda (April 12, 1968), Letter to Pradyumna (February 17, 1968), Letter to Tamala Krsna (June 21, 1970), etc.⁵⁷ The ritviks certainly have no issues with citing Srila Prabhupada’s letters when they believe them to support their claims.

Testimony of Previous Acaryas

As described previously, a religious precept can be accepted as fact only if it is in line with the statements of guru-sadhu-sastra. Previous acaryas represent the sadhu aspect of this system of checks and balances. ISKCON’s leaders in dealing with the crisis of spiritual masters falling down consulted the writings of previous acaryas wherein it is

⁵⁴ PRABHUPADA 1997b (letter of August 21, 1968 to Acyutananda and Jaya Govinda).

⁵⁵ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 19.

⁵⁶ DASA, Krishna-kirti 2001: 2-4.

⁵⁷ KRISHNAKANT 2002 has references to letters throughout the work.

explicitly described what one should do if his or her spiritual master deviates. The ritviks, however, believe it is wrong to consult the writings of previous acaryas wherever these writings cannot be corroborated with something Srila Prabhupada himself has said (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 79; bolding in the original):

But Srila Prabhupada told us that **everything** we needed to know about spiritual life was in his books. Why are we introducing systems never mentioned by our *acarya*?

Although the ritviks regard this to be an absolute instruction, it is in fact circumstantial. At the various times Srila Prabhupada gave this and similar instructions, it was to disciples who were not much inclined to study his books:

There is no need by any of my disciples to read any books besides my books — in fact, such reading may be detrimental to their advancement in Krishna Consciousness. All reading of outside books, except in certain authorized cases such as for example to read some philosopher like Plato to make an essay comparing his philosophy with Krishna’s philosophy — but otherwise all such outside reading should be stopped immediately. It is simply another botheration. If my students cannot even read my own books thoroughly, why they should read others? I have given you TLC, what need is there to read Caitanya Caritamṛta translated by someone else. You are right to stop such reading.⁵⁸

On another occasion, when some disciples asked Srila Prabhupada about reading the books of previous acaryas, he affirmed that their works may be studied:

Paramahaṁsa: Srila Prabhupada, I remember once I heard a tape where you told us that we should not try to read the books of previous *ācāryas*.

Prabhupāda: Hmm?

Amogha: That we should not try to read Bhaktivinoda’s books or earlier books of other, all *ācāryas*. So I was just wondering ...

Prabhupāda: I never said that.

...

Paramahaṁsa: Yeah, that was, the reason was because of, he didn’t want

⁵⁸ PRABHUPADA 1997b (letter of January 20, 1972 to Sri Govinda).

the devotees going to Gauḍīya Maṭha. But there's nothing wrong with the idea of studying the previous *ācāryas'* books.

Prabhupāda: No. Who said? That is wrong. We are following previous *ācāryas*. I never said that.

Paramahansa: All of your commentaries are coming from the previous *ācāryas*.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

Jayadharma: But that wouldn't mean that we should keep all the previous *ācāryas'* books and only read them.

Prabhupāda: That is already there. You first of all assimilate what you have got. You simply pile up books and do not read — what is the use?

Jayadharma: First of all we must read all your books.

Prabhupāda: Yes.⁵⁹

Srila Prabhupada himself answered queries from his disciples on a variety of issues. It is true that in response to some questions, rather than answer, he requested his disciples to carefully read his books. However, Srila Prabhupada also considered that there would be situations where after reading books and consulting with senior leaders it would still be necessary to personally ask him:

It is a very important question, and I am glad that you have asked me, but I think from now on the GBC men may be consulted in all such matters of temple management and affairs. I have given them everything, so they shall be able to answer all questions, and if they cannot answer from their experience, then I have given answer in my books — and still if they cannot answer, they may ask me.⁶⁰

As we see in this reference, Srila Prabhupada lists alternative sources for answering a question, and one of those sources is his own self — not simply his books.

If while Srila Prabhupada was physically present it was necessary for him to answer queries, even after writing so many books, then it is unreasonable to think that there will never arise a situation *after* Srila Prabhupada's disappearance where consulting resources other than his books will not be necessary. The written works of previous acaryas are

⁵⁹ PRABHUPADA 1997a (morning walk conversation of May 13, 1975).

⁶⁰ PRABHUPADA 1997b (letter of February 16, 1972 to Kirtika).

therefore a source of authorised information that is not to be neglected.

A second argument offered by the ritviks against consulting some of the written works of previous *acaryas* is that a devotee in ISKCON must not try to understand the teachings of Srila Prabhupada from outside of Srila Prabhupada's own recorded teachings. Please note this exchange (DASA, Adridharana 2000):

Adridharan: In trying to understand Srila Prabhupada's teachings we are instructed to not 'Jump over' to the previous *acaryas*. Instead one must understand Srila Prabhupada's instructions from Srila Prabhupada himself.

Niscala: And Srila Prabhupada has instructed us in many places to study the books of the great *acaryas*, such as in the introduction to Srimad Bhagavatam. Should we ignore those instructions?

Therefore, "jumping over" means only to ignore one's own guru's instructions in favour of the previous *acaryas*. But we are primarily giving quotes and directions from Srila Prabhupada, so where is such an attitude of jumping over? How can we ignore such literature and still follow the above mentioned instructions of Srila Prabhupada? Gurus do and can fall as described in the books of these *acaryas*.

Adridharan: Not members of the disciplic succession. Nowhere is this stated by Srila Prabhupada, he only states the opposite:

"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)⁶¹

"There is no possibility that a first class devotee will fall down." (C.c. Madhya, 22.71)

"A spiritual master is always liberated." (SP Letter to Tamal Krsna, 21/6/70)

"Narada Muni, Haridasa Thakura and similar *acaryas* especially empowered to broadcast the glories of the Lord cannot be brought down to the material platform. (S.B. 7.7.14, purport)

You are trying to use the teachings of other *acaryas* to overturn our immediate *acaryas* teachings. According to Narahari Sarakara, whose books you want to refer to, this is very sinful:

"... a disciple who listens to the words of other Vaisnavas, even if their in-

⁶¹ DASA, Adridharana 2000 ends this line on "... 4.42, purport)?".

instructions are proper and true, but does not re-confirm those teachings with his own spiritual master and instead directly personally accepts these instructions, is considered a bad disciple and a sinner.” (verse 49, Sri Kṛṣṇa Bhajanamṛta by Srila Narahari Sarakara)

Please note we only quote this to show that even by your own authority what you are doing and teaching is off.

The term “jumping over” is a commonly understood expression among ISKCON's members, and it means trying to surpass the understanding of one's immediate acarya, often by citing other previous authorities:

This is *paramparā* system. You cannot jump over. You must go through the *paramparā* system. You have to approach through your spiritual master to the Gosvāmīs, and through the Gosvāmīs you will have to approach Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and through Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu you have to approach Kṛṣṇa. That is the way.⁶²

One is considered to be “jumping over” Srila Prabhupada if by citing other authorities one contradicts or invalidates some teaching of his. But this assumes that one always understands what Srila Prabhupada's opinions were on any given issue — no exceptions. If Srila Prabhupada did not write or say something, then according to the ritviks it must mean he would not approve or agree with it if it were proposed (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 78f.; bolding added):

Despite a total absence from Srila Prabhupada's books of bona fide gurus deviating, the GBC's book GII has a whole section on what a disciple should do when his previously bona fide guru deviates! The chapter begins by asserting the importance of approaching a current link, and not ‘jumping over’ (GII, p. 27). **However, the authors proceed to do precisely this by quoting numerous previous acaryas in an attempt to establish principles never taught by Srila Prabhupada.**

This is a complaint against some references cited in a GBC paper entitled *Gurus and Initiation In ISKCON* (GII), which describes the procedure and etiquette for dealing with gurus in particular circumstances. One situation described therein happens to be about what needs to

⁶² PRABHUPADA 1997c (lecture on CC AL 1.4 on March 28, 1975 in Mayapura).

be done if one's guru deviates. According to that paper, one may attempt to reform the guru, keeping one's self distant from the errant guru, or completely reject the guru if he proves to be incorrigible. For support, the GBC paper refers to conclusions of acaryas in our disciplic succession:

It is natural that the disciple will be fixed in the conclusion that the spiritual master cannot be subject to criticism, as this is Srila Prabhupada's advice. In the Hari-bhakti-vilas, verse 359, the Aditya-purana states how one should not immediately reject a Vaisnava guru who is in difficulty:

*avidyo va savidyo va gurur eva janardanaḥ
sarga-stho vapy amarga⁶³-stho gurur eva sada gatih*

(from the Aditya-purana) "He may be uneducated or he may be learned, yet the spiritual master is the external manifestation of Janardan, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. And he may remain on the path or he may deviate from the path, still the spiritual master is the [disciple's only] way."

And if it is thus confirmed that one's guru is deviating from the path of devotional service, one may approach him, respectfully question him, and try to keep him fixed on the right path. In the Kṛṣṇa Bhajanamṛta (verse 59) Srila Narahari Thakura explains this clearly:

"If a spiritual master commits a wrongful act, breaking Vaisnava regulative principles, one should confront him in a solitary place for his rectification, using logic and appropriate conclusions from *sadhu*, *sastra*, and guru, but one is not to give him up."⁶⁴

*dbitīya kāraṇa ei ye. guru-baraṇa samāje guru-deba baiṣṇava o tattba-
jñā chilena, kintu saṅga-doṣe pare māyā-bādī bā baiṣṇava-bidbeṣī haiyā
jāna; e-rūpa guruke parityāga karā kartabya ...*

The second instance in which one may reject the guru is when the guru was at the time of one's initiation a Vaisnava conversant in the Absolute Truth but later due to bad association became a mayavadi or an offender

⁶³ Printing mistake in original: *anarga*.

⁶⁴ GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1995: 57. The verse of the *Kṛṣṇabhajanāmṛta* runs (KB 59):

*kintu yadi gurur asamañjasam karoti tarhi yukti-siddhaiḥ
siddhāntais tasya rahasi dandah karanīyo na tu tyājyāḥ*

to the Vaisnavas. That guru should be rejected.⁶⁵

There are two reasons the above excerpts are unacceptable to the ritviks. Firstly, references such as these from Srila Prabhupada's writings (below) are cited in TFO to put to rest any idea that someone who is a genuine guru can fall down:

The pure devotee is always free from the clutches of Māyā and her influence.⁶⁶

There is no possibility that a first class devotee will fall down.⁶⁷

A Spiritual Master is always liberated.⁶⁸

If the spiritual master is always liberated, then where is the possibility that he can deviate? These terms are so emphatic that they seem to be mutually exclusive of any other terms which suggested that a guru could fall down. The ritviks then conclude that a spiritual master can never deviate and thus any other conclusion is unacceptable.

Secondly, and in response to references like the ones cited from Srila Narahari Thakura, the ritviks claim that such references are inadmissible because they cannot be validated with a corresponding reference from Srila Prabhupada. The ritviks believe quoting these references to be an instance of "jumping over".

But this line of reasoning inadequately explains why recognised acaryas have said things so contradictory to what the ritviks believe Srila Prabhupada's instructions to be. Could recognised acaryas be wrong? If so, then why are they recognised at all? Within ISKCON it is considered a great offence to find fault with previous acaryas. The standard we accept in ISKCON is that a subject matter must be understood according to the words of not only the guru and sastra but also of recognised saintly persons. If a particular understanding is out of line with any of these three sources (guru, sadhu or sastra), then the idea should not be accepted as

⁶⁵ Bengali text taken from Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's *Jaiba dharma*, chapter 20; translation taken from GOVERNING BODY COMMISSION 1995: 66.

⁶⁶ Purport of BP 5.14.3 in PRABHUPADA 1982.

⁶⁷ Purport of CC ML 22.71 in PRABHUPADA 1996.

⁶⁸ PRABHUPADA 1997b (letter of June 21, 1970 to Tamal Krishna Goswami).

true.

By rejecting the authority of statements from Srila Narahari Thakura and Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura,⁶⁹ the ritviks imply that the teachings of prior acaryas contradict the teachings of Srila Prabhupada, or that Srila Prabhupada's teachings contradict the teachings of previous acaryas. ISKCON's faithful reject both ideas. Nonetheless, we find this curious statement in *The Final Order* (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 82):

But would an authorised *acarya* ever contradict the direct orders left by a previous *acarya* to his followers? To do so would surely undermine the authority of the previous *acarya*. It would certainly cause confusion and bewilderment for those followers faced with the tortuous choice of whose order to follow.

Equivocation

In *The Final Order*, with regard to the term “physical presence”, we find the following objection to the ritvik doctrine portrayed (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 85; bolding in the original):

“On three occasions Srila Prabhupada states that you need a physical guru, and yet your whole position rests on the idea that you do not.”

along with three references that would seem to support this objection:

Therefore, as soon as we become a little inclined towards Kṛṣṇa, then from within our heart he gives us favourable instruction so that we can gradually make progress, gradually.

Kṛṣṇa is the first spiritual master, and when we become more interested then we have to go to a physical spiritual master.⁷⁰

Because Kṛṣṇa is situated in everyone's heart. Actually, he is the spiritual master, *caitya-guru*. So in order to help us, he comes out as physical spiritual master.⁷¹

Therefore God is called *caitya-guru*, the spiritual master within the heart. And the physical spiritual master is God's mercy . . . He will help you

⁶⁹ Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura is the third acarya in ISKCON's disciplic succession from Srila Prabhupada.

⁷⁰ PRABHUPADA 1997c (lecture on BG 4.34 on August 14, 1966 in New York.).

⁷¹ PRABHUPADA 1997c (lecture on BP 1.2.4 on May 28, 1974 in Rome).

from within and without, without in the physical form of the spiritual master, and within as the spiritual master within the heart.⁷²

And here is part of TFO's rebuttal (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 86; underlining in the original):

Srila Prabhupada used the term physical guru when explaining that in the conditioned stage we cannot rely purely on the *Caitya*-Guru or Supersoul for guidance. It is imperative that we surrender to the external manifestation of the Supersoul. This is the *Diksa*-Guru. Such a Spiritual Master, who is considered a resident of the spiritual world, and an intimate associate of Lord Krsna, makes his physical appearance just to guide the fallen conditioned souls. Often such a Spiritual Master will write physical books; he will give lectures which can be heard with physical ears and be recorded on physical tape machines; he may leave physical murtis and even a physical GBC to continue managing everything once he has physically departed.

The term "physical" is stressed to suggest that the byproducts of the guru (books, tapes, pictures, etc.) are identical with the actual manifestation of the guru himself, as he walks, talks, eats and breathes. Or in other words, the guru's physical body is considered "physical presence" and the guru's book is also considered "physical presence", and further distinction is unnecessary. In another place in TFO, a similar claim is made: the state of a living (opposite of deceased) guru is equivalent to the currently existing byproducts of the living guru (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 23; bolding and underlining in the original):

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

Srila Prabhupada: **I will never die**

Devotees: *Jaya! Haribol! (laughter)*

Srila Prabhupada: **I will live from my books and you will utilise.**

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

Here was a clear opportunity for Srila Prabhupada to lay out his plans for the M.A.S.S. were that to be his intention. But instead of saying his disciples will succeed him as *diksa* gurus he says he shall never die. From the

⁷² PRABHUPADA 1997a (room conversation of May 23, 1974).

above exchange it can be understood Srila Prabhupada is a **living** spiritual master who continues to impart transcendental knowledge (*the main constituent of diksa*) through his books; and that this will continue for as long as ISKCON exists.

The claim that the ritviks are attempting to refute here is that if Srila Prabhupada is absent, then there must be someone to replace him, since Srila Prabhupada himself has said a physically present diksa-guru is necessary. Even TFO accepts that a physical guru is necessary (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 86): “It is imperative that we surrender to the external manifestation of the Supersoul. This is the *Diksa* Guru.” Since Srila Prabhupada continues to *live* through his *physical books, physical tapes and physical pictures*, then, challenge the ritviks, how can we say he is not physically present?

If for argument’s sake we accept this as true, then what is meant by the term “disappearance” or “absence” of the guru? These are terms Srila Prabhupada used on many occasions, even sometimes referring to his own self. Obviously a book or a picture of a guru continues to exist after a guru passes away. But if we accept the ritvik line of thought, then we could not say that Srila Prabhupada passed away. There couldn’t be any disappearance day ceremonies (since there was never any disappearance). Therefore, terms such as physical presence, physical absence, etc., must refer to the guru’s body, the one he walks around in and that gets interred after he passes away; it does not refer to pictures, books, or tape recordings.

Arguing From Ignorance

TFO makes claims its author says must be true if there is no evidence that they are false. But this is problematic: “Since the Vedas do not forbid one to take initiation from the ghost of a dead snake, doing such a thing is allowed by Vedic authority.” Here are some of the more prominent examples from TFO:

There is **no** mention in the letter that the system should stop on Srila Prabhupada’s departure, neither does it state that the system was to **only** be operational during his presence.⁷³

⁷³ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 4.

There is nothing in the letter that says the instruction was only meant for whilst Srila Prabhupada was physically present.⁷⁴

Srila Prabhupada did *not* give any order to terminate the *ritvik* system on his physical departure.⁷⁵

The demand for the *ritvik* system to only operate within a pre-specified time period is contradicted by accepting its operation for 126 separate 24 hour time periods (i.e. four months). Since none of these 126 separate time periods is specified in the letter, yet everyone seems quite happy that the system ran during this time frame. Unless we take the word ‘henceforward’ literally to mean ‘indefinitely’, we could stop the system at any time after July 9th, so why choose departure?⁷⁶

Srila Prabhupada did not publish a new book each time he issued an important instruction, regardless of whether the instruction was to continue past his departure. Thus, the form in which the instruction was issued does not make it prey for indirect interpretations, nor in any way diminishes its validity.⁷⁷

For example, had Srila Prabhupada intended the *ritvik* system to stop on his departure he would have added the following seven words to the July 9th letter — “This system will terminate on my departure”. A quick look at the letter tells us he wanted it to continue ‘henceforward’.⁷⁸

Improper Accent

The *ritviks* frequently place unusual emphasis on a word, phrase or particular aspect of a claim in order to lead the reader to unwarranted conclusions.

Over-Emphasis on Words and Phrases

Here is a notable example (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 14; bolding and underlining in the original):

⁷⁴ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 7.

⁷⁵ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 6.

⁷⁶ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 9.

⁷⁷ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 11.

⁷⁸ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 11.

Srila Prabhupada unequivocally stated that the *diksa* guru must be a ***maha-bhagavata*** (most advanced stage of God-realisation) and be specifically **authorised** by his own spiritual master. He had always strongly condemned the assumption of guruship by those who were not suitably qualified and authorised. We quote below the only passage in Srila Prabhupada's books where the qualifications of the *diksa* guru are stated.

***Maha-bhagavata-srestho brahmano vai gurur nram
sarvesam eva lokanam asau pujyo yatha harih
maha-kula-prasuto 'pi sarva-yajnesu dikṣitaḥ
sahasra-sakhadyayi ca na guruh syad avaisnavah***

“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.”

(C.c. Madhya, 24.330, purport)

The ritviks claim that the verse starting with *mahā-bhāgavata-śreṣṭho* is “the only passage in Srila Prabhupada's books where the qualifications of the *diksa* guru are stated”. In order to prove this, they underline and bold the words *mahā-bhāgavata-* and *dīkṣitaḥ*. However, in the purport in which this verse appears, Srila Prabhupada does not fully translate it. Also, the verse itself is from the *Padmapurāṇa*. But what is most significant here is their bad translation of the Sanskrit. The word *dīkṣitaḥ* simply means that the guru himself is initiated. Indeed, the word is semantically linked to *sarva-yajñesu*, meaning that the guru is “initiated in all the sacrifices”. Apart from that, Srila Prabhupada himself does not mention here that this is the definition of a *diksa*-guru.

The ritviks consistently underline and highlight words to convey understandings ordinarily not warranted by reading the same text in its original, unmarked form. Though a minor issue, typographical emphasis can still mislead the unwary (bolding and underlining as in the original TFO):

“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)*⁷⁹

Indian man: *When did you become the spiritual leader of Krsna Consciousness?*

Srila Prabhupada: **What is that?**

Brahmananda: *He is asking when did you become the spiritual leader of Krsna Consciousness?*

Srila Prabhupada: **When my Guru Maharaja ordered me. This is the guru parampara.**

Indian man: *Did it ...*

Srila Prabhupada: **Try to understand. Don't go very speedily. A guru can become guru when he is ordered by his guru. That's all. Otherwise nobody can become guru.**⁸⁰

In the two passages above, the phrases “authorised by his predecessor spiritual master” and “when ... ordered” are overemphasised to suggest that there has to be some sort of specific instruction such as, “now, you accept disciples”. This is misleading because there is no mention of the nature of the order. Orders may be direct or indirect. For example, if one is ordered to cook food, it is understood that one must use a stove, or fire. The order to cook a meal includes the order to use a stove.

One more example (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 22f.; bolding in the original):

“Now, tenth, eleventh, twelfth. My Guru Maharaja is tenth from Caitanya Mahaprabhu, I am eleventh, you are the twelfth. So distribute this knowledge.”

(SP Arrival Lecture, 18/5/72, Los Angeles)

“At the same time, I shall request them all to become spiritual master. Every one of you should be spiritual master next.”

(SP Vyasa-Puja address, 5/9/69, Hamburg)

The first quote clearly mentions that Srila Prabhupada's disciples are already the twelfth — ‘you **ARE** the twelfth’. Thus this is not some authorisation for them to become *diksa* gurus in the future, but merely a statement that they are already carrying on the message of the *parampara*.

⁷⁹ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 14.

⁸⁰ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 14f.

The second quote is in a similar vein. It undoubtedly mentions that his disciples are next in line. But as the first quote states, that succession had already taken place by dint of the disciples vigorous preaching. Either way, there is no clear explicit order to take disciples, but simply to preach. Just because he was asking his disciples to become spiritual masters next, does not mean he wanted them to become *initiating* spiritual masters next. To insist that he did mean this is pure speculation. In fact, we know it is wrong since the final order made it clear that his disciples were only to act as representatives of the *acarya*, and not in any type of initiating or *diksa* capacity.

Here the emphasis on the phrase “you **ARE** the twelfth”, with special emphasis on “are”, is without doubt an attempt to lead the reader to conclude that this statement does not refer to a succession. But the next reference is more emphatic: “Every one of you should be spiritual master next.” Taken by itself, this indicates succession. But in order to dismiss it, the ritviks interpret this phrase in the light of their interpretation of the previous phrase (“tenth, eleventh, twelfth”).

The rest of the attempt to hush this bit of evidence becomes absurd. In the same paragraph the ritviks previously stated that they (the devotees) were *already* carrying on the message of the parampara (meaning they were currently siksa-gurus). But why would Srila Prabhupada tell his students to become something they already were, unless he was actually referring to something that they already were not? What kind of guru do you not become in the presence of your spiritual master? A diksa-guru — hence the reference to the future.

And finally, the ritviks make sure there is no room to doubt their interpretation: Since a straightforward grammatical reading would contradict “the final order”, its plain meaning cannot be accepted. For the ritviks the “final order” becomes its own proof — circular logic wherein all contrary evidence is filtered, discarded, or suitably interpreted to fit “the final order”.

Out-of-Context References

This next section deals with out-of-context references used in TFO (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 54; bolding and underlining in the original):

‘Diksa can only take place if the guru is within a distance, not greater than the earth's diameter, of his disciple during a formal initiation

ceremony.’

To date no one has been able to locate such an injunction. Rather as the quote below shows, a well-known example of *diksa* in our philosophy (Bg. 4.1) actually contradicts the above proposition:

“So there was no difficulty in communicating with Manu or Manu’s son, Ikṣvaku. The communication was there, or the radio system was so nice that communication could be transferred from one planet to another.”

(Srila Prabhupada Bg. Lecture, 24/8/68)

It would appear that *diksa* is not affected by the physical distances between gurus and disciples.

A larger piece of the reference (Srila Prabhupada’s lecture) cited by TFO is found below, with portions of this reference omitted by TFO highlighted in bold:

In the Siddhaloka the living entities or human beings are so advanced in yogic practice that they can travel with this body from one planet to another. This description are [sic] there in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, Second Canto. And in this planet also there are many yogis even still existing, they can travel in this planet very swiftly by yogic power. There are many yogis who daily take bath in four places: in Prayāga, in Rāmeśvaram, in Jagannātha Purī, and in Hardwar. Still there are some yogis in India. So they can transfer themselves, transport themselves, from one place to another very quickly. So there was no difficulty in communicating with Manu or Manu’s son, Ikṣvaku. The communication was there, or the radio system was so nice that communication could be transferred from one planet to another.⁸¹

TFO’s author omitted the fact that such personalities had the ability to travel to other planets. Just because the guru and disciple resided on different planets does not imply they had no opportunity to personally visit each other. Furthermore, such communication mentioned here can be *siksa* too, not necessarily *diksa*.

Another example (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 80):

Srila Prabhupada taught that a guru will only fall down if he is not

⁸¹ PRABHUPADA 1997c (lecture on BG 4.1 on August 24, 1968 in Montreal).

properly authorised to initiate:

“... sometimes a spiritual master is not properly authorised to initiate 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.”

(Nectar of Devotion, p. 116)

Excluded portions of the reference cited by TFO highlighted by bolding and underlining:

. . . sometimes, if a spiritual master is not properly authorized and only on his own initiative becomes a spiritual master, he may be carried away by an accumulation of wealth and large numbers of disciples. **His is not a very high grade of devotional service. If a person is carried away by such achievements, then his devotional service becomes slackened. One should therefore strictly adhere to the principles of disciplic succession.**⁸²

By reading the reference as cited in TFO, one could conclude that being unauthorised to accept disciples is the only cause of falling down for a guru. TFO refers to this to support the idea that one must have some sort of explicit instruction to accept disciples — qualification alone is insufficient. But the excluded portion never mentions receiving an explicit order. Rather, it advocates strictly following the principles of the disciplic succession.⁸³ As we will see later, qualification is sufficient authorisation for accepting disciples in the absence of one’s spiritual master.

The May 28, 1977 Conversation

On May 28, 1977, senior GBC members met and queried Srila Prabhupada on the future of initiations after his departure. The discussion itself has been the focus of much controversy and has been used to bolster arguments for the ritvik doctrine and against it. Generally, it has been used mostly against the ritvik doctrine. Thus TFO’s author has tried to discredit the conversation rather than try to weave it into his own doctrine. At the end of his lengthy analysis, he states that this discussion can

⁸² PRABHUPADA 1979: 114 (“Devotional Qualifications”).

⁸³ For more examples, please refer to DASA, Krishna-kirti 2001: 29.

probably be dismissed because of the different versions circulating (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 46): “It should be noted that there are at least four different transcripts, and four differing ‘official’ GBC interpretations of this very same conversation. Many devotees feel that for this reason alone the conversation cannot be considered as conclusive evidence.” But he stops short of saying it is unacceptable evidence. The length to which he dispenses with grammar and reason in his analysis seems sufficient reason for him to wish the May 28 conversation would just go away. Indeed it is the only piece of evidence he begrudgingly accepts as having any potential to contradict his doctrine. Below is an excerpt of the conversation, as TFO has presented it (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 36f.):

(16) **Tamal Krsna Goswami:** No. He is asking that these *ritvik acaryas*, they are officiating, giving *diksa*,

(17) (their) ... the people who they give *diksa* to, whose disciples are they?

(18) **Srila Prabhupada:** They are his disciples.

(19) **Tamal Krsna Goswami:** They are his disciples (?)

(20) **Srila Prabhupada:** Who is initiating ... (his) (he is) grand-disciple ...

And below is an excerpt of the analysis (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 42):

Lines 19-20: Tamal Krsna Goswami repeats the answer, and then Srila Prabhupada continues; ‘who is initiating ... his grand-disciple.’ We have chosen the transcript version ‘his grand-disciple’ over the version ‘he is grand-disciple’ since it most closely resembles the tape, and seems to flow best with the sense of the conversation. (Otherwise the person initiating would simultaneously become a grand-disciple! — ‘who is initiating ... he is grand-disciple.’)

The argument that when speaking here in the third person, Srila Prabhupada must be referring to the *ritviks* and not himself, can be tested by modifying the conversation in accordance with this view, replacing third person with first person statements (shown in brackets), for **lines 17-20** :

TKG: Whose disciples are they?

Srila Prabhupada: They are (the *ritvik*’s) disciples.

TKG: They are (the *ritvik*’s) disciples.

Srila Prabhupada: (The *ritvik*) is initiating ... (The *ritvik*’s) grand-disciple ...

Given the premise that *ritviks* are only officiating, and that their role is only representational, it should be self-evident to the reader that this interpretation of **lines 17-20** is nonsense. It is a contradiction in terms for a *ritvik* to have their own disciples, what to speak of grand-disciples.

There is much added to the conversation to make it work the way he wants it to, with the modified statements coming off as gibberish. One scholar has remarked (BRZEZINSKI 1996-1997: 160): “Prabhupāda’s English was never entirely unambiguous, and his broken sentences answering questions fired at him simultaneously by two different people while he was on his deathbed were susceptible to creative hermeneutics by these dissenters.” That the hermeneutics employed here were indeed creative is something admitted to by TFO’s author himself (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 42):

The accusation may be made that we are in some way twisting Srila Prabhupada’s words by taking third person to be first person statements. However we feel our interpretation is consistent with the function Srila Prabhupada assigned to his ritviks.

“The Final Order”

The ritvik doctrine is ultimately based on a letter written on July 9, 1977 by Tamal Krishna Goswami and co-signed by Srila Prabhupada. Those who accept the ritvik doctrine (and its variations) generally believe this letter to be Srila Prabhupada’s “final order” on the matter of gurus and initiations. Hence, the paper *The Final Order* takes its name from this belief. The letter itself named 11 senior disciples to accept disciples on behalf of Srila Prabhupada. Each of these disciples would act as a *ritvik* (“representative of the *acarya*”⁸⁴). Persons initiated by these representatives would be considered Srila Prabhupada’s disciples, not the disciple of the representatives who initiated them. Furthermore, these representatives did not have to consult with Srila Prabhupada before initiating anyone. Those who accept the ritvik doctrine believe that Srila Prabhupada intended this system to continue after his departure, or passing away, and that he would continue to accept disciples through this procedure.

The ritviks say that there is no reason to believe that Srila Prabhupada

⁸⁴ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 31.

would not continue to accept disciples after his departure because the system, as it was, did not need his personal superintendence (they refer to this as “the system of management”). Furthermore, the ritviks (specifically the hard ritviks, not the soft ritviks) consider that the presence of the word “henceforward” in the letter indicates the indefinite future as the time frame for the letter, at least as long as the system itself could continue to function.

“The System of Management”

Whether or not a system of management exists that could allow proxy-initiations to continue indefinitely depends on determining what Srila Prabhupada wanted his disciples to do after his departure. Hence, it is not actually relevant to a discussion on whether or not Srila Prabhupada wanted such a thing. However, its utility in the controversy has been to convince others that such a thing is not out of the realm of possibility. But because this subtopic is not an essential determining factor in the validity or non-validity of the ritvik doctrine, we will not deal with it here.⁸⁵

“Henceforward”

The word “henceforward” as found in this letter, and as defended in *The Final Order*, deserves scrutiny because several key arguments in TFO depend on it. At the same time, TFO has denied that it is relevant to their interpretation of the July 9, 1977 letter (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 4):

Furthermore the argument that the whole *ritvik* system ‘hangs’ on one word — ‘henceforward’ — is untenable, since even if we take the word *out* of the letter, nothing has changed.

The above statement seems to be more of an afterthought rather than an original part of the TFO. One reason for its existence could be that not long after TFO was first published, opposing arguments demonstrated that the word “henceforward”, as Srila Prabhupada has used it, can be implicitly limited by other circumstances or instructions previously given. Here is an example (*italicisation added*):

I am so glad to hear that you are now married. I pray Krishna that you may live *henceforward* happily as a householder, without thinking of a separa-

⁸⁵ DASA, Krishna-kirti 2001 treats this subject in detail.

tion from your wife.⁸⁶

If we insist on using “henceforward” in the way TFO’s authors insist we use it, then this man must stay with his wife from now onwards, from now until either of them die. Yet there are abundant references from Srila Prabhupada’s written works which state that when a householder reaches the age of 50, he should retire from family life; the husband and wife, eventually, voluntarily separate, and the man takes sannyasa. Thus the word “henceforward” is not exempt from being understood within the context of Srila Prabhupada’s other instructions (*italicisation added*):

*You can chant their beads *henceforward*. Hope to meet you at Mayapur.⁸⁷

If we consider “henceforward” means “from now onwards” and must be taken literally, without consideration of other instructions, then this devotee should still be allowed to chant on the beads of prospective disciples regardless of his present situation. (The devotee to whom Srila Prabhupada wrote this letter has since left the movement and has abandoned his vows.)

As we can see, the ritviks over-reliance on the use of the word “henceforward” in determining the time-frame intended for the July 9, 1977 letter became problematic for them. Thus they have denied that this word is actually relevant to their thesis. Other key arguments presented in defence of the ritvik doctrine heavily rely on the presence of the word “henceforward”.

There is no example, either in Srila Prabhupada’s 86 recorded uses, nor in the entire history of the English language, where the actual word ‘henceforward’ has ever meant:

‘Every time period until the departure of a person who issued the order’.

Yet according to current thinking this is what the word must have meant when it was used in the July 9th letter. All the letter states is that the *ritvik* system is to be followed ‘henceforward’. So why was it stopped?⁸⁸

⁸⁶ PRABHUPADA 1997b (letter of December 10, 1966 to Janis, New York).

⁸⁷ PRABHUPADA 1997b (letter of February 1, 1974 to Bhagavan, Hong Kong).

⁸⁸ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 10.

For example, had Srila Prabhupada intended the *ritvik* system to stop on his departure he would have added the following seven words to the July 9th letter — “This system will terminate on my departure”. A quick look at the letter tells us he wanted it to continue ‘henceforward’.⁸⁹

What **lines 11-13** do establish is that the *ritvik* system was to operate whilst Srila Prabhupada was still present., but not that it can *only* operate whilst he is present. The July 9th letter makes this clear anyway by the use of the word ‘henceforward’. The word ‘henceforward’ encompasses all time frames from that day onwards, regardless of Srila Prabhupada’s physical proximity.⁹⁰

On July 9th 1977 Srila Prabhupada appointed 11 *ritviks* to carry out first and second initiations ‘henceforward’.⁹¹

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, and other previous *acaryas*, did not authorise a *ritvik* system to run ‘henceforward’.⁹²

Instead he set up a *ritvik* system whereby he would remain the *acarya* ‘henceforward’.⁹³

The July 9th letter shows Srila Prabhupada’s intention was to run a *ritvik* system ‘henceforward’.⁹⁴

In all of the above places, where the word “henceforward” is used, it is enclosed in quotation marks, with some of the references specifying that this is the word as it appears in the letter and is what justifies an indefinite time-frame. Even if the word “henceforward,” as it appears in the letter, is irrelevant to the meaning of the letter, it certainly is indispensable to the *ritvik* doctrine.

One popular variation of the *ritvik* doctrine is “soft *ritvik*,” or the idea

⁸⁹ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 11.

⁹⁰ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 41.

⁹¹ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 46.

⁹² KRISHNAKANT 2002: 67.

⁹³ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 82.

⁹⁴ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 83.

that Srila Prabhupada intended the ritvik system to continue after his departure until one or more of his descendants become fully liberated, top-most devotees. When such devotees manifest, they may accept disciples just as Srila Prabhupada himself did. This view assumes that lack of qualification is the only thing that prevents someone from accepting disciples. This is TFO's response to "soft ritvik" (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 82):

Some have argued that *acaryas* have the power to change things, and thus a new one could alter the *ritvik* system within ISKCON. But would an authorised *acarya* ever contradict the direct orders left by a previous *acarya* to his followers? To do so would surely undermine the authority of the previous *acarya*. It would certainly cause confusion and bewilderment for those followers faced with the tortuous choice of whose order to follow.

All such concerns melt away once we read the final order. There is simply no mention of the 'soft' *ritvik* injunction. The letter just says 'henceforward'. Thus to say it will end with the emergence of a new *acarya*, or perfected disciple, is superimposing one's own speculation over a perfectly clear request.

But if the word "henceforward" is considered to be irrelevant, then "soft ritvik" becomes a possible alternative. Again the reference above not only uses the word "henceforward", but refers to its source, the July 9, 1977 letter.

Since the word "henceforward", by itself, is subject to limitation by other authorised instructions, the time-frame for the letter cannot be determined without reference to Srila Prabhupada's other works or works of the *acaryas* in our disciplic succession.

The July 9, 1977 Letter

Without doubt the July 9, 1977 letter is the most important piece of evidence to the ritvik doctrine. Without it, it would be doubtful that the ritvik doctrine could have come about at all. One thing that all agree upon was that Srila Prabhupada had in fact set up a system whereby designated senior disciples would initiate others on his behalf and without the need to consult him, and that the new initiates would be considered Srila Prabhupada's disciples. Where the debate lies is in how Srila Prabhupada intended his disciples to carry on with initiations after his departure.

Was the system to be followed only up until the time of Srila Prabhupa-

da's departure, and afterwards qualified disciples would then accept disciples (current ISKCON system), or was the system to be continued as it was, indefinitely, after Srila Prabhupada's departure (hard ritvik), or was the system meant to be followed until a future time when suitably qualified devotees appeared in ISKCON and would be allowed to accept disciples (soft ritvik)? These are the three possible outcomes of the ritvik debate, with a fourth outcome being that the issue is indefinitely unresolved. At the heart of this debate is the question of the intended time-frame for the ritvik system Srila Prabhupada established, and, to a somewhat lesser degree, what the minimal qualifications required for one to accept disciples are. The remainder of this section will take a look at evidence with regard to the time-frame.

Time-Frame

Is the ritvik system to be continued after Srila Prabhupada's departure or is it to be discontinued? That is the central question. To begin with, we will examine arguments offered by TFO in support of indefinite continuance.

The ritviks reason that if there is no explicit order issued to discontinue the proxy-guru system, then it cannot be discontinued:

There is nothing in the letter that says the instruction was only meant for whilst Srila Prabhupada was physically present.⁹⁵

The letter also does not state : '*The ritvik system should only run until the departure of Srila Prabhupada*'. Yet it was only allowed to run till his departure.⁹⁶

To argue that since the letter is not specific about the time period in which it is to run, it must therefore stop on departure is completely illogical. The letter does not specify that the *ritvik* system should be followed on July 9th either, so according to this logic it should never have been followed at all.⁹⁷

Objections to the above claims were reinforced by some of Srila

⁹⁵ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 7.

⁹⁶ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 9.

⁹⁷ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 9.

Prabhupada's other instructions which did not fit the ritvik doctrine. As shown previously, the ritviks dealt with these objections either by outright rejecting the evidence (on usually questionable grounds) or by offering exotic interpretations of the evidence.

There were no explicit instructions from Srila Prabhupada that confirmed he would continue to accept disciples after his departure. The ritviks claim that the July 9, 1977 letter itself is an explicit order. But since it was shown that the word "henceforward" and other related words were still liable to interpretation from Srila Prabhupada's other instructions, the time-frame for the letter could not be assumed from the letter alone. Remarks such as

At the same time, I shall request them all to become spiritual master. Every one of you should be spiritual master next.⁹⁸

continue to be problematic for the hard ritviks. Being without the support of explicit statements, the ritviks were forced to substantiate their claim of an indefinite time-frame for the ritvik system by arguing from ignorance (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 4; bolding in the original):

There is **no** mention in the letter that the system should stop on Srila Prabhupada's departure, neither does it state that the system was to **only** be operational during his presence.

But when the truth of a claim is substantiated on the basis of absent evidence, other statements, which are often contradictory, must similarly be taken as true. It is also truthful to say:

There is no mention in the letter that the system should continue after Srila Prabhupada's departure, neither does it state that the system was to be operational after his departure.

It is a fact that the July 9, 1977 letter does not state either of the two remarks above. Since we are faced with two conclusions that are mutually contradictory, we can conclude that the time-frame is not conclusively described in the July 9 letter. Other references from Srila Prabhupada's works further discredit the idea that the time-frame for the July 9 letter is absolutely indefinite. For example:

⁹⁸ PRABHUPADA 1997c (Sri Vyasa-puja lecture on September 5, 1969 in Hamburg).

Ācārya means one who has become a rigid disciple of his *ācārya*. Just like a critical student under a professor, he becomes a first-class professor, similarly, a person who is a very rigid student of bona fide *ācārya*, he becomes next *ācārya*.⁹⁹

One who is now the disciple is the next spiritual master. And one cannot be a bona fide and authorized spiritual master unless one has been strictly obedient to his spiritual master.¹⁰⁰

Keep trained up very rigidly and then you are bona fide 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. 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.¹⁰¹

Ultimately, it would be futile to argue that none of Srila Prabhupada's spiritual descendents would ever become qualified enough to accept disciples. If no one could become a topmost devotee in Srila Prabhupada's line, then it would be a declaration that somehow no one would ever make significant spiritual advancement, no matter what they did.

To substantiate the hard ritvik doctrine and accommodate the possibility of devotees qualified to accept disciples appearing in ISKCON, the ritviks present two final arguments against allowing future diksa-gurus in ISKCON other than Srila Prabhupada: one must have attained the platform of a maha-bhagavata (topmost devotee), and one must receive an explicit order to accept disciples.

Gurus and Initiations

TFO argues that one must attain the level of a maha-bhagavata, or topmost devotee, before one may be qualified to accept disciples (give diksa). Here are references cited to support this claim (bolding and

⁹⁹ PRABHUPADA 1997c (lecture on CC ML 20.144-146 on December 1, 1966 in New York).

¹⁰⁰ Purport of BP 2.9.43 in PRABHUPADA 1982.

¹⁰¹ PRABHUPADA 1997b (letter of December 2, 1975 to Tusta-Krsna).

underlining in the original):

Srila Prabhupada unequivocally stated that the *diksa* guru must be a *maha-bhagavata* (most advanced stage of God-realisation).¹⁰²

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.¹⁰³

So it would seem that one must first become a maha-bhagavata before one may accept disciples. But Srila Prabhupada has said in other places that although it is preferable that a spiritual master be a maha-bhagavata, others who are not on the level of a topmost devotee may also accept disciples (bolding added):

The great associates of Vaikuṅṭhaloka, Nanda and Sunanda, could understand the mind of Dhruva Mahārāja, and thus they showed him that his mother, Suniti, was going forward in another plane.

PURPORT This incident proves that the *sikṣā*- or *dikṣā-guru* who has a disciple who strongly executes devotional service like Dhruva Mahārāja can be carried by the disciple even though the instructor is not as advanced. Although Suniti was an instructor to Dhruva Mahārāja, she could not go to the forest because she was a woman, nor could she execute austerities and penances as Dhruva Mahārāja did. Still, Dhruva Mahārāja was able to take his mother with him. Similarly, Prahlada Mahārāja also delivered his atheistic father, Hiraṇyakaśipu. **The conclusion is that a disciple or an offspring who is a very strong devotee can carry with him to Vaikuṅṭhaloka either his father, mother or *sikṣā*- or *dikṣā-guru*.**¹⁰⁴

These statements not only affirm that a disciple can become more advanced than his or her guru, but it also strongly implies that a diksa-guru may not necessarily be situated on the topmost platform. Note the phrase “even though the instructor is not as advanced”. There is no need for a disciple to carry his guru if his guru is already a topmost devotee, as Srila

¹⁰² KRISHNAKANT 2002: 14.

¹⁰³ Purport of CC ML 24.330 in PRABHUPADA 1996, as cited in KRISHNAKANT 2002: 14 (printed bold there).

¹⁰⁴ Translation and purport of BP 4.12.33 in PRABHUPADA 1982.

Prabhupada affirms:

Still, he was not less obliged to Sunīti. There was no question of carrying Nārada Muni to Vaikuṅṭhaloka, but Dhruva Mahārāja thought of his mother.¹⁰⁵

It may be objected that Suniti was Dhruva Maharaja’s siksa-guru, not his diksa-guru, and argue that this example is irrelevant. But Srila Prabhupada states that the example of Suniti applies to the diksa-guru as well as the siksa-guru. He is taking a specific incident and shows how it demonstrates a general principle. It is therefore understood that there may be diksa-gurus who are not on the level of a maha-bhagavata.¹⁰⁶

The Monitor Guru

Even though it is preferred that one accept an uttama-adhikari as a guru, it is not prohibited to accept someone as a guru who may be on lower stages, provided the guru in question strictly follows the teachings of the parampara, or disciplic succession. Since this less qualified guru is not as qualified as the guru who is a topmost devotee, it is expected that the less qualified guru’s capacity to mentor disciples will not be as great. Srila Prabhupada describes this guru as follows (PRABHUPADA 1985: 34):

13. He must not take on unlimited disciples. This means that a candidate who has successfully followed the first twelve items can also become a spiritual master himself, just as a student becomes a monitor in class with a limited number of disciples.

TFO, however, dismisses this reference and tries to interpret Srila Prabhupada’s statement here as referring to accepting siksa-disciples and not diksa-disciples (KRISHNAKANT 2002: 22; bolding and underlining in the original):

Some devotees point to the section in *Easy Journey to Other Planets* (p. 32) dealing with **monitor** ‘gurus’ as evidence supporting the M.A.S.S., and the resultant dismantling of the *ritvik* system. However, this clever

¹⁰⁵ Purport of BP 4.12.32 in PRABHUPADA 1982.

¹⁰⁶ For further discussion, see DASA, Krishna-kirti 2001: 25-29 (“Qualifications of a Bonafide Guru”).

classroom analogy is clearly defining the position of *siksa*, not *diksa*, gurus. In this passage the monitor acts on behalf of the teacher. He is not a teacher himself. He may become qualified as a teacher, but that is a process, and is not described as automatic on the departure of the teacher (who obviously corresponds to the *diksa* guru). A monitor guru can only have, by definition, *siksa* disciples; and a limited number at that. Once such a monitor has become qualified, i.e. attained the platform of *maha-bhagavata*, and then been authorised by his predecessor *acarya*, there is no sense in calling him a monitor any longer; he will be a teacher in his own right. Once he is a teacher in his own right, he may accept unlimited disciples. So the monitor is the *siksa* guru, the teacher is the *diksa* guru, and by strictly following the *diksa* guru, the *siksha* [sic] guru may gradually rise to the platform necessary before *diksa* authorisation can theoretically take place. Furthermore, a monitor merely assists the teacher whilst the teacher is present. This again is at variance with the ‘law’ of disciplic succession, used to support the M.A.S.S. system, were the monitors actually *diksa* gurus. In other words, a monitor is not an entity that comes into being to replace or succeed the teacher, but exists to run in parallel or alongside the teacher.

TFO’s author here makes a mistake in his analysis: he fails to take into account the context of the reference he interprets. Let us take another look at this reference from chapter 1 of *Easy Journey to Other Planets* (PRABHUPADA 1985: 34):

13. He must not take on unlimited disciples. This means that a candidate who has successfully followed the first twelve items can also become a spiritual master himself, just as a student becomes a monitor in class with a limited number of disciples.

Item number thirteen is significant. This reference comes serially (thirteenth item) in a list of 64 items that is found in at least two other places in Srila Prabhupada’s books, and the items listed in all three lists are the same and are listed in the same order. This list of 64 items is additionally found in PRABHUPADA 1979: 53 (chapter 6), and partially (first 55 items) in PRABHUPADA 1996 on CC ML 22.115-127.¹⁰⁷ These 64 items comprise

¹⁰⁷ The full list of 64 items is also found in *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*, but is punc-

what is called sadhana-bhakti, or devotional service in practice. These 64 items of devotional service, or sadhana-bhakti, are performed by those in the elementary stages of bhakti. This thirteenth item falls within the realm of sadhana-bhakti, or a stage of spiritual advancement that is not the topmost platform of devotional service.

With regard to TFO's claim that the "monitor guru" referred to in PRABHUPADA 1985 is a siksa-guru and not a diksa-guru, we find evidence from the list in PRABHUPADA 1996 that quite clearly indicates that the monitor guru is none other than a diksa-guru. On CC ML 22.118

*a-baiṣṇava-saṅga-tyāga, bahu-śiṣya nā kariba
bahu-grantha-kalābhyāsa-byākhyāna barjiba*

it is said:

"The twelfth item is to give up the company of non-devotees. (13) One should not accept an unlimited number of disciples. (14) One should not partially study many scriptures just to be able to give references and expand explanations.["]

PURPORT Accepting an unlimited number of devotees or disciples is very risky for one who is not a preacher. According to Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, a preacher has to accept many disciples to expand the cult of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. This is risky because when a spiritual master accepts a disciple, he naturally accepts the disciple's sinful activities and their reactions. Unless he is very powerful, he cannot assimilate all the sinful reactions of his disciples and has to suffer the consequences. Therefore one is generally forbidden to accept many disciples.¹⁰⁸

Accepting the sinful reactions of disciples happens only through diksa, or initiation, not through siksa. (See p. 109 above for more detailed information.) The guru referred to here, and in *Easy Journey to Other Planets* as well, must therefore be a diksa-guru. It should also be noted in the above passage that Srila Prabhupada draws a distinction between "monitor gurus" and someone who is a "very powerful" devotee. Both classes of devotees can accept disciples by giving diksa, yet one class (the very powerful devotee) can accept unlimited numbers of disciples whereas the

tuated by descriptions of the ten offences against the Holy Names and other descriptions (PRABHUPADA 1997d).

¹⁰⁸ Translation and purport of CC ML 22.118 in PRABHUPADA 1996.

monitor guru cannot accept so many.

The Order to Become a Guru

TFO's final significant argument against others in ISKCON (besides Srila Prabhupada) accepting disciples is that one must receive an explicit order from the spiritual master to accept disciples. As stated in TFO:

Aside from the qualification, Srila Prabhupada also taught that specific authorisation from the predecessor *acarya* was also essential before anyone could act as a *diksa* guru.¹⁰⁹

Either way, there is no clear explicit order to take disciples, but simply to preach.¹¹⁰

In other words, TFO is saying that besides whatever other orders you may have received, your guru must tell you something like: "Now you can accept disciples." And if you did not receive this explicit instruction, then you can never accept disciples (bolding and underlining in the original):

"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)*¹¹¹

Indian man: *When did you become the spiritual leader of Krsna Consciousness?*

Srila Prabhupada: **What is that?**

Brahmananda: *He is asking when did you become the spiritual leader of Krsna Consciousness?*

Srila Prabhupada: **When my Guru Maharaja ordered me. This is the guru *parampara*.**

Indian man: *Did it ...*

Srila Prabhupada: **Try to understand. Don't go very speedily. A guru can become guru when he is ordered by his guru. That's all. Other-**

¹⁰⁹ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 14.

¹¹⁰ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 23.

¹¹¹ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 14.

wise nobody can become guru.¹¹²

“On the whole, you may know that he is not a liberated person, and therefore, he cannot initiate any person to Krsna Consciousness. It requires special spiritual benediction from higher authorities.”¹¹³

“One who is now the disciple is the next spiritual master. And one cannot be a bona fide and authorised spiritual master unless one has been strictly obedient to his spiritual master.”

*(S.B. 2.9.43, purport)*¹¹⁴

The first two passages have already been examined in the “Improper Accent” section above. Although the ritviks stress the words “ordered” and “when” and try to convey to the reader that somewhere at some time there must be some explicit order (to accept disciples), none of these over-emphasised words and phrases rule out the possibility of the order being indirect.

The third reference is that of Srila Prabhupada referring to a god brother whom he considered unfit to initiate anyone. Emphasising the phrase “requires spiritual benediction” is done to suggest that this god brother did not receive an explicit order to accept disciples. However, Srila Prabhupada also considered that this god brother was disobedient to his guru. So lack of “special spiritual benediction” can also indicate that this person was unfaithful to his guru.

The last reference uses typographical emphasis to suggest the word “authorised” somehow refers to an explicit order. Without the typographical emphasis, the sentence plainly says that one cannot be a bona fide and authorised spiritual master unless he has been strictly obedient to his spiritual master. Since the word “authorised” is semantically linked to the phrase “strictly obedient,” the emphasised word “authorised” does not necessarily imply that one must receive an explicit order to accept disciples.

Although this next reference is not cited in TFO, it nonetheless offers the strongest support for the idea that an explicit order from Prabhupada

¹¹² KRISHNAKANT 2002: 14f.

¹¹³ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 14, quoting PRABHUPADA 1997b (letter of April 26, 1968 to Janardana).

¹¹⁴ KRISHNAKANT 2002: 21.

was needed in order for his disciples to themselves accept disciples.

Prabhupada: Yes. I shall choose some guru. I shall say, “Now you become *ācārya*. You become authorized.” I am waiting for that. You become all *ācārya*. I retire completely. But the training must be complete.¹¹⁵

So it would seem from this that an explicit order is necessary. Does this mean that if, before his passing, Srila Prabhupada never mentioned that any of his disciples should be an acarya, or a diksa-guru? Not necessarily. Srila Prabhupada’s spiritual master himself never appointed anyone (including our Srila Prabhupada) as an acarya before his passing away.

I have also read specifically your articles on the matter of *acaryas*, wherein on the 14th Paragraph I see the acharya shall be entitled to nominate in writing his successive acharya. But we do not find any record where our Srila Prabhupada¹¹⁶ nominated any acharya after Him.¹¹⁷

So if Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura (Srila Prabhupada’s spiritual master) did not select any acarya from his disciples before his passing away, then how is it that Srila Prabhupada himself came to accept disciples?

Srila Prabhupada’s Order

At various other times Srila Prabhupada spoke with his disciples or corresponded with them about the demise of his spiritual master’s preaching mission, the Gaudiya Matha.

If Guru Maharaja could have seen someone who was qualified at that time to be acarya he would have mentioned. Because on the night before he passed away he talked of so many things, but never mentioned an acarya.¹¹⁸

So at least from the ritvik perspective, this letter would be referring to

¹¹⁵ PRABHUPADA 1997a (room conversation of April 22, 1977 with Tamal Krishna Goswami).

¹¹⁶ This refers to the guru of Bhaktivedānta Svāmī.

¹¹⁷ PRABHUPADA 1997b (letter of August 21, 1969 to Swami B.S. Bhagavata Maharaja).

¹¹⁸ PRABHUPADA 1997b (letter of April 28, 1974 to Rupanuga).

the appointment (explicit order) for either Srila Prabhupada or his godbrothers to be a diksa-guru (bolding and underlining added):

He never asked anybody to become *ācārya*. He asked that “You form a governing body of twelve men and go on preaching, and Kunja Babu may be allowed to remain manager during his lifetime.” He never said that Kunja Babu should be *ācārya*. None, none of them were advised by Guru Mahārāja to become *ācārya*. His idea was “Let them manage; then whoever will be actual qualified for becoming *ācārya*, they will elect. Why I should enforce upon them?” **That was his plan. “Let them manage by strong governing body, as it is going on. Then *ācārya* will come by his qualifications.”**¹¹⁹

Not only do we see that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura never asked anybody to become acarya, we also find that the acarya will come “by his qualifications”. Even if we accepted that no one except the acarya (who would later manifest according to his qualifications) could accept disciples, the acarya himself, like them, would have had no previous explicit instruction to do so. Thus qualification is the main consideration in whether or not someone is fit to accept disciples. Additionally, Srila Prabhupada considered discipleship itself to be the other essential aspect of authorisation.

Journalist: Is there in India a licensing body by the state for people to preach or to ... How in the heck would you say it here?

Prabhupada: It was not there because in India there are so many churches, and they’re supposed to be very saintly person. So simply to become a disciple of a saintly person is sufficient certificate. Just like in your country, marriage requires certificate. In India still, there is no certificate. The boys and girls, they are seated before the relatives and priest and elderly persons. They are offered. I am doing that. There is no certificate. But still their connection is lifelong. What certificate will do? That ceremony is so nice, the wife takes “My husband for life” and the husband takes wife, “She is my companion for life.” They cannot separate. There is no history in India that there was a certificate issued. No. But still, their connection is so nice, that life long.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ PRABHUPADA 1997a (conversation of September 21, 1973 with Banker).

¹²⁰ PRABHUPADA 1997a (press interview of December 30, 1968 in Los Angeles).

Conclusion

We have shown that arguments presented in defence of the ritvik position heavily employ fallacies of equivocation, improper accent, and whimsical interpretations to establish their doctrine. It has been shown that the ritvik viewpoint rejects the fundamental Vaisnava doctrine of guru-sadhu-sastra as a means of objectively deciding controversial issues. With regard to the intended time-frame of the July 9, 1977 letter, we demonstrate two things: that the duration of the ritvik initiation system cannot be determined from the July 9, 1977 letter alone, and that the validity of the July 9 letter is limited to the time of Srila Prabhupada's disappearance. The different types of gurus, classes of devotees, and the minimal qualifications for a guru are established and described in detail. It is conclusively shown that a sadhaka, or person who strictly follows sadhana-bhakti, can also be a qualified diksa-guru. TFO's claim that Srila Prabhupada received an explicit order to accept disciples, separate from the order to preach, is refuted. We show that in the absence of the spiritual master qualification and discipleship together constitute sufficient authorisation for one to act as a diksa-guru.

Opposing Positions and Potential Outcomes

Although it is unlikely that the IRM, for various reasons already described, will be able to establish their view within ISKCON, it is still important for us to consider the possible outcome of such a thing happening. This is the crystal-ball portion of this paper. What could happen if the IRM establishes its conclusions within ISKCON? What could happen if ISKCON's status quo is maintained?

Ritvik as Established ISKCON Doctrine

The principle of guru-sadhu-sastra, as explained previously, has been implicitly rejected by the IRM. The only evidence they accept is that which comes from the guru, or Srila Prabhupada. Future controversies not necessarily related to ritvik will be difficult if not impossible to objectively resolve because the authoritative sources of sadhu and sastra would be considered unacceptable. Without a system of checks and balances to minimise the possibility of a wrong conclusion, future decisions by a ritvik leadership will be at high risk of being coloured by mundane inclinations. It may be questioned here that if this is what will happen with a ritvik leadership, why did the GBC itself, who accept the principle of guru-sadhu-sastra, also arrive at wrong conclusions in the past? The answer is that although the GBC accepts this principle, in some particular circumstances they did not take full advantage of it. Rather, the problems they have faced were due to a lack of not thoroughly researching relevant issues. In the introduction to the paper "Guru Ashraya" (DASA, Gaura-ke-shava 1998), the author states:

This paper is the only official paper on this subject [of gurus and initiations] authorized by the GBC since the disappearance of Srila Prabhupada. There have been many GBC resolutions concerning this topic since that time, none of them were accompanied by an officially authorized paper explaining the philosophy behind those resolutions. Although many in our movement profess to understand these subjects well, there has not been a paper since 1978 authorized by the GBC, that the ordinary member of ISKCON can read and explain to others the GBC position on the guru and initiation in ISKCON. There have been many papers by different Pandits, but none of them have been authorized by the GBC. As a result there is large amount of inconclusive literature on these topics. Various accepted

by some members of ISKCON and rejected by others. The GBC should be heavily criticized for this. Their duty is not to legislate and re-legislate every year without explanation. If the GBC do not take up the task of explaining philosophically their resolutions to the rest of the society then they have failed.

Another point: The ritvik world-view would leave ISKCON a weakened spiritual institution because although the IRM's followers accept the principle that everyone is a siksa-guru, the premise engendered by the ritvik doctrine is that such siksa-gurus are themselves unqualified, or inadequately qualified, to offer little more than meagre spiritual assistance to anyone.

What can these barely adequate siksa-gurus teach others that can't be learned just by reading Srila Prabhupada's books? It may be said that there will be senior, respected ritviks who will be looked up to for guidance. But the ritvik conception encourages the attitude that even senior and respectable leaders themselves somehow lack in qualification. This attitude will be a stumbling block for those trying to attain practical instruction beyond the preliminaries.

A few more points on the IRM as an institution separate from ISKCON: Their ability to recruit ISKCON members will depend on the lack of success of ISKCON's ability to maintain moral and spiritual standards within its leadership. There will be few brahmacaris, and the sannyasa asrama, because it represents a kind of living guru status, will generally be anathema for IRM members and, hence, non-existent. The IRM as a separate society will be comprised almost exclusively of grhasthas (married couples, householders).

Continuing With the Status Quo

It is perhaps easier to see the future of the current ISKCON establishment because they are, in fact, ISKCON's established leadership.

At the present time, the IRM's influence in ISKCON, compared to what their influence has been, is minimal. Articles about ritvik (for or against) have nearly disappeared from popular Vaisnava websites like *chakra.org* and *vnn.org*. Discussion of ritvik is virtually non-existent on smaller, private conferences, smaller devotee mailing lists and online forums. The only current and major issue ISKCON has with the IRM is a court battle for control of the ISKCON temple in Bangalore, India. After that is re-

solved (either favourably or even unfavourably toward ISKCON), the most ISKCON is likely to encounter from the IRM are their people coming to major ISKCON functions to recruit members.

The IRM's influence has also been partially eclipsed by ISKCON's efforts in the matter of improving its social conditions. It is understood by ISKCON's leadership that prevailing social attitudes and tendencies of ISKCON's members can favourably or unfavourably affect the ability of all of ISKCON's members with regard to avoiding immoral behaviour. So that its members can maximise their potential for spiritual advancement, the GBC has thus encouraged and benefited from research into the matter of how to organise and manage a Krishna conscious society; having an orderly society with minimal social disturbance to its members is an important goal for the GBC. Since this is a priority for ISKCON's leaders, anomalies the ritvik movement sought to address — unsteady leaders, gurus and sannyasis — are expected to improve within ISKCON. As mentioned before in this paper, the stricter policies already implemented for approving candidates for sannyasa seem to have reduced the incidences of falling down within that segment of ISKCON, and has consequently restored a measure of faith. Furthermore, ISKCON's efforts in reforming its society have recently focused on the grihastha ashrama — something the ritvik movement never addressed. Because the general body of ISKCON's members are beginning to perceive some progress with its social conditions, they are expected to have diminishing interest in the IRM.

If ISKCON's leadership can make sustained and tangible progress in improving ISKCON's social stability, then "ritvik" will eventually become a permanent non-issue for ISKCON's members.

Abbreviations

AL	Ādilīlā
AnL	Antyalīlā
BG	<i>Bhagavadgītā</i> (see PRABHUPADA 1993a)
BP	<i>Bhāgavatapurāṇa</i> (see PRABHUPADA 1982)
BRS	Rūpa Gosvāmin's <i>Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu</i>
BS	<i>Brahmasaṃhitā</i> (see THAKURA 1989)
CC	<i>Caitanyacaritāmṛta</i> (see PRABHUPADA 1996)
KB	Narahari Ṭhākura's <i>Kṛṣṇabhajanāmṛta</i>
ML	Madhyalīlā
MU	<i>Mundakopaniṣad</i>
TFO	<i>The Final Order</i> (see KRISHNAKANT 2002)

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